

THE CORDOBA DECLARATION ON THE RIGHT TO FOOD AND THE GOVERNANCE OF THE GLOBAL FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL SYSTEM

Launched on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Universal declaration of Human Rights¹ | 10 December 2008



This Declaration presents a number of issues and recommendations that should be given attention in further work dealing with chronic hunger and the aggravation of the food crisis, as identified by a group of experts in the context of the Cordoba process ². The present Declaration demonstrates how the right to food can tackle the structural causes of hunger and contribute to food security for all.

I. Preamble

The dramatic scope of the world hunger has now become fully recognised. Widespread hunger riots and social unrest has at long last made it obvious to the public and to governments that this unacceptable failure of the global civilisation can no longer be allowed to fester much more. It is now abundantly clear that conventional approaches to food security have failed.

The Members of the United Nations declared in 1948 that everyone has a right to be free from hunger and to adequate food including drinking water, as set out in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This commitment was given legally binding form in Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It is implicit also in the right to life as contained in Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The right to an adequate standard of living including food is also found in Article 27 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and is implicit in its Article 24.

The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has in its General Comment 12 (adopted in 1999) clarified the nature of state obligations to implement the right to food, and has in its General Comment 15 (2002) made a similar clarification regarding the right to drinking water.

States have repeatedly reiterated the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger and the right to adequate food. World leaders and their representatives stated in 1996 in their Rome Declaration on World Food Security: *“We consider it intolerable that more than 800 million people throughout the world, and particularly in developing countries, do not have enough food to meet their basic nutritional needs. This situation is unacceptable”*.

The participating states therefore committed themselves to implement policies aimed at eradicating poverty and inequality and improving physical and economic access by all to sufficient, nutritionally adequate and safe food, and they pledged themselves to eradicate hunger in all countries, specifically

¹ This declaration was presented, in its english version, on 10 December 2008 in the Municipality of Berlin (Germany) and the spanish version was presented on 13 January 2009 in the Diputación of Cordoba (provincial council), Spain. This Declaration is available at www.cehap.org

² The Cordoba process was started at an international seminar on the right to food at CEHAP, Cordoba October 2007, further pursued at the Right to Food Forum organised by the FAO Right to Food Unit in October 2008, and completed in its present version following a second meeting convened in Cordoba by CEHAP on November 28-29, 2008. It will be subject of further consultations and possible revisions during 2009

by reducing the number of undernourished people by 2015 to half their level in 1996.

If implemented, this would have meant that by this point in time (end 2008) the number should have decreased to some 583 million hungry people. The contrary has happened – the number of hungry has increased over its 1996 number and is now at the incredibly high number of 967 million.

A similar commitment to reduce the share to a half by 2015 of the world population who go hungry was also made at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000, and is included in Millennium Development Goal 1, also reiterated by the 2005 Summit outcome document. But it was clear even before the present financial crisis that the target would not be reached, if conventional approaches were continued. Nor have more recent commitments made at the highest level on food and agricultural policies (Plan of Implementation adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg 2002), led to the re-design of the policies, and much less to their implementation.

In 2004, through the FAO Council, world governments adopted the Voluntary guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security. If these guidelines are followed with conscience and commitment, developments are likely to take a different turn.

The current hunger crisis is not a time-restricted famine but the sudden worsening of a chronic problem that has affected hundreds of million people for decades. Hunger is a structural problem and therefore demands structural changes, with consequences for institutional development and food system governance. Food security for all must be considered as a global public good and it must be made a central focus of global governance as well as of national development, taking into account that often the main problem is not too little food production but the inability of many to have access to food.

2. Existing diagnoses and responses

The final outcome documents of the World Food Summits in 1996 and 2002 and the High-Level Conference on “World Food Security: the Challenge of Climate Change and Bioenergy” of June 2008, and the document “Comprehensive Framework for Action” of July 2008 by the UN Secretary-General’s Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis, all contain a great number of topics and concerns, sometimes contradictory since they result from political processes that contain trade-offs and contradictions. Parts of the diagnoses given are relevant, but the responses in terms of recommendations made are not always coherent and there is lack of prioritization from a right to food perspective. Moreover, the documents do not provide for effective accountability and follow-up mechanisms that will ensure implementation. Nor has there yet been comprehensive follow-up in terms of financial disbursements to the commitments made in the High Level conference in June 2008.

Some of the factors affecting hunger and the lack of access to adequate food have been recognised in these documents, but sometimes without clear guidelines on how to meet those challenges.

The International Assessment of Agricultural Science, Knowledge and Technology for Development (IAASTD), supported by the World Bank and FAO and endorsed by more than 60 countries in April 2008, is the latest and most authoritative assessment of the role of science and technology in agriculture.

It should form the basis for ongoing discussions on the potential role of agricultural technologies. It provides valuable insights and recommendations recognizing the need for complementary and diversified approaches to sustainable agriculture, pointing out that agricultural models based on small farming can present alternatives appropriate for a human rights-based food security. Important contributions were also made at the Right to Food Forum, convened at FAO headquarter in October 2008, which demonstrated that significant advances in the promotion of the right to food is being made in several countries.

Among the factors that need much more attention and adequate responses are the following:

- Speculation in land and in food prices, which are responsible for a significant part of the recently soaring of food prices.
- Lack of legal and physical security for the tiller of the land against exploitation, deprivation of land and forced evictions
- Lack of protection of smallholder farmer communities and indigenous people against plantation-type agro-industrial expansion, as reflected in the ICARRD declaration on land and agrarian reform (Portoalegre, 2006).
- Insufficient land and agrarian reforms in favour of poor rural communities, indigenous peoples and agricultural workers, and especially women among them.
- Lack of support for small scale food production regarding access to or control over seeds, water, infrastructure, information, credits and marketing.
- Overemphasis on international trade in agricultural production over the encouragement of the production of crops for local consumption, responding to local needs and corresponding to local dietary habits.
- Dangers arising from massive investment in production of liquid agrofuels for transport, which has resulted in competition between food and non-food crops, increased food market volatility and accelerated the eviction of smallholders and indigenous peoples.
- Lack of safeguards to avoid abuses and to prevent the negative consequences of excessive intellectual property rights in seeds.
- Overemphasis on forms of agricultural production which rely on high levels of external inputs over organic cultivation.
- Lack of recognition of the value and, as a consequence, lack of investment and research on traditional food culture and of traditional crops, making these now marginalised and underutilized.
- Lack of adequate protection against the loss of biodiversity which is caused by expanding monoculture in food production.
- Pressures towards acceptance of genetically modified crops without paying due attention to the precautionary principle and to the social impacts, particularly for smallholders, of the use of such crops.
- Lack of recognition of the need of different approaches/solutions based on different agro ecological conditions, local cultural traditions and kind and level of national development.
- Not enough understanding that decisions made in one region may impact the rest of the world as they generate spin off effects (i.e. affecting security or triggering migration).
- Insufficient awareness of the relationships between agriculture-trade-energy-finance-environment and development policies.

3. Recommendations

As a consequence of the 2007-2008 food crisis and its aftermath, a series of different initiatives have been promoted by governments and international organizations to tackle hunger and the unbalances created in the food system (including the World Food Security Conference in June 2008, the High Level meeting to be held in Spain in January 2009, the proposals made by President Sarkozy of France or the World Bank's New Deal on Food Security). Those initiatives pursue a common goal: to restructure the global agri-food system. To ensure that these initiatives will help to combat hunger, there should be a call on all States to place the right to food at the top of the political agenda regarding food and agriculture. This means that:

- In general, States should, as a matter of priority, revise policies and practices to guarantee that the food insecure and vulnerable groups in their society can feed themselves directly from productive land or other natural resources, or have the means for the procurement of adequate food. They should also avoid policies and practices that prevent other States from being able to do so.
- The international community should be ready to provide assistance, when necessary, in order to enable States to meet these priority obligations. Agriculture, food security and the right to food should be given priority in national, regional and international development plans and poverty reduction strategies. Consistency should be sought in different policy areas (infrastructure, social protection, trade, research, climate change and environmental management).

Institutions/Coordination: The food crisis is not new. The problem is structural. There is urgent need to address the root causes of hunger, the structural problems and the governance dimension. This requires coordinated international action by international agencies and other international organisations and bodies, whether UN-based or otherwise, whenever issues of food security are involved. States should, individually and through international cooperation,

- aim at setting clear and more coherent goals at international and national levels and ensure their effective monitoring by using existing but underutilized instruments such as FIVIMS and national strategies for the realization of the right to food;
- facilitate the participation of civil society organizations, producers, and the most vulnerable groups in decision-making, design and implementation of policies;
- guarantee that present and future meetings aiming at the restructuring of the global food and agricultural system form part of an articulated process with intermediate achievements on common goals, keeping the right to food and food security at the core of the new system;
- consider the progressive realization of the right to food as a strategic objective of the FAO in the context of the organization's reform and strengthen its Right to Food Unit;
- ratify as quickly as possible the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,
- fully implement the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, in particular its multilateral system for access and benefit sharing and its article 9 on the Farmer Rights.

Small-scale farming: There is urgent need to prioritize the effective support, in all manners, to local, agro-ecological model of small scale farming production as a way to overcome hunger, as recommended by the IAASTD. In particular, States should

- prioritize the promotion of small farmer agriculture and the livelihood of indigenous peoples, giving special attention to the role and situation of women in food production;
- take measures to promote and protect the security of land tenure, especially with respect to women and vulnerable groups, with special attention to equitable land distribution, with agrarian reform if necessary, as mentioned in Article 11(2) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the Voluntary Guidelines for the progressive realization of the right to adequate food;
- support mechanisms to prevent the erosion and ensure the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources for food and agriculture, including the promotion of traditional knowledge, bio-diversity, local and under-utilized marginalized crops;
- take measures to strengthen local markets, shortening the chain from food production to food consumption;
- promote small-scale agriculture as important source of employment and livelihood.

Coherence: All national and international policies should be guided by a human rights-based approach, to guarantee that they respect, protect and fulfil the progressive realization of the right to adequate food. In particular, States should

- implement their obligations under the right to adequate food, including the core obligations to ensure non-discrimination and the freedom from hunger for all, and take immediate steps to establish a national strategy for the realization of the right to adequate food;
- recognize their international obligation to cooperate for the full realization of the right to adequate food;
- develop mechanisms to monitor corporations in order to ensure that they respect the right to adequate food, consistent with the obligation of States to protect this right;
- undertake human rights impact assessments of policies and programmes, particularly for trade and investment agreements;
- complete the existing twin-track approach to food security, as developed by FAO, IFAD and WFP, comprising emergency safety nets and investment in agriculture and rural development, with a third track focusing on the promotion of the right to food, institution-building, and human rights-based governance issues, giving proper relevance to accountability, participation, empowerment, non-discrimination, justiciability and capacity building. Measures should be adopted to explore and implement regulatory measures to limit speculation on agricultural commodity markets, that increases volatility of international prices and threatens the right to food of consumers and producers alike,
- reduce food dependency in developing countries and reverse the long time decline of attention to agriculture and food security.
- promote more public investments in agriculture and food security, taking into account the social, cultural and environmental dimensions of these two sectors.

Process: Without effective participation in the design, decision and implementation of policies, without monitoring, accountability and claim mechanisms, the right to food cannot be realized and hunger will continue to prevail. In this context, States should

- develop a national strategy based on the identification of the hungry and food insecure; the assessment of policies, institutions and legislation; the development of an appropriate legal framework; the strengthening of institutions and definition of roles and responsibilities to guarantee accountability and coordination; the establishment of monitoring and claim mechanisms;
- in all their activities, respect the human rights principles of participation, accountability, non-discrimination, transparency, human dignity, empowerment and the rule of law;
- promote research on the inter-relations among the concepts of the right to food, food production, sustainable agriculture, food security and food sovereignty;
- promote training and capacity building on the right to adequate food, both to duty bearers and right holders. This should include training of specialized professionals in these areas by establishing universities degrees and specific subjects, as appropriate.
- Promote and develop a Code of Ethics to facilitate the contribution from academia, professionals and civil society in general to the implementation of the right to food.
- Promote coordination and synergy among different international initiatives aimed at developing agriculture, securing food security and achieving the right to food. Any new global initiative, such as the Global Partnership for Agriculture and Food, should be developed under the aegis of the United Nations.

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