

# **The right to food for the furthest behind**

**By Pat Mc Mahon Mothers First**

The principle of equity is the cornerstone of human rights. Equity by its meaning calls us to go where it has the greatest disparity and act accordingly.

Despite being mid way through the Sustainable Development Goals which committed to leave no one behind we still have not attempted to define who the furthest behind are. This has had the effect that the story of the furthest behind has little or no substance and the coined phrase far from being a clarion call to action has gradually fizzled out of our vocabulary.

In relation to the achievement of the right to food the furthest behind is easily correlated when applied through the lens of acute food insecurity. IPC/CH 3 4 and 5 food security rating and their nutritional outcomes. The very end point of food insecurity is our data on nutrition related mortality. We have reached the end point where the right to food is fully lost.

## **Applying the right to food guidelines to the furthest behind**

If we are to truly apply the right to food guidelines to the furthest behind it is at this point that we must begin to apply the covenant and directly related human rights treaties such as CEDAW.

In practice this is easier than one would think but directly integrating the language of the treaty base within and throughout UN reports and in the future frameworks that deal specifically with acute hunger. Currently, the 3 main UN reports on acute hunger do not even mention the right to food.

- Hunger Hot Spot Report
- The Global Food Crisis Report
- The Global Humanitarian Overview

Integrating strong languages into these specific reports would be a significant single sign of accountability.

## **Broundenting the The Narrative of Human Rights for the furthest behind.**

Integrating human rights into these reports need to go beyond the inclusion of words but need to translate into developed arguments to counter bottlenecks and challenges in ensuring at least a minimum level of food security which reduces mortality and build resistance.

## **Humanitarian Response Plans and the Duty bearer**

It is important to understand what humanitarian response plans are developed when “there is evidence that the magnitude and/or severity of acute food insecurity and acute malnutrition exceeds the local resources and capacities needed to respond effectively, leading to a request for the urgent mobilization of the international community” GRFC 2023.

A central question within the human rights framework that we have not seen discussed but clearly implied within Article 11.2 of the Covenant *The States Parties to the present Covenant, recognising the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger, shall take, individually and through*

*international cooperation, the measures, including specific programmes, which are needed:* when governments request assistance through the humanitarian system who then becomes the duty bearer.

General Comment 12 of the Covenant provides clarity on the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders in achieving the right to food for all. It highlights the state's role in upholding the right to food and distinguishes between an inability and unwillingness to provide minimum interventions to free people from hunger.

### **Concerns raised regarding the ability of the CFS to fulfill its mandate to reach the most food insecure people in the world**

While the wording of the covenant and general comment 12 would seem clear that the duty bearer then becomes the countries, the implications for this remain undiscussed. This ambiguity means that at a population level across all the human rights treaties the framework is weakest at the points of greatest human rights inequalities. This issue is well argued in general comment 2,3 and 12 of the covenant.

Within the present scenario humanitarian response plans are underfunded by up to 70% by donor countries who in principle at least becomes a major stakeholder duty bearer. Framework if one existed.

### **The scale of the problem**

The global Report on Food crisis details the scale of the problem with 350 million people in 48 countries experiencing IPC/CH 3 4 and 5 food security and its food security impacts. The global Humanitarian overview details the scale of the funding deficits which last year amounted to over 37 billion dollars accounts for 70% of the required needs. In terms of available resources the shortfall must be seen within both the trillion dollar economies and the perspective that these same countries spend over 3000 billion dollars military.

### **Progressive reaction of the right to food.**

The central premise of the right to food is the concept of it being a progressive ongoing process, recognising that countries as the primary rights holders for its citizenship.

The scale of the regression since 2015 has been unprecedented promoting the International coordinator for humanitarian affairs to declare that we are in the middle of the largest food crisis in modern history.

While the principle of progressive realization of the right to food is understood, we need to recalibrate the inequalities within the wording of progressive. At what point is the change so slow or regressive that the term progressive can no longer be applied.

While the periodic reviews are the accountability mechanism for the human rights based treaties. Unfortunately our research on the periodic reviews which is the accountability system for the human right the reviews center only on national governments role within their own country.

This can be seen in the 2 way process by which the reviewers compile a list of questions for countries and how countries respond to these questions. Equally we found that civil society have not utilised Article 11.2 of the Covenant

We have also not been able to find instances where the human rights council have raised this as an issue with donor countries.

## **Section 2**

**Concerns raised regarding the ability of the CFS to fulfill its mandate to reach the most food insecure people in the world**

**Title Equity within the inequalities work stream for the furthest behind.**

## **Policy input paper for the Reducing Inequality workstream**

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Mothers First have been deeply immersed in the development of the Inequalities Report, contributing to the [scoping document](#) and the [VO Draft](#). Both submissions unsuccessfully advocated for the addition of acute, which is extreme food insecurity and its associated nutritional outcomes in the final inequalities report. Please find our [short intervention](#) at the report launch in June 2023.

Our [1 page summary report](#) prepared for the new Chair of the CFS in November taps this work and presents 3 overarching recommendations. We welcome the chair's engagement with this issue and her suggestion to include this issue in the Inequalities working group for further exploration.

We cannot disentangle agri food systems from food insecurity. Furthermore the principle of equity requires us to go to where it is most severe. It is here that the food systems are failing most because it is here that the intersectionality of extreme poverty resides. Intersectionality has one name and that is poverty. Within its own process poverty begets marginalisation and primarily resides within the constituency base of the CSIPM.

This 2 page submission seeks to develop a narrative that is recognisable, understandable and actionable to directly reach the most food insecure and malnourished people. Only in doing so will the CFS framework align with its own vision and mandate to reach the most food insecure and malnourished people in our world.

This submission will be flanked by our submission to the the right to food guidelines and the policy uptakes working group. (Get links when available)

### **Why the inequalities report excluded acute food insecurity and implications for the CFS**

The reason the inequalities report only deals with chronic hunger is because the CFS is largely confined/governed within the framing structure of the SOFI report. The mandate of the SOFI Report primarily limits itself to chronic hunger as to the SDG indicators it reports on.

The consequences of this siloed approach goes far beyond a single HLPE report but strikes at the heart of the anomaly within the CFS to achieve its vision as set out in the Standing note of MYPoW.

MYPoW “aims at eliminate hunger and malnutrition through policy convergence where all activities are designed, planned and implemented to promote: resilience of livelihoods; attention to the people most affected by food insecurity and malnutrition”

MYPoW is simply not achievable because the policy process and actions are not framed within contexts with the highest prevalence of extreme hunger. The recommendations of inequalities report for example are exemplary as a theory to achieve food security.

**In practice however** fragile countries do not have the fiscal and technical capacity even to ensure a minimum of acceptable diet to over 350 million of its people across 48 countries. Equally Humanitarian Response Plans which are the social protection programs of the extreme poor are underfunded by up to 70% by the global north.

These two interrelated issues are the single biggest impediments to implementing the Framework for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises (FFA) and the right to food for the furthest behind in the food system.

“The world is facing the largest food crisis in modern history, and famine is knocking on many doors,” the words of Martin Griffiths, the Humanitarian Affairs Coordinator at the United Nations last year.

We regard it as a significant lost opportunity that in the midst of such a food crisis the CFS as the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform remains institutionally siloed even within its own institutions

### **The silk glove approach and the humanitarian Development Divide**

The humanitarian Development Divide has been long talked about and well understood particularly in the humanitarian community. A key objective of the World Humanitarian Summit in 2015 was to bridge the divide. The exclusion of acute food insecurity is most probably a vestatude of this.

The difference between acute and chronic hunger would appear to be largely misunderstood and unrecognised within the CFS Framework. Most probably it is because the SOFI report while focusing on chronic hunger uses the terms moderate to severe food insecurity.

In simple terms moderate and severe food insecurity is a term derived from the methodology of the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) developed by FAO. It measures chronic hunger to the classification of moderate to severe food insecurity. Acute hunger has five phases Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) and Cadre Harmonisé (CH) analyses.

Phase 2 is comparable to severe food insecurity using the (FIES) methodology.

The 3 remaining phases are seen below are how we define acute hunger.

Phase 2 Stressed
Households have minimally adequate food consumption but are unable to afford some essential non-food expenditures without engaging in stress-coping strategies.
Action required for disaster risk reduction and to protect livelihoods

Phase 3 Crisis	Phase 4 Emergency	Phase 5 Catastrophe/Famine
Households either have food consumption gaps that are reflected by high or above-usual acute malnutrition; or are marginally able to meet minimum food needs but only by depleting essential livelihood assets or through crisis-coping strategies.	Households either have large food consumption gaps which are reflected in very high acute malnutrition and excess mortality; or are able to mitigate large food consumption gaps but only by employing emergency livelihood strategies and asset liquidation.	Households have an extreme lack of food and/or other basic needs even after full employment of coping strategies. Starvation, death, destitution and extremely critical acute malnutrition levels are evident. (For Famine Classification, area needs to have extreme critical levels of acute malnutrition and mortality.)
Urgent action required to 		
Protect livelihoods and reduce food consumption gaps	Save lives and livelihoods	Revert/prevent widespread death and total collapse of livelihoods

[This interactive webpage](#) developed by FAO clearly demonstrates the difference between acute and chronic food insecurity.

[The Global Report on food Crisis](#) is the reference document on global, regional and country-level acute food insecurity. It is a collaborative effort among 16 partners including the World Food Program and FAO. The report aims to **inform humanitarian and development action** by providing the global and national food security community **with independent and consensus-based evidence and analysis**.

### Geographic location of acute hunger.

It is important to point out that while the highest prevalence of acute food insecurity occurs in fragile settings, pockets of acute food insecurity manifesting in mothers and children who are severely malnourished are widespread across low and middle income countries. That is to say that acute food insecurity primarily determinant is extreme poverty.

### Food Security and Nutrition outcomes.

Ultimately the nutritional outcomes for the furthest behind is a sad tale that rarely gets narrated. Each year 3 million children die of hunger and malnutrition. Over 250 million women are severely underweight resulting in over 270,000 women dying in childbirth every year. Over 21 million babies are born malnourished with a low birth weight.

### Implications for the inequalities working group and the CFS

In order for the inequalities work stream to fulfil its mandate to focus on the most affected by hunger and malnutrition the humanitarian development divide will need to be successfully navigated.

This will require opening the doors of the CFS to the furthest behind. As such the policy convergence process will need to overlay recommendations with a strong feasibility mechanism paying particular attention to the applicability and relevance of policy recommendation to those affected by acute hunger.

These doors and required communication pathways are already ajar with the dual mandate of FAO and WFP within the SOFI Report, the Food Crisis Report and their function on the advisory committee.

### Conclusion and policy recommendations.

The very principle of equity and human rights means we must go to where the needs are greatest and act accordingly. Similarly we must go beyond the progressive realisation of the right to food to the right to food for those who are most food insecure. We greatly encourage the work stream and

stakeholders' deliberations to consider more broadly our recommendations as set out in our 1 page overview on considered ways forward

### **Overarching policy recommendations**

**1** We call for the incorporation of acute food insecurity within the policy framework of the upcoming open-ended working group on inequalities.

**2** Our central overriding suggestion for the next step is the development of a cohesive dialogue merging the expert knowledge of the SOFI report and the Global Report on Food crisis

**3** In accordance with the [CFS Reform document](#) we urge the inclusion of structured nutrition-related expertise on acute hunger to inform the plenary.

**4** The inclusion of the Global Report on Food Crisis at CFS 52. .