

The Right to Food and FAO in Afghanistan

The Afghan Government states that the Right to Food is far from being realised in the country. National assessments conducted in 2005 showed that 44% of the households classify themselves as food insecure, furthermore about two thirds of the households have a poor diet indicated by an extremely low diversity of food items (NRVA 2005). In 2007 45% of the households were not able to meet their basic energy requirements compared to 30% reported in 2005 (MRRD 2008). The Ministry of Public Health and its partners report that between 6% and 10% of the preschool children suffer from acute and between 45% and 60% of the pre-school children suffer from chronic malnutrition, 48% to 75% of pre-school children and mothers suffer from iodine or iron deficiencies. Despite the fact that the 2007 harvest was the best of the previous decade, the actual deficit of cereals amounts for more than half a million tons. The recent global food crisis resulting in price hikes within Afghanistan contributed to the deterioration of the food security situation. However, the situation is not unique throughout the country and varies by location (urban-rural), geography, ethnicity and livelihoods in general and by physiological vulnerability and sex in particular.

Afghanistan has ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Afghanistan's recent submission of a regular report to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights showed the Government's interest to a human rights based approach. Actions are taken to increase accountability on obligations made. An office of Human Rights, within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is responsible for reporting progress on the ICESCR. There is also a nascent Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock reported to the human rights office that *'the Right to Food for all Afghan citizens is the main objective of the agriculture sector'*. At the same time it is recognised that this objective can not be achieved through the agricultural sector only, but requires concerted efforts of all sectors of the Afghan Government and its respective development partners to work towards this goal. Recent policy developments, in particular the master plan and the Afghanistan National Development Strategy, lay the ground for an improved political framework for the incorporation of measures to work towards the Right to Food.

Upon request of the Afghan Government, FAO Afghanistan plans to support the Government in mainstreaming a Right to Food based approach into ongoing policies, strategies and relevant programmes, a pro-poor approach is central to all efforts. FAO support will focus on providing support to the development of a normative framework for the practical application of a Right to Food based approach. Improved coordination of efforts between different sectors and actors, i.e. inter-ministerial and interagency coordination is a key to work towards the goals set. The MAIL supported by FAO is envisaged to play a core role in implementation, whereas close coordination will include MoJ, MoFA, MRRD, MoPH, independent human rights institutions, national and international NGO as well as multi- and bilateral organisations. Immediate and practical actions supported by FAO are the integration of a rights based approach in ongoing training efforts with a focus to strengthen central level capacity in situation analysis and monitoring, as well as local level awareness raising and empowerment.