Chapter 15

Rights-Based Approach to Food and Nutrition Security in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the need for a rights-based approach to food and nutrition security in Nigeria. The topic is introduced with the definition of basic terms used throughout the chapter. The objectives of this chapter are to create awareness of the need to adopt a rights-based approach to food and nutrition security and help define the context of the right to food in Nigeria. The rest of the chapter sets out the roles of right holders, duty bearers, and accountable agents in food and nutrition security. It highlights their rights, obligations, and responsibilities, as well as voluntary guidelines and implications for a rights-based approach to food. The chapter also reviews policies that have been developed toward ensuring a right to food in Nigeria.

BACKGROUND

Food and nutrition insecurity is increasing in the world where 925 million people are undernourished. Today, over 900 million people are food insecure across the world despite the fact that the world food production has doubled during the past three decades (FAO, 2010). Helen (2002) noted, food security maintains political stability, and ensures peaceful coexistence among people while food insecurity results in poor health and reduced performance of both children and adult. Poor nutrition weakens children’s immune systems and renders them more vulnerable to deadly diseases, which further deteriorates their nutritional status. Hence children get stuck in a cycle of undernutrition and infection, which adversely affects their health, development, and increases the risk of mortality.

The first and most important component of social and economic justice is adequate food production (Otaha, 2013). This can therefore improve food and nutrition security if viewed from rights-based
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perspective with the ultimate goal of development to guarantee all human rights to everyone. A human rights-based approach is a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to encouraging and defending human rights (United Nations, UN, 2017). It seeks to analyze inequalities which lie at the core of development complications and amends discriminatory practices and unfair distributions of power that hinder development progress.

Under a human rights-based approach, the plans, policies and processes of development are anchored in a system of rights and conforming obligations established by international law. This helps to promote the sustainability of development work, empowering people themselves—especially the most marginalized—to participate in policy formulation and hold accountable those who have a duty to act. A rights-based approach to development is both a vision and a set of tools: human rights can be the means, the ends, the mechanism of evaluation and the central focus of sustainable human development (UN, 2002).

According to World Food Programme (WFP, 2017), here are ten things to know about Nigeria food and nutrition security status:

1. Nigeria is a food deficit country and is Africa’s largest importer of rice.
2. One third of children under 5 are stunted. That’s twice the rate of Thailand and three times that of Tunisia.
3. A child in the remote northwestern region of Nigeria, where stunting rates are around 55 percent, is four times more likely to experience malnutrition than a child in the south.
4. At the same time, child obesity is increasing and 33 percent of adults are obese or overweight. That is roughly on par with Singapore.
5. Nearly half of women of reproductive age (48.5 percent) are anaemic. This ranks Nigeria 172th best out of 185 countries.
6. Conflict with Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria has left a large part of the population without access to enough food, water and health services.
7. Displacement, lack of access to many locations, high inflation and reduced purchasing power of communities are worsening the food security situation in northeastern Nigeria.
8. Over 3 million people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance due to conflict.
9. In March 2016, WFP began providing cash transfers via mobile phones to displaced persons and host communities in critical areas. This gives them the opportunity to buy the food they need.
10. In partnership with the Government and other agencies such as UNICEF, WFP is scaling up its assistance in northeastern Nigeria to reach a total of 431,000 people in desperate need, including malnourished children and pregnant and nursing women.

The right to food and nutrition is a holistic concept which empowers people. The right to food and nutrition relates to diverse dimensions of human life, from the most basic access to sun light, seeds, land, water, which allows food production, up to the moment in which food reaches human beings. Food is not just a commodity, it is part of our life, as a social, cultural and economic right and it impacts our lives as communities: security, democracy, health, among others. It is in the light of these that this chapter aim at creating awareness of the need to adopt rights-based approach to food and nutrition security. It will also help define the context of the right to food in Nigeria so as to ensure attainment of food and nutrition security.