



UNIVERSITÄT HOHENHEIM  
**Center for Gender and Nutrition**



# Gender, Nutrition, and the Right to Adequate Food

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Public Workshop Report

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The Department of Gender and Nutrition,  
University of Hohenheim

and the

FoodFirst Information and Action Network,  
FIAN International

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## **1 Gender, Nutrition, and Rights to Adequate Food Public Workshop, 20 May 2011, University of Hohenheim, Stuttgart, Germany**

When so many call for inclusion of women and a gender perspective in food security, why is the status of women and girls in terms of food security still not improving? When the goal of food security is improved health status for everyone, why do research, policy, trade, and civil society engagement divide their energies between food production on the one hand and malnutrition on the other, the apparent outcome being food trade profits coexisting with increased hunger, food “shortages”, and social instability?

The Department of Gender and Nutrition at the University of Hohenheim (UHOH), together with the International Secretariat of the FoodFirst Information Action Network (FIAN-International), are developing a focused approach on Gender, Nutrition and the Human Right to Adequate Food. This endeavor has two objectives: it reflects upon the reasons why gender is not adequately addressed in right to adequate food planning and advocacy, and it inquires into how pro-nutrition approaches can and should bridge food production research and policy with the goal of healthy communities. Our approach employs the legal and institutional frameworks of human rights and human dignity wherein individuals and groups have the right to self-determination and the right to feed themselves.

On Friday 20 May 2011, we organized a morning Public Workshop meeting on Gender, Nutrition and the Right to Adequate Food (GNRtAF) to present our work and to initiate public discussion with representatives from international human rights bodies. To these ends, we collaborated with the UN Special Rapporteur for the Right to Food, Prof. Dr. Olivier de Schutter, members of UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies: the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (a representative could not participate in the reported Public Workshop) and Dr. Ismat Jahan, Member of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (from Bangladesh), and with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights represented by Senior Legal Adviser, Ms. Asako Hattori.

The Public Workshop was followed by a closed afternoon meeting with the morning panel participants plus additional right to adequate food Experts who reviewed the UHOH-FIAN work to date and helped us develop strategies for follow-up. The perspectives of many of these Experts is captured in this Public Workshop Report from the public dialogue.

### **1.1 Introduction**

#### **Anne Bellows, Department of Gender and Nutrition, University of Hohenheim**

Anne Bellows - Chair of the Department for Gender and Nutrition of the University of Hohenheim - welcomed the panelists and participants of the workshop *Gender, Nutrition, and the Right to Adequate Food*, and briefly presented the cooperative work between the Department of Gender and Nutrition and FIAN International (FoodFirst Information and Action Network), built to address issues related to gender, nutrition and the right to adequate food in the context of human rights and civil society's capacity to work with State Parties to achieve sustainable livelihoods. This work has led, in a two-year process, to the development of a cooperative paper addressing these issues, and has found at the international level the support and interest of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food of the United Nations, Olivier de Schutter. Anne Bellows introduced the question being

specifically addressed with this workshop: *“When so many call for inclusion of women and a gender perspective in food security: why is the status of women and girls still not improving?”* Ms. Bellows emphasized that this question has not been addressed for the first time in such a context. She expressed her gratitude towards the funding organizations that enabled the realization of the workshop: the European Union supported EcoFair Trade Dialogue Projects consisting of Glopolis, the Heinrich-Böll Foundation, and Misereor; Misereor’s additional individual support; the Foundation fiat panis; and the Research Center for Gender and Nutrition (KGE) with support from the University of Hohenheim. Anne Bellows finally welcomed the Rector of the University of Hohenheim, Hans-Peter Liebig, who officially opened the workshop.

## **1.2 Opening Remarks**

### **Hans-Peter Liebig, Rector of the University of Hohenheim**

The University Rector, Hans-Peter Liebig, welcomed all panelists and guests to the workshop. He highlighted the commitment of the University of Hohenheim to food security, dating back to the foundation of the institution by King William I and Queen Katharina of Württemberg in 1818 as an effort to mitigate the European famines that followed the 1815 eruption of Mount Tambora, Indonesia. He pointed to the special role that women have played in the history of the University and to its willingness to continue strengthening women’s role in the future. He emphasized the importance of addressing the right to food, gender and nutrition issues in the research activities of all faculties of the University, of raising awareness of the interconnections between gender and nutrition, and of including not only agricultural production but also nutritional aspects and women’s viewpoint into the research agenda for the realization of the right to food. He pointed to the University’s contribution to food security by offering its capacity in knowledge production, teaching and research, and maintained that addressing and involving civil society in this process is a new, but fruitful approach. He finally expressed his gratitude for the organization of the workshop and the cooperation with the relevant initiatives, committees and specialists to help the University take the right direction and participate in the ongoing process.

## **1.3 Gender and Nutrition from the Perspective of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food**

### **Olivier de Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food**

Mr. de Schutter began his speech by describing his mandate as UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food as fulfilling the tasks of providing governments with recommendations to improve their ability to realize the right to adequate food and guiding them towards making the right decisions. This is achieved by means of reports to the UN General Assembly and to the UN Human Rights Council, as well as by means of country missions, consultations, meetings and conferences. In his work, he uses essentially two approaches: first, he tries to move the discussion surrounding the implementation of the right to adequate food from the macro-perspective, in which commodities are produced and traded, and in which supply and demand meet on global markets, to a micro-perspective that looks at how and through which chains food is produced, and where the imbalances of power are located. He described this micro-perspective as being of a political rather than of a technical nature. Its key question looks at who benefits from the shape of current food systems. His second approach addresses social and environmental sustainability. This focus conducts, on the one hand, an

analysis of the impacts of current ways of production on the most vulnerable segments of the population and advocates for the development of socially sustainable food systems that contribute to reducing poverty and inequality rather than accelerating marginalization. On the other hand, attention is placed on environmental consequences of the farming systems that were built in developed countries in the 1920s, 1930s and after WWII and that are highly fragile. These farming systems have often had negative impacts on ground water, contribute to climate change and are highly dependent on fossil fuels through the use of chemical inputs, mechanization and long transport distances.

The Special Rapporteur continued to explain the relevance of this meeting and of the questions of nutrition and gender, and their relationships for the discussion on the implementation of the right to adequate food. He proclaimed his aim of learning about new issues that are linked to those he has been working on. He is also interested in expanding his work in new directions through his participation in the workshop and his intention to present a report on the question of gender and nutrition in relation to the right to adequate food in 2012.

Mr. de Schutter then posed two questions. First: Can current food systems respect the dimension of *adequacy* of the right to food in the context of agro-industrial food production that nowadays provides half of the world's population with refined food, and which is focused on a relatively limited range of basic cereals often leading to imbalanced diets and problems of overweight, obesity, and micronutrient deficiency? He noted that he deplored the official title of his mandate "*Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food*" for not reflecting the legal dimension of adequacy, which in his view should be understood as food quality, not merely in terms of calories and micronutrients, and which he believes should be much more at the center of all right to *adequate* food efforts. The second question posed by Mr. de Schutter related to the manner in which gender empowerment can contribute to the realization of the right to adequate food. He referred to the issue of nutrition as increasingly being dealt with in the Human Rights and Food Security Committees. However, they limit themselves to address nutrition and its link to gender and the right to adequate food as a concern for pregnant and lactating women, and for children during the first years of life – perhaps the thousand-day window, the first two years of their lives –, when the diets that they are fed are essential for their later physical and mental development. He added to pregnancy and lactation two further reasons for the relevance of women's rights for food security: first, women's essential role in agriculture as producers in food systems in developing countries, where it is estimated that women's labor produces seventy to eighty per cent of all food harvested. In this context, he highlighted the need for women to have equal access to productive resources as a component of their right to adequate food, and which is in many countries constrained either as a result of legislation or of social custom. He shortly made reference to the new Working Group on Discrimination against Women established by the Human Rights Council, which is responsible for reviewing discriminatory legislations in the context of access to productive resources. Secondly, he emphasized the importance of women's enhanced decision-making authority over the distribution of household and communal resources (use of land, distribution of income, etc.), noting that it has been documented that women prioritize resource strategies that directly address family and community nutrition, health and well-being. As illustration he mentioned the common preference of male farmers to grow cash crops destined for distant markets over the production of food crops for local consumption, underestimating and/or disregarding both the nutritional needs of local communities, and the higher vulnerability to price shocks.

The Special Rapporteur closed his speech by citing two French authors. The first quote originates from Simone de Beauvoir: “*On ne naît pas femme, on le devient*” (“one is not born a woman, one becomes a woman”). Mr. de Schutter explained that gender roles – particularly those related to production and distribution of food as well as to care-giving – are very difficult to challenge because they are a matter of culture rather than a matter of laws. Gender roles, he continued, are influenced by the education of both women and men. His second quote was coined by Claude Levi Strauss “*la civilisation de l’homme par la femme*” (“how men are civilized by women”), which puts men in the position of having to learn from what women have to teach them. Thus, Mr. de Schutter finished by expressing his intention to listen very carefully to what the workshop participants have to say.

#### **1.4 Interfaces between Gender, Nutrition, and the Right to Adequate Food: Identifying Gaps and Challenges**

##### **Anne Bellows, Department of Gender and Nutrition, University of Hohenheim**

Anne Bellows introduced the cooperative project between FIAN International and the Department of Gender and Nutrition at the University of Hohenheim. This project effort is made up of Flavio Valente and Ana María Suárez-Franco from FIAN International and Anne Bellows, Stefanie Lemke, Veronika Scherbaum, Anna Jenderedjian and Roseane de Socorro Gonçalves Viana from the Department of Gender and Nutrition. Describing the cooperative project’s main objectives, she identified two basic “disconnects” that needed direct attention. The first disconnect is the separation of legal obligations and institutional organization, program delivery, and the research agendas between the right to adequate food housed in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discriminations Against Women (CEDAW). Ms. Bellows explained how the 1960s ICESCR (and its companion Convention on Civil and Political Rights) failed to recognize and address how the idealized UN commitment to universality was damaged by structural discrimination and the resultant vulnerabilities of specific groups. Later UN instruments, CEDAW (1979), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) have sought to articulate the rights of, and national obligations to, these groups, however, in the case of CEDAW, there is virtually no attention to the right to adequate food, or food and nutrition security. Anne Bellows mentioned in this context the existing potential and limitations for building bridges between the different international treaties, as addressed already by Isabella Rae in her work ‘*Women and the Right to Food*’ of 2008.

The second disconnect relates to the non-integrate foci on agriculture and food production on the one hand, and nutrition and public health on the other. Ms. Bellows named more localized food systems that emphasized a “sustainable livelihoods approach” and “community food security” as theoretical and practical alternatives to bring together production and consumption. A systems approach would reestablish the importance both of public dialogue and of rituals and the culture of daily food consumption at the hub of the cycle of food production, processing, marketing, preparation, consumption, and recycling. A systems approach, including the culture of food and a democratized dialogue around food systems, need to be reflected in the legal rights and public obligations associated with a right to adequate food.

Anne Bellows went on to introduce the University of Hohenheim-FIAN premises behind the disconnects and their recommendations for moving forward. The first premise relates to the

structural separation and legal isolation of relevant rights, and the need to coordinate food and nutrition objectives between the ICESCR, the CEDAW, and the CRC, in order to benefit women, children and men. She highlighted the importance of avoiding stereotyping women as mothers and wives in the context of the right to adequate food. She pointed out that the Millennium Development Goals exacerbate this structural separation by reducing attention to nutrition only in the context of pregnant and lactating women and children during the first years of their lives, effectively ignoring adult men, adult women who are not in the “minus nine-to-twenty four months” stage of the reproductive cycle, and older children.

The second premise addresses violence against women as a central reason for the situation of women and girls not improving. She underscored the importance of recognizing and addressing violence – ranging from direct and aggressive violence to structural violence – as an under-examined barrier to women’s right to adequate food and to their participation as autonomous members in efforts to address hunger and food insecurity. Ms. Bellows cited a phrase by Galtung (1969) “*Structural violence is a process aligned with social injustice that is built into [social] structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances*” as a way for conceptualizing violence as a process, not an occurrence of the moment.

The third premise introduced tackles maternal-child health and nutrition, with maternal mortality highlighted as one of the greatest health inequities. Ms. Bellows referred to limitations of the recent emphasis on nutrition interventions that focus on malnutrition during pregnancy and infancy (the so-called “window of opportunity”, i.e. the minus nine months during pregnancy through the first two years period of a child’s life when breastfeeding ideally is initiated immediately and exclusively for the first six months and thereafter gradually tapers off). The drawbacks of this approach are mainly the complete lack of attention to the context of life-long human rights deprivation and the intergenerational reproduction of malnutrition that is characteristic of malnourished women and children in the “window of opportunity”. She promoted here the need to enhance education on, and opportunities to access, local and sustainable interventions, especially breastfeeding and appropriate complementary feeding, as well as reproductive rights and health. Protecting maternal-child health and nutrition includes avoiding the risks of local dependency on external aid and impairing women’s and communities’ rights to dignity and self-determination. Concern was expressed for the introduction of medicalized, short-term, and non-locally sustainable nutrition interventions like the initiative, Scaling-Up Nutrition (SUN), that seeks to provide a “quick fix” delivered during the “window of opportunity” without paying attention to the context of life-long human rights deprivation and the associated generational recycling of malnutrition.

The fourth premise relates to food systems, gender and participation. Anne Bellows emphasized the need for more localized and sustainable food and nutrition systems with agro-ecology approaches that support smaller scaled farmers. She believes that these systems are particularly gender relevant due to the high share of small-scale women farmers. She further highlighted the need for democratization of food governance at diverse scales, from the local to the international levels, and finally the need to support local knowledge production (and local production knowledge).

### **Flavio Valente, Secretary General of FIAN International**

Flavio Valente continued with part I of the fifth premise, identifying the application of human rights perspectives and tools in general, and the application of the right to adequate food in particular, as the effective framework to guide governments in producing policies that break the pattern of the above-mentioned problems (premises 1-4). He stated that the right to adequate food has to date failed to be applied in this manner. In Mr. Valente's view, this failure originates from the narrow understanding of the right to adequate food limited to the mere physical and economic access to commodities, or to micronutrients distributed to combat malnutrition in emergency situations. The fifth premise insists on a broad, organic understanding of the right to adequate food as the right of people to have adequate food. Mr. Valente explained the meaning of the right to adequate food as embracing the way people organize to feed themselves, as guaranteeing that every single human being has the right to be fed and to feed him or herself in a way that provides him or her with the capacity to become an active citizen and a participatory human being, as well as reaffirming their cultural identity and social roles and engagement.

He emphasized that the adequacy dimension should be the focus of the right to *adequate* food, because it links food produced in the agricultural sector by people to the end of producing healthy and well-nourished human beings, while guaranteeing that the producers stay healthy as well. In order to guarantee that the right to adequate food is able to be applied as an effective framework, it is, in his opinion, necessary to build bridges between the right to adequate food and other human rights and to other fundamental social frameworks like self-determination (by nations, groups and individuals to e.g. determine the use of natural resources), popular sovereignty, food sovereignty, women's rights (and, i.a. issues like the intergenerational reproduction of malnutrition e.g. in South-Asia), protection against violence (both direct and structural), and nutrition security.

### **Ana María Suárez-Franco, Permanent Representative of FIAN in Geneva**

Ana María Suárez-Franco spoke on part II of the fifth premise, addressing recommendations for necessary next steps to promote gender, nutrition and the right to adequate food in the context of human rights struggles and institutions. She acknowledged the advances that have been made by international institutions in recognizing the right to adequate food, but emphasized at the same time the fact that these advances are not yet reaching and changing the grassroots level. She referred in this context to the diverse UN bodies' initiatives and competences, including the Human Rights Council, the treaty bodies in charge of monitoring State Party compliance to ratified international obligations - in the case of the right to adequate food within the ICESCR -, the efforts and input of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, the UN Secretary General's High Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis on Food Security, the Committee on World Food Security, and the Standing Committee on Nutrition.

Subsequently, Ana María Suárez-Franco made concrete proposals for moving forward, but emphasized that there is no need to redo the work that has already been done in the past. She started by arguing for better coordination between existing strong initiatives. She referred next to the need to enhance people's and especially women's participation in the UN bodies, and gave the example of the current 17 member ICESCR Committee having only 3 women members. The 1999 ICESCR General Comment 12 contributed largely, in her view, to clarifying States' obligations and rights violations, nevertheless without properly

addressing the issues identified in premises 1-5. She proposed that CEDAW, which up to this time has no general recommendation on the right to adequate food, might reflect on the possibility of developing a General Comment on the issue of women's rights and the right to adequate food in a comprehensive manner. She also recommended that the ICESCR and CEDAW Committees both attend more closely the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food.

Ms. Suárez-Franco closed her presentation by making reference to the need for an updated framework to the right to adequate food at UN level that includes the holistic concept of this human right (i.e. its gender dimension and the right to self-determination). This conceptual framework should also be able to address upcoming regulation challenges that are introduced by new realities. Ms. Suárez-Franco gave two examples for these upcoming challenges and developments in the human rights world: on the one hand, she mentioned the powerful intervention of transnational companies on issues related to nutrition, as well as their advertising and other practices. Finally, she referred to the need to address transnational companies' extraterritorial obligations.

## **1.5 Comments from UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies**

### **Asako Hattori, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights**

Asako Hattori opened her comments based on her work and experiences in the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights by referring to the gap in human rights instruments that are applicable to nutrition and gender issues. She pointed out the fact that human rights treaties and standards are negotiated and adopted by States in a specific time and context and therefore they naturally entail a certain incompleteness and fragmentation, making it necessary to constantly understand and adapt them to the current context. She highlighted the provisions among the human rights treaties adopted in the past that could be used to address nutrition and gender issues. CEDAW, for example, addresses the need to modify stereotypical gender roles of men and women (Article 5), to ensure women's participation in decision-making (Article 7), and to take into account the particular needs of rural women (Article 14) most of whom are farmers. Ms. Hattori therefore argued for the inclusion of multiple approaches and provisions to tackle the links between gender, nutrition and the right to adequate food. She mentioned the further development of human rights law itself, naming the "*Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa*" adopted in 2003 as an example of treaties that: a) reflect contemporary issues; b) incorporate a specific provision on women's "Right to Food Security"; and c) explicitly address the adequacy and nutritional dimension of the right to adequate food as well as the importance of women's right to access to productive resources.

Secondly, Ms. Hattori referred to the evolution of international human rights law in the past, highlighting the progress made by treaty bodies, rights holders, and State Parties on clarifying the normative contents of the majority of rights. This means, specifically, that the challenges today focus on the implementation of human rights. She then posed the question to the audience, whether it is more sensible to continue efforts to clarify the content of each specific right or whether it is time to start the discussion of what it means to develop a human rights-based approach to realizing human rights, i.e. *applying* human rights principles and contents both in specific situations as well as *developing* the process of applying the principles and contents in specific situations. As she elaborated further, in the context of the right to food this would mean needing to think about whether the right to food concept should

be made more comprehensive, or whether the application of all relevant human rights into gender and nutrition issues should be clarified. As an example for this second approach, Asako Hattori referred to a report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women that focuses on the political economy of women and that links violence against women to the right to adequate food and other rights.

Ms. Hattori agreed with the problematic fragmentation of the Millennium Development Goals perceived from a human rights perspective, as presented by Anne Bellows in premise 1. However, she emphasized the importance of efforts that have been made to address more comprehensively the link between human rights and the MDGs. She made reference to the 2010 Millennium Development Goals Summit Outcome Document that explicitly mentions the link between the right to adequate food and MDG 1, and that tries to address women's role in the production and distribution of food.

### **Ismat Jahan, CEDAW Committee Member**

Ismat Jahan started her presentation by referring to Hans-Peter Liebig's speech, highlighting the part Queen Katharina played in promoting the role of agriculture for the prevention of food crises. She then proceeded to make comments from the point of view of CEDAW on the issues presented earlier, beginning by emphasizing the strong but often overlooked role of women as main actors in agricultural production. She made reference to the adequacy dimension of the right to adequate food and women's rights to self-determination and decision-making in the context of food production and consumption. She continued by asking which role women play in the development of agricultural programs, as well as in subsistence and commercial agriculture. She argued that women are missing in agricultural decision-making and there is therefore the need to provide necessary amenities to increase their access to the means of production, including reference to needed land reforms and inheritance laws in the context of gender equality in access to land, as well as to the potential of media revolution in terms of equalizing access to information.

Ms. Jahan pointed out that the concept of the right to adequate food has a long history – reaching back to President Roosevelt's speech on freedom including freedom from want and thus implicitly freedom from hunger – and is included in different international instruments like the ICESCR, the CRC, and the Convention against Torture. However, all of these international instruments address people in general, while there is an urgent need to specifically focus on women. She then turned to CEDAW and agreed that it lacks explicit mention of the right to adequate food, although it may implicitly address the right to adequate food with references to women's particular vulnerability in situations of hunger (Preamble), the nutritional status of lactating mothers and pregnant women (Article 12), rural women (Article 14), and women's right to public and political participation (Article 7). Ms. Jahan stated that in the 1970s and 1980s, the international community focused on the political and civil rights needs of women, as well as, to a lesser extent, on education, work, and health. Overall, however, the economic, social and cultural rights of women, including the right to adequate food, received relatively little attention. Ms. Jahan supported the proposal presented by Ana María Suárez-Franco of elaborating a recommendation by CEDAW that specifically looks into the issue of women's right to adequate food. She briefly referred to the reporting obligations of State Party representatives, who do not always understand the expectations for their reporting obligations and often only provide information on monitoring women's access to food when and if they are specifically asked to do so in the reporting

guidelines. Further, she agreed on the need for better coordination among the international instruments and for mainstreaming the issue of women's right to adequate food.

Ms. Ismat Jahan expressed her particular interest in the finding that violence is an under-examined barrier for women's right to adequate food. She argued that women's nutrition is often determined by beliefs and superstitions that place women at a disadvantage. She illustrated this statement with reference to women feeding all other family members before eating themselves, saving the less expensive, less nutritious and leftover food for themselves, and giving sons preference over daughters. She provided specific examples: the Hindu traditions that prohibit widows from eating protein or any food that might act as a stimulant; the practice of forced feeding of girls as a beauty concept in Mauritania, and the largely northern beauty concept of thinness that has led to anorexia and bulimia. In summary, Ms. Jahan stated that coordination among the international instruments, the support from civil society organizations, and the interaction between the international community and students and the academic world is very important. The most critical issue, however, remains the challenge of implementing human rights to make tangible changes in the lives of women and men.

## 1.6 Open Discussion

### **Anne Bellows, Department of Gender and Nutrition, University of Hohenheim**

Anne Bellows opened the discussion round by mentioning the absence of a Law School at the University of Hohenheim, which should nevertheless not hinder students from becoming familiar with the language, potential and objectives of human rights instruments. She reminded the audience that current discussions on food and nutrition security originate in development programs that were based on human rights decrees and programs. She further suggested the need to link development *not* to aid or charity, but to a human right to claim and participate in (self-determined) food and nutrition security. Ms. Bellows then highlighted the need for human rights-based research approaches, referring briefly to work initiated by the FAO Right to Food Unit and related possibilities for university cooperation with civil society and governments.

### **Franz Heidhues, University of Hohenheim**

Mr. Heidhues recalled a comment made by a woman from India in the context of a different conference comparing the issue to the repetition of a movie. He argued that similarly discrimination of women is a known problem and the question now should address the way to get this issue on the agenda of the Heads of State. He made reference to the discussion on climate change reaching the agenda with the help of a report in *Stern* (a popular German magazine) emphasizing the greater economic costs of climate change mitigation measures for society in terms of development progress, nutrition, health and so on, if they would only be implemented after 2015. He expressed the necessity of doing more work on the costs of not dealing with the issues emphasized in earlier presentations.

**Answers:** Ms. Ismat Jahan replied that the cost dimension of not including women in development is known and discussed. She emphasized the need for mainstreaming gender issues without making a 'tight jacket'. She pointed to advances already made in drawing attention from the highest political levels due to pressure of civil society.

Ms. Asako Hattori agreed that the cost argument is a very convincing one, having strong value force. Nevertheless, she argued that limiting ourselves to cost and financial related

analysis may not be enough to understand what is happening in a society as a whole. To really evaluate the “stability” of a country, for example, the assessment of other issues, i.e. inequity, power relations, discrimination, etc. is also crucial. To illustrate this, she referred to the situation in Tunisia, that the World Bank in 2010 assessed as very positive and stable in terms of economic and democracy development. Clearly other non-cost measurable factors exploded in December 2010 and resulted in the uprising in 2011. She supported thus the inclusion of multiple approaches to risk assessment in the discussion.

### **Christine Chemnitz, Heinrich-Böll Foundation**

Christine Chemnitz expressed the necessity that every decision-maker at all different levels should keep in mind that every intervention or political decision is gender-sensitive. As an example she referred to gender-blind international reactions to the food crisis in 2007/2008, as well as to the distribution of research funds and climate funds. In her opinion, decision-makers are needed to mainstream gender issues. They need to be gender experts, independently of whether they are women or men, and they need to promote capacity building on gender issues at very different inter-sectoral levels. This means for example to have a gender expert making relevant decisions on trade issues. Ms. Chemnitz stated that although the inclusion of more women in decision-making processes represents an improvement on the one hand, this is not enough; there is still the need to include more gender experts in decision-making. Finally, she responded to Mr. Heidhues' comment by naming the FAO State of Food Insecurity in the World 2010 dedicated to gender issues in protracted crises as an example for relevant publications addressing the costs factors, but which unfortunately are not followed by a broader public or political reaction.

**Answers:** First, Ms. Ismat Jahan replied to the comment by pointing to the recent integration of the number of agencies related to women within the UN structure under the leadership of UN Women that should ensure more coordination.

Ms. Asako Hattori emphasized the importance of addressing women's issues from a *gender* perspective. She explained that the necessity to talk about issues related to women's rights originates from the historical gender imbalance and aims at achieving the equal enjoyment of rights by both women and men. However, Ms. Hattori insisted that equal attention has to be paid to the resulting gender balance, looking at the impacts of interventions on both women and men. For example, breastfeeding is often regarded as an exclusive woman's issue, overlooking the need for an enabling environment for both men and women to support and maintain this practice. It is therefore necessary to fill the historical gender gap to make women equally enjoy rights with men, while analyzing the issue from a gender perspective. Further, she referred to her participation at the UN level in the discussion of the global food crisis in 2007/2008 and to strong voices from many agencies advocating for the recognition of women's role. She stated, however, that this discussion has neither been comprehensive nor implemented.

Finally, Mr. Flavio Valente described gender and women as being different issues. He referred to both Brazil and Germany as examples of countries having female representatives in decision-making at highest levels, but who are not gender sensitive and make decisions that negatively affect the lives of millions of people from a human rights perspective. He nevertheless highlighted the importance of women's participation in decision-making as a reference for recognizing the process of moving towards gender balance by opening up more policy-related opportunities for women.

### **Tsige-Yohannes Habte, University of Giessen**

Mr. Habte put forward the argument that the right to adequate food, the right to access to resources, and the right to decision-making at household or community levels are achievable only through struggle. He emphasized the importance of regarding the system as a whole, including the vitality of ecologically, economically and socially sustainable and equitable food production when talking about agriculture and food production. He asked the panel to speak about the role of education in achieving the right to adequate nutrition.

**Answers:** Ismat Jahan described education as crucial for achieving a better nutritional status within households, without forgetting cultural aspects that might influence its impact.

Ana María Suárez-Franco stressed the kind of education required. She referred to current paternalistic methodologies for working with affected communities that are not sensitive to communities' specific problems. She underscored the necessity for creative approaches, learning from the communities themselves in order to reach out to affected people and address their needs.

Flavio Valente emphasized human rights' central characteristic as built upon the struggle of people against discrimination, oppression, and abuse of power. He reaffirmed that human rights must thus serve the struggle of the people for better lives for themselves.

### **Dorcus Gement, University of Hohenheim**

Ms. Gement gave her comment as a Kenyan non-social scientist woman, daughter of a man who lived in the city and a woman who lived in the village. In her view the reason for the situation of women and girls not improving in the context of the right to adequate food, access to land, and decision-making both in rural and urban areas can be found in structural violence and the privileges of men resulting from this structural violence. She pointed to the fact that gender discrimination will remain a fight as long as not more men are also willing to take part in the discussion, noting that among the panelists there were only two male speakers. Next, she noted the problem that in developing countries, the participation of women in public appointments usually includes only educated women who are sometimes already 'above their culture', remaining thus without impact at the village level.

**Answers:** Flavio Valente referred to the interests served by structural violence and discrimination of women, of poor people, of indigenous peoples, i.e. that structural violence makes it very difficult for the situation of inequality to be changed.

Ana María Suárez-Franco described the additional problem of double discrimination, not only of women but also among women. She called for caution in not putting an additional burden on already poor and excluded women by the implementation of affirmative remedies that cause them more work and may put them into positions of social retaliation and violence.

### **Irmgard Jordan, University of Giessen**

Ms. Jordan started her comment by asking for information about men's and boys' nutritional status, which in some cases is poorer than that of the mother, contradicting what is usually thought of as men's greater access to food. She further asked for data on the educational background of parents and grandparents and its impact on the nutritional status of children. She referred to the disrespect of the right for education of boys and girls having to step out of school for income-generating activities or marriage, and to the need for not separating this

and other rights from the right to adequate food – as she understood was the direction of the work presented by the group at the workshop – in order to realize the “overall human right”.

**Answers:** Mr. Flavio Valente explained the invisibility of men and boys and of the elderly and young as a deviation along the path taken in the area of nutrition, having an overemphasis put on some aspects but losing sight of other components. This has in his view not helped to solve the issues because of only addressing part of the problem in a very limited way, instead of the real problem.

#### **Fatima Shabodien, Women on Farms Project (WFP) South Africa**

Ms. Fatima Shabodien warned against focusing solely on small-scale farming in the developing world. She highlighted, in contrast, the importance of not neglecting attention to big plantation economies as another form of agricultural production whose role is especially relevant in former settler colonies, and that is growing now in the context of land grabbing. She emphasized the fact that the conditions existing on these plantations have very specific implications for women, who are more often contracted into those relationships as marginal casual workers, often outside of the framework of laws governing all other non-farm work. She pointed, as reference, to the rates of child stunting in South Africa as being highest amongst children of farm workers.

#### **Martin Remppis, Bread for the World**

Mr. Remppis argued that women’s discrimination is often very deeply rooted in culture and therefore attempts to change it are often stamped as “Western concepts”. He asked the panel where the line is between women’s rights on the one hand, and cultural rights and values on the other hand. In his opinion research needs to be done to clarify this “edge” in the human rights debate.

**Answers:** Ms. Jahan replied by referring to reservations of State Parties towards international instruments, including CEDAW, due to the perception that certain Articles of various international instruments disrespect and therefore could crush existing culture and customs. She argued that cultural pluralism is important, but that problems arise when traditions come into conflict with human rights principles. She highlighted in this context the importance of education of the society, especially of young people, for changing structural prejudices that are passed from one generation to the next, and of implementing the articles of international treaties in a way that is not perceived as an introduction of alien Western concepts. She also emphasized the need for developing legal awareness about many issues and referred to efforts of State Parties to CEDAW in taking legal measures to bring about changes in laws that were discriminating against women.

Ms. Hattori pointed to the difference between cultural values and universal human rights, and to the choices and alternatives available to people in relation to self-determination within a given culture. As illustration she referred to child labor, whereby children prefer to work in order to help out the family, but if the family is supported by other means they prefer to go back to school.

Ms. Suárez-Franco indicated the existence of different legal methods to approach the issue, and highlighted human dignity as the main principle that should be protected and applied when making a judgment in this context.

### **Carsta Neuenroth, Bread for the World**

Ms. Neuenroth's comment related to the challenging perception of women as victims of poverty, hunger, and climate change, leading to overlooking women as well as women's knowledge and experience as being part of the solution. In her opinion, this perspective represents a barrier to women's participation and decision-making and leads to paternalistic attitudes towards them. She expressed her hope for human rights-based approaches to contribute to changing this perspective.

### **Ina Verzivolli, International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN)**

Ms. Verzivolli's comment related to Anne C. Bellows' presentation. She agreed on the importance of looking at the nutrition and right to adequate food of women during their whole life span, but emphasized that it is also important not to overlook pregnancy and lactation as a critical time. She pointed to the complexity of breastfeeding from the perspective of the human right to food, since it materializes the bond between two human beings and involves at same time many different rights.

### **Isabella Rae, GORTA – The Freedom from Hunger Council of Ireland**

Ms. Rae first described the Millennium Development Goals as not fully human rights sensitive due to their advocacy for reducing the proportion of hungry people rather than number. Further, she commented on the tendency in different sectors to move towards quick fixes in any area, including nutrition, as an approach that has been often supported and demanded by governments and that is now leading to "quick fix remedies" being used in long-term development strategies, leaving no room for real integrated and sustainable development to come in. She stated a risk for sustainability arising from the absence of the word "agriculture" in climate change and nutrition discussions and expressed her wish to see it included in these dynamics as well.

### **Tande Ndoping, University of Hohenheim**

Tande Ndoping's question referred to the duplication around agencies and instruments. He suggested that it is time to stop having more discussion and to make use of the work that is already available.

**Answers:** Ms. Ismat Jahan agreed to this comment by referring to her duty as representative of Bangladesh in drafting some reports for the international human rights treaty bodies, finding that State Parties are often asked to report on the same issue over and over again despite the limited resources available in developing countries.

Ms. Asako Hattori stated that there has long been an awareness of these duplications among UN agencies, donors, and UN human rights mechanisms, and that there is the need to better harmonize reporting procedures and examinations without harming the uniqueness of each monitoring body. She pointed out the fact, however, that the creation of those agencies, bodies, and mechanisms has been at the same time a decision made by Member States.

Mr. Flavio Valente referred to the conflict between the increasing influence of private interests in government and the push of public regulation – to defend public interests – as the underlying cause for not promoting holistic approaches, because governments would never be able to explain why they put some private interests above diminishing hunger. He gave several examples to illustrate this conflict: the Committee on World Food Security reform initiative that is trying to put food security and nutrition above private interests, and which is

facing resistance from the part of the richest countries; the Ruggie report to the Human Rights Council that attempts to diminish public influence over the private sector; the financial problems now faced by the WHO that are being partly underwritten by the Bill Gates Foundation, bringing into question WHO's independence; and the Scaling-Up Nutrition (SUN) Initiative that is being promoted as a quick fix to the nutritional problems of the world. The fact that most countries take policy decisions that are regarded as incoherent with the goal stated by these countries to reduce hunger and malnutrition, is seen by Mr. Valente as fully coherent with the submission of governmental policies to private and national elite interests. However, this submission will never be publicly admitted. What is required in Mr. Valente's view is the understanding of the need to continue fighting to change the current distribution and correlation of power in order to have human rights as the main framework.

Ms. Ana María Suárez-Franco finally described the issue as a dynamic process consisting of discussion and implementation at the same time, but where the underlying framework should be changed to a more pro-people approach.

## **1.7 Final Comments**

### **Olivier de Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food**

The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier de Schutter, added to the discussion several questions remaining unsolved also for him. He highlighted again the fact that important choices will have to be made in the current moment of transition, in which food systems are undergoing a significant transformation in many regions of the world. He described the outcome of the most plausible scenario, the "business-as-usual" scenario, as local food systems that feed communities through short food chains and that directly connect local producers to local consumers being gradually displaced by commercialized food systems in the hands of large multinational corporations. These MNCs have transformed food into commodities to increase profits and have environmental impacts on the ability of communities to feed themselves. He reminded the audience of the origin of the English word 'profit' in the idea that one must improve things, whereby in the pretext of improving or combating food insecurity there is the idea that food systems must be improved, making food a profitable commodity. He emphasized the need of being aware of the responsibility to support local food systems and to make them viable in the long term, wherein supporting women's rights is an absolute key strategy. As an example he mentioned gender-sensitive extension services, which only amount to 5% of the extension services that are supported by donors' money, and the absence of extension services for women in many regions of the world due to cultural obstacles to women receiving advice from men. He then referred to Ms. Rae's comment on the dominance of the quick fix culture through this sense of urgency that is now present. This approach does not take into account the detrimental impacts that short term solutions may have - like responding to emergencies, feeding the hungry, trying to boost production in order to reassure the markets that there will be no food scarcity -, at the expense of long term development that is more sustainable. In this context he also named the addiction of countries to the import of cheap foods to feed the urban poor that is detrimental to the viability of farming by local producers, as well as the attempt to feed the hungry by short term interventions through the medicalization of food at the expense of investing in developing local food systems that can provide more diverse diets.

Mr. de Schutter then posed the question of the proper way to manage a combination between the short term concerns that are real and the long term objectives that have to be

achieved. His reply related to the need to build multi-year strategies that adopt both short and long term objectives. These could be framed, for example, in the governance mechanism of national strategies for the realization of the right to adequate food. He proceeded to explain the characteristics of national strategies, i.e. as multi-year strategies that define certain measures to be taken within a specific time frame and that enable a better coordination of policies, converging them towards the one vision pursued. The objective would be to avoid, for example, the development of agriculture in a way that is oblivious of nutrition and disregards the question of gender. He argued that national strategies should improve accountability, obliging governments to justify not adopting measures they have committed to take within a specified time frame, to explain their failure (or success) in achieving objectives and to monitor progress. Further, national strategies should democratize decision-making, developing bottom-up participatory strategies that allow communities to identify solutions that respond to their real concerns, and avoiding paternalistic attitudes. He illustrated the important role of participation by giving two examples: first, he referred to large plantations, which might develop on the one hand at the expense of family agriculture, while at the same time employing women at good wages and providing them for the first time in their lives with some cash income and the possibility to make decisions otherwise made by men about how the cash is spent. His second example related to cash-for-work programs like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in India that might on the one hand destroy or interfere with the traditional organization of rural households, and provide on the other hand women with the first opportunity to work outside the household and to have access to cash. He described himself as agnostic as to which priority should be explored and how this question should be approached. He emphasized that it is for this reason crucial that women themselves are given the ability to express their views on this issue, pointing out to the need for capacity building and information about the opportunities and alternatives from which they can choose. He finalized his closing comment by expressing his conviction that linking short term concerns to long term visions are absolutely key strategies.

Ms. Anne Bellows closed the session by thanking all guest speakers and the audience for their participation, FIAN International for the cooperative work and the team of the Chair of Gender and Nutrition of the University of Hohenheim for its support with the organization of the workshop.

### **1.8 Suggested Reading**

- Bellows AC, Scherbaum V, Lemke S, Jenderedjian A, Viana RdS. 2011. Gender-specific risks: women, nutrition and the right to food. *Right to Food and Nutrition Watch 2011*. Pp. 23-29. <http://rtfn-watch.org> (visited November 2011).
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- Lemke S, Bellows AC. 2011. Bridging nutrition and agriculture. Local food-livelihood systems and food governance integrating a gender perspective. *Technology Assessment - Theory and Praxis*, Special Issue "Feeding the World." (Eds. Meyer R, Sauter A, Kassam A.) 20 (2) July. Pp. 52-60. <http://www.itas.fzk.de/tatup/112/lebe11a.htm> (visited November 2011).
- Scherbaum S, Lemke S, Bellows AC. Das Recht von Kindern auf Gesundheit und angemessene Ernährung im Wandel von Forschung und weltweiten Strategien. *Ernährungs Umschau*. Accepted; expected publication date: February/March 2012.
- Valente FLS, Suarez-Franco AM. 2010. Human Rights and the Struggle Against Hunger: Laws, Institutions, and Instruments in the Fight to Realize the Right to Adequate Food. *Yale Human Rights & Development Law Journal*. Volume XIII. Issue 2. (2010) p: 435-461. Available in:

[http://www.law.yale.edu/documents/pdf/LawJournals/Valente\\_Franco\\_Human\\_Rights\\_and\\_the\\_Struggle.pdf](http://www.law.yale.edu/documents/pdf/LawJournals/Valente_Franco_Human_Rights_and_the_Struggle.pdf) (visited November 2011).