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# Right to Food

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## Introduction

I write this Policy Perspective as the former (2014–2020) United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. I am motivated by two very troubling facts about our world today:

- i. 348 million people are acutely food insecure- they are at risk of severe malnutrition, starvation, destitution, and even death (FSIN 2023).
- ii. 40% of the world's population- three billion people - cannot afford healthful food (UN FAO 2023, p.5).

This deeply disturbing reality is even more jarring because the world economy recently hit a new high of US \$105 trillion (IMF 2023).

It is not a matter of chance that hundreds of millions are experiencing acute food insecurity at a time when the world economy is surging to new heights. In this Policy Perspective, I identify the causes of this widespread hunger and deprivation. I also argue that all UN member states must implement the right to food for everyone within their borders as an international human right obligation. My larger aim is to argue for a global food governance system that is human rights based.

Since 2014, the annual reports of the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) have documented increasing food insecurity. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine war have further disrupted the global food supply chains. They have created the most severe global food crisis since the Second World War. That crisis has been compounded by climate change related extreme weather events (such as longer and deeper droughts and severe, unpredictable floods). The confluence of these problems has meant a sharp drop in agricultural yield as well as in the production and

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distribution of food. Given these multiple crises, reaching the “Zero Hunger” target of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goal Number 2 clearly is not viable until 2030.

More importantly, the impact of these crises is not distributed equally among countries and regions, or across social groups. With vertical and horizontal inequalities widening, eliminating hunger and malnutrition in low-income households has become an even more daunting task. Social and economic injustices and inequities (such as poverty, forced displacement and migration, and intergenerational inequality) as well as multiple forms of discriminations has meant that over 300 million people cannot get enough food to assuage their hunger, let alone nutritious food. It is a painful irony that most of the people suffering from hunger, malnutrition and poverty are rural populations that live and work in the food and agriculture sector, producing much of the locally consumed food.

During my mandate as the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food (2014–2020), I witnessed such inequality, injustices, and human rights violations in many countries. These regions were already suffering from the severe impact of climate change, natural disasters, political conflicts, unilateral coercive measures, health hazards of agricultural chemicals, and massive displacements (that are attributable to development projects and extractivist mode of production). There is absolutely no question that Indigenous peoples and peasants are disproportionately harmed by these crises. Women’s rights and gender equality in general, specifically in the food and agriculture sector, continue to be undermined everywhere. Our job as a Special Rapporteur is to bring those marginalized populations’ voices to the UN platforms and the international media, exposing the human rights violations against them to search for remedies.

## Violations of the Right to Food

I and many others have witnessed that in the current globalized food system, the public sector in low-income countries is gradually losing its regulatory power against global trade regimes. Those nations have become net food importers, instead of producing their own food.

International trade rules continue to undermine the interest of less powerful countries that are trying to meet the food and other basic needs of their starving populations. Those countries have had to choose between participating in the global trade regimes *or* domestic food self-sufficiency and realising the right to food of their citizens. Grassroots activists who seek to defend human rights (especially, the right to food) and food sovereignty and promote local food systems are losing ground against powerful corporations. Indigenous peoples in Latin America and South Asia trying to protect their land and water rights are subject to psychological and physical violence by corporate supported militias. The Ogooni people fighting against oil companies in Nigeria and the activists struggling to conserve Brazilian rainforests are just two examples of those who have been targeted by such violence.

I have also witnessed the right to food treated as mere rhetoric, nothing more than an empty promise. It is disheartening that even many human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International, have not used the

right to food, and more broadly, a human right based approach, as a tool to effectively fight hunger and malnutrition.

Only recently, the tide has started to change, with organizations like HRW paying increase attention to the economic, social and cultural rights of persons, including the structural drivers and causes that impede their realization.<sup>1</sup> The increasing focus of those organizations on human rights is coupled with a growing recognition for the need to explore the structural drivers of food insecurity, which include profit-driven food inflation, corporate control of and concentration in the food system, inequitable land distribution, and the pressing need for universal social protection.

However, non-state actors (such as human rights organizations) and states still do not completely understand what it means to implement human rights laws. There is also a lack of institutional and legal support to actualize the human right to food. Moreover, there is a sense of disappointment that human rights principles are not strong enough to reverse harmful policies or adequately punish human rights violators to discourage such wrong doings. For instance, it is an international crime to use famine or starvation as a weapon of war in conflict situations. However, no country or armed groups that has perpetrated these severe human rights violations has ever been punished.

These trends indicate that the current global order usually ignores those who are less powerful. Similarly, economic globalization includes the global food system, but it excludes small-scale farmers and food producers in favour of a few powerful actors. As a result, food security has become highly monopolized and politicized - both at the national and international levels - by the involvement of actors and economic interests that do not recognize the human right to food.

## **How can the Dysfunctional Global food Systems be Transformed?**

The need for change is urgent because the present food governance system is not in the interest of the vast majority of the small holder farmers, producers, and food system workers. They produce 70–80% of the food locally consumed, but they are the ones who suffer most from food insecurity. A new system to eliminate hunger and malnutrition for ensuring food security for all is urgently needed. However, it is deeply contentious issue, with proponents of neoliberalism opposing those who support a human rights-based approach to global food governance.

We witnessed that tension during the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit. The dominant view on the global food governance system is a production-oriented, neoliberal market model that supports globalised food systems. It is promoted by powerful states, the private sector, industrial scale producers, and global food trade supporters. There is absolutely no doubt that this system does not serve the vast majority of smallholder farmers, producers, and food systems workers. It means severe food insecurity for 348 million people and leaves more than 3 billion people unable to afford healthful food, even as it produces skyrocketing profits for big food corporations.

<sup>1</sup> Since 2012, HRW, for instance, has published more than a dozen reports on the right to food, see, <https://www.hrw.org/topic/economic-justice-and-rights>.

A human rights-based approach to global food governance is the viable and just alternative to the dominant neoliberal food governance system. It promotes the right to food (and nutritious food) for all, and entails the implementation of women's rights, food workers' rights, peasants' rights, and Indigenous people's rights. It also requires the equitable distribution of resources, especially for the marginalized. The human rights-based approach to global food governance supports small-scale farmers and producers. It prioritizes national food self-sufficiency and local markets, and defends agroecology and food sovereignty.

Efforts that undermine the human rights system, specifically the right to food and other relevant rights, are a major obstacle to eliminating hunger and malnutrition in a highly unequal food system. Such efforts also endanger ecosystems and destabilize the pursuit of overall human security.

In contrast, activists, peasant networks (such as La Via Campesina), the right to food friendly states (these are mostly in Latin America), UN human rights organisations, progressive human right scholars, and civil society organizations support a human rights-based approach to global food governance. They recognize that it is a powerful tool to eliminate hunger and malnutrition and bring justice and equity to food systems.

To understand why the world needs a human rights-based global food governance system, it is useful to trace the history of the development of the right to food.

## **Development of the Right to food in the UN System: A History**

The right to food was first recognized in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) Article 25, along with other economic and social rights. Those rights are necessary for human beings to have an adequate living standard:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control (UDHR 1948).

Although purely aspirational and lacking legal force, the Declaration achieved the status of customary international law by being recognized by all UN member states. This recognition created a general and consistent state practice without a treaty. That means that principles of the UDHR are widely accepted as obligatory for all states, even if particular states are not party to the relevant treaties.

Then, in 1966, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) was adopted to place legal obligations on states. The Covenant entered into force in 1976 and was signed and ratified by 170 countries. Those nations agreed to take steps to maximize the resources they had to progressively achieve the full realisation of the right to adequate food as a legal entitlement, both nationally and internationally.

Article 11 of the ICESCR specifically placed an obligation on UN member states to ensure that everyone has the right to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their family, including food, clothing, and housing, and guaranteeing them the right to be free from hunger. Subsequently, the right to food was recognized in major UN human rights conventions, including the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on Right of Child, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

## Correcting Misconception about the Right to food

Since its inception, the right to food has been frequently subject to criticism because of its allegedly undefinable, undeliverable, and non-justiciable nature. The latter claim asserts that the right of food is not capable of being decided by legal principles or by a court of justice. There is also the common misconception that the right to food is a matter of charity. In other words, it is a form of humanitarianism or a moral responsibility, not a legal entitlement.

In response it needs to be clarified that there is a fundamental difference between charity and the right to food. Charity is a voluntary commitment. In contrast, the right to food is a legal entitlement of individuals that places on UN member states the obligation to create and maintain adequate human rights institutions and avenues, so that rights holders can hold them accountable for violations of their right to food, and secure remedial relief for themselves.

While the right to food is one of the fundamental rights among other human rights, it took several years for states to implement it. One of the key reasons for the delay was the difficulty that states had in 'translating' the right to food into practice. Therefore, the UN has taken several steps to promote the implementation of the right to food by its member states. They are delineated below.

### Implementing the Right to food: Step 1

In response to the complaints by member states, in 1999, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights formulated the normative content of the right to food in General Comment No. 12. That Comment 'translated' Article 11's seemingly abstract principles so that they applied to real life situations. It laid out the following three principles – the respect principle, the protection principle, and the fulfilment principle- as obligatory for UN member states:

1. The respect principle stipulates that states must not interfere with the enjoyment of the right to food for those who can feed themselves or have access to food by some mean or another;
2. The protection principle requires of governments that they control third parties, such as private actors, to prevent their actions from violating the human right to food;

3. The fulfilment principle asserts that in times of emergency, states must proactively engage in activities to strengthen peoples' access to and utilization of (food) resources.<sup>2</sup>

### **Implementing the Right to food: Step 2**

In 2000, the UN Commission of Human Rights created the position of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. At the same time, Right to Food unit was established at the FAO.<sup>3</sup> General Comment 12 and the creation of the special rapporteur position (along with the Right to Food unit) provided two important developments. First, they institutionalized the right to food at the global level for UN institutions and motivated like-minded countries. Second, they strengthened the basis for an alliance between the right to food and food sovereignty movements. They also helped in efforts to monitor the implementation of the right to food at the international level. (Full monitoring process of the Convention was completed in 2013 after the Optional Protocol of the Convention entered into force).

### **Implementing the Right to food: Step 3**

In 2004, the UN took a third positive step to implement the right to food. It was the adoption of the Voluntary Guidelines to Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security. The UN FAO's Voluntary Guidelines document was created by an Intergovernmental Working Group under the auspices of the FAO Council.<sup>4</sup>

Neither the FAO's Voluntary Guidelines nor the General Comment No. 12 are legally binding. However, both provide authoritative commentary and guidelines that are endorsed by member states (based on a consensus among those countries), linking food security and nutrition with the right to food. They constitute the most comprehensive human rights documents that bring clarity to normative and procedural human rights standards, namely: participation, accountability, non-discrimination, transparency, human dignity, empowerment and equality, and the rule of law. These procedural principles help in the elaboration and implementation of a rights-based approach to food security policies and programs.

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<sup>2</sup> "The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement," see, United Nations Committee of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> To promote the implementation of the right to food at the national level *FAO Right to Food Office* produced a series of handbooks and newsletters to assist regulatory developments and legal actions, <https://www.fao.org/right-to-food/background/qa-on-right-to-food/en/>.

<sup>4</sup> The 'Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security' were adopted by the 127th Session of the FAO Council in November 2004.

## Recognition of the Right to food by UN Member States

As of June 2023, over 30 countries explicitly and some 54 countries implicitly recognized the right to food in their constitution.<sup>5</sup> Latin American countries have led the way in recognizing the right to food in their constitutions. Recently Brazil, Egypt, Cuba, Nepal, Zimbabwe, Mexico, Fiji, Maldives, Equator, Bolivia, Dominican Republic, Kenya, Panama, Democratic Republic of Congo and Niger included the right to food in their constitutions in various modes. However, even in countries that recognize the right to food, there is still a significant gap between the law and its implementation and varying levels of understanding about the right to food.

## Challenges of Implementing a Human Rights Approach

After seven decades of the international human rights system, states continue to neglect the economic, social, and cultural rights of persons, particularly their right to food. The following are the key challenges in implementing a human rights approach to food:

- i. Weak human rights institutional structure and monitoring mechanisms.
- ii. Alleged dichotomy between civil and political rights and economic, social, and cultural rights.
- iii. Harmful institutional silos within the UN.
- iv. Undermining of human rights by free markets.
- v. False dichotomy between the rights of nature versus human rights.

Each of these challenges is outlined below.

### Weak Human Rights Institutional Structure and Monitoring Mechanisms

While a human rights-based approach is a necessary policy tool for eliminating hunger and malnutrition, states cannot deliver results if they do not have human rights institutions, or if their human rights institutions are ineffective, inefficient, or corrupt. It is widely agreed that the quality of a state's human rights institutions has a significant impact on the implementation of the right to food, and the state's economy and the level of food security enjoyed by its population (Ramanujam et al., 2015, pgs. 13–14).

Human rights institutions cannot be effective without corresponding mechanisms for monitoring and holding them accountable, both at the domestic and international level. Therefore, the UN human rights system provides several mechanisms for monitoring state compliance, as does the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council (HRC), including Universal Periodic Reviews (UPI), Special Rapporteurs, and individual complaint procedures. Special Rapporteurs as human rights experts

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<sup>5</sup> A comprehensive list of the right to food recognized by specific states is available at: Food and Agriculture Organization, 2019.



serve a unique role as monitors of compliance and accountability. Appointed by the HRC, they are independent of any institutional affiliation or government and work pro-bono. Their reports carry the same legal weight as those of other UN reports. The first Special Rapporteur on the right to food was appointed in 2000. Subsequently, three others, including I, have been appointed by the HRC, and each of us has had a six-year term and published multiple reports covering a wide range of thematic and country mission reports.<sup>6</sup>

As indicated earlier, for decades, there were no complaint mechanisms for the economic, social and cultural rights similar to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which obligates nations to respect the civil and political rights of persons. In 2013, the long-awaited Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (OP-ICESCR) entered into force. As a result, individuals who experience violations of their economic, social, or cultural rights could take their complaints to the international level. However, state parties are still reluctant to implement the international complaint mechanism, and thus, the protocol remains mostly dormant.

### **Alleged Dichotomy between Civil and Political Rights and Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights**

All human rights are universal, interdependent, and interconnected (WCHRV 1993). However, there is still a wide gap between civil and political rights and economic, social, and cultural rights regarding justiciability and complaint mechanisms in favour of civil and political rights.

During the Cold War period, the two sets of human rights were the main source of disagreement between the East and the West. The West prioritized civil and political rights, and the East emphasized economic, social, and cultural rights. The legacy of the Cold War, unfortunately, is still alive and continues to this day. This is partly because the United States insists on making a distinction between these two sets of rights. It considers civil and political rights as negative rights, and economic, social, and cultural rights as positive rights. The United States is formally committed to the idea that as a liberal democracy it has an obligation to ensure that the civil and political rights of individuals are not violated. So, it formally recognizes only negative rights, i.e., civil and political rights, and it has not ratified the ICESCR. Thus, whenever the right to food has been on the agenda in the Human Rights Council, the United States representative has rejected recommendations for including the right to food in the category of human rights.

When a state does not recognize the human right to food, then it is at the discretion of the government – even during crises - to ensure that the poor within its borders do not go hungry or suffer from malnutrition. For instance, in the US, hunger skyrocketed during the Covid 19 pandemic. The government's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and free school lunch programs, as well as basic income support to all low-income persons and households were experiments in a right-based approach to welfare, however, they were basically run on a charity basis. They have

<sup>6</sup> For the entire list see, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures-human-rights-council>.

been terminated<sup>7</sup> despite their success in preventing hunger prevalence that showed states what is achievable with a right based approach if they are recognized as an entitlement.

### **Dismantling the False Dichotomy between Rights**

Political philosopher Henry Shue has rejected the practice of dividing human rights into negative and positive rights, and privileging the former type of rights. He has argued that basic rights, such as the right to food, are “an essential and necessary condition to the enjoyment of all other rights” (Payne, 2008, p.2). Similarly, Amartya Sen argues that “there is strong evidence that economic and political freedoms help to reinforce one another, rather than being hostile to one another” (Sen, 1999, p.5).

Using international human rights law to assert the right to food remains a contentious matter in certain countries and regions. Canada, the United States, and the European Union claim that the right to food is not justiciable. Moreover, international mechanisms for individuals to grieve violations of their right to food are limited.

Over the years, for reasons other than ideological differences, implementing the right to food at the national level has become even more difficult. The implementation of economic, social, and cultural rights place financial and practical burdens on low-income countries. The ICESCR is cognizant of the reality that the realization of economic, social and cultural rights will be gradual for such countries, and thus, it holds states responsible for implementing the right to food only to the extent that they have available resources.<sup>8</sup>

Given the recent food prices crises and increase in hunger and malnutrition, some countries have changed their stance on the right to food. In Europe, Germany, Spain, Scotland, and Switzerland, now support and promote the right to food on an international level, especially through overseas development programs. That has helped bring the right to food discussion to the level of states.

### **Harmful Institutional Silos in the UN**

Some states are also reluctant to recognize the interdependency of all human rights. For instance, during the Committee on World Food Security (*CFS*) meetings about the pivotal role of women in food security and nutrition, representatives of the Russian Federation were consistently opposed to recognizing women’s rights to food security. They insisted that women’s rights have no place in food security institutions. Such a stance is at odds with the spirit of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030, which emphasizes the need to dismantle the siloing of UN institutions and healing their fragmentation. Institutional fragmentation and silos within and between the Human Rights Council in Geneva and the Rome-based food institutions<sup>9</sup> and their

<sup>7</sup> Minnesota, New Mexico, Colorado, Vermont, Michigan, and Massachusetts continue to provide free school lunches (Karnowski & Bryan, 2023).

<sup>8</sup> For more comprehensive information about the progressive development of economic, social, and cultural rights, see Elver, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> I.e., the FAO, the World Food Programme, and the International Finance Agriculture Development.

mechanisms have further weakened efforts to mainstream human rights into the food policy agenda.

### **Undermining of Human Rights by free Markets**

In recent years, the human rights system as a whole has been attacked by emerging nationalism, populism, and predatory global capitalism. Moreover, world powers are retreating from their historical commitment to human rights. Consequently, United Nations institutions are experiencing extreme financial shortfalls, especially the Human Rights Council and regional human rights mechanisms, such as the Inter-American human rights system.<sup>10</sup>

A major stumbling block to food security, however, is inadequate political will to implement the right to food. The weak political commitment of certain UN member states is attributable in no small part to the conflict between, on the one hand, the ‘logic’ of the market and capitalism, and on the other hand, the principles of international human rights laws with respect to economic and social rights. Along with the less than a handful of transnational corporations that control food and agriculture trade under free market rules, powerful states have been blocking the right to food approach on every global platform.

Moreover, even though the right to food is part of international law, mainstream human rights organizations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, do not recognize hunger as a human rights violation, in part because of justiciability issues in international human rights law. Those organizations are also reluctant to directly challenge the existing economic system (Monsalve, 2021, pgs. 13–18). In other words, there seems to be the belief that the “right to food” is a moral principle and rhetorical strategy, but it should not go beyond that and states should not be required to recognize it as a legal entitlement of persons (Jurkovich, 2020, pg. 169).

The right to food and other economic, social, and cultural rights of persons tend to be violated primarily by the private sector. While corporations accept voluntary “corporate social responsibility,” they do not want to be held accountable to others for their human rights violations. This approach leaves no room for normative considerations. It exacerbates inequality, inequities, and poverty within countries. Moreover, it undermines self-sufficiency, sustainability, agroecology, and many other principles (and the policies based on them) that are part and parcel of a human rights-based approach to food governance.

### **False Dichotomy between the Rights of Nature versus Human Rights**

The traditional anthropocentric principles of human rights do not recognize the rights of nature. However, the right to food cannot be sustainably realized without regard for protection of natural resources and nature itself. In this respect, Indigenous peoples are among the first to have challenged the limited conceptual framework of the traditional conception of human rights. Peasants, family farmers, fisherfolk, pastoralists and other rural people have joined Indigenous peoples in support of the idea of

<sup>10</sup> For a critical perspective on food systems, food crises and the future of the right to food, see Elver, 2020.

including the rights of nature in the human rights-based approach to the right to food, land, water and seeds (Monsalve, 2021, p.14.).

As a result of an effective campaign by civil society organizations, the UN Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), and the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (2018) were recognized by the UN General Assembly. These two Declarations combine human rights and the rights of nature, and extend the traditional understanding of human rights as individual rights to include human rights at a communal level.

## Responses to Multiple Global Crises

The world is currently facing several complex and interdependent problems, such as, public health crises, protracted conflicts, forced (climate, economic, or political) migrations, high inflation, economic recessions, deep inequalities, energy shortages, depletion of natural resources, environmental pollution, and climate change. In 2020, with the COVID-19 pandemic, hunger and malnutrition reached an unexpectedly high level. The so called “sophisticated” global food supply chain turned out to be not resilient enough to handle worldwide sudden shocks. Then in 2022, the war in Ukraine caused further destruction in the Black Sea grain transportation route, to reach countries in the Middle East and Africa, which were dependent on grain imports for national food security.

It is because of these crises that the international community is paying greater attention to the global food supply chain, with the aim of avoiding the catastrophe of 300 million people experiencing acute food insecurity and 3 billion people unable to afford nutritious food. UN organizations as well as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Economic Forum are issuing warnings to the international community about the prospect of prices of food, fuel, and fertilizers rising to historic highs, and extreme weather events (including heat waves) that are hindering efforts to develop alternative modes of production and search for new markets. The FAO is reminding the international community of the 2007–08 food crisis and advising countries to maintain open trade, and halt stockpiling food and export restrictions on food. It is also asking countries to support vulnerable households, ensure sufficient agricultural supply, and diversify food production (Torrero, 2022). Moreover, global leaders and key personnel of international financial institutions have convened to develop an action plan to address the financial pressures created by the multiple crises for low and (even) middle-income countries.

As a solution to those crises, some countries have tried to create regional food hubs and prioritized local markets, returning to traditional self-sufficiency rather than relying on the global food systems. The war in Ukraine has made the business community reconsider its long-term dependency on Russia for grain and fertilizers. Businesses are now seeking alternative food supply sources in the interest of avoiding supply problems in the future, and geopolitical uncertainties.

The UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and other high-level UN officials continue to remind world leaders to act decisively and effectively to stop food crises from spiralling out of control. Guterres has warned the world about an approaching

“hunger hurricane” (Clapp & Elver, 2022). Such crises are more strongly felt in low-income countries than high-income ones. However, it is also a concern for the latter set of countries because they are not immune from the consequences of global crises. Nevertheless, many of the crises disproportionately affect low-income countries, and poorer communities, making life very difficult for their inhabitants.

There is a growing recognition that existing national and global institutions are unable to effectively handle the challenges of the 21st century. That will have potentially dire consequences for human development and security, and for the planet as a whole. Structural limitations plague the current global governance systems, preventing state and non-state actors from adequately and appropriately responding to multiple, interconnected problems. There is a significant power imbalance among countries, as well as civil society and the private sector. It undermines the ability of the marginalized and less powerful to access and control the global governing of food systems, especially the decision-making mechanisms.

Nations and international organizations are limited in their capacity to control and regulate the emerging power of corporations. In contrast, corporations are able to successfully lobby to ensure that the global regulatory system protects their interests. At the same time, fragmentation, bureaucracy, budgetary problems, and competition for power and influence among human rights institutions at every level make the food governing system slower, less effective, and dysfunctional.

Greater solidarity and cooperation at every level is necessary. However, solidarity starts when there is equitable distribution of and just access to resources. It also requires equitable power relations in governing and decision-making processes.

## **A Human rights-based Approach to Equitable and Sustainable Global food Governance**

This brings me to the following question: how should a human rights-based approach be used to realize equitable and sustainable global food governance? One of the major procedural rules of the human rights-based approach is to include all concerned parties in an effective and equitable decision-making process. Implementing the human rights-based approach would be the effective and appropriate policy tool for building a democratic, just, and equitable global food governance system. That requires the following important policy changes:

1. Allocation of public resources to food security institutions and human rights institutions based on a strong political commitment to equity and justice;
2. Creation and maintenance of democratic institutional structures ensuring strong partnerships, and meaningful participation in dialogue and decision-making;
4. Reforming of international financial institutions so that they respect human rights in their global food policies;
5. Reshaping of international food trade system to ensure equitable power relations among states;

6. Establishment of accountability systems for states and businesses that violate human rights, especially the right to food;
7. Prioritization of the needs of the most vulnerable populations, communities, groups, individuals, including women, youth and Indigenous peoples who suffer the most, but can help solve immediate crises;
8. Dedicated attention to raising awareness, and equitable access to information, resources, technology and education;

Use of evidence-based analyses that draw on different kinds of knowledge (including Indigenous knowledge and traditional knowledge) and monitoring to increase accountability.

States must implement these human rights instruments to ensure that all affected parties, not just the powerful ones, are included in the decision-making process. Those who disproportionately suffer from food insecurity must be represented and be able to advocate for their rights.

Solving hunger and malnutrition entails not only a commitment to realizing fundamental human rights, but also the elimination of the current crises of inequality and inequities, and justice and political stability for every part of the human and the natural world. The failure to address inequities, injustices, and inefficiencies in global food governance -especially at a time of accelerating climate change, increasing social unrest, political instability- is unconscionable. Radical transformation of food governance systems is essential if we want to enhance the resilience of our food systems. That is all too important because other global catastrophic risks could interact in toxic ways with food insecurity.

This Policy Perspective provides a detailed analysis of the crises and failings of the current neoliberal global food governance system that has resulted in 300 million people experiencing acute food insecurity and 3 billion people unable to afford nutritious food. However, I want to close with a message of hope: the implementation of the human right to food is not an unattainable dream, rather it is as yet an unrealized possibility that is well within our reach.

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