Defining Food Security

When we deal with the issue of the right to food, we have to consider the concept of food security. These two issues are deeply interconnected but not overlapping.

While the right to food was already formulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 25) of 1948, the concept of food security is more recent as it has been developed and deployed beginning in the ‘70s.

Since then, much has followed especially in official documents, which helped to expand and develop the definition of the concept used at present.

In the aftermath of the great global food crisis, the international community came together to reflect on the theme of food. At the World Food Conference of 1974 they formulated a concept of food security based on food availability. The focus was on strengthening food production to meet increasing food demands.

The recent food crisis (2008), the increasing food demand and the consequent rise in prices convinced the International Community that the world was moving towards overall food shortages. Seeing that hunger emergency was the most serious threat, the Summit’s final statement affirmed that “Every man, woman and child has the inalienable right to be free from hunger and malnutrition.” The more comprehensive “right to adequate food” that was formulated by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was not mentioned.

This concept of food security was declined particularly at national levels. So the action plan of the Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO) Council adopted in 1979 (Plan of Action on World Food Security) was addressed to...
national governments for the implementation of food security national strategies and the increase of food stocks.

In 1981 there was an important change in the concept of food security by which the attention shifted from food availability to its accessibility.

The contribution made by Amartya Sen was very important. His article “Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation” brought this point to the center of the international debate.

It was no longer national food security but individual food security. Sen argued that individual food security can be severely constrained despite sufficient national supplies, and that some of the worst famines took place due to entitlement shifts with no significant decline in food availability per capita.

Alongside the problem of food availability, food accessibility, often limited by poverty, must therefore to be considered

The attention moved from the acute food crisis on a national level to the problem of chronic hunger, which concerned a high average of the World population.

No longer was attention paid only to the national dimension of food security but also on the household and individual levels. It is in this direction that in 1985 the document “World Food Security Compact” that brought together general principles of food safety at the national level and for the first time, even at household and individual levels was adopted. The reflection on this subject has also led to stress the importance of not reducing food security only on the household aspect because discrimination could be present even in this context, as in the case of women and children who are the weakest segments of the population. It is very important to keep the individual level of food security.

In addition to these discussions some other issues not directly related to food but more generally to nutrition were debated, such as, those related to health, hygiene and the nutritional value of food.

This long debate has come to a shared definition of food security in 1996 during the World Food Summit in Rome. The adopted definition still in use today is: “Food security, at the individual, household, national, regional and global levels is achieved when all people, at all times, and economic have physical access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”

We can see how this definition includes all of the above aspects, such as, the importance of accessibility to food, which is the precondition
of its availability and the various levels at which food security must be guaranteed and all the aspects of nutrition and food safety.

The definition is in line with a human rights-based approach that focuses on the fundamental concept of human dignity.

Taken from “FORUM ROMA”, 2/2011

More Effective Foreign Assistance

More effective aid matters to countries such as Haiti and Liberia. Haiti is struggling to recover from long standing poverty made worse by the 2010 earthquake. The people of Liberia are emerging from two devastating civil wars that left many deeply impoverished. Problems like these cannot be solved quickly.

But more effective U.S. assistance will make a big difference as Haitians and Liberians, and people in many other developing countries, increase their capacity and infrastructure so they can become self-sufficient and build a better future for themselves.

“We need to make sure U.S. foreign aid reaches those who need it most, and that it supports their efforts to lift their communities out of poverty. Hunger and poverty are not partisan issues, and we will push members of Congress to work together to ensure that the needs of hungry and poor people are met” stated Rev. David Beckmann.

Bread for the World seeks changes in U.S. foreign assistance on four fronts:
1) A stronger focus on reducing poverty.
2) Clearer accountability for how U.S. aid dollars are spent and their results.
3) A transformed U.S. development agency.
4) U.S. aid that meets the needs and wants of local people in developing countries.

President Obama and Republican and Democratic leaders in Congress have all endorsed the need for reforms in U.S. foreign assistance. But Congress must pass legislation to make changes permanent and lasting. Your letters will help build the political will to pass this reform legislation.

SAMPLE LETTER YOU MAY WISH TO USE
Date

Dear Representative and/or Dear Senator,

I’m asking you to reform the way the United States delivers foreign assistance so it will help millions of people in poor countries move out of hunger and poverty. Streamlined and more efficient U.S. foreign aid programs will ensure that our tax dollars are used effectively.

By focusing our aid dollars on moving people out of poverty, we help foster economic growth and opportunity. Fewer people struggling with poverty and stronger economies in developing countries contribute to our own national security as well.

This is why I am asking you to support reforms in the ways we deliver and administer U.S. foreign aid. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Your name and address

Senator
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Representative
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

DO YOU THINK THE HUNGER PROBLEM IN THE U.S. IS GETTING BETTER, STAYING THE SAME OR GETTING WORSE?

49% GETTING WORSE
34% STAYING THE SAME
8% GETTING BETTER