

Task Force 01

FIGHTING INEQUALITIES, POVERTY, AND HUNGER

The Right to Adequate Food as Cornerstone of the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty

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Abstract

This Policy Brief focuses on the essential role of the Human Right to Adequate Food for the G20 Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty, and how it can be used to effectively support countries, including through trilateral and international cooperation. Twenty years after the adoption of the FAO Right to Food Guidelines, there is large evidence on how human rights-based policies and programmes have addressed structural inequalities, social exclusion and systemic discrimination in the context of food security and nutrition.

The Right to Food Guidelines pioneered the national implementation of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights through national policies and legislation, with strong involvement of parliamentary and civil society actors. They were key to the reform of the UN Committee on World Food Security in 2009, and have inspired and contributed to normative instruments related but not limited to Indigenous Peoples', peasants' and women's rights, gender equality, land, small-scale fisheries, decent work, and many other key policy outcomes.

Today, national implementation and international cooperation can use a more advanced, elaborate and nuanced normative framework that provides clear direction for transforming agrifood systems towards more equitable, resilient and sustainable outcomes, focusing on equality, social participation and inclusion.

The Policy Brief presents evidence-based and actionable policy proposals on how to use the Right to Food Guidelines to advance legal and regulatory frameworks and policies on the Right to Food in the context of the G20 Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty. Based on the achievements, challenges and lessons learned, the Brief makes seven key recommendations for strengthening national and international efforts against hunger and poverty by using the existing normative guidance on the Right to Food.

Diagnosis

Global hunger and malnutrition are on the rise, while [extreme poverty](#), after declining between 1990 and 2014, began to stagnate before spiraling up with the outbreak of COVID-19. Moderate and severe food insecurity is found in all regions, but is far more prevalent in Africa where it has been increasing since 2015 (Figure 1).

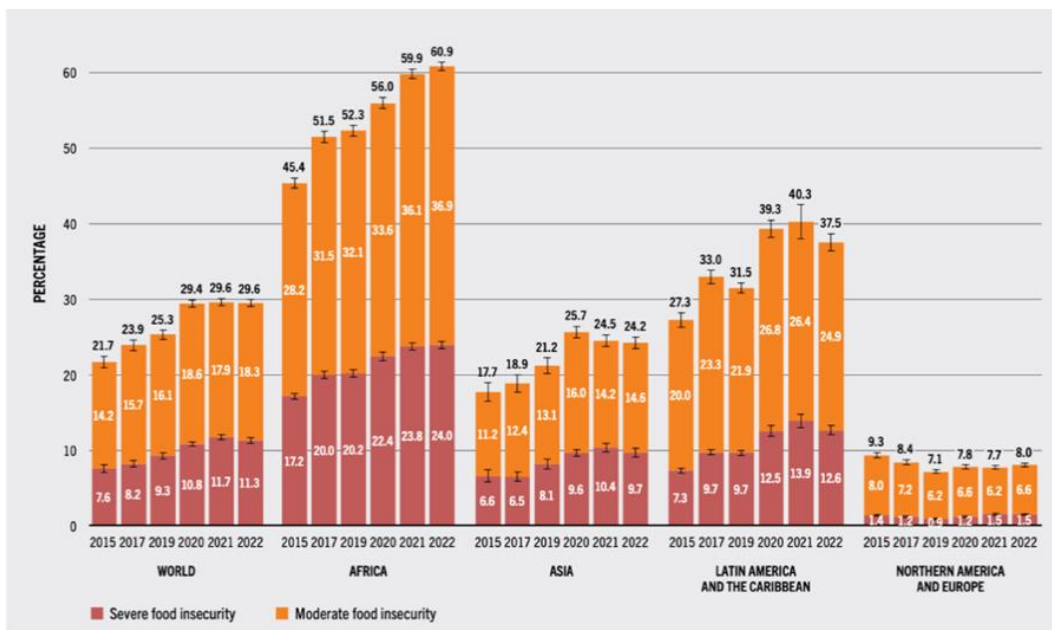


FIGURE 1. Moderate and severe food insecurity, by region, 2015-2022

Source: FAO et al., 2023.

Everywhere but in high-income countries, food insecurity worsens with increasingly rural residence (Figure 2). Poverty, too, is [overwhelmingly rural](#) and concentrates primarily among those working in the agricultural sector (Figures 3 and 4). Meanwhile, the cost of a healthy diet has increased in all parts of the world, except for Northern America and Europe (Figure 5).

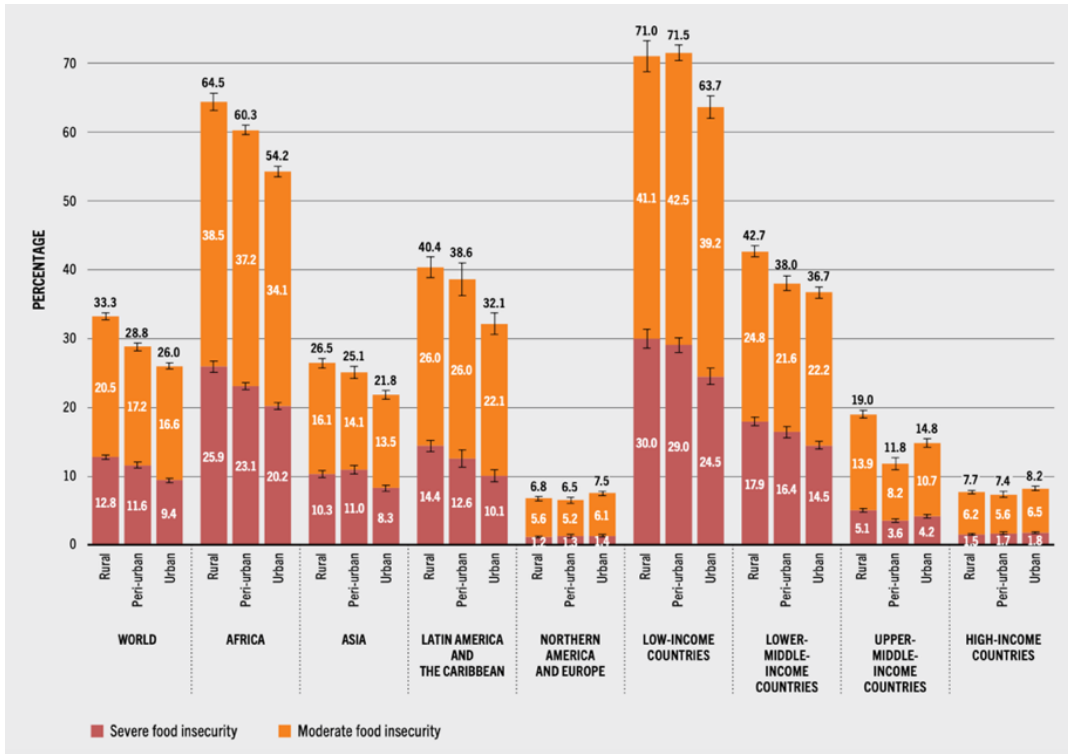


FIGURE 2. Moderate and severe food insecurity, by urban, peri-urban and rural residence. *Source:* FAO et al., 2023.

Region	Survey Coverage (%)	\$2.15 (2017 PPP)				
		Headcount ratio (%)		Number of poor (mil)		
		Mar 2023	Sep 2022	Mar 2023	Sep 2022	Mar 2023
East Asia & Pacific	97.4	1.1	1.2	24	25	
Europe & Central Asia	87.4	2.4	2.3	12	11	
Latin America & Caribbean	86.7	4.3	4.3	28	28	
Middle East & North Africa	48.3	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	
Other High Income	82.3	0.6	0.6	7	7	
South Asia	96.4	8.5	8.6	156	161	
Sub-Saharan Africa	54.3	35.1	34.9	389	391	
Eastern & Southern Africa	29.6	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	
Western & Central Africa	90.5	27.2	27.3	122	124	
World	84.6	8.4	8.5	648	659	

FIGURE 3. Poverty estimates by region. *Source:* Baah et al., 2023.

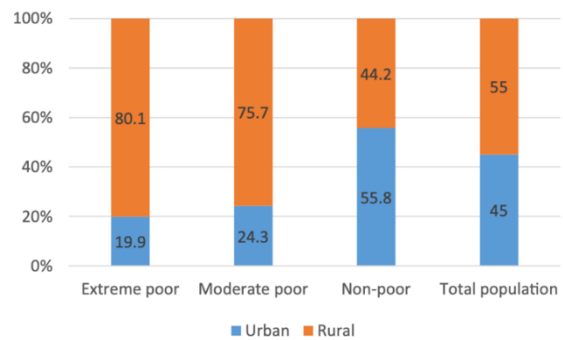


FIGURE 4. Share of population by urban/urban residence. *Source:* Castañeda et al., 2018.

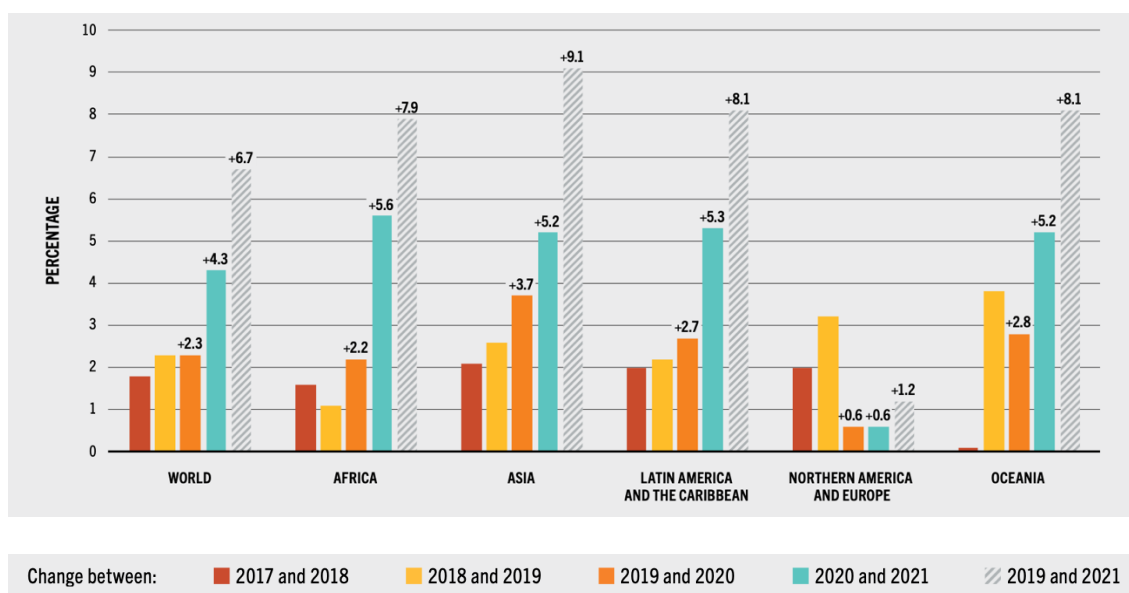


FIGURE 5. Change in the cost of a healthy diet.

Source: FAO et al., 2023, and FAO, 2023.

Despite their key role in agrifood systems, small-scale producers and agricultural workers, including landless farmers, Indigenous Peoples, artisanal fishers, pastoralists and forest-dependent communities make a disproportionate share of the world’s poor and hungry. They contribute the least to [climate change](#) but, because of their high reliance on climate-sensitive livelihoods, are most at risk of welfare losses from rising global temperatures and extreme weather events ([Figure 6](#)).

There is enough food in the world to satisfy the caloric requirements of more than 9.5 billion people, yet [nearly one in ten suffers from hunger](#). No less than [14 percent of food is lost](#) from production globally before reaching retail. Another [17 percent is wasted](#) at the retail stage and when food is consumed. While this happens, millions of children under five continue to suffer from malnutrition and more than 3 billion people do not make enough money to afford a healthy diet.

In the [words of Secretary-General Guterres](#) at the opening of the UN Food Systems Summit+2, we live in a world whose agrifood systems are "broken": they do not generate

decent jobs or sufficient income for many of the 3.8 billion people who depend on them for their livelihood, nor do they provide nutritious and affordable diets to the more than 700 hundred million who go to bed hungry each day. Meanwhile, current methods of producing, packaging and consuming food and other agricultural products use 70 percent of the world's fresh water, damage the environment, and contribute 20 percent of greenhouse gases to global warming, while failing to ensure food safety which endangers human health and can contribute to the spread of zoonotic diseases and other food system risks that impact the poor disproportionately.

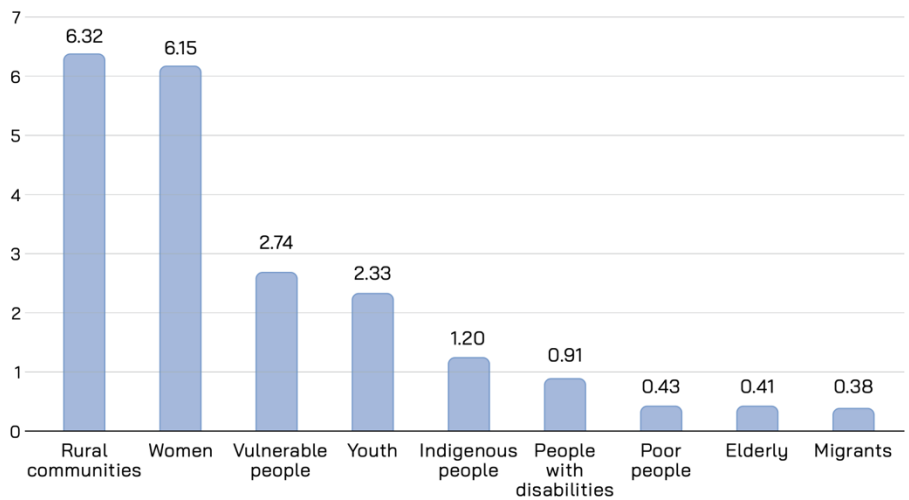


FIGURE 6. Mentions of vulnerable population groups in national climate actions (NAPs and NDCs). *Source:* FAO, 2024.

A Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty is needed to address the world’s ills and ensure equity, inclusion and well-being for all. Embedding human rights in the Global Alliance and in national food system transformation pathways will be key to address power asymmetries, level the playing field and tackle the structural drivers of poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition across the globe.



The Right to Food must be at the centre of current efforts to transition towards inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems, capable of generating sustainable livelihoods for the hundreds of millions of the world's poor and hungry and of delivering healthy and sustainable diets for the present generations, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Recommendations

This Brief proposes ten recommendations for consideration by the G20:

1. Countries joining the Global Alliance should adopt measures anchored in human rights, to promote the application of international normative frameworks and the inclusion of the right to food in public policies and legal frameworks, including its recognition in national constitutions.

Rationale: The COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing lockdowns revealed the acute need for a clear constitutional and statutory framework on the right to food. Unprecedented levels of [concentration of markets](#), land and other natural resources provide a stark contrast to increasingly widespread poverty and food insecurity affecting millions, while soil degradation, water pollution, deforestation, depletion of fishing grounds and loss of biodiversity continue unabated. The absence of a formal commitment to a rights framework has contributed to widening inequalities that conflict, economic downturns and climate change are accentuating further.

2. Countries joining the Global Alliance must ensure that human rights-based strategies for realising the right to food are made part of overarching national development strategies. A cohesive institutional framework, with coordination among relevant duty-bearers, should be set up to guide planning, implementation and oversight of public policies. National human rights institutions must be put in place where absent, as well as accountability mechanisms to monitor the impact of policies, programmes and budgets on the realisation of the right to food, identifying impact and outcome indicators and benchmarks to be achieved.

Rationale: If duty bearers are to fulfil their obligations, appropriate spaces are required in which rights-holders can constructively engage and ensure accountability on matters related with the realisation of their right to food and other basic human rights. In particular, small-holder food producers are the backbone of food security and need to be involved and consulted on matters pertaining to, or with significant impacts on, their lives and livelihoods.

3. Members of the Global Alliance should devise inclusive, non-discriminatory and sound economic, agriculture, fisheries, forestry, land use and climate adaptation policies to allow food producers to earn a fair return for their labour, capital and management and conservation efforts. Policies must be such as to recognise the unique contribution of peasants and family farmers to food security and nutrition.

Rationale: Agricultural workers, smallholders, fishers, peasants and landless, pastoralists, children and people with disabilities, migrants and displaced persons, refugees, women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, homeless and other historically disadvantaged groups are disproportionately affected by food and nutrition insecurity.

4. Social security provisions and, where appropriate, social and food safety nets should be put in place to protect all workers, including informal or seasonal workers, and their families during crises and downturns.

Rationale: Robust social protection systems, living wages and strong labor protection laws are missing in many contexts, while care work, mostly performed by women, continues to be invisible and underpaid. Informal and seasonal workers in food processing, logistics and distribution require special attention if comprehensive social protection is to be achieved.

5. Measures should be taken to protect consumers from deception, misrepresentation and undue influence in the packaging, labelling, advertising and sale of food and facilitate consumers' choice by ensuring appropriate information on marketed food, especially items consumed by children.

Rationale: Protecting consumers from deceptive food packaging, labelling and advertising is essential for public health, consumer rights and market fairness. It is particularly important for children, who are vulnerable to misleading marketing. Ensuring transparency fosters informed choices, maintains trust in the food system, and supports fair competition.

6. The Global Alliance should promote the adoption of legislation and regulatory frameworks to ensure non-discriminatory access to markets, prevent uncompetitive practices, and foster the development of small-scale local and regional markets. It should promote the establishment of national, sub-regional and regional Parliamentary Networks against Hunger and Malnutrition, as well as the transfer of resources and capacities to subnational entities to bring delivery, oversight, grievance redress and accountability mechanisms closer to the public.

Rationale: Evidence has shown that national parliaments and parliamentary alliances can play a key role in the recognition and realisation of the right to food, setting up the enabling legal and institutional frameworks, allocating appropriate budgets, and monitoring government action.¹ Subnational jurisdictions play an equally important role,

¹ In Latin American and the Caribbean, for instance, parliamentary fronts against hunger have over the past 15 years contributed to the approval of more than 100 laws aimed at implementing the right to food. They are present in more than 25 countries, and articulate

in terms of creating safe food environments, zoning legislation, early warning and disaster preparedness and management, and health inspection.

7. Members of the Global Alliance should make every effort to empower small-scale producers and family farmers, women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and other groups to improve knowledge of their rights, utilise legal tools to advance their right to food and other inter-related rights, and participate in decision-making in food-systems. Consultative policymaking bodies with participation of a wide spectrum of civil society are key to democratising decision-making structures and must be at the core of the implementation of the Global Alliance.

Rationale: Legitimate tenure rights of individuals and communities to resources such as land, water, forests, fisheries and livestock must be recognised and respected, without any discrimination.² When Individuals and communities are empowered to make demands, contribute to devising policies tailored to their needs, and ensure accountability and transparency in policy implementation, effective and impactful policies can result. Social participation in governance bodies and public policy making is essential to realising the right to food for all.

their work with representatives from academia, civil society and international cooperation agencies.

² The 2023 [Deccan High Level Principles on Food Security and Nutrition](#) provide invaluable guidance for building more inclusive agrifood systems to enhance food security and nutrition outcomes.

8. The Global Alliance must recognise the preeminent role of the UN Committee on World Food Security and endeavour to strengthen it as the foremost inclusive intergovernmental platform for policy coordination on food security and nutrition. The actions developed in the framework of the Alliance should prevent fragmentation and instead bolster collaboration and policy convergence under the guidance of the CFS. This includes a comprehensive effort to integrate the use and application of CFS policy outcomes into the Action Plan of the Alliance.

Rationale: A global governance system in the form of a pluralistic, inclusive and democratic platform allows States and the international community, including civil society and right holders, to monitor the enjoyment of the right to food and identify areas where more financing to put in place specific actions is required. To combat inequalities and address power asymmetries in polycentric agrifood systems, it is essential to promote social participation in global and regional multilateral governance forums, democratising decision-making structures and contributing to create and/or strengthen strategic spaces for consultation between governments and civil society.

9. UN organizations, in collaboration with other actors from government, parliamentary networks, civil society and academia, should step up their efforts to make knowledge, guidance, data and technical assistance widely available in support of rights-based policies for improved food security and nutrition. A digital knowledge management platform can provide a global public good for the Right to Food community worldwide, alongside a Right to Food Management Information System (RTF-MIS) to serve as a one-stop shop containing disaggregated data on the state of the Right to Food in the world, including constitutional provisions and laws, national strategies and policies, institutional setups for policy coordination and

convergence, process and outcome indicators, and other information of relevance to local, national, regional and international actors.

Rationale: Strengthening coordination between UN organizations in support of country efforts to apply the advanced normative framework on the right to adequate food will enhance their impact and effectiveness in key areas of policymaking. Tools and guidance developed and tested over many years need to be made easily accessible to a plurality of countries and actors. Disaggregated data and information could be pooled together and shared widely to enable more effective tracking of progress made in implementing measures geared towards the realization of the right to adequate food for all.³

10. South-South and triangular cooperation should be actively promoted in the framework of the Global Alliance, to facilitate the adoption and implementation at scale of policy instruments with a proven impact on realising the right to food.

Rationale: Notably, the right to adequate food is the only economic, social or cultural right for which international cooperation has been explicitly prescribed as being essential to achieving it. Many successful examples of such cooperation exist in relation to school

³ The Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) and the unbranded socialprotection.org knowledge platform are good examples of successful interagency, multistakeholder initiatives fostered by the G20 in previous years, which have improved coordination and information sharing for the benefit of all the parties involved.

feeding, public purchases, family farming, and national food security and nutrition councils that countries can learn from.⁴

Scenario of outcomes

Adopted by the FAO Council in 2004, the [Right to Food Guidelines](#) provide practical guidance to Member States towards its progressive realisation through national policies and legislation, with strong involvement of parliamentary and civil society actors. The Guidelines have inspired and contributed to the development of several other normative instruments in the realm of the UN, which make it possible to move beyond isolated interventions to a systemic approach to address the interconnected challenges affecting poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the escalation of armed conflicts, in addition to the triple planetary crisis, exposed the world's agrifood systems' shortcomings and shed light on their [hidden costs](#). Current agrifood systems not only fail to fulfill the right to adequate food for all but [perpetuate inequalities](#). However country examples provide possible scenarios that can follow from the adoption of our recommendations and yield valuable lessons for other contexts.

⁴ See, for instance: <https://www.fao.org/in-action/program-brazil-fao/projects/regional-agenda-sustainable-school/en/>, <https://www.fao.org/policy-support/tools-and-publications/resources-details/en/c/1158936/>, <https://www.fao.org/right-to-food/news/news-detail/en/c/1650987/>, <https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/Brazil-to-fund-food-purchasing-in-five-African-countries/en>, <https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/az523e>.

In **India**, the Supreme Court has held that the right to food comprises part of the fundamental right to life with dignity under Article 21 of the Constitution. Subsequently, the Parliament enacted the [National Food Security Act](#) (NFSA), 2013, with the objective of providing food and nutritional security throughout the lifecycle. The Act provides a statutory basis for implementing food security programmes as legal entitlements. Several schemes were included in its ambit as statutory rights: subsidized food grains under the Public Distribution System, Midday Meal Scheme, Integrated Child Development Services Scheme and maternity entitlements. The law provides for an oversight mechanism including the constitution of State Food Commissions in every state, periodic conduct of social audits, and provisions for transparency in the implementation of the Act.

When COVID-19 struck, the Act was the lifeline for India's poor because it covered 800 million people who had previously been identified, making it easier to direct relief speedily. But the pandemic also highlighted acute gaps in provision, with many people in need excluded from the food security net. Lessons for bolstering the Act's impacts include the need for progressively moving towards universal coverage, and a stronger focus on nutrition, by for instance setting nutritional standards for the public distribution system. Principles for framing a Right to Food law should not only include the goal of universal coverage, but also:

- A life-cycle approach to guarantee the right to food to people at each stage of their life
- A right to nutritious and age-appropriate food based on local dietary preferences
- Provision of food grains and cash transfers, depending on context

- Support to farmers, e.g., by recognizing a Minimum Support Price for procurement
- Recognising the right to employment and to social protection as part and parcel of the right to food
- Decentralised, effective and time-bound grievance redress and accountability frameworks
- Provisions to ensure transparency through dissemination of relevant information through the Internet and public disclosures at the point of delivery
- People-led monitoring
- Adequate and sufficient budgetary outlays to promote better outcomes for health and productivity.

In **South Africa**, Section 27 of the Constitution embeds a progressive right to food for all as well as an absolute right to nutrition for children. Over time, the latter has resulted in the implementation of a large-scale child grant, regulations concerning advertising to children, free primary healthcare for mothers and children, and a school feeding programme. By encompassing issues relating to food quality, safety and nutritional value, [nutrition security](#) is inextricably linked to the right to adequate health services, including dietary services and care for diet-related non-communicable diseases. It is also directly linked to the provision of water, sanitation and hygiene, and has special importance to children during the first 1000 days of life.

At the same time, South Africa's experience underscores some contradictions and tradeoffs involved in legislating the right to food. The persistence and possible increase in the [prevalence of stunting](#) suggests that this right is not being addressed despite the existence of appropriate policies. This has been accompanied by a dramatic increase in

the prevalence of obesity and [diet-related non-communicable diseases](#). The duty holders have not been challenged in the country's Constitutional court. Even if this happened, it is unlikely that the right could be met without significant reprioritization of budget allocations. A more structured approach is needed, whereby the costs, impact and optimal sequencing of scaling up or combining interventions are assessed. As the long-term impact of the interventions is improved productivity and reduced health expenditure, additional measures could be introduced as these become affordable.

Brazil provides another good example of the costs and benefits of action or inaction. During the first decades of this century, the country made the fight against hunger one of its top priorities. A battery of government programmes was introduced to support small-scale farmers, deliver meals to school-age children, and provide income support to poor households, among others. A national council with wide participation from civil society and a cross-section of government ministries was set up to coordinate planning, implementation and monitoring. Brazil thereafter made impressive progress in reducing hunger and poverty, until a change of government and priorities led to the dismantling of the national council and the downsizing of many of the hitherto successful programmes. With the launch of the Brazil Without Hunger plan in August 2023, the country has made fighting hunger a top priority once again. This ambition extends beyond the domestic policy agenda into the international scene, as reflected in the G20 Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty.

The impressive normative progress on the right to adequate food needs further support for universal implementation, ensuring policy coherence and effective monitoring and redressal mechanisms. In addition, national, regional and global institutions for effective governance of agrifood systems need strengthening to avoid fragmentation across sectors



and encourage social participation, inclusive decision-making, transparency and accountability.



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