



**Food and Nutrition Security
Community**



Solution Exchange for the Food and Nutrition Security Community Consolidated Reply

Query: Implementation of Right to Food - Experiences

Compiled by Gopi N. Ghosh, Resource Person and T. N. Anuradha, Research Associate
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From [Rebecca Kik](#), Right-to-Food Volunteer, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), New Delhi
Posted 17 October 2007

Dear all,

16th October is celebrated all across the world as World Food Day (WFD). This year's theme for the WFD is 'Right to Food'. Also here in India, interesting events took place to enhance people's awareness about the topic and make them think about it. An important conference is being planned in December this year on this issue.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food in 2002 defined the right to adequate food as: "Right to adequate food is a human right, inherent in all people, to have regular, permanent and unrestricted access, either directly or by means of financial purchases, to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food corresponding to the cultural traditions of people to which the consumer belongs, and which ensures a physical and mental, individual and collective fulfilling and dignified life free of fear".

The General Comment 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) states that: "The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, have the physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement". Kindly see the FAO WFD theme (http://www.fao.org/wfd2007/index_en.html) and Guidelines (<http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/009/y9825e/y9825e00.htm>) for more details.

The right to food is not only guaranteed in a voluntary and moral manner, it is assured in different international covenants and agreements like the ICESCR as well as put into the international agenda through the World Food Summit (<http://www.fas.usda.gov/icd/summit/basic.html>) and the Millennium Declaration (<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>), which envisage reducing the number of hungry and malnourished by half by the year 2015.

India has ratified these covenants and agreements and is legally bound to honour these commitments. This becomes much more relevant when India still is found to be the home of the largest number of poor and malnourished people in the world.

After some path- breaking decisions by the Supreme Court, good and astute work of various civil society organizations, Indian Government also improved its programs to implement the Supreme Court decisions and various interim orders which stipulate that assistance must be extended to those at risk of starvation and also stressing on the full implementation of all food- based schemes across India. Several measures are already under implementation in this regard.

With these backgrounds, I will like the members to share their experiences on the following issues:

- What are some measures that have been taken to create greater awareness about the issues and challenges concerning Right to Food?
- What additional special programmes and activities could be geared towards the fulfilment of the Right to Food obligations?
- What actions would ensure the implementation of the Right to Food if appropriate legislation is brought in as per the Guidelines, and what could be the role of stakeholders in fulfilling various Right to Food provisions under Indian context?

I am really looking forward to exciting inputs from the members that could ensure every citizen the right to food. I would also be using the inputs to prepare a concise document.

Responses were received, with thanks, from

1. [K. V. Peter](#), Kerala Agricultural University, Thrissur
2. [P. K. Thampan](#), Peekay Tree Crops Development Foundation, Kochi
3. [T. P. Trivedi](#), Indian Council for Agricultural Research, New Delhi
4. [B. L. Kaul](#), Society for Popularization of Science, Jammu
5. [N. P. Y. Raman](#), National Cooperative Development Corporation, New Delhi
6. [Ranjan Mohapatra](#), Vision Foundation for Development Management, New Delhi
7. [Gopi N. Ghosh](#), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), New Delhi
8. [Umesh Kapil](#), All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi
9. [Raj Ganguly](#), Independent Consultant, New Delhi
10. [Anaam Sharma](#), Centre for Science, Development and Media Studies (CSDMS), Noida
11. [Ramesh V. Bhat](#), Centre for Science, Society and Culture, Hyderabad

Further contributions are welcome!

[Summary of Responses](#)
[Comparative Experiences](#)
[Related Resources](#)
[Responses in Full](#)

Summary of Responses

'The Right to Food' is a fundamental human right, entitling every person regular access to sufficient, nutritionally adequate and culturally acceptable food to lead an active, healthy life. In India, 28.6% of the 106.54 crore population still do not have enough food to eat. Responding to the query on ways to improve implementation of 'right to food' efforts, members shared successful initiatives and outlined possible strategies for its realization, such as large-scale awareness generation.

Respondents referred to the Global International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development ([IAASTD report](#)), noting the high levels of rural (30.2%) and urban (24.7%) poverty;

hunger and malnutrition (20% of the population is undernourished and 49% of children under-five are under weight); gender inequality and social exclusion; environmental degradation; and the growing urban-rural divide in India. They also expressed alarm over the decline in the agricultural sector's contribution to the total GDP, given that agriculture remains the main source of livelihood for millions.

Members pointed to the poor promotion of development programmes and right-based issues in India and felt there have been minimal efforts towards **promoting and/or creating awareness** about the right to food. Discussants argued it is essential to clarify the myths associated with the 'right to food' in order to promote the concept. According to [FAO guidelines](#) the right to adequate food is not the 'right to be fed,' it is the right to feed oneself with dignity. Another misconception, equates the right to adequate food with food-standards or the right to safe food. The right to food guidelines emphasis the quantity, appropriateness and quality of food, as well as highlighting the fact that the right to adequate food is not a western concept but a fundamental aspect of all cultures and not just a development 'fad.'

Highlighting the need for greater awareness regarding the 'right to food,' members discussed divergent views on the concept. One view argues people do not need 'human rights' but food. On the other hand, the human rights approach stresses the importance of putting people at the center of development and empowering them to claim their rights. The rights-based approach, discussants explained, casts an inalienable responsibility on government to create the necessary environment that allows everyone to feed himself or herself in dignity, while at the same time noting it is difficult to expect the Government alone to provide food to everyone.

Another important issue raised was that the people to have the 'right to know what food they eat'. In this context, members cited the experience of the banned Corn Soy Blend mixture supplied in [Orissa](#) that caused an allergic reaction among those consuming it. Respondents felt there is a need for appropriate labeling of Genetically Modified (GM) and non-GM food. They pointed out not all GM is suitable for human consumption and beneficiaries not adequately informed about the contents of the food. Large-scale awareness building at the national level through advertisements and promotional spots may also be effective, similar to the promotional efforts presently underway for the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) and National Rural Health Mission (NRHM).

Even though green revolution brought a major change by making India self sufficient in food and an exporter of cereals, recent years have witnessed a reversal of this trend, with India once again becoming a massive importer of grains. Discussing **various strategies** towards improved agricultural production systems for realization of the right to food, members stressed that formulating practical steps could be a more viable action rather than reiterating production and productivity problems. They felt Local Self-Government Institutions (LSGIs); particularly village panchayats could play an important role in creating multiple sources of food and generating income and employment. Capacity building of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to plan for procurement and stocking to ensure availability of food on long-term basis as part of the implementation of programmes was suggested. Additionally, discussants noted the management of food security needs to rest on local initiatives like cooperatives, self-help groups and other similar people-based initiatives and not only on government departments.

Respondents put forward the need to recognize root and tuber crops, protective foods like fruits and vegetables, animal products as major sources of food in addition to cereals. Emphasizing the need to adopt a viable production system, discussants recommended employing integrated intensive agriculture approach for the diverse food needs. They cited the successful experience of the farmers in Pattanakkad Block, Alappuzha district of [Kerala](#) as an example. Another alternative cited was the time-tested agriculture practice of growing coarse grains to achieve food security.

Other suggestions included dovetailing with major national level development programmes, like NREGS, NRHM, and the Mid-Day Meal, with food security initiatives and ensuring funding for food security initiatives by setting up a 'National Food Security Fund' with contributions from the government, the

public and private sector, voluntary agencies, and organized sector workers. Another recommendation was to use 'Social Audits' during implementation of the right to food initiatives to guarantee a transparent and participatory process with systematic monitoring and evaluation to curb leaks within the system. This approach was successfully employed in [Andhra Pradesh](#) for the National Food for Work Programme that resulted in a pool of trained resource persons, paving way for the audits being conducted by the beneficiary families.

Members felt that in the ultimate analysis, no action could be effective in translating legislative intent into action on the ground without political will. They felt grass root level institutions like PRIs, gram sabhas and other people-based initiatives must be empowered so that the 'right to food' campaign meets the needs of its intended beneficiaries. Governments also must be motivated in strengthening the demand system to put pressure on the supply system to deliver on promised programmes. Finally, they stressed the necessity of bridging the knowledge gaps to secure involvement of stakeholders.

Comparative Experiences

Andhra Pradesh

Social Audit can Ensure Right to Food (from [N. P. Y. Raman](#), *National Cooperative Development Corporation, New Delhi*)

The National Food for Work Programme conducted a social audit on its work, which has given significant insights into what constitutes a well-designed delivery system. The actual auditing on the progress was carried out by literate village resident beneficiaries. Based on the success of this social audit, a similar one is planned to examine the implementation of employment guarantee schemes in the state. [Read more](#)

Kerala

Intensive Integrated Agriculture for Realising Right to Food, Alappuzha (from [P. K. Thampan](#), *Peekey Tree Crops Development Foundation, Kochi*)

Mr. Vishwanathan of Thuravur Panchayat in Pattanakkad block has adopted integrated agriculture practices by raising poultry, rabbits and pigs on his 20-cent farming unit. This integrated approach is helping his family earn an average income of Rs. 10,000 per month and is proving to be an innovative way of ensuring multiple sources of food, income and employment.

Orissa

Right to Know What You Eat (from [Ramesh V. Bhat](#), *Centre for Science, Society and Culture, Hyderabad*)

Starlink variety of genetically modified corns were distributed in the state, resulting many of those who consumed the corn to people develop an allergy. This variety was banned in United States, Japan and South Korea as suitable only for animal consumption. As a result, concerns have been raised in the country regarding the need for the population to know more about what they eat. [Read more](#)

Related Resources

Recommended Documentation

Unapproved GM Corn Found in US Food Chain (from [Ramesh V. Bhat](#), *Centre for Science, Society and Culture, Hyderabad*)

Article; Kurt Kleiner; NewScientist Environment; United States; 23 March 2005

Available at <http://environment.newscientist.com/channel/earth/dn7188-unapproved-gm-corn-found-in-us-food-chain.html>

Reports on incident of Swiss company accidentally selling unapproved genetically modified corn, which calls for apart from Right to food, the right know what is in the food

Developing a System for Managing Food Security Through Panchayati Raj (from [Ranjan Mohapatra](#), Vision Foundation for Development Management, New Delhi)

Article; by Ranjan Mohapatra; Vision Foundation for Development Management; New Delhi

Available at <http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/food/cr/res171007.doc> (Doc, Size: 35 KB)

Analyses the problem of food security that is rooted in food production in and around centres of consumption, income generation and purchasing power of poor to buy food

From [Rebecca Kik](#), FAO, New Delhi

Voluntary Guidelines

Report; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); Rome; 2005

Available at <http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/009/y9825e/y9825e00.htm>

Provides practical guidance to states for implementation of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security and goals of the World Food Summit Plan of Action

World Food Summit: Basic Information

Article; FAO; FAS Online; November 1995

Available at <http://www.fas.usda.gov/icd/summit/basic.html>

Provides backgrounder to the Summit that aimed at renewing the commitment of world leaders on eradication of hunger and malnutrition, and achievement of food security

Global International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) Report (from [K V Peter](#), Kerala Agricultural University, Thrissur)

Draft Report; 14 September 2007

Available at http://www.agassessment.org/docs/Global_SDM_150907.pdf (PDF, Size: 150 KB)

Reviews the possibility of meeting IAASTD goals of reducing hunger and poverty through income generation, access to and use of agricultural knowledge, science and technology

Generating Jobs through Food For Work (from [N P Y Raman](#), National Cooperative Development Corporation, New Delhi)

Article; by Aditi Lahiri; Press Information Bureau; 26 May 2005

Available at <http://pib.nic.in/release/release.asp?relid=9497>

Refers to the effective implementation of the National Food for Work Programme due to the transparency in its implementation through social audit and vigilance at the grassroots level

From [Gopi Ghosh](#), Resource Person

Enforcing Right to Food in India: Bottlenecks in Delivering the Expected Outcome

Paper; by George Cheriyan; Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS), Jaipur; Paper for Second International Workshop ICSSR-WIDER/UNV Joint Project on Food Security; Helsinki, Finland; 12-14 October 2005

Available at <http://www.wider.unu.edu/research/2004-2005/2004-2005-4/papers/cheriyan.pdf> (PDF, Size: 124 KB)

Examines and reviews the obligations and initiatives by the Government of India (GoI) to ensure food security through various schemes.

Right to food in India

Paper; by S. Mahendra Dev; Centre for Economic and Social Studies; IDEAS

Available at <http://ideas.repec.org/p/ind/cesswp/50.html>

Examine right to food in the Indian context, analyses the right to food in terms of availability, accessibility, adequacy and sustainability in terms of equity and justifiability

The Human Right to Food in India

Article; by George Kent; University of Hawai; 12 March 2002

Available at <http://www.earthwindow.com/grc2/foodrights/HumanRightToFoodinIndia.pdf> (PDF, Size: 60 KB)

Reviews the case by People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL) that is challenging the practice by the Indian Government of storing many millions of tons of grain while people are starving

From [T. N. Anuradha](#), Research Associate

The Right to Food in Practice

Paper; FAO; Rome; 2006

Available at http://www.fao.org/docs/eims/upload/214719/AH189_en.pdf (PDF, Size: 538 KB)

Gives practical guidance as to how to implement the right to food at the national level, with examples of best practice from various countries

The Right to Food

Article; by Biraj Patnaik; Infochange; October 2006

Available at http://www.infochangeindia.org/agenda6_13.jsp

Outlines how the campaign has succeeded in establishing the importance of law as facilitator, but at the same how the right to food requires political means and people's participation

Status of Social Security Schemes under Right to Food

Research Findings; Poorest Area Civil Society Programme

Available at

<http://www.empowerpoor.com/downloads/statereport/JharkandReport/Research%20issues%20JH.pdf>

(PDF Size: 767 KB)

Highlights the need for appropriate mapping and analysis for implementation of right to food to identify discrepancies and status of social security schemes

SC Checking Food Crisis

Article; India Together; August 2003

Available at <http://www.indiatogether.org/2003/aug/pov-rtfupdate.htm>

Reports the focused monitoring of the implementation of the Supreme Court's May 2003 directives on the "Right To Food" litigation is beginning to pay off

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Recommends Constitution of Watch Committees for a Hunger Free India

Article; National Human Rights Commission (NHRC); New Delhi; 16 October 2007

Available at <http://nhrc.nic.in/dispArchive.asp?fno=1492>

NHRC has a Core Group on Right to Food, has come out with guidelines for constitution Watch Committees at various levels in every State to ensure Right to Food

Recommended Organizations and Programmes

From [T. N. Anuradha](#), Research Associate

Right to Food Campaign, New Delhi

5 A, Jungi House, Shahpur Jat, 110049 New Delhi; righttofood@gmail.com; www.righttofoodindia.org

An informal network of organisations and individuals committed to the realisation of the right to food in India works towards the fundamental right to be free from hunger

Sir Dorabji TATA Trust, Mumbai

Bombay House, 24, Homi Mody Street, Mumbai 400001 Maharashtra; Tel: 91-22-66658282; Fax: 91-22-22045427; sdtt@sdtatatrust.com; http://www.dorabjitatatrust.org/ngo_profiles/rtf.asp

Trust is supporting six community based organisations for ensuring ruling of the Supreme Court of India on Right To Food in 2001 is implemented

Recommended Portals and Information Bases

From [Rebecca Kik](#), FAO, New Delhi

The Right to Food, FAO, Rome

http://www.fao.org/wfd2007/index_wfd2007

Provides background information, related resources, events thematic sites and related links on the right to food

UN Millennium Development Goals, United Nations

<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

Lists information on the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), that includes eradication of extreme poverty and hunger as agreed by all countries and development institutions

Responses in Full

[K. V. Peter](#), Kerala Agricultural University, Thrissur

World food day is celebrated with the theme 'the right to food,' an elusive dream to 28.6% of 106.54 crores of people in India. Rural poverty headcount is 30.2% and urban 24.7%, not at all a good picture for the country. Prevalence of under nourished is 20% in 2004 while it is only 12% in China. A comparison with China is quite revealing. In absolute numbers, the undernourished counts 20.95 crores in India and 15.37 crores in China. "India's economy may be roaring up, but Agriculture remains its Achilles heal", the sources of livelihood for hundreds of millions of people but a fraction of the nations total economy and a symbol of its abiding difficulties, New York Times writes Indian farmers could not harvest enough grains to feed the nation during the 'ship to mouth' existence in the post Bengal famine period and harvested enough to a state of 'Farm to ship' during green revolution.

Green revolution brought major change in agriculture based on extension of irrigation, use of high yielding varieties seeds responsive to higher doses of inorganic fertilizers and other inputs. India moved from an importer of cereals to a net exporter. The recent years witness a reversal of India's food production capability from self sufficiency in wheat and rice to a massive importer of grains. The present per capita production of food grains is reversed back to that in 1970s. Over uses of ground water transformed states like Punjab and Haryana, water vulnerable states. Carbon content of soil is down due to depletion of nutrients from bio- organic sources. Soils in major production centres are sick due to dwindling life supportive microbial load. High levels of rural poverty, hunger and malnutrition, gender inequality and social exclusion, environmental degradation and a growing urban-rural divide continue to maim development processes and outcomes in India. Percentage of under five under weight is 49 in the category of moderate and 21 in severe as per a global International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) Report, 2007 (http://www.agassessment.org/docs/Global_SDM_150907.pdf).

About 57% of Pre School children have sub clinical vitamin A deficiency. Rural poverty has not abated in Bihar (44%), Assam (40.3%), Madhya Pradesh (37.2%) and the so called industrially progressive Maharashtra (23.2%), Jammu and Kashmir(4.7%) Punjab (6%), Haryana (7.4%) and Himachal Pradesh (7.5%) are success stories of political sagacity coupled with toiling cultures of farmers and effective transfer of scientific technology. Despite break through in development of varieties and hybrids, productivity is low in wheat (2.5 t/ha-32nd global rank), rice (2.8t/ha-35th rank) and pulses (0.6 t/ha-118th rank). Percentage of people employed in agriculture in India is 60 while it is 49 in China. The percentage contribution of agriculture to total GDP of India is 22%. Any slackening in this front would be catastrophic.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1946 recognized the right to food as a human right. It was then incorporated in the International Covenant on Economics, Social and Cultural Rights (article 11), adapted in 1966 and ratified by 156 states, which are today legally bound by its provision. Is it possible for India to produce 420 million tonnes of food grains by 2020 to meet the food needs of 140 crores of people and to ensure the right to food.

P. K. Thampan, Peekay Tree Crops Development Foundation, Kochi

I have gone through with interest the views and comments of Rebecca Kik and K. V. Peter on the subject. I am of the view that cereals alone do not constitute food. Apart from this, root and tuber crops, protective foods like fruits and vegetables, animal and poultry products as well as fish also form major sources of food. With concerted efforts it will not be impossible to augment the availability of these food products for the benefit of our people. By taking measures for sustaining a viable production system for these diverse food products not only the availability but the access to of the economically poor people is also enhanced through the creation of increased employment opportunities.

The Local Self Government Institutions (LSGIs), particularly the village panchayats have a major responsibility for stimulating the interest of the people towards adopting intensive integrated agriculture in their holdings for growing a variety of food crops with or without animal components for producing multiple sources of food, income and employment. My experience in this regard is that by adopting such a production technology in an area of just 50 cents not only the food and nutrition needs of the family could be satisfied but the cash needs of the dependent family of 4-5 members could also be met from the marketable surplus derived from the farming unit. A case in point is a 20 cents farming unit owned by one Mr. K. P. Viswanathan of Thuravur Panchayat in the Pattanakkad Block in the Alappuzha district of Kerala from which the net monthly income earned by the family is average Rs. 10,000 per month. Mr. Viswanathan has integrated poultry, rabbitry, piggery etc in the farming unit. In recognition of the efforts put in by this enterprising farmer my organization 'Peekay Tree Crops Development Foundation' has awarded a prize on the 17th of October 2007 in association with the local panchayat.

Instead of reiterating the production and productivity problems of cereals in the country practical steps are to be formulated and put into effect at the village levels for creating multiple sources of food, income and employment under the leadership of the village panchayats. By giving priority to the promotion of intensive integrated agriculture in household units, both the availability of and access to food for the millions of families presently languishing below poverty line could be taken care of.

T. P. Trivedi, Indian Council for Agricultural Research, New Delhi

Efforts should be made to create awareness in rural and urban segments towards balanced nutritional requirements. Market should be created so that diversified farming is promoted and becomes a profitable venture.

[B. L. Kaul](#), Society for Popularization of Science, Jammu

With the information continuously trickling in that production of cereals is coming down and cereal producing farmers are following in foot steps of cotton farmers in committing suicides and many farmers selling their holdings in order to migrate to Canada food production scenario is fast changing. The question we must ask ourselves: Is Green Revolution coming to a stop?

There is no other alternative but to revert to old practices of agriculture including a stress on growing coarse grains to meet food and nutritional needs. Panchayats and Local Self Governments have to step in a big way to help produce more food to implement Right to Food. Organic farming too has to be encouraged on a massive scale to enrich our depleted soils. Right to Food is the basic right of every citizen and it is to be implemented at all costs. We can not be complacent and face famines.

[N. P. Y. Raman](#), National Cooperative Development Corporation, New Delhi

Here are my viewpoints to the specific queries you have raised

Measures to create greater awareness

Food security needs to be viewed in multi-dimensional prospective encompassing aspects of health, education, employment generation, gender inequality etc. Programmes for achieving food security or alleviating poverty have to be essentially devised / designed in such a manner that the distribution of power and resources are not biased against the needy poor. The ultimate objective of such programmes should be empowerment, domination by the people for whom these are meant. Major bottlenecks in the way are: bridging the knowledge gap and securing the involvement of the stake-holders.

In this connection, the experience of a team, which surveyed the status of primary education services and the extent of local participation in Uttar Pradesh, appears interesting (Reference Economic and Political Weekly – 14-20 Apr 07). The first intervention was to address the actual knowledge gap in the village about primary education. The gap was not only knowledge about provisions, resources and decision making at the local level, but also about how to share the existing information that is already available.

The team found it quite difficult to get people to agree to participate in the village meetings. To ensure reasonable attendance in such meetings, it organized smaller meetings and discussions in small groups on village-to-village basis. Written messages through posters had little meaning on account of high illiteracy. The team had to discard the model of ‘outsider’ coming and giving speeches to ‘inform’ the villagers because it appeared that few were likely to retain this information for any reasonable period of time or actually use it to change their actions. It therefore tried to facilitate the discussion in such a way that it was the local key actors of the village (Gram Pradhan and School Teachers) who provided both general information about the provisions and resources available at the village level, and other village-specific information, its membership, what resources it receives and the different roles it can play.

In the second intervention, the team invited local inhabitants to participate in collecting information about the learning status of their children. This led the adults to participate and interact with children to see for themselves who could read or do arithmetic and where the children were getting stuck. The team used this technique to train literate adults to facilitate children to read, write etc. The third and most intensive intervention included introduction of this technique in the village on a boarder scale and training of local volunteers. This experience could offer valuable lessons in our attempt to create a radical consciousness and greater awareness among the rural poor about their right to food security.

Special programs and activities

Apart from programmes like 'mid-day meal' which address the food and nutrition requirements of school-going children and 'food for work' programmes which ensure security through employment and also creation of infrastructure in rural areas, other social security schemes in the areas of employment generation (like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme), health (National Rural Health Mission), disability, maternity, old age protection etc. need to be appropriately dovetailed and implemented in conjunction with food security initiatives. At macro-level, a 'National Food Security Fund' could be set-up to finance food security initiatives by contribution from Governments, public & private sectors, voluntary agencies, employees and workers of organized sector etc.

Ensuring the implementation of the Right to Food

There needs to be a major shift from the Fabian and neo-Fabian models that have been largely in practice in India. This would imply management of food security not by government departments and parastatal bodies but such management predominantly resting on local initiatives like cooperatives, self-help groups and other similar people-based initiatives. Local self-governance institutions like panchayats could also be expected to play its role if such bodies are elected and represent truly the will of the local populace. NGOs and voluntary agencies should be roped in to play a major role not only in creating the necessary awareness but also in helping implementation, with the national/State Governments confining itself in creating and sustaining the necessary ambience and regulatory framework.

'Social Audit' should form the backbone of implementation of the right to food initiatives for the simple reason that it is a transparent and participatory process that can be used not only as a monitoring and evaluation tool but also as a means of uncovering and addressing the leakages within the system. In this context, the experience of some of the Indian states like Andhra Pradesh in implementing National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) could be of advantage (reference Economic and Political Weekly 3-9 Feb'07). The Andhra Pradesh's experience is significant as it comes against the backdrop of a well-designed delivery system. A committed top-level bureaucracy has undertaken several initiatives to address corruption and leakages. An end-to-end information technology (IT) application ensures a variety of jobs undertaken easily and efficiently. Selected personnel from different CSOs, NGOs and other people-based associations have received training to act as State resource persons. As part of training, pilot social audits were conducted on civil works carried out under the National Food for Work Programme. The insights gained were significant. The entire initiative has resulted in a pool of trained resource persons and paving way for the actual audits to be conducted by literate village residents who belong to the beneficiary families. The State Government has now decided to bring more districts where the employment guarantee scheme is being implemented under the social audit process.

[Ranjan Mohapatra](#), Vision Foundation for Development Management, New Delhi

Thanks for your interest on Right to Food and food security. The specific answers to your questions are given below.

1. History of promotion of development programmes and right based issues are very poor in India. There is a TV campaign about the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), beyond this hardly any effective campaign is being made to promote right to food
2. Right to food obligation can be effectively implemented through additional programmes like
 - Awareness building, a national programme may be launched involving NGOs, media channels offering free time slots for advertisement, promotional spots may be made with commitments of the top leaders and eminent personalities.
 - Capacity building of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to plan for availability of food and implement programmes matching with local conditions.
 - No action can be effective to translate legislation into action on ground, in absence of political will, which is missing now. The strategic need is to empower the grass roots level institutions like

PRI and gram sabhas to be capable of demanding and asserting their rights, which demands huge investments. The government is not ready to spend on awareness building, capacity building and controlling delivery system to increase reach from 15 % to 90 %.

We therefore need to motivate government to spend money on strengthening the demand system, the grassroots level institutions, which can put pressure on supply system to deliver programmes as committed.

I am also sharing my article on 'Developing a System for Managing Food Security through Panchayati Raj' (<http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/food/cr/res171007.doc>)

Gopi N. Ghosh, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), New Delhi

The right to food concept has to be understood in its real perspectives. Let me quote some of the myths that I learnt from a course from FAO Rome only last week.

The Right to Adequate Food is not equal to the Right to Be Fed. Many people assume that the right to adequate food means that governments have an obligation to hand out free food to everyone who wants it. The right to adequate food would then be equated with food aid, which could also have negative effects as a cause of dependency and disincentives to work. This is a misunderstanding. The right to adequate food is in fact primarily the right to feed oneself in dignity. Food aid is an emergency measure that should have a limited time frame.

The Right to Adequate Food is not equal to the Right to Safe Food. The right to adequate food is sometimes understood as referring to the standards for the food that is available on the market. Adequacy refers to quantity, quality and appropriateness, taking into account cultural aspects as well as the physiology of the individual, for instance, age and health status.

The Right to Adequate Food is not a Western Concept. Some perceive human rights as a Western concept that is culturally irrelevant to many developing countries and serves primarily the purpose of controlling the latter through aid, trade and debt conditionality. This view is mistaken. Human rights are universal and sought after by people from all cultures. No one wishes to have their human rights infringed.

The Right to Adequate Food is not Voluntary. It is sometimes argued that the right to adequate food is not a real human right. At best it constitutes an inspirational goal, as there will always be food insecurity in the world, and the right itself does not lend it self to legal enforcement. This line of thought overlooks the fact that the right to adequate food is recognized in binding international law. Many countries have demonstrated that such steps can be taken.

The Right to Adequate Food is not a Development Fad. To some people in the development field, the human rights based approach to food security seem yet another fad in international development. This is not so. A human rights based approach does not replace development approaches, but enriches them.

The Right to Adequate Food is not too Legalistic. It is true that international human rights law is indeed law. However, the implementation of human rights requires measures in many fields, not only the legal field. Indeed, full implementation of the right to food should permeate all sectors of government and civil society.

The Right to Adequate Food is not Unnecessary. There is a perception that people do not need rights but food. However, the human rights approach puts those people at the center of development

and empowers them to claim their rights. Implementation of the right to adequate food ensures that the well-known techniques and instruments are actually used.

The Right to Adequate Food is not too Demanding on Governments. It is argued that the globalized economic system puts enormous pressure on governments to stay competitive which lead to lower revenues. This is said to limit the possibilities to live up to the function of primary duty bearer. Governments do not need to provide food for everyone but create an environment that allows everyone to feed him or herself in dignity. Also, no matter how huge pressure on governments might be, ensuring that nobody suffers hunger always has to be a priority.

Umesh Kapil, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi

I have been reading the interesting and informative responses on the issue of Implementation of Right to Food.

Gopi Ghosh has added few dimensions in his comments posted recently, I would like to further add another important aspect which is the "Right to Know What Food We Eat". Often the food is provided or administered or distributed free to the "Poor and Underprivileged people" as a part of supplementary feeding or supplementary nutrition programs in the developing countries. The different types of food provided by National and Bilateral agencies, directly or indirectly, without informing the beneficiaries, possible advantages and disadvantages, if any, of the food provided to them.

Recently, Genetically Modified (GM) food was provided by an agency, as an charitable food aid to the poor beneficiaries, when adequate data on it's safety was (possibly) not available on long term feeding of the GM food. The beneficiaries were never informed that the food provided to the was genetically modified.

The supplementary food provided may have many micronutrients, which might be interacting / competing with each other for absorption and possibly doing some harm then benefit, in severely malnourished beneficiaries.

This type of Food Aid may be provided on a continuous basis for 200 to 300 days each year, during the first 5 years of life.

The poor beneficiaries also have "Right to Know What Food They Eat".

Raj Ganguly, Independent Consultant, New Delhi

While the effort towards 'Right to Food' is laudable, it is high time we don't limit our actions and vision for 'Right to Good Food'. The recipient should be treated at an equal level with the donor. When on one hand food labelling has gone up to 'nutrition labelling' and often includes other safety dimensions such as HACCP, GMP, Organic etc., we need to secure at least "Right to Know What Food They Eat" in the international food aids and set quality benchmarks with agreed food safety standards.

Anaam Sharma, Centre for Science, Development and Media Studies (CSDMS), Noida

In our country we as consumers (who pay) have no choice making between GM and Non-GM food. It is not legally mandated to declare if the food is GM or not. Under the light of this discussion it is important to secure our right to food and information on its origin as well.

Ramesh V. Bhat, Centre for Science, Society and Culture, Hyderabad

The concern of poor beneficiaries "Right to know what food they eat" is fully justified. The agencies involved in distributing the Corn Soy Blend mixture in Orissa around 2000-2003 had denied the distribution of any unsafe food. However, after the CNN news channel broke the story of allergenicity among persons consuming Starlink variety of genetically modified corn, it became clear that this variety was not approved in the USA for human consumption (<http://environment.newscientist.com/channel/earth/dn7188-unapproved-gm-corn-found-in-us-food-chain.html>) but only for use in animal nutrition.

Subsequent to the actions of the Governments of Japan and South Korea in impounding consignment of shipments of Corn supplies containing Starlink variety of corn, the foods made from this variety were sold in the USA were recalled from the market. Despite the unequivocal evidences available, the US Embassy in India took the stand that the consignments sent to India as food aid for distribution to poor beneficiaries could have contained the Stralink variety of corn, which was not approved in the USA itself, but they had no mechanism to prevent its contamination and the supplies could be from old stock. Even attempts were made later to claim that the Starlink variety of GM Corn is safe. Sutton et al (2003) had proposed that Double blind placebo controlled food challenge approach as the ultimate proof of the true allergenicity of Starlink or other transgenic proteins and found Starlink maize to be non allergenic. In our publication in the same journal (Siruguri et al 2004), we challenged that finding.

Sutton et al 2004, agreed that

- Reliable methods of allergen predictability are not available
- Only "educated guesses concerning when and how a protein might be allergen" to be made
- Double blind placebo controlled food challenge a method of choice to prove allergenicity and not the "ultimate proof"
- Safety assessment of GM foods using more sophisticated techniques are needed

A negative double blind placebo controlled challenge to genetically modified corn (<http://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0091674903020244>), by Sutton S A, Assaad A H, Steimetz C, Rothenberg M E and Starlink genetically modified corn and allergenicity in an individual (<http://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0091674904006104>) by J Allergy Clin Immunol, Siruguri V, Sesikeran B and R V Bhat summarizes our current knowledge on the subject and the scenario had not changed during last several years.

Under these circumstances there are difficulties for the poor innocent beneficiaries to exercise their "Right to know what food they eat". The lesson that has been learnt is that the civil society groups should keep vigilance, civil servants should withstand the pressure from vested interests and the Government should ensure that only right quality of food is distributed.

Many thanks to all who contributed to this query!

If you have further information to share on this topic, please send it to Solution Exchange for the Food and Nutrition Security Community in India at se-food@solutionexchange-un.net.in with the subject heading "Re: [se-food] Query: Implementation of Right to Food - Experiences. Additional Reply."

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