



Why a Right to Food Approach Can Eradicate Hunger



Author

Charlotte Dreger, Policy and Advocacy Officer for Sustainable Food Systems, FIAN International

dreger@fian.org



SDC Contact

Alessandra Roversi, joined the SDC in spring 2021, as Programme Officer with the Global Programme Food Security, where she oversees the Nutrition portfolio.

alessandra.roversi@eda.admin.ch

Feeding the World is Not about Scarcity

Hunger and malnutrition have been on the rise again since 2014. Today, [between 720 and 811 million people are hungry and more than 2.3 billion people do not have access to adequate food](#), which is more than 30% of the global population. Yet, globally there is enough food to feed the world.

Hunger is not about scarcity. Hunger is a result of injustices and discrimination. Gender-based discrimination and violence against women are among the foremost structural causes of hunger and malnutrition. Uneven distribution of land and other natural resources, lack of access to markets, and ecological destruction are also important factors. The current dominant industrialised food production and distribution model is extremely dysfunctional, and the externalities of this model entail high costs for public systems.

The Right-to-Food Approach

The Right-to-Food approach tackles these structural causes of hunger and malnutrition. Human rights are indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. In that sense, the right to adequate food and nutrition (RtFN) is closely interconnected with other human rights such as the right to water, to health, to a healthy environment, the rights of women, the rights of children, the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas, the rights of workers and the rights of indigenous peoples.

If indigenous people's collective land titles are not protected, if women are discriminated, if peasant seed systems are replaced by industrial ones or even criminalised, if pesticide-intense monocultures or antibiotics-laden aquaculture pollutes water, or if corporations are allowed to

market unhealthy food to children, people will be deprived of their right to food. Only by addressing all the different violations that lead to hunger and malnutrition, and by working in an intersectoral manner to address food and nutrition, can this situation be reversed.

States have obligations to realize human rights. They must therefore ensure transparency in their actions and put into place clear frameworks and mechanisms through which they can be held accountable for their decisions and actions.



WATCH launch 2015 ©FIAN India

States must also establish clear regulations and accountability frameworks for holding private actors, including corporations, accountable for actions that undermine human rights. FIAN is therefore working for a binding treaty on transnational corporations with regards to human rights.

Importantly, a human rights approach recognizes the agency of people. Agency means the capacity of individuals or groups to make their own decisions about what food they eat, what foods they produce, how that food is produced, processed and distributed within food systems, as well as their ability to engage in processes that shape food system policies and governance ([HLPE 2020](#))¹.

In this sense, the right to food cannot be fully achieved without food sovereignty. This perspective places the tackling of power imbalances at the forefront and emphasizes people's autonomy and participation for the realization of the RtFN.

The meaningful participation of those most affected by hunger and malnutrition in the determination of public priorities and the development of strategies, policies, legislations and other measures that affect them is therefore key.

The [Committee on World Food Security](#) (CFS) with its autonomous [Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism \(CSM\)](#) is the foremost inclusive UN body that enables direct interaction between rights holders and duty bearers. FIAN works to help enable small- scale food producers and Indigenous Peoples to participate in this space.

Realising the Right to Food and Nutrition: lessons from Brazil

The Brazilian Food and Nutrition Security Councils have taught us that social participation in formulating, implementing and monitoring public policies at national and sub-national levels can improve accountability and help develop programmes to overcome hunger and malnutrition.

¹ HLPE. 2020. Food security and nutrition: building a global narrative towards 2030. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome

A concrete example is the Brazilian national school feeding programme, where 30% of food comes directly from family farmers. Public procurement plays an important role in scaling up sustainable and socially just practices².

Realising the Right to Food and Nutrition through Agroecology: lessons from Ecuador

Solutions to the multiple crises we are facing are practiced on a daily basis by people all over the world, not least through the practice of agroecology. Agroecology can be defined as a science, a set of practices and a social movement. It promotes environmentally sustainable and socially just agriculture and mimics ecological processes and biological interactions as closely as possible, building on peasant practices, innovations and knowledge, including traditional knowledge.

During the first year of the pandemic, Ecuadorian peasants involved in global industrial agriculture, such as the production of rice for export, were heavily affected by the disruption of global commodity chains. On the contrary, peasants practicing diversified agroecological methods for their own consumption experienced almost no disadvantages due to the pandemic. Furthermore, peasant groups in Ecuador and elsewhere have quickly been able to adapt to the new context, put in practice support actions and thereby enhance agroecology, such as through the creation of agroecological urban gardens, food exchanges between communities, and solidarity baskets.

A wide and growing range of people all over the world are calling for the transformation of food systems towards greater justice. There is an urgent need to meet their rightful demands and implement tangible practices to make more sustainable and just use of our resources to tackle the multiple global crises facing the world today.



Community Meeting with Earthquake affected Tamang Women © FIAN Nepal

² In 2009, the Brazilian government passed a law requiring that at least 30% of the food purchased for the country's school feeding programme be bought from small-scale farmers. The National School Feeding Programme, (*Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar*) caters to over 40 million primary public school children.

SDC's Support in Strengthening the Right to Adequate Food

Despite the numerous international soft and hard law instruments on the Right to Food (RtF) and related rights (e.g. to land, seeds, or health), there remains a wide gap in implementation of these standards, a lack of accountability and insufficient policy coherence at national and global levels. To address these gaps, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) decided to support the realisation of the RtF via two lines of actions.

1

Between 2011 and 2021, SDC supported a project that aimed to support the creation of spaces for civil society to claim their RtF and nutrition via the FIAN network interventions in about 60 countries and globally. An external evaluation concluded that FIAN's project was highly relevant to promote progress for global governance for food security and nutrition. FIAN International was, for instance, a critical civil society stakeholder in the process that led to the adoption of the [Declaration on the Rights to Peasants and other People Working in Rural Areas](#) (UNDROP) in December 2018 by the UN General Assembly after 20 years of mobilisation and 6 years of negotiation in the UN Human Rights Council. FIAN's methodology has crystallised the know-how on ensuring space for people to advocate for their own rights (see e.g. [Cooking Up Political Agendas](#) – a guide to support transformative feminist food politics). These people monitoring processes have led to strong RtFN recommendations and soft law amendments in many countries.

In 2022, the SDC will continue its commitment to new interventions to address the structural causes behind hunger using a human rights based approach to food systems transformation in 14 countries and globally. The new projects will similarly work to ensure that rights-holders, such as small-scale farmers, pastoralists, women and young peasants, can claim their rights related to food systems and participate in governance mechanisms, while also ensuring that duty-bearers are trained and capacitated for the effective translation of the RtF and related rights into legislations and policies.

2

The SDC's second line of action reinforces the mandate of the [UN Special Rapporteurs on the RtF](#) with additional staff to reinforce advocacy, particularly at the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), public outreach and country monitoring. This commitment started in 2018 with Hilal Elver and continues with Michael Fakhri.

A selection of useful references and tools

[Right to Food and Nutrition WATCH](#) (annual publication)

[Right to Food Handbooks](#) (FAO): a compilation of 10 publications providing practical information and guidance on how to implement the RtF and apply human rights based approaches to legislation, monitoring, assessment, budget and education activities. Available in EN, [ES](#), [FR](#), [PT](#).

Voluntary Guidelines: [Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realisation of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security](#), FAO, 2004 | [CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition](#), 2021 | [CFS Voluntary Guidelines on the responsible governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forests in the context of national food security](#), 2021

[The Rights of Peasants](#), Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights project, featuring different documents and events on the Right to Food Sovereignty, the Right to Land and Other Natural Resources, and others.

Hubert, C., [The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants – A Tool in the Struggle for Our Common Future](#), CETIM, 2019

Claeys, P. and Edelman, M., [The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas](#), The Journal of Peasant Studies, 47(1), 2020