

Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food (VGRF)

Poverty and hunger situation have worsened in South Asia over the last few years and nation states are lagging far behind in achieving the goals of halving the numbers of hungry and malnourished, as mentioned in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and other declarations.

Hunger exists in South Asia amidst plenty of food and hunger exposing structural inequalities, discriminations and imposition of such neo-liberal policies, which are widening the gap between rich and poor in different countries. In the neo-liberal regime, the emphasis has been on food grown for export and not for communities. Furthermore, increased militarization, armed conflicts and wars have devastated the lives of people and aggravated their food insecurity. The rapid industrialization policy of our governments and emergence of Special Economic Zones (SEZ) etc have resulted in displacements of peasants, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, agricultural workers and fisher folk communities and they are losing land and control over other resources. Needless to add women and children are the most affected. The governments have largely failed to protect the interests of the poor and vulnerable groups and to promote Right to Food and food sovereignty, thereby often violating RTF of the commons.

In this sordid backdrop, the Voluntary Guidelines on Right to Food (VGRF) was unanimously adopted by Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of United Nations (UN) in 2004 in order to give practical guidance to all nation states to promote the Right to Food (RTF).

The objective of the Voluntary Guidelines is to provide practical guidance to States in their implementation of the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security, in order to achieve the goals of the World Food Summit Plan of Action. They provide an additional instrument to combat hunger and poverty and to accelerate attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. The Voluntary Guidelines represent the first attempt by governments to interpret an economic, social and cultural right and to recommend actions to be undertaken for its realization. Moreover, they represent a step towards integrating human rights into the work of agencies dealing with food and agriculture.

However, much remains to be done to mainstream VGRF in policies and programmes for realization of RTF at national and regional levels in South Asia. For mainstreaming the VGRF the nation states in South Asia assess the hunger situation in the country with a special emphasis on vulnerable groups in a participatory way. The governments should ensure that their own legislations, administrative policies, programmes and projects would promote and fully realized RTF and would be based on the VGRF principles.

ⁱ Note prepared by Food Sovereignty Network South Asia (FSNSA)