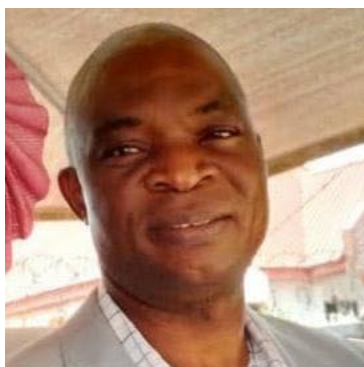


**Special Issue - Food Justice and Food Sovereignty in the context of the Right to Food**

**THE RIGHT TO FOOD:  
A FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHT AND ITS IMPERATIVES**

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## Introduction

In an age of unprecedented global wealth and technological advancement, the persistence of hunger and food insecurity remains one of the most glaring contradictions of our time. The right to food is a fundamental human right enshrined in various international treaties and national constitutions. Yet, despite this recognition, millions of people across the globe continue to suffer from malnutrition and starvation, highlighting a critical need for holistic action to uphold this fundamental right. Available statistics reveal that Africa bears a disproportionate burden of malnutrition and food insecurity accounting for 20 percent<sup>1</sup> and 61 percent<sup>2</sup> of the population respectively. There is a link between access to food in the right quantity and quality and the cognitive development of children which has a spillover effect on the productivity of nations [2, 3]. It is time to reaffirm our commitment to ensuring that this basic right is upheld for all. This right is essential not only for ensuring that individuals lead healthy and productive lives but also for promoting broader social and economic stability. This editorial explores the dimensions of the right to food, its implications, and the urgent need for a coordinated effort to address food insecurity.

## Understanding the Right to Food

The right to food is defined as the entitlement of all people to have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life that is dignifying and free from hunger. This right is articulated in Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which underscores that states have a responsibility to respect, protect, and fulfil this obligation. This right encompasses several dimensions [1]:

**Availability:** This entails the existence of food in sufficient quantities to meet the requirements of individuals. This dimension is relevant to ensuring adequate production and distribution of food.

**Accessibility:** This dimension involves the ability of every individual to gain economic and physical access to food, regardless of their economic or social status. This dimension is relevant to affordability, physical accessibility and the likelihood of obtaining food without discrimination.

<sup>1</sup> Africa - Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2023 - World | ReliefWeb

<sup>2</sup> Section 1.2 (fao.org)

**Suitability:** Food has to be culturally and age-appropriate, nutritious and safe for consumption. This is relevant to individuals meeting dietary needs of individuals, including those with allergies or intolerances.

**Adequacy:** This is a dimension that involves the sufficiency of food in meeting individual's nutritional needs and maintaining a healthy and active lifestyle. This dimension addresses the right quality and quantity of food.

**Non-discrimination:** The right to food must be enjoyed without discrimination of any form, such as race, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability or other status. This dimension focuses on equity in food access.

The right to food is more than a mere ideal; it is a fundamental human right enshrined in international law. Yet, despite widespread recognition, achieving food security for all remains a complex and ongoing challenge. This editorial explores various perspectives on the right to food, drawing from recent article collections in this special issue that address its multifaceted nature.

## Theoretical Foundations and Legal Frameworks

At the heart of the right to food is the principle that access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food is essential for a life of dignity and health. The right to food is articulated in several key international instruments, including Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Recent articles have examined these theoretical foundations, exploring how these legal frameworks are interpreted and applied across different contexts. Theoretical discussions often delve into the distinction between the right to food as a moral imperative and as a legal obligation. Scholars argue that while the former provides a broad ethical framework, the latter imposes concrete responsibilities on states and other duty-bearers. This distinction is crucial for understanding the practical implications of the right to food and its enforcement.

## Implementation Challenges

Implementing the right to food presents numerous challenges, particularly in areas afflicted by poverty, conflict, and environmental degradation. This special issue has highlighted how structural issues, such as economic inequality, inadequate social safety nets, and poor governance impede progress. For instance, the impact of neoliberal economic policies on food security has been a recurring theme, with critics arguing that market-driven approaches often exacerbate inequality rather than alleviate hunger. Another significant challenge is the intersection of food rights with other human rights, such as the right to health, education, and a clean environment.

The articles in this special volume have been selectively and carefully researched to fill the knowledge gaps in food security issues.

[Rukundo and Oniang'o's](#) commentary on twenty-five years of the United Nations General comment number 12 on the human right to adequate food – malnutrition continues to surge highlighted the need to uphold the Universal law on the rights to food as well as the need for national governments to provide resources and show more commitments to its actualisation.

[Gituku Muringo's](#) commentary on the global food security conundrum through the lens of the right to food tries to unravel the different components that make up the food security conundrum and how these components can be properly integrated to making these rights achievable looking at the changing socioeconomic dynamics in the different countries of the world. The commentary concludes by advocating for initiative synergy among the different role players in the food system interface.

[Anne Musotsi's](#) commentary on food sovereignty or food security and the way for sub-Saharan Africa highlighted the different approaches embedded in achieving the United Nations' sustainable development goal 2 (SDG2) and how these can be harnessed enhance food security without compromising the sovereignty aspect of the food rights. The author concludes by emphasising the need to interrogate the two concepts as a way of prioritising the best approaches to achieving both going forward.

[Claudio Schuftan's](#) commentary on the dominant policy approach to the right to food has been improperly underpinned by a food security paradigm emphasised the issue of food sovereignty as against the mere food access not minding its implication on the health and loss of identity on the part of the primary producers of food.

[Oluwatayo and Ojo's](#) paper x-rayed how the teeming population of youth in Africa should be seen as an asset to unlocking the locked-up opportunities in the agriculture landscape to meeting the food need of the growing population of people in Africa and beyond. The paper emphasised the energy in the youth, if well harnessed can transform agriculture and other critical sectors of the continent's economy for inclusive development. The paper concludes by highlighting the need to provide the youth with the necessary skills, financing and mentorship to unlocking these potentials for positive deployment.

[Munyiri Nkoyabi's](#) paper on seeds and farmers rights as drivers of change on food systems emphasised the need to acknowledge the role of farmers in their own space as the primary producers of food and recognise their skills and cultural inclinations in the food systems ecologies. Thus, the paper further deemphasise imposition of genetically modified seeds on farmers and the populace as this is likely to eradicate

the culturally adaptable and environmentally friendly crop varieties in Kenya and other African countries.

[Addo Phyllis et al.'s](#) review paper on gender role in food rights and sovereignty in west Africa highlighted the significant role that gender plays in food security issue by emphasising the need not assume that a one cap fits all approach will address food insecurity challenges. The paper emphasised the prime place of women and children in harvesting food processing and distribution as pivotal in the food systems value chain.

[Firew and Aman's](#) paper on determining food intake, the requirement, and weighing the relative risk between food secure and insecure households in the Oromia region of Ethiopia emphasized the need for adequacy as well as the role that education play in food security complexities. This was done by comparing the calorific intake between the food secure and food insecure households and suggest alternative methods of crop production involving irrigation agriculture and provision of water conservation infrastructure by government and other relevant stakeholders to bridge the gap.

[Owuonda and Olembo's](#) review paper dwelt on balancing the right to food and environmental sustainability. The paper alluded to the intricate nexus between the right to food and ecosystem conservation by recognizing the importance of addressing these interlinked issues for sustainable global development. Food rights if not enforced with caution can overshadow the environmental sustainability which may hamper the survival of the coming generation. The paper suggests integration of farmers' rights, agroecology, educational awareness on linear agricultural practices that weakens climate resilience and promotes desertification should be intensified.

[Effiong's](#) review paper on right to food policies, justice and sovereignty in Nigeria echoed the same views of previous researchers on food rights and non-discriminatory food policies in Nigeria by highlighting some of key food policies in Nigeria, their achievements and drawbacks especially the lack of proper coordination and harmonisation of these policies, and what needs to be done going forward considering the changing landscape and ecologies of food systems in the country.

[John Effiong et al.'s](#) empirical paper on effect of road infrastructure on food sovereignty in Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria x-rayed the pivotal role of infrastructure in steering the ship of the global food systems. The paper emphasised the prime place of agriculture in providing livelihood for the people of the state and how critical road infrastructure is important in enhancing the functioning of the food systems value chain.



Another paper by [Effiong](#) focussing on the influence of socioeconomic factors and extension inhibitors on food sovereignty in Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria alluded the twin impact of these variables in shaping the food security architecture of the state. Extension officers are change agents, therefore, adequate training and adequacy of fund to provide the necessary infrastructure are very important for effective delivery of services to enhance food sovereignty.

Thus, food security is a multidimensional and complex issue requiring a multipronged approach to achieving it, as highlighted in the sustainable development goal (SDG 2 – Zero Hunger).

### ***Success Stories and Innovations***

Despite all the challenges highlighted, there have been some remarkable achievements and innovations in advancing the right to food. Some authors have focused on grassroots movements, government policies, and international initiatives that have made a positive impact. For example, community-based programs that integrate local agricultural practices with modern technology have shown great promise in improving food security in various regions. Also, the role of international organizations and partnerships in supporting food security has been emphasized. Collaborative efforts, such as those by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have demonstrated that multi-stakeholder approaches can lead to significant improvements in food access and nutrition.

### **The Future of the Right to Food**

Going forward, the right to food will likely face new and evolving challenges. The rise of global issues such as climate change and other environmental issues, pandemics, geopolitical tensions, and declining government revenues will shape the future of food security. Several articles exploring these emerging issues have stressed the need for adaptive and resilient strategies to address both immediate and long-term food security concerns. Future debates will also need to address the role of technology and innovation in enhancing global food systems. Innovations in areas such as sustainable agriculture, food distribution and consumption, and digital apparatus for monitoring the changing agroclimatic variables, the sociopolitical environment and food security situations especially in low and middle-income countries, where the greater share of the world's poor reside offer promising remedies but also raise new questions about equity, inclusion and access.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the right to food remains a cornerstone of human dignity and well-being. While appreciable progress has been made, ongoing collaborative efforts among key players in the global economy are needed to address the complex challenges that persist. The recent article collections offer valuable insights into both the obstacles and opportunities in realizing this fundamental right. By learning from our lived experiences and embracing innovative solutions, we can leap closer and faster to a world where everyone enjoys the right to sufficient, safe, dignified and nutritious food.

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