

30 YEARS
SUPPORTING

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE RIGHT TO FOOD & NUTRITION



Women

The Right to Feed Off Equality

What are women's rights?

As right-holders of all internationally recognized human rights, women are entitled to equal remuneration for work of equal value, land tenure, sexual and reproductive health, as well as to education, social security and political participation.

Given the appalling discrimination that women face, their rights have also been incorporated into different domestic and public international legal instruments. The **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)** has been groundbreaking as it acknowledges that „extensive discrimination against women continues to exist“, and emphasizes that such behavior is in violation „to the principles of equality of rights and respect for human dignity“.

This human rights instrument spells out the meaning of equality and how it can be achieved by establishing an international bill of rights for women and also an agenda for action to guarantee the enjoyment of those rights. Overall, however, States are still miles away from reaching full equality for their female citizens.

Women's rights in food sovereignty

As laid down by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights (ICESCR), the right to food must be guaranteed to every human being without discrimination. Emphasizing the interdependence of human rights, without equal access to education, health, employment and other economic opportunities, as well as to land and natural resources in the rural areas, the right to food and nutrition of women fails to be fulfilled.

When assessing the realization of peoples' human right to adequate food, the participation of women across the entire spectrum of food production cannot be overlooked. Women cultivate, plough and harvest **more than 50% of the world's food**. They significantly contribute to the reproduction of labor in the food sector through their participation in pre-harvest and post-harvest activities, preservation and transferring of traditional knowledge in their communities, and by bearing the responsibility of caregiving in both rural and urban areas.

Indeed, given their key role in food production, as well as their specific needs, the rights of women have been addressed recently by the CEDAW with its **General Recommendation No. 34**, including their right to adequate food and nutrition within the framework of food sovereignty.



But currently...

Women and girls suffer disproportionately from malnutrition and still have restricted access to adequate food as well as to the means for its procurement. In practice, this leads to an unfortunate scenario where women and girls account for 70% of the world's hungry and are at highest risk to suffer in times of food price volatility. By the same token, women own less than 2% of the land worldwide in rural areas and are also likely to be excluded from decision-making and leadership positions in relation to management and control over natural resources, crucial for food production.

Furthermore, in other sectors of society women are restricted from obtaining a decent income from employment or self-employment and are thus left without a possibility to secure their access to adequate and nutritious food.

Traditionally-assigned roles to women and men have prevented the way to sustainable and gender-transformative food systems. A discriminatory approach to food does not address inequitable power relations in a structural manner, and therefore dissociates the fulfillment of women rights to that of the right to food. This is the case of laws and policies that fail to acknowledge women as food producers and disregard the specific challenges a woman faces when seeking access to food and nutrition on a regular basis throughout her lifespan.

Required approaches

As long as women are left in a disadvantaged position and in the public and private domains of society, the full realization of the right to food will not be achieved. Proper implementation of anti-discrimination laws and policies are an essential prerequisite for access of women to resources and food systems. Likewise, States should tackle accordingly the different realities experienced by women vis-à-vis men and other women, especially those from excluded sectors of society such as rural, indigenous, low-income and LGBTI women.

Increasing overall dispossession of the world commons has significantly affected women's interaction to the few productive resources upon which they have gained access and control; such as seeds, water and land. In hostile environments, this has been accompanied by sexual attacks and other forms of gender-based violence perpetrated either by public authorities and/or private security officials. States should ensure that the defense of the right to food is not restricted through the misuse of criminal law, arbitrary detentions, harassment to the communities defending their territories, and the killing of its members.

If the right to food of women is not realized, they will be unable to perform. If their fundamental freedoms are undermined, women, as well as men, will not be able to further procure their human right to adequate food and nutrition and that of corollary rights.

What comes next?

The next series will look into the challenges that the future generations will face to meet their human right to food and nutrition.

Want to know more?

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