



Enhancing the Contribution of Non-Wood Forest Products to Poverty
Alleviation and Food Security in Central African Countries

1. Introduction

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) that was signed by most Central African countries introduces in its Article 11 the right to adequate food for everyone.

The project GCP/RAF/441/GER "Enhancing the contribution of non-wood forest products to poverty alleviation and food security in Central African countries" financed by the German government and implemented in Gabon, Congo and the Central African Republic organized a training on the right to adequate food in the context of non-wood forest products (NWFP) and food security in order to enhance the knowledge on the right to food and to contribute to its practical realization in the region.

The training was conducted from 20th to 22nd October 2010 in FAO's Sub-regional Office for Central Africa, Libreville, Gabon with the technical support of FAO's Right to Food Team.

Module 1: The right to food in theory

The right to adequate food complements the technical concept of food security with its four pillars: physical availability of food, economic and/or physical access to food, food utilization and stability of these three dimensions over time with human rights principles. Even though human rights are grouped in economic, social and cultural rights on the one hand and political and civil rights on the other hand, all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated.

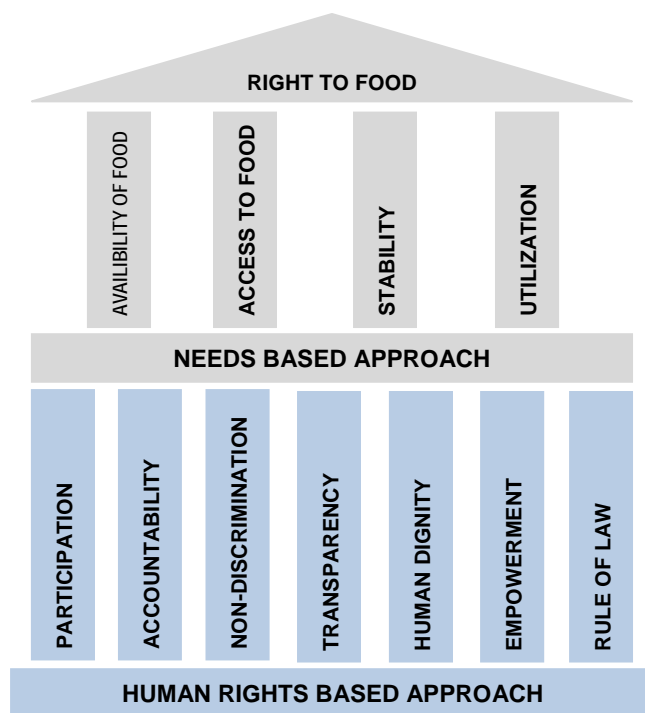


Figure 1: The four dimensions of food security and the human rights based approach to the right to food.

The Right to Adequate Food

The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has the physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement. The implementation of this right is a daily challenge and contributes to fight poverty and food insecurity.

The human rights based approach underlying the right to food empowers national juridical, political and institutional capacities in order to boost economic development and to improve the living conditions of the populations.



2. The training

The three days training was officially opened by the Gabonese Minister for Water and Forests His Excellency Martin Mabala. Luisa Cruz from FAO's Right to Food Team facilitated the training that was moderated by Armand Asseng Zé, Specialist for NWFP of the project GCP/RAF/441/GER coordinated by Ousseynou Ndoye.

The different training modules provided basic knowledge on the realization of the right to food and the linkages between non-wood forest products, food security and right to food to representatives of the Central African Forestry Commission (COMIFAC), of FAO, the Ministries in charge of forest and civil society from Gabon, the Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic e.g. the African Network for the Right to Food (ANRF/ RAP-DA) as well as to forestry law resource persons.

Module 2: Obligations and recourse mechanisms

Under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general State obligations with respect to the right to food are defined on three levels (see figure 2). Through the example of the Ogoni community in Nigeria, participants learned how to identify cases of violation of the right to food and which possible recourse mechanisms are available at national, regional and international level.

National legal frameworks integrate the right to adequate food in different ways: (i) constitutions explicitly recognize the right to food like for example Article 47 of the constitution of the Democratic Republic of Congo warranting the right to health and to food security; (ii) general frame laws such as the Brazilian National Food and Nutrition Security Law; (iii) sector laws for land tenure, agriculture, forest and non-wood forest products, food security, consumer protection and trade etc.

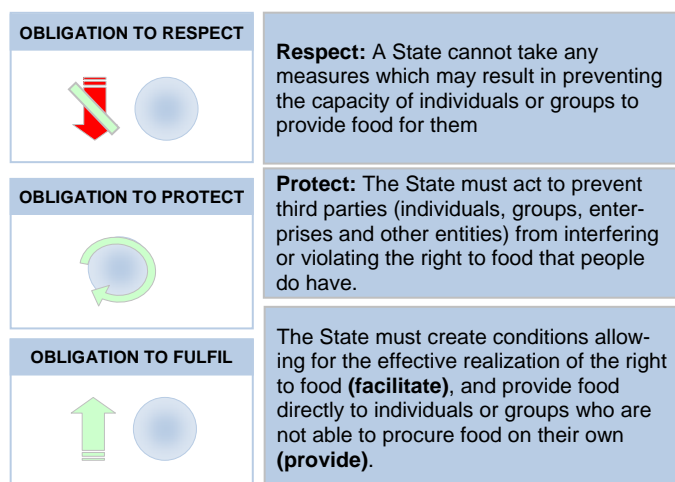


Figure 2: State obligations within the right to food.

Module 3: The right to food in practice

The multidimensional character of the right to food integrates institutional, political, legal, human and economic aspects underlining that the right to food is not a solely legal approach or does only concern the agricultural sector or even jeopardizes a countries economy. On the contrary, the improvement of the living conditions of local populations can provide economical benefits such as declining poverty and decreasing unemployment as well as reduced costs for health care and a more active and better educated population.

In order to formulate an answer to the question “*How the implement the right to food in practice?*”, FAO Member States adopted 2004 the “Voluntary guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security”. Seven guiding steps were identified to help States to implement the right to food in their specific country context:

1	Identifying the hungry and poor
2	Conducting a thorough assessment
3	Elaborating a sound food security strategy
4	Allocating obligations and responsibilities
5	Creating a legal framework
6	Monitoring the progress
7	Ensuring recourse mechanisms

Figure 3: The seven guiding steps for the realization of the right to food.

During the training, participants exchanged on the definition of roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders in regard to:

- The importance of the civil society as “voice of the voiceless” being the voice of populations and minorities,
- The responsibilities and obligations of States through their legal systems, their jurisprudence and their policy frameworks,
- The contribution of the international cooperation providing technical and financial support to States and NGO’s in the implementation of the right to food,
- The role of the Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC) being a political and technical authority in regard to the harmonization of policies and activities for a sustainable forest management in the Central African region.

Module 4: The right to food linked to non-wood forest products

During this module, Ousseynou Ndoye, Regional project coordinator, explained the existing links between non-wood forest products, food security and the right to food. Non-wood forest products contribute to food security in two ways: (i) the direct consumption of non-wood forest products on household level providing proteins, fats, minerals and vitamins supplementing carbohydrate-rich staple foods, (ii) trade of non-wood forest products generating income that can be used amongst others to buy additional food items or medicine.

The right to food with its political, legal, human, economical and institutional dimensions influence the above described contribution of non-wood forest products to food security in different ways for example in regard to:

- Access of local populations and indigenous people to forest resources,
- Conversion of customary user rights granted to local populations into commercial user rights allowing them to sell non-wood forest products in the supply zone in order to buy other basic products,
- Reduction of informal taxes (bribery) to be paid at checkpoints creating financial returns for the officers at the control posts but diminishing producer’s and trader’s revenues from non-wood forest products,
- Cooperation of institutions from different sectors engaged in enhancing food security.

The Toolbox on NWFP, food security and right to food

In the frame of the project’s activities on the right to food, a regional model called “Toolbox on non-wood forest products, food security and the right to food” will be developed in order to facilitate the application of a human rights based approach to food security in forestry policies, programs and activities in COMIFAC countries. Subsequently, this Toolbox will be validated by COMIFAC and tested in Congo, Gabon and the Central African Republic. Being elaborated as an orientation document, the Toolbox will use a multi-stakeholder approach taking perspectives and experiences of all stakeholders into consideration.

Following fruitful exchanges, the participants of the right to food training proposed five strategic axis or dimensions for the above mentioned Toolbox:

- Capacity development,
- Sustainable resource management
- Institutional and legal framework,
- Market and value chain promotion,
- Partnerships and research.

The content and ideas of two key documents will feed into the Toolbox:

- The “Voluntary guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security” adopted during the 127th session of the FAO Council in November 2004,
- The “Sub-regional guidelines for the sustainable management of non-wood forest products of plant origin in Central Africa” adopted on the occasion of the extraordinary session of COMIFAC’s Council of Ministers held in October 2008 in Brazzaville, Congo.