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Food Security, the Right to Food and the Human Development Report 1994

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Abstract

The paper addresses the evolution of the concept of “food security” after the publication of the 1994 Human Development Report. This Report stressed the relevance of the access to food, a major achievement with regard to previous definitions, moving the concept out of from a purely production concern into a broader approach involving poverty and development. Later, worries with other factors such as food safety, nutritional balance and food preferences, lead to a re-appraisal of the 1994 definition. Parallel to the development of the concept of food security, there was also an elaboration of a human rights perspective on issues related to the alleviation of hunger and the promotion of access to adequate food and good nutrition, i.e. the right to food. The paper argues that the 1994 Human Development Report constituted an important step in the efforts to understand and cope with hunger and poverty

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I. INTRODUCTION.

The number of hungry people in the world is difficult to estimate with any precision, as Sen (2013) points out. There are, in fact, different ways of making this estimation and even diverse ways of defining hunger and undernutrition, although we shall always end up with very large numbers.¹ For example, FAO, IFAD and WFP (2013) estimates that 842 million people, 12% of the global population, were unable to meet their dietary energy requirements in 2011 – 2013. Thus, around one in eight people in the world are likely to have suffered from chronic hunger, not having enough food for an active and healthy life, i.e. they were “food insecure”.

To be “food insecure” is to lack the state of “food security”, a term that is closely related to the history of the attempts or eliminating hunger and poverty since the Second World War. The concept of “food security” was considered by the 1994 United Nations Human Development Report (HDR94) as one of the seven main categories that contained the list of threats to human security. As such, the Report provided a precise definition of the term. Nevertheless, the concept was not new; it had a life before and, no doubt, it had a stirring life after the Report. In fact, the term has acquired a number of different meanings over the time. It has been estimated that approximately 200 definitions and 450 indicators of food security exist in the literature (Toma-Bianov and Saramet, 2012).

The early concern with overall world food supplies had been gradually transformed into a debate about sufficient food supply adequately distributed to satisfy human needs, changing the focus from food production to food security, defined at different levels but gradually zoomed in on the notion of household food security. Interestingly, the definition of food security evolved over time influenced both by factual events and by academic research. From a narrow perspective, the meaning and common understanding of food security evolved until a multi-dimensional definition was reached.

Somehow parallel to this conceptual development, there was an increasing concern with the need to broaden the understanding of human rights to emphasize economic, social and cultural rights on par with civil and political rights. Among these economic, social and cultural rights, the right to food is one core element. The separation between civil and political rights on the one hand, and economic, social and cultural rights on the other, was based on the contentious argument that the two sets of rights were of different nature and, therefore, needed different instruments. Civil and political rights were supposed to be “absolute” and “immediate”, while economic, social and cultural rights were essentially programmatic, to be realized gradually. A related assumption was that civil and political rights were “justiciable” whereas economic, social and cultural rights were essentially aspirational. However, that there are close links between and within the two sets of rights, since civil and political rights seem to be the foundation of economic and social rights (Gahia, 2003)

Since the 1980s the way was paved for a logical link between food security and the right to food. The process of translating food security into policies that would increase the chances of households to obtain it demanded an identification of responsibilities and action of the state and other actors. The notion of a relationship between rights-holders and duty-bearers appeared attractive in going from food security as a

¹ See De Weerd *et al* (2014) for a discussion of how estimates of hungry people are very sensitive to alternative designs of households consumption expenditures surveys.

desirable state of affairs, to considering means for realizing it by responsible and accountable actors, underpinned by legal measures, i.e. the right to food.

Summarily tracing the development of the concepts of “food security” and the “right to adequate food”, as well as their link, the paper argues that the 1994 Human Development Report constituted an important step in the efforts to understand and cope with the ignominy of hunger and poverty. The next section contains an overview of the evolution of the concept of “food security” before and after the HDR94, while the third one looks at the development of the concept of “right to adequate food”. The fourth section analyzes the link between both terms and the role of the HDR94. The fifth section concludes.

II. THE MEANING OF FOOD SECURITY BEFORE AND AFTER THE HDR94.

During the Second World War, the food supply chain broke down and many countries made efforts to increase food production in order to reduce the dependency towards outside. After the war, on both sides of the Atlantic, governments decided to support agricultural production to reinforce self-sufficiency and hence to ensure that there would not be a lack of food again. These policies were so successful that quickly food production exceeded consumption, creating significant surpluses. Part of this food surplus began to be utilized as food aid, initiating the link between food security, food surpluses and food aid that was present in the last half of the twentieth century.

By the end of the 1960's world cereal markets continued to show important surpluses. However, in 1972 extremely bad weather conditions in several regions of the world resulted in a significant reduction in food production, mainly cereals. Many countries became food importers and food prices picked up. In view of the international food crisis, the United Nations organized a World Food Conference that took place in 1974. The summit approved a number of recommendations dealing with what was referred to as “food security”, recognizing that food security was a common concern. This first World Food Conference focused on the problems of global production, trade and stocks, i.e. on adequate supply of food and ensuring stability of supplies through food reserves (Sen S. R., 1981).

In line with the image of a world that was moving towards global food shortage, the 1974 World Food Summit defined food security as the “*availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices*”. Food security was then perceived and defined mainly as the availability of adequate food supply at all times. All efforts should be concentrated on increasing the production of food and ensuring its availability. Thus, this earlier concept referred to physical availability of food whether people had access to it or not. In practice, food security efforts focused primarily on food production and storage mechanisms to offset fluctuations in global supply and ensure the ability to import food when needed.

The concentration on physical availability began to shift in the 80s in line with the work on poverty and famines by Amartya Sen (1981) that showed how famines developed even without a decline in food availability. Keeping away from the concept of food security that focused on food supply, Sen's work instead placed emphasis on consumption and entitlement, directing attention to ownership and exchange. Sen argued that during famines the main problem was not so much the lack of food, but rather the impossibility for poor people to access to it. Sen explained that most cases of famines resulted not from people being deprived of what they were entitled, but rather from people not being entitled to adequate means of survival. As Sen (2013)

clarifies, hunger and starvation result from some people not having enough food to eat; it is not a characteristic of their not being enough food to eat in the country or in the region. Sen's approach was important then for introducing the dimension of access for food security.

Also during the 80s systematic efforts to give content to "household food security" were taken by researchers, aiming at establishing a broad-based concept relating to the economics of a household, its social and ecological environment and the prevailing food culture as the broad frames of determinants of the food security conditions of a household.

A re-appraisal of the term was conducted in 1983, when the 22nd Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) endorsed a revised definition. Under this revised definition, the ultimate objective of food security should be "*to ensure that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food they need*". Thus, food security should have three specific aims, i.e. ensuring production of adequate food supplies, maximizing stability in the flow of supplies and securing access to available supplies on the part of those who need them. In this way, the food security concept was "officially" expanded to include economic access. Access to food is influenced by market factors and the price of food as well as the individual's purchasing power, which is related to employment and livelihood opportunities. Hence, these concerns brought food security closer to the poverty reduction agenda.

In 1986, the World Bank (1986) further elaborated the food security concept to include the adequacy of food. Thus, food security now meant "*access of all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life*". The Report also made a distinction between chronic food insecurity, brought about by structural poverty and lost incomes, and transitory food insecurity, caused by natural disasters, economic collapse or conflict. A first distinction between chronic and transitory food insecurity was recognized by FAO during the 1960's, together with the difference between chronic malnutrition and famines.

In this context, in 1994 the UNDP Human Development Report promoted a broader concept of human security, including food security as one of its component. It is interesting to note that Amartya Sen collaborated with the underlying conceptual framework of the Report. His views related to famines and poverty can be distilled from the definition of food security raised by the HDR94. Thus, "*food security means that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to basic food*". The Report explains that this "... requires not just enough food to go around. It requires that people have ready access to food – that they have an 'entitlement' to food, by growing it for themselves, by buying it or by taking advantage of a public food distribution system". The availability of food, continues the Report, is thus a "necessary condition of security, but not a sufficient one, since people can still starve even when enough food is available". Thus, the HDR94 definition matches with the 1983 FAO's concept that extended its scope to economic access.

The Report goes further when stating that overall availability of food in the world was not a problem, since there was enough food to offer everyone in the world, around 2,500 calories a day, 200 calories more than the basic minimum. However, not everyone got enough to eat. Then, the problem often was the poor distribution of food and a lack of purchasing power. People went hungry not because food was unavailable, but because they could not afford it. Access to food came from access to assets, work and an assured income and unless the question of assets, employment and income security was tackled upstream, state intervention could do

little for food insecurity downstream. Note that in this context it does not seem aleatory that in describing the categories that constitute human security, “food security” was enumerated second after “economic security”. Economic security is defined by the Report as requiring “... an assured basic income – usually from productive and remunerative work, or in the last resort from some publicly financed safety net”.

In spite of the recognition of the “access” dimension, a concern grew up to include considerations for food safety and nutritional balance needed for an active and healthy life, together to link dietary needs to food preferences, socially or culturally determined. Also food quality and the role of micronutrients were recognized. Finally, non-food factors, such as adequate care, health and hygiene practices received attention. These concerns constituted another dimension, food utilization, which is determined primarily by people’s health status. Utilization is commonly understood as the way the body makes the most of various nutrients in the food (FAO, 2008). General hygiene and sanitation, water quality, health care practices and food safety and quality are determinants of good food utilization by the body. Food security was traditionally perceived as consuming sufficient protein and energy. The importance of micro-nutrients for a balanced and nutritious diet was then well appreciated.

The next (and final?) step was the 1996 World Food Summit, considered as a major milestone in the history of food security (George-André, 2009). In this summit, a new definition was adopted; one that afterwards was and is currently the most commonly accepted, remaining as one of the important achievements of the meeting. It also recognizes the multidisciplinary approach to food security as well as the interlinked causes of food insecurity. According to this definition, that has been formally endorsed at the global level, food security exists “*when all people, at all times, have physical, [social] and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life*”.² The 2009 Declaration of the World Summit on Food Security continued with the same concept.

Defined in this way, food security involves four aspects, called the “four dimensions or pillars of food security” (FAO, IFAD and WFP, 2013). The first dimension is “availability”, embodied in the word “*sufficient*”, i.e. the amount of food that is present in a country or area (also in villages and households) through domestic production, imports, food stocks and food aid. The second dimension is “access”, contained in “...*have physical, social and economic access*...”, i.e. a household’s ability to acquire adequate amount of food regularly through a combination of purchases, barter, borrowings or food assistance. Note that there are three elements in the access to food: physical, social and economic. The physical side is almost a logistical issue, for example, when limited or no transport facility between two regions impedes the normal flow of food between them. The social aspect refers to the fact that, even when food is available and there are resources to acquire it, some groups of the population have limited access to the food for social reasons, for example for gender motivations (Maiga, 2009). The economic aspect of the access to food refers to when food is available and households have the financial ability to regularly acquire it, i.e. it is determined by disposable income, food prices and the provision of and access to social support.

The third dimension of food security is food “utilization”, that can be found in “...*safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs* ...”. Thus, it is not enough that food be available and accessible to households to ensure a safe and nutritious diet.

² The word “social” was added in 2002 to the 1996 definition.

There are people that having full access to food, still suffers from malnutrition mainly because of a non correct utilization of food. Food utilization is related to clean water, sanitation and health care, i.e. the use, the conservation, the processing and the preparation of the food commodities.³ This dimension also shows how closely nutritious is linked to food security, as explained before. Note that therefore, as George-André (2009) points out, it is a useless repetition to speak about food security and nutrition as there could not be any food security without proper nutrition. When defining food security, FAO (2009) points out that the nutritional dimension is integral to the concept of food security. Nevertheless, it is common to find, even in official documents, the utilization of both terms together.⁴

The fourth dimension of food security is “stability”, referred to in the definition in the words “...*at all times*...”. Accordingly, food security is a situation that does have to occur on a permanent basis with sustainability. This dimension allows to distinguish between chronic (long term or persistent situation) and transitory (short term or temporary state) food insecurity.

At this point, it is worth to calibrate the place of the HDR regarding the particular issue of the definition of food security. As it was mentioned, the HDR definition is almost identical to the 1983 one. Nevertheless, we think that the emphasis of the Report on the access dimension, as we mentioned embodied in the explanation of the concept and without doubt influenced by Sen, is what allow us to underline the historical relevance of the Report. On the other hand, the 1996 definition is wider in scope, with the HDR definition lacking the third dimension of food security, i.e. food utilization.

III. THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE FOOD.

Parallel to the development of the concept of food security, there was also an elaboration of a human rights perspective on issues related to the alleviation of hunger and the promotion of access to adequate food and good nutrition. This section is thus devoted to analyze the meaning and scope of the right to food, while the next one will cope with its relation to food security and with the HDR94.

FAO (2007) identifies three main phases: a) the articulation of ideals of the right to adequate food, through their adoption in international and national law, from 1940s to 1960s; b) the broadening of the scope and of the content of the right to adequate food, from 1970s to 1980s, and c) the promotion of the recognition and implementation of the right to adequate food worldwide, from 1990s.

The history of the right to adequate food is traced back to Roosevelt’s speech to the US Congress in 1941, when he pointed at humanity’s four basic freedoms: freedom of speech, freedom of faith, freedom from want and freedom from fear. After the Second World War, many countries embraced these four freedoms, which were included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The Declaration was

³ These elements bring the attention to the problematic of “food safety”. There has been, and still are, some confusion between food safety and food security. In some languages, like French and Italian, there are no distinctions between concepts, i.e. “sécurité alimentaire” and “sicurezza alimentare”, respectively (George-André, 2009).

⁴ For example, in the foreword to FAO, IFAD and WFP (2013, pp5) we find: “Ultimately, political stability, effective governance and, most importantly, uninterrupted long – term commitments to mainstreaming food security and nutrition in policies and programmes are key to the reduction of hunger and malnutrition”.

considered as “a common standard of achievement for all people and nations”. Article 2 states that “everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration”. Article 25 relates to the freedom from want, stating that “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food...”.

Note that unlike national laws, international legal norms are divided into binding and non-binding laws. From a juridical standpoint, declarations of principles are not legally binding, while treaties ratified by states are binding international law. The next step in the history of the right to adequate food was hence its incorporation into legally binding international treaties that occurred in 1966 when the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) was adopted. Article 11 of ICESCR contains the clause “freedom from hunger”. The process to ratify the ICESCR by countries began in 1976. It is important to point out that with the ratification, a state is called a “state party with legally binding obligations”. Academic work provided understanding about the meaning of the obligations of states having ratified the ICESCR. There are three levels of obligations, i.e. to respect, to protect and to fulfill.

At this point, it is worth to mention that the right to food was also present in the HDR94. The Report stated that the next World Summit for Social Development that was expected for March 1995, in the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, was the occasion to establish the framework of equality of opportunities among nations and people, through a new world social charter. The Report gave an illustrative world social charter (UNDP, 1994, Box I), whose second paragraph proposed “...to build a society where the right to food is as sacrosanct as the right to vote...”. The Report also stated that much of the ground work for such a charter already existed, since the ICESCR encompassed most of the social goals, including the rights to food, health, shelter. We will come back to the HDR94 and its link with the right to food in the next section.

At the 1996 World Food Summit, where the definition of food security was re-elaborated, it was reaffirmed “...the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free of hunger”. A series of events took place after the 1996 World Food Summit. A major breakthrough occurred with the adoption in 1999 of General Comment 12 on the right to adequate food that interpreted Article 11 of the ICESCR. The General Comment provided an interpretation of the right to food which was wide in scope and also reflected a notion of food security encompassing both access and adequacy: “*The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, have physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its production. The right to adequate food shall therefore not be interpreted in a narrow or restrictive sense, which equates it with a minimum package of calories, proteins and other specific nutrients. The right to adequate food will have to be realized progressively. However, States have a core obligation to take the necessary action to mitigate and alleviate hunger...*”

In the year 2000, the UN Commission on Human Rights appointed a Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, to accelerate the promotion and protection of the right to adequate food worldwide. In 2002, during the World Food Summit: *five years later*, an agreement was reached to elaborate “voluntary guidelines for the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security”. This agreement led to the establishment of an Intergovernmental Working Group to elaborate these guidelines. This is considered to be the first time that the right to adequate food was discussed in substance and in detail among governments

and within FAO. It was also the first time that states agreed on the meaning of the right to adequate food. The Voluntary Guidelines were approved during the 127th session of FAO in November, 2004. They are voluntary and non-legally binding, although they build on international laws and they are addressed to all states, parties and non-parties to the ICESCR. Eide and Kracht (2005) consider that the adoption of the “Voluntary Guidelines” was an historical achievement and of considerable interest to human rights advocates and development economist alike, since it was the first time that an intergovernmental body agreed on what a certain economic and social right really meant or ought to mean and also to recommend actions to be undertaken for its realization (FAO, 2005)

The Voluntary Guidelines contain a definition of food security, in line with the 1996 elaboration, i.e. “*Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. The four pillars of food security are availability, stability of supply, access and utilization*” (FAO, 2005). In this context, the Voluntary Guidelines aim to guarantee the availability of food in quantity and quality sufficient to satisfy the dietary needs of individuals, physical and economic accessibility for everyone, including vulnerable groups, to adequate food, free from unsafe substances and acceptable within a given culture or the means of its procurement.

In 2009, the right to food was also placed at the heart of the reformed Committee on World Food Security, the main international and intergovernmental forum for coordinated action against food and nutrition insecurity and hunger, whose vision is to “strive for a world free from hunger where countries implement the Voluntary Guidelines for the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security”.

It is interesting to end this section, where the concept of the right to food was introduced, dealing with the following question: was the concept of the right to food an issue, explicit or implicit, in the HDR94 Report or it was not? To answer this question, let's turn to Chapter 1 of the Report where some “philosophical” discussion is raised. Accordingly to this chapter, the real foundation of human development is universalism in acknowledging the life claims of everyone. This universalism of life claims underlies the search for meeting basic human needs. Universalism implies the empowerment of people and it protects all basic human rights and it holds that *the right to food* is as sacrosanct as the right to vote. We can conclude, then, that the concept was present in the HDR94 Report, although consistently with “its time” it was no further developed.⁵

IV. LINKING FOOD SECURITY AND THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE FOOD.

The relation between food security and the right to food is easily summarized by United Nations (2001) when it claims that the corollary of the right to food is food security, i.e. food security follows from the right to food. FAO (2005), in turn, asserts that the right to food is a mean of achieving food security. Thus, the right to (adequate) food is a practical goal, as well as a moral and legal obligation. It

⁵ In the context of the definition and history of the right to food, United Nations (2001) argues that an idea may be right and true for generations, sometimes centuries, without impinging on public debate or taking shape in a social movement, i.e. in the collective consciousness. The idea remains unacceptable until the “right time” comes. As far as the right to food is concerned, the “right time” came in 1996 at the World Food Summit.

recognizes an imperative obligation to act, i.e. it implies that others have specific obligations to assure the realization of this right, specifically governments have this obligation. The right to adequate food does not imply state provision of food, except under special circumstances and natural disasters; it could be viewed as a right to policies or as a right to rights.

Note that, although food security was always considered to be a global concern, rules that organize the world recognize only the single country as the individual actor and starting point and then calls for coordination at the global level rather than for global governance. In this context, the concept of the right to food requires governments to fulfill their relevant human rights obligations, and this requirement is consistent with the statement that food security is a national responsibility and that any plans for addressing food security challenges must be nationally articulated, designed, owned and led (FAO, 2009).

These obligations come from international laws, i.e. international instruments, as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Thus, at the national level, a human-based approach to food security emphasizes universal, interdependent, indivisible and interrelated human rights. Thus, the achievement of food security is an outcome of the realization of existing rights, such as the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs, the right to freedom of expression and the right to seek, receive and impart information, including in relation to decision-making about policies on realizing the right to adequate food. It is worthy to note that during the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, in June 2012 (Río+20), the outcome document “The future we want” was endorsed, with countries members reaffirming their commitments regarding “*the right of everyone to have access to safe, sufficient and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger*” (United Nations, 2012).

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Note also that, in this context, the obligations of governments also imply the establishment of concrete institutional arrangements to ensure the realization of the right to food, for example the integration of the right to food into national legislation, such as the constitution or a framework law, thus setting a long – term binding standard. In 1994, South Africa included the right to food in article 27 of the post-apartheid Constitution. Other countries have followed suit. The new Constitution of Kenya, approved by a popular referendum in 2010, states the right of every person “to be free from hunger and to have adequate food of acceptable quality”; like that of South Africa, the Constitution imposes on the State a duty to respect, protect, promote and fulfil that right. A 2011 study identified 24 States in which the right to food was explicitly recognized, although in about half of them, it was recognized for the benefit of a particular segment of the population only, such as children, and sometimes through another human right such as the right to life (United Nations, 2013).

FAO (2013) considers that Brazil has developed the most comprehensive institutional and legislative frameworks for the realization of the right to adequate food. Besides having the explicit objective to realize the right to adequate food, Brazilian law emphasizes the indivisibility and interdependence of human rights, stating that adequate food is a basic human right, inherent to human dignity. In addition to Brazil, other countries have an explicit guarantee of the right to adequate food in their National Constitutions or Basic Laws, such as Bolivia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Kenya, Maldives and Niger.

The Constitution of Mexico was amended in order to insert the right to food. In El Salvador, Nigeria, and Zambia, processes of constitutional revision are under way

that may lead to insertion of the right to food in the respective Constitutions. In other countries, such as Uganda and Malawi, ensuring access to adequate food and nutrition is defined as a principle of State policy. In Germany, the right to food is indirectly protected by the guarantee to a decent subsistence minimum so that everyone may live in dignity. In addition, other countries like Argentina and Norway, implicitly guarantee the right to food by granting constitutional rank or a rank superior to the Constitution to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and other international human rights treaties ratified by the State (United Nations, 2013).

It is very important that, once the right to food is incorporated to national laws, it can be claimed by judicial, extrajudicial or administrative mechanisms. FAO (2013) considers that India provides an example of justiciability of the right to food at the national level. Since 2001, the Supreme Court in Delhi has been addressing a public interest litigation case on the right to food and has issued numerous interim orders creating legal entitlements to food and work under various governmental programs. In Guatemala, an important court decision on the right to adequate food was made in June 2013 regarding the situation of five undernourished children from four families living in a remote village. In its judgment, the court ordered the state to implement 25 specific measures necessary to address the structural obstacles faced by right holders, especially children affected by chronic malnutrition and to ensure the enjoyment of their rights, particularly the right to adequate food.

I think this section provides a good contextual overview – describing how the right to food has been diffused to the national level – but I think what is needed is much more analysis on how the discourse of food security – perhaps through the concept of right to food – has played out – and indeed what impact this has actually had on achieving the goals of food security outlined in the 1994 Report in practice. Has the redefinition of food security helped or hindered the achievement of food security goals? What has been the relationship between the state and the individual in practice in relation to achieving food security (and what has this meant for achieving it?) Have certain groups mobilized and articulated demands more than others and what are the implications of this for the security of the individual? In short – we need to understand whether and how food security still has purchase 20 years on – and how it can be taken forward and implemented more effectively going forward. You might want to focus down on a particular region or set of countries and provide a little more detail on the narrative and practice of food security – so that we get a flavour of where the debate is at the moment and where we are in concrete terms with regard to the practice of food security

V. CONCLUSION.

Nowadays, the concept of food security is utilized by everybody involved in the general food debate, including those who resist adopting a rights-based approach to development in any form. On the other hand, those who promote a rights based approach also agree on the relevance of food security as a contextual parameter in assessing and promoting the enjoyment of the right to food, i.e. the promotion of the right to adequate food is a prerequisite for obtaining food security.

Nevertheless, as Shaw (2007) argues, food security is now being seen as the eye of the storm of interlocking national and global concerns to which it contributes and whose solution lies in tackling those concerns holistically. This implies the broadening of the concept of world food security, with its multifaceted and

multidimensional aspects. These series of interlocking food security concerns include local concerns, such as basic services, technology, assets, and also major global concerns, such as environmentally sustainable development, water resources, world trade, climate change and the current pattern of globalization.

On the other hand, the argument in favor of the human rights approach is that policy objectives come and go with changing governments and the numerous declarations of intent to end world hunger and poverty are not legally binding, but the imperative of human rights based on human dignity, with consequent legal obligations, would remain of constant value beyond the volatility of politics. By moving to a human rights framework, the elimination of poverty becomes more than a desirable, charitable, or even moral policy goal. It becomes an international duty of states. The 1994 Human Development Report phrases Mary Wollstonecraft, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, published in 1792: “It is justice, not charity, that is wanting in the world”.

It is important to consider that the states are not the unique actors involved in addressing hunger and access to food. For example, every facet and segment of the global food system is increasingly dominated by huge transnational corporations which monopolize the food chain, from the production, trade and processing, to the marketing and retailing of food, narrowing choices for farmers and consumers. It seems then necessary to address also the ethical and human rights responsibilities of the food and agricultural industry, i.e. the multinational corporations.

To see all humans as possessing economic rights may prove to be the most effective way of addressing world poverty. Despite pioneering academic work, economic rights remain less well articulated conceptually than civil and political rights, less accurately measured and less consistently implemented in public policy. As Shaw (2007) argues, it remains to be seen whether the human rights approach will prove to be more successful than the other commitments made over the past sixty years.

In this context, even when the HDR concept of food security was overcome by the 1996 definition, in our view the HDR constitutes a cornerstone in the intellectual contention to bring attention to the issue of the access to food, and also in the issues of basic needs, equal opportunities, claims and entitlements. The 1994 Human Development Report constitutes one of the important intellectual steps in the fight against hunger, that silent holocaust that repeats year after year (Kent, 2005).

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