



HOW TO



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CONDUCT A RIGHT TO FOOD ASSESSMENT

WHY?

Developing a strategy to implement the right to food must begin by evaluating the current situation. Right to Food Guideline* 3.2 recommends that duty-bearers (states) start with a, “careful assessment of existing national legislation, policy and administrative measures, current programmes, systematic identification of existing constraints and availability of existing resources”.

Not only the outcomes and impacts of policy and programme measures are important, but also the implementing processes; rights-based processes are transparent, participatory, non-discriminatory and empower rights-holders to hold duty-bearers accountable. Subsequent analysis will reveal what policy changes, new measures and food security priorities can best lead to realization of the right to food.

WHO?

Generally governments initiate right to adequate food assessments, but civil society organisations can also undertake an assessment. Making the assessment jointly increases the likelihood that its conclusions will be accepted by all and that recommended follow-up actions will be implemented. This “common-sense” approach puts more emphasis on common understanding than on academic precision. In this spirit, rights holders must be consulted during the preparation of the assessment and included in subsequent activities. It is very important to gather an assessment team and select its members from different disciplines.

The core elements of the assessment are:

- Identification and characterisation of food-insecure, vulnerable and marginalized groups that do not enjoy the right to adequate food (and likely other economic, social and cultural rights)
- Understanding underlying reasons each group is food-insecure, vulnerable, marginalized
- Understanding legal and institutional environment where policy/programme measures must be implemented and risks that could jeopardise the furthering of the right to adequate food
- Understanding shortcomings of existing or proposed policies/programmes and the need to re-design to incorporate a rights-based approach toward realizing the right to adequate food.

HOW?

Four key areas require assessment.

1. Legal and legislative framework

How conducive is the legal environment for progressive realization of the right to food? The assessment should consider the international human rights obligations the state has undertaken, the constitution and national laws, and institutions mandated to protect human rights. Where should a state prioritize changes in its legal framework and what areas need further study to develop concrete legislative proposals?

2. Policy Framework

To what extent are policies, strategies and programmes conducive to the progressive realization of the right to food? Does the policy framework respond to the underlying and root causes of the non-realization of the right to food? The assessment should also include the processes by which policies and programmes are formulated and implemented, and evaluate the extent to which they are consistent with human rights principles. Human-rights based policies or programmes should develop the capacity of right-holders to assert their rights, and of duty-bearers to meet their obligations

3. Institutional Framework and CSO participation

Legislation, policies and institutions may be place, but are they performing well enough to make realizing the right to food possible? Right to Food Guideline 5.1 recommends evaluation of, “the mandate and performance of relevant public institutions.” Clarifying roles and responsibilities among government sectors and levels can improve function and accountability. Cross-sectoral coordination is essential for all levels of government agencies. Guideline 6 encourages states to “apply a multi-stakeholder approach to national food security to identify the roles of and involve all relevant stakeholders, encompassing civil society and the private sector.” Civil society can empower vulnerable groups to assert their rights. In many countries, civil society has been the main driving force for social programmes and the realization of ESC rights.

4. Budget analysis

Is the maximum of available resources used to progressively realize the right to food? Analysing a national budget, the most important economic policy instrument any government produces, will reveal political commitment (or lack thereof) towards realizing the right to food. Spending priorities must be analyzed alongside other assessment data. For example, have anti-poverty or food security allocations actually reached intended targets? Has weak oversight or lack of political power among rights-holders allowed the money to become diverted? It is necessary to analyse the government’s strategies and programme, the institutional set-up and power structures of society.

** The Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security, adopted by FAO Council in November 2004 are available for downloading on the right to food website: www.fao.org/righttofood..*