

Statement by the Community Law Centre on Food Security in Africa

Presented at the 45th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

This statement highlights the challenges to food security in Africa and makes recommendations for improving the realisation of the right to food and food security in Africa.

Food insecurity in Africa remains a major problem. Ingrained and persistent poverty on the Continent has been exacerbated by recent soaring food prices caused by the current global recession. Africa, as a result of structural poverty, war, internal conflicts and poor governance, remains more susceptible to the ravages of a global recession, like the one we currently face.

To be free from hunger is a fundamental human right and food insecurity is one of the gravest affronts to human dignity. The right of everyone to food is guaranteed in many human rights treaties and the African Commission has found this right to be implicit in the African Charter. The right to food, as observed by the Africa Commission (*SERAC Case*) is essential for the enjoyment and fulfilment of other rights such as health, education, work and political participation. The right to food is realised, as stated by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Right (General Comment 12, 1999), when everyone, individually or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement.

At the domestic level, several countries have adopted national strategies and have food security interventions in place aimed at reducing food and nutrition insecurity so as to ensure that everyone has physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food. Despite these strategies the attainment of food security continues to be a challenge in Africa. Millions of people suffer from hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity. For instance, the greatest proportion of children in the world going hungry continues to be found in sub-Saharan Africa. An estimated 300 million Africans are malnourished. Food insecurity exists even in more affluent countries like South Africa that is perceived to be currently food secure. While the projections are that South Africa will have a surplus of wheat and maize in 2009 and 2010, food insecurity exists due to the lack of purchasing power of certain segments of society, in particular the poor and marginalised.

The Community Law Centre is committed to promoting and strengthening the realisation of the right to food. We believe that achieving food security in the continent is of paramount importance, especially as it is necessary to alleviating or reducing poverty. While the rise in food prices can be seen as an opportunity for agricultural producers in Africa to expand production and open up domestic and international agriculture markets, one should not lose sight of the fact that it also poses grave risks to food insecurity among the poor. Such a situation could see starvation in a country which *de facto* produces enough food to feed its population. It is therefore imperative to ensure that food production is not solely market-driven. Moreover, food insecurity may also lead to political instability. For instance, in 2008, the rising food prices resulted in widespread protest in over 40 countries worldwide, including South Africa, Egypt, Burkina Faso, Senegal and Cameroon. In addition to having health implications, poor nutrition also limits access to educational opportunities and learning capacities of learners, thereby undermining some of the Millennium Development Goals. Hence, efforts towards achieving food security need to be strengthened, well coordinated, and addressed as a matter of urgency. There is need to increase food availability, accessibility and adequacy for all Africans.

Challenges to food security

Poor or non-implementation of policies as well as slow or non-compliance with regional strategies and commitments on food security are partly responsible for the continuous food insecurity in some countries. For instance, states made a number of food security commitments in 2003 in Maputo and 2006 in Abuja, but their implementation has been rather slow and partial. Other major challenges to food security in Africa include:

- an underdeveloped agricultural sector; difficulties in accessing markets;
- HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases that increase the burden on households in acquiring food;
- the effects of globalisation on countries that are already food insecure;
- difficulties in accessing land, especially by small and traditional farmers;
- limited or lack of support for small-scale farmers (who account for 80% of the region's farmers and are predominantly women); and
- top-down development cooperation; and rapid urbanization.

In addition, good governance is fundamental to achieving food security as it promotes dialogue and shared decision-making authority and control over allocation of resources. It also discourages corrupt or inefficient practices. A peaceful, stable and enabling political, social and economic environment enables states to give adequate priority to food security and poverty eradication. However, such an environment is lacking in some countries such as Zimbabwe. Hence, 'poor' governance is partly responsible for food insecurity in some countries.

Recommendations

In the struggle for full realisation of the right to food and food security in Africa, we make the following recommendations in respect of Africa in general.

- (a) The African Commission should issue a firm statement and/or adopt a resolution on food security in Africa, with practical guidelines on addressing the challenges to food security and achieving food security, and encouraging states to effectively implement African regional and national strategies on food security.
- (b) The African Commission, as required in the Declaration of the Abuja Food Security Summit 2006, should continue to follow up with states, Regional Economic Communities and other relevant stakeholders on the implementation of the declaration and make its annual report on the progress and challenges accessible to all.
- (c) The African Commission's Working Group on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Africa should pay particular attention to the realisation of the right to food and the corresponding state obligations in its principles and guidelines on economic, social and cultural rights.
- (d) The African Commission and the Working Group on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Africa should call on states to translate their commitments into reality by signing and ratifying the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, an important instrument in the fight against poverty and hunger.

- (e) States that have not yet done so should respect their commitments made in 2003 in Maputo, which was affirmed in 2006 in Abuja, to allocate at least 10 per cent of their national budgets to agriculture and rural development.
- (f) States should implement the recommendations of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food with regard to building national strategies for the realisation of the right to adequate food based on a human rights framework, including:
 - i. an adequate mapping of food insecurity and vulnerability;
 - ii. improving accountability mechanisms so that people are able to claim their right to food and participate in the designing and monitoring of legislation and policies; and
 - iii. strengthening the rights of land users and women, in particular, in rural areas.
- (g) States should refrain from pursuing policies that have a negative impact on the right to food, such as policies promoting the use of agrofuels.
- (h) States should support small-scale farmers as a way of realising the right to food, including protecting and facilitating their access to land, natural resources such as water and basic agricultural inputs such as fertilizer and seeds, and should ensure that agricultural strategies are implemented within the framework of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme.
- (i) States should facilitate education and skills training programmes in agricultural production, diversification and investment; and where possible, states should incentivise production for local markets so that the most vulnerable in society are able to access food at reasonable prices.
- (j) Civil society organisations should keep the African Commission informed of violations of the right to food or state obligations in this regard.

In conclusion, we wish to thank the African Commission for allowing us to raise the issue of food security in Africa for its consideration. We hope that the discussions on this subject at the 45th session will assist in coming up with tangible solutions for substantially alleviating food insecurity in Africa.

Thank You.

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