The FAO Voluntary Guidelines to help achieving the Millennium Development Goals

A – The Millennium Development Goals and the Voluntary Guidelines on the right to food

On September 18, 2000 all States of the UN General Assembly adopted the UN Millennium Declaration which reaffirmed the faith of States in the system of the UN. The Declaration reiterated the need for more peace, democracy and respect for human rights, alleviation of poverty, environmental protection and UN reform to strengthen the organisation and provide more effectiveness and coherence. The states adopted the Declaration and by doing so committed themselves to implement and achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for development and poverty eradication. The first of the 8 MDGs is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger with the related target to reduce by half the proportion of people suffering hunger by 2015.

So far, development policies have not succeeded in eradicating hunger. On the contrary, the progress towards halving the number of hungry worldwide until 2015 is really weak and in certain regions of the world, the situation is even worsening. Increased agricultural productivity alone is no sufficient and adequate response to the problem of the prevalence of hunger and to violations of the right to food. They will not help in effectively reducing hunger as long as forced evictions without adequate compensation and other forms of violations are taking place at the same time, leaving millions of rural poor without means of livelihood.
Indeed, contrary to what is often claimed, only about 10 percent of the hungry are victims of natural catastrophes or armed conflicts. An overwhelming majority of the hungry are victims of violations of her/his right to food and suffer from chronic hunger and malnutrition. Therefore, a human rights approach to development policies and hunger eradication strategies is needed. In that context, the MDG process appears as a great chance to introduce this approach.

Since 2000, the MDG process has mobilised the whole development community as well as a large part of the public opinion and will continue doing so for the next 10 years at least. For FIAN and civil society organisations, this means that major stakeholders and actors who have significant influence on the realization of the right to food are involved in the process and this is a unique opportunity to discuss with them and to influence them towards the adoption of a human rights approach to development efforts and cooperation. Over the last years, the successful work to get the Voluntary Guidelines for the realisation of the right to food[1] adopted by the FAO member states already aimed at reaching out with the right to food approach of the Human Rights community into the broader UN system. These Guidelines which were adopted in November 2004 by all FAO member states are now at disposal to start using this human rights based approach within the field of fight against hunger and malnutrition.

The Declaration explicitly evoked human rights and the need to ensure their respect.
The Goals themselves are technically formulated and concern various developmental issues. The development community is just starting to work together with the human rights community. In the struggle against hunger and poverty, this concretely means that changes in government policies are needed towards accountability of states so that people can claim from their government the entitlements they have.

[1] http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/009/y9825e/y9825e00.htm (June 2005)

2005 will be the year of the first big review of progress in the implementation of the MDGs. The mobilisation of the international community and of national public opinion has rarely been so strong for the struggle against hunger. Civil society organisations (CSOs) and NGOs should not loose this opportunity to put their expertise at disposal and promote the right to food as a coherent approach and instrument to eradicate hunger in dignity and freedom.

An appropriate gender approach to MDG work

Indeed, women and girls are often disproportionately affected by hunger, malnutrition and its negative impacts. The situation of women as one of the most affected groups needs to be addressed by ending current forms of discrimination and support women to overcome their historic discrimination. The missing integration of gender aspects is a severe shortcoming in the formulation of the MDGs. Therefore it will be crucial and one of the challenges to strengthen the awareness on gender dimensions regarding the hunger problem.

From charity recipients to rights holders

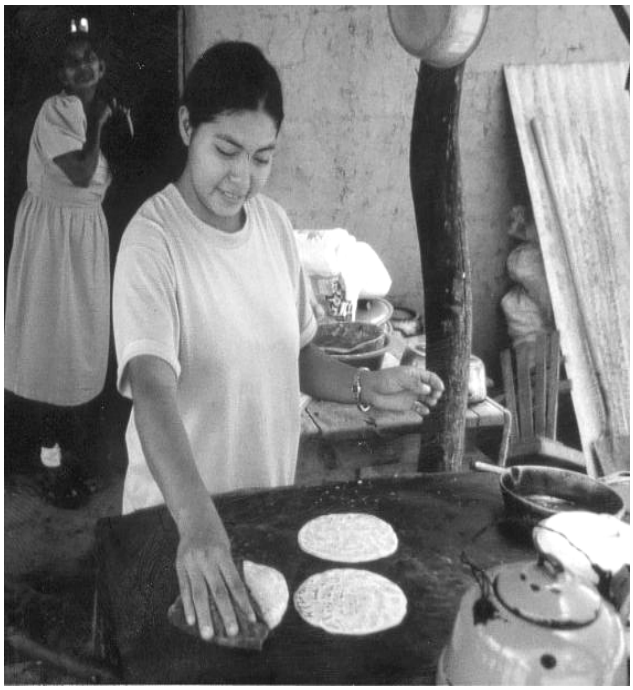
In a human rights approach, all political processes at all levels (designing, planning, implementation or monitoring) should be driven by key principles such as empowerment, participation, transparency, non-discrimination. Indeed, adopting human rights based approach means to consider and treat people as rights holders who can actively decide upon their lives and not any more as charity recipients. Human rights create obligations on the basis of which people can hold their states accountable. Eventually, talking about the realisation of the MDGs within a human rights framework means to give people the power to hold the responsible authorities accountable for their actions or inactions.

C – Strategies and possible actions for CSOs and NGOs around the MDGs

Strategy at the international level

At the international level, more and more CSOs and NGOs are working to promote a human rights based approach to development. One of the obvious successes of this promotion work is the adoption of the Voluntary Guidelines (VG) by the FAO member states in November 2004. For the first time, one of the ESC-rights is specified outside the UN human rights system and enters the developmental sphere under the auspices of the UN agency responsible for food and agriculture.

The Guidelines reaffirm the standard interpretation of the right to food that has been achieved in the UN human rights system during the last decade. This interpretation has been so far only developed in the human rights system by experts and, at the first place, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (see General Comment 12 from 1999). In addition to this reaffirmation of the standards of interpretation of the right to food by states, the VG give guidance for states on how best to implement the right to food. By doing so, the VG apply a human rights framework within which food and agricultural policies and strategies should be designed, implemented and monitored.



The last big event in the Guidelines process was the Berlin conference "Policies against Hunger IV" from 14 to 16 June 2005 (for the results, please consult www.policies-against-hunger.de). The conference gave both development and human rights experts the task to make proposals on how to concretely use the Guidelines. The Berlin conference showed that the FAO has committed itself to start using a rights based approach if possible at all levels of its activities.

Since a large majority of hungry and malnourished are peasants and rural workers, such a commitment of the FAO to the realisation of the right to food is a first important achievement. However, other intergovernmental organisations have a great impact and influence on the enjoyment of the right to food (such as the World Bank, WHO or UNICEF, etc.). That is why CSOs and NGOs shall use the general mobilisation created by the MDG process to outreach and mainstream the right to food in the broader development community.

Call for action at the national level

However, the Goals are both global and national in the sense that the approach and the strategy towards their realisation is a complementary and coherent action between national and international levels. Therefore, the first advocacy and awareness raising efforts have to focus on and have to be undertaken at the national level. The Guidelines themselves are developed to guide practical steps to the realization of the right to food at the national level.

At this very level, there is a lot to do for the national CSOs and NGOs in order to mobilize civil society, educate the general public, inform both vulnerable groups and decision-makers and make concrete proposals on how to integrate the VG in national policies. Even in the various campaign documents about the MDG process of CSOs and NGOs at the national level, human rights do not have their due place. There is therefore still a lot to do in order to place back the MDG debate and work within a human rights framework.

Proposals for action at the national level: Convincing actors of the added-value of using human rights and the VG

- promoting a rights based approach and the VG within the NGO/CSO community, by concentrating efforts to get the development community and the grass-roots organisations use this approach;

- monitoring states´ performance and documenting violations of the right to food;

- using the VG to promote a human rights base approach in rural development and national strategies to reduce hunger and poverty;

- using the VG as a checklist for development cooperation and to guide the reorientation of the official development aid

- promoting a gender approach in the general MDG process and especially regarding hunger and poverty reduction, especially through pressure created by civil society activities and through advocacy, training and awareness raising with regard to gender specific right to food violations and the situation of rural women;

- advocacy and awareness raising at different levels on the VG and the right to food, especially with civil servants and ministries in charge of the MDG review;

- advocacy work around the Guidelines with the responsible authorities for the elaboration of the national reports for the World Food Summit 10 years review at the FAO, in 2006 (submitted to the Committee on Food Security).

United Nations – Millennium Project
The UN Millennium Project is an independent advisory body to advise the UN on strategies for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, which are targets for fighting against extreme poverty by 2015. The research work has been articulated around task forces. The Hunger task force which is particularly relevant for the right to food has worked under the coordination of Pedro Sanchez and M.S. Swaminathan. The last report published under the title "Halving Hunger: It Can Be Done" can be downloaded at: www.unmillenniumproject.org.
One of the key findings of the Hunger Task Force was to identify the most vulnerable groups affected by hunger and malnutrition in a detailed manner. These results on vulnerability confirm the need for a human rights based approach and is a incentive for CSOs and NGOs to continue promoting this approach as well as concrete programs aiming at giving and securing access to productive resources. Indeed, the majority of hungry lives in rural areas and the majority of these hungry are smallholder farming households. Among these households, 2 out of 10 are landless.

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✓ **To participate in our interventions against concrete cases of violations, or**

✓ **To become member and/or support our work with donations, please contact:**

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FIAN- For the Right to Feed Oneself

FoodFirst
Promotes the fundamental human right to food as guaranteed in international human rights treaties. FIAN focuses on the right to feed oneself.

Information
FIAN informs victims about their right to feed themselves and alerts the general public about violations of this right.

Action
Through its activities, as for example protest letter campaigns, FIAN supports the struggle of victims' groups against violations of their right to feed themselves.

Network
FIAN is a network of members and sections in more than 60 countries all over the world, joining hands for the realisation of the right to feed oneself.

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