Mainstreaming Human Rights in Development Programmes and Projects: Experience from the Work of a United Nations Agency

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Since the 1990s, mainstreaming has become a word of fashion. It generally stands for methods of integrating ideals considered disparate or bringing some value from the periphery to the centre. Many development organisations have been working on mainstreaming human rights into their activities. With a focus on the work of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the present article analyses the progress made and challenges faced in human rights mainstreaming. It suggests ways of strengthening the work on mainstreaming the right to adequate food at FAO. Based on practical knowledge from working with the organisation, the author argues for streamlining the mainstreaming work currently done within FAO and the development of a corporate strategy that has stronger organisational support.

Keywords: Human rights; Mainstreaming; Targeting; Human Rights-Based Approach; Development; UN; FAO

I. Introduction

Human rights are values of human dignity that aim at protecting and advancing the liberty, equality and well-being of human beings. They project corresponding duties on states to abstain and protect from interference with the enjoyment of rights, and to proactively facilitate and sometimes ensure the fulfillment of these rights. Mainstreaming, however, is concerned with the conscious, systematic and concrete integration of certain values and standards into policies, plans, programmes, priorities, processes and results of the work of an organisation. Human rights mainstreaming refers to the deliberate infusion of human rights standards into the work of organisations in areas such as development, emergencies and peace and security. It is a result of a general endeavour to develop approaches that promote the integrated application of interdependent values. Hence, it seems to avoid or at least minimise parallel and disparate functioning in areas that are essentially interrelated. Human rights mainstreaming at FAO is therefore about the integration of human rights perspectives into the organisation’s work in the achievement of food security for all.

Human rights mainstreaming is considered part of the human rights-based approach, which is a conceptual framework for the process of human development. It is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed towards promoting and protecting human rights. Under this approach, human rights become part of the overall objective of development, humanitarian and other interventions that aim at strengthening the capacity of duty-bearers to meet their obligations and rights-holders to claim their rights. The human rights and good governance principles of participation, accountability, non-discrimination, transparency and empowerment guide the process of delivery of development, humanitarian and other objectives. By placing focus on the governance dimensions of developmental and humanitarian problems and

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the power dynamics that cause and reinforce exclusion and discrimination, the approach, and hence human rights mainstreaming, helps to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of programmes/projects and the sustainability of their outcomes. It aims to ensure the free, active and meaningful participation of individuals in decisions that affect themselves and to analyse the roles, responsibilities and capacity gaps of relevant state and non-state actors.

Mainstreaming should, however, be understood as only one among many other ways of implementing human rights. It is different from the direct promotion, enforcement of or advocacy for the realisation of human rights; it requires another area of work, such as development, in which human rights are to be infused. Furthermore, the body that mainstreams human rights should have authority over or play a role in a process. A development or humanitarian organisation may, for example, mainstream human rights in its own plans, programmes and activities. However, it may only advocate for the integration of human rights in related policies of states through capacity development, information provision and partnership. For example, FAO may apply the right to food standards in the design, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects that it implements on its own or together with other partners, whereas it may only advocate for the integration of the right to food standards in the food security policies of states.

Established in 1945, FAO is a specialised United Nations (UN) agency with 194 member nations, two associate members and one member organisation: the European Union. It has the triple goals of eradicating hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition; the elimination of poverty and driving forward economic and social progress for all; and the sustainable management and utilisation of natural resources.1 It is one of the intergovernmental organisations which has recognised the relevance of human rights to their work relatively early. After laying down a broader framework within which human rights mainstreaming within FAO may be looked at, this article demonstrates why it is important to mainstream human rights in the work of the organisation and then assesses the state of affairs. By laying focus on the human right to adequate food, it examines the mainstreaming work at FAO based on an analytical framework with institutional, instrumental and resource-related components.

The article aims to document the relevant work of FAO and to provide specific recommendations towards the effectiveness of its efforts in human rights mainstreaming based on a review of pertinent literature and the practical exposure of the author to the work of the organisation. The next two sections briefly present the human rights mainstreaming work at the UN in general and at FAO in particular. Section four makes a relatively in-depth examination of the work of FAO based on selected criteria for effective human rights mainstreaming. The last section closes with remarks on how to strengthen the organisation’s mainstreaming work.

II. Mainstreaming within the UN in Brief

As the UN Charter and the specialised instruments adopted under it clearly show, the promotion and protection of human rights has been one of the main objectives of the organisation.2 Nevertheless, human rights were for long considered to be the domaine exclusif

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2UN Charter, arts 1(3), 55 and 56. See also the International Bill of Rights constituted of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and other human rights treaties adopted within the UN. All the human rights instruments are available at http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/InternationalLaw.aspx (accessed 9 July 2014).
of some relatively isolated set of bodies, especially the Commission on Human Rights (now the Human Rights Council) and treaty monitoring bodies. In his report on UN reform in 1997, the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) designated human rights as a crosscutting issue for the whole of the UN system, stating that they should be mainstreamed into the programmes, policies and activities of all UN specialised agencies, programmes and funds. Human rights were later designated as one of the three interlinked pillars of the UN system – alongside development and peace and security. The repeated reaffirmation of this interrelationship, including in the Millennium Declaration of 2000 and the UNSG’s milestone report “In Larger Freedom” of 2005, reinforced the idea of integrating human rights in the other areas of work of the UN.

The designation of human rights as a crosscutting issue of the UN system ushered in policy and programming shifts within the UN agencies, programmes and funds, which have been exerting separate and common efforts in the integration of human rights in their work. Following the confirmation of the fundamental importance of human rights in the UNSG’s report on “further change” in 2002, Action 2 of the plan of actions for reform was devoted, *inter alia*, to the integration of human rights throughout the UN system in humanitarian, development and peacekeeping work and to apply a human rights approach to programming in UN actions at the country level. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has been entrusted with the overall responsibility of driving the policy of human rights mainstreaming forward. This was boosted by the invitation of the High Commissioner to the executive committees of the UN.

UN agencies, programmes and funds have been mainstreaming human rights in their work to differing degrees. Organisations such as the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have had relatively wider experience based on specific mainstreaming policies on integrating human rights, especially in development and humanitarian work. Having made the Convention on the Rights of the Child its frame of reference in 1996, UNICEF made the actualisation

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4For example, see Vienna Declaration and Program of Action, art 8, World Conference on Human Rights 1993.
7Strengthening of the United Nations: An Agenda for Further Change, report of the UN Secretary-General, 2002, para 45. Action 2 was a capacity-building program that is no longer operational, but it exhibited an increased interest in human rights mainstreaming in the work of the UN and its training materials are still in use.
of the rights of women and children part of its foundation strategies and has been providing assistance to strengthening national and local capacities in human rights-based programming.\textsuperscript{10} UNDP established mainstreaming human rights in development programming as one of the strategic areas of its work at least since 2005.\textsuperscript{11} Although they do not have overarching human rights mainstreaming policies, organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and FAO have normative, policy and/or institutional frameworks that exhibit human rights-based approaches (HRBA). The WHO launched a mainstreaming process that brings together gender, equity and human rights under a team mandated to stimulate actions from the corporate to national levels and with national counterparts; WFP integrated human rights and gender issues in its humanitarian protection policy; and the FAO has normative documents and guiding tools on the right to food and HRBA.\textsuperscript{12} Institutions such as OHCHR and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) have also developed detailed manuals to help their staff and partners operationalise an HRBA in their work.\textsuperscript{13} All these and other UN bodies are further engaged at the country level in the Common Country Assessment and the UN Development Assistance Framework, which use gender equality and HRBA as their programming principles.\textsuperscript{14}

The 32 member UN Development Group (UNDG), which was established in 1997 with the purpose of designing system-wide guidance to coordinate, harmonise and align UN development activities, has served as a common platform for the promotion of human rights mainstreaming. In 2003, it adopted the Common Understanding on HRBA to Development Cooperation and Programming which consists of furthering the realisation of human rights, being guided by human rights standards and principles, and developing the capacities of rights-holders and duty-bearers. The different UN agencies, funds and programmes showed diversified levels of interest in terms of giving human rights more prominence in practice than referring to them in policy documents.\textsuperscript{15} In the 2005 World Summit, the UNSG reported that although the concept of “mainstreaming” human rights had gained greater attention, it was not adequately reflected in key policy and resource decisions.\textsuperscript{16} Participating states resolved “to support the further mainstreaming of human rights through the UN system.”\textsuperscript{17} The UNDG human rights mainstreaming mechanism (HRM) was established in 2009 to further strengthen system-wide coherence, collaboration

\textsuperscript{17}2005 “World Summit Outcome” A/RES/60/1.
and support for UN Resident Coordinators, Country Team and member states. As an active member of the UNDG and also as a specialised organ with the mandate to “ensuring humanity’s freedom from hunger”, FAO has been working towards mainstreaming human rights in general and the right to food in particular at the normative, analytical and operational levels.

It should finally be noted that the increasing interest of UN agencies in HRBA and human rights mainstreaming also faces some operational challenges. First, it falls prey to the general aversion to conditionalities imposed by donors on cooperating partners in the South. It is seen as yet another form of conditionality that attaches the delivery of aid to the fulfilment of preset human rights standards at the domestic level. Secondly, the Aid Effectiveness principles of ownership by “recipient” states and alignment of donor interventions with the states’ strategies and existing systems of governance pose another challenge to the imperatives of human rights mainstreaming as the international standards may not necessarily be honoured in domestic policies and practices. Nevertheless, these challenges do not disprove the importance of infusing internationally agreed upon human rights standards in the programmes and projects of the UN bodies. They rather suggest that mainstreaming should be context-sensitive and non-confrontational – issues addressed towards the end of this article.

III. Human Rights Mainstreaming at FAO

Freedom from hunger is at the core of FAO’s mandate. The substantive work of FAO has human rights dimensions relating mainly to food security and nutrition, gender, livelihood and decent work and indigenous peoples. These issues relate to the human right to adequate food, the right to work, the right to equality, women’s rights and indigenous people’s rights. Human rights mainstreaming in the various areas of FAO’s work, including agriculture, food security, nutrition, emergencies and investment, should, therefore, take these interrelated values into account. The present article focuses on mainstreaming the human right to adequate food, which is a right to feed oneself in dignity by producing or procuring food items. This right does not impose an obligation on governments to hand out food for free, but it requires the state to put in place safety nets for those who are unable to feed themselves.

With specific reference to the right to food, FAO has a relatively long history. It played an instrumental role in normative developments relating to the human right to adequate food at the international level. It initiated and facilitated discussion on the implementation and realisation of the right to food in the 1996 World Food Summit, which requested the clarification and full implementation of the right to adequate food and freedom from hunger. FAO provided technical support in the elaboration of General Comment No 12 on the right to adequate food that was issued by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) in 1999. When the UN Commission on Human Rights established the Special Rapporteur mandate on the right to food in 2000, it requested the
mandate holder to work in cooperation with FAO. Following the identification of the need to provide states with practical guidance on the progressive realisation of the right to adequate food in the 2002 World Food Summit, the FAO Council established the Intergovernmental Working Group to elaborate such guidelines. After two years of negotiations, the Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security (Right to Food Guidelines) were adopted by consensus at the FAO Council meeting in 2004. This instrument provides practical guidance for the implementation of the right to food by, inter alia, creating an enabling environment, building institutional and resource capacity, advocacy and monitoring, and covers such areas as development cooperation, trade, disasters and food aid. It lays down an elaborate foundation for mainstreaming the right to food in the different areas of work of FAO and its partners and for advocacy on its integration in the relevant policies of states.

Human rights and HRBA have also received increasing attention in the normative and programming framework documents of FAO. The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT), which was endorsed by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in May 2012, has the purpose of supporting the progressive realisation of the right to adequate food. It also enshrined other relevant human rights provisions (including indigenous people’s rights) as well as human rights principles (human dignity, non-discrimination, gender equality, consultation and participation, rule of law, transparency and accountability). The HRBA is also identified as one of the country programming principles in the FAO’s Country Programming Framework, although the programming guidelines do not provide guidance on the operational requirements of the right to food. It is similarly enshrined in FAO’s Project Cycle Guide, which provides some guidance on the application of the right to food and other human rights standards within a project cycle. The right to food has further been part of the FAO’s corporate commitments. Under the reviewed strategic framework of the organisation (2010–2019), the development and implementation of frameworks and mechanisms for the realisation of the right to adequate food is one of the main outputs under Strategic Objective 1 on contributing to the eradication of hunger, food

21 Commission on Human Rights resolution 2000/10, the right to food, 52nd meeting, 17 April 2000, para 11(b).
28 Under FAO’s Strategic Framework that was adopted in 2009, the right to food was a key component of the Organizational Result H2 that contributes to achieving Strategic Objective H – Improved Food Security and Better Nutrition.
insecurity and malnutrition. The right to food and the principles of participation, equality, transparency, accountability further underpin the other four strategic objectives of FAO and the two crosscutting themes of gender and governance.

Despite the existence of normative and programming framework documents, it should be emphasised that human rights mainstreaming in the work of FAO is not a matter over which there is political consensus. At the time of the adoption of the Right to Food Guidelines, for example, a number of countries asked FAO to mainstream the right to food into its work, while some countries did not. Of course, FAO’s role can only be one of providing technical support to states in the implementation of the Guidelines and its mainstreaming work cannot extend to areas that require the negotiation and decision of states. In this sense, objections to mainstreaming by FAO may relate less to mainstreaming the right to food in its programmes and activities than to advocating for its infusion in states policies relating to food and agriculture. The latter may also be regarded as a way of implementing states’ commitment under the Right to Food Guidelines to adopt national human rights-based strategies for food security and poverty reduction.

Infusing or integrating the human right to adequate food in the work of FAO is important for various reasons. In the first place, it facilitates the execution of the human rights mandate, which emanates from the UN Charter and other internationally agreed upon standards and its designation as one of the three pillars of the UN system, in an area most relevant to the mandate of FAO as a specialised organ. It helps frame development cooperation and assistance relating to food security in terms of entitlements, responsibilities and obligations rather than discretionary charity initiatives. Mainstreaming the right to food in the availability, access, stability of supply and utilisation dimensions of food security helps address critical governance dimensions in the fight against hunger and malnutrition. It strengthens the participation and coordination of relevant public institutions, including civil society organisations, independent human rights commissions and parliamentarians in the development and implementation of food security programmes. At a more general level, human rights mainstreaming contributes to ensuring the sustainability of outcomes through the empowerment of rights-holders to participate in decision-making and to claim


their rights, and building the capacity of duty-bearers to meet their obligations. It can also increase coherence among measures taken in different areas.

It should be emphasised, however, that mainstreaming the right to food does not replace existing development efforts towards hunger eradication. It may not also lead to radical changes in or the replacement of existing approaches and methods of work. Rather, it brings new dimensions to or complements traditional approaches to fight hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in various contexts. With a view to increasing the effectiveness of FAO’s work and the sustainability of the results, the right to food mainstreaming can help bring the much needed focus on activities “that have the highest impact on food-insecure people”.

The implementation of HRBA as well as human rights mainstreaming require moving beyond referring to human rights in policy instruments. Mainstreaming for an effect should happen at the operational level. As described in its website on the right to food, FAO’s efforts to mainstream the right to food at the programme level are exerted based on the following three central criteria:

- The realisation of the right to food as an overall objective or guiding framework;
- Ensuring that the process (design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes) respects the principles of participation, accountability, non-discrimination, transparency, human dignity, empowerment and rule of law (known at FAO by the acronym PANTHER) to improve the efficiency and quality of outcomes; and
- Promoting rights, obligations, responsibilities and accountability mechanisms by focusing on empowerment and capacity development, of duty bearers to meet their obligations and of right holders to claim their rights.

While evidence on the application of these criteria and their effects are generally scarce, it can be said that the practical implementation of the approach will go a long way in terms of increasing the effectiveness of the work of the organisation and the sustainability of the results.

IV. Seeing the Work at FAO against the Requisites of Mainstreaming

The work of mainstreaming a certain value in an organisational setting presupposes the existence of agency or authority to mainstream, a normative or policy instrument on the crosscutting value and a mandated area of work or a programme in which the value is mainstreamed. For example, FAO does not mainstream the right to food in the food and nutrition security programme of a given state. Rather it may advocate or provide technical support for the integration of the right in such an instrument. It is up to the concerned state to mainstream human rights in its policy and programme instruments. This shows that the organisational mandate and the resulting method of work affect the approach to mainstreaming. Furthermore, “mainstreaming” in an organisational context may be seen in contradistinction with “targeting”. Targeting refers to the direct implementation of a policy by

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a specialised organ, whereas mainstreaming is about the implementation of a certain policy through the instrumentality of all branches of an organisation. Comparatively, mainstreaming is an ambitious approach that requires more resources and continuous staff attention, whereas targeting is more focused and often limited in terms of scope, size and time.\(^{37}\) Moreover, mainstreaming may be slow in producing results but has better prospect of long-term sustainability, whereas targeted interventions tend to be disparate and short-term, and hence score lower in terms of sustainability.\(^{38}\) It should nonetheless be emphasised that the two approaches are complementary. One may diagrammatically present targeting and mainstreaming in relation to a human rights policy as follows:\(^{39}\)

**Targeting:** human rights policy → specialist unit/specialised organisation → implementation  
**Mainstreaming:** human rights policy → specialist unit → the entire organisation → implementation

Mainstreaming the right to adequate food at FAO, therefore, means that the right will be integrated in the work of the various departments, programmes and projects of the organisation (from headquarters to regional and country levels) to which it is pertinent. As indicated earlier, mainstreaming is not only about policy level integration. It should be exhibited in the development of knowledge and skills in the normative and practical aspects of the right to food as well as its conscious and concrete application in the relevant activities of concerned staff. A reasonable effort at mainstreaming basically requires a specialist unit, clear and feasible policy and tools of implementation, capable and dedicated staff and organisational support. The following sub-sections assess these elements with specific reference to mainstreaming the rights to adequate food at FAO.

**IV.1. Specialist unit**

When the FAO Council adopted the Right to Food Guidelines in November 2004, many member states requested the FAO Secretariat to ensure adequate follow-up to the Guidelines through mainstreaming and the preparation of information, communication and training materials, and to strengthen its capacity to assist members in their implementation.\(^{40}\) The Right to Food Team was founded in 2007 within the Agricultural Development Economics Division (ESAD) of FAO to support the implementation of the right to food. The multidisciplinary team works with the Development Law Service of the Legal Office of FAO, which provides legal advice to states in relation to normative frameworks for the right to food, with the Office for Partnerships, Advocacy and Capacity Development (OPC), which is involved, among others, in advocacy for the right to food, and with the Governance and Policy Team under the Economic and Social Development Department that leads the work on the cross-cutting issue of governance under the Revised Strategic Framework of FAO. The division of labour among these units is not fully clear and may cause tension or duplication if

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aspects of their right to food mandate are not delineated specifically and properly. While multidisciplinarity is important to address the relevant issues from different perspectives, the difference in the disciplinary background of those who are engaged in right to food work as well as those targeted by the mainstreaming agenda may also pose challenges. The Right to Food Team does a good job in trying to make effective use of the disciplinary diversity of its (small and mainly temporary) staff and partners in other divisions, but more has to be done to build the acceptance of the importance of the right to food among the economists in the ESAD itself and other staff within the organisation.

Nevertheless, the Right to Food Team has cooperated well with the legal office in its work of supporting legal processes, capacity development, mainstreaming, partnering with civil society and assessment and monitoring in relation to the right to food.\(^{41}\) In relation to mainstreaming, the Team has been implementing projects on integrating the right to food and good governance into global and regional food security initiatives, into national policies, legislation and institutions, and into sub-national plans and strategies.\(^{42}\)

Together with its above-mentioned partners, the Right to Food Team at FAO forms a specialised unit for mainstreaming the right to food in the normative, analytical and operational work of the organisation. At the normative level, it works towards the inclusion of appropriate human rights language in standard setting and outcome documents of major norm-development and policy-making processes through the provision of information and technical advice. The integration of appropriate human rights language in the VGGT and the designation of HRBA as one of the programming principles of the Country Programming Framework are two good examples. The team does analytical work by conducting studies on how the right to food relates to such other areas of work as food security, land tenure and nutrition and by contributing to broader international reports. For example, it conducts studies on how the right to food can help guide the implementation of the VGGT and the Global Strategic Framework on Food Security and Nutrition and makes contributions to the right to food aspects of UN reports (e.g., to the Africa Human Development Report 2012). At the time of writing, the team was carrying out a ten-year review of the progress and challenges in the implementation of the Right to Food Guidelines by conducting a series of studies (in collaboration with its partners), which feed into a synthesis report to be presented at the CFS in October 2014.\(^{43}\) The team and its partner units further develop practical tools and inform the various operational or technical areas of FAO’s work with the right to food standards. These include the collaborative projects on the development of the methodological toolbox, which includes guides to legislating on and monitoring and assessment of the right to food, and the preparation of a guidance note on integrating the right to food into food and nutrition security programmes.\(^{44}\)

The Right to Food team has been operating mainly based on project funding. The reliance on trust funds and short-term professional staff has an adverse effect on the sustainability of the team’s work and its impact. Effective mainstreaming requires dedicated support staff, and even focal persons in other divisions if possible, that are engaged in the


right to food work on a more sustainable basis than extra-budgetary support that leaves it to the will of donors.\textsuperscript{45} The generally low level of internal support it receives threatens even the very existence of the Right to Food Team in the structures of the organisation.

IV.2. Mainstreaming strategy and tools of implementation

Mainstreaming often suffers from receiving mere lip service or from being considered a “feel good” rhetorical agenda. It is often framed as a desirable objective without a clear strategy and concrete mechanisms of implementation. There is a need to ensure that the value being mainstreamed, the right to adequate food in this case, is clearly articulated and does not disappear in an overarching objective or an agenda “more prominent” in the views of the executing departments or staff. The detailed standards in the Right to Food Guidelines, the integration of the right to food and other human rights principles in the objectives and crosscutting issues of the Revised Strategic Framework, the identification of the HRBA as one of the principles of the Country Programming Framework and the progressive human rights provisions in more specific instruments such as the VGGT serve as foundations and entry points for mainstreaming the right to food in the work of FAO. The publications of the organisation, such as the Right to Food Methodological Toolbox, the Monitoring Framework for the Right to Adequate Food, the Right to Food Making it Happen (progress and lessons learned through implementation), and the Guidance Note on how to integrate the right to food into food and nutrition security programme\textsuperscript{46} provide practice-orientated tools that can be used in mainstreaming the right to food in the work of FAO at the normative, analytical and operational levels.

The above-mentioned normative instruments and implementation guides are being put to use to differing degrees in the various projects and contexts. These strategic tools can be strengthened by an operational mainstreaming strategy that FAO does not have at present.\textsuperscript{47} A comprehensive right to food mainstreaming strategy that clearly sets out the policy and concrete mechanisms of implementation helps create coherence among relevant activities and increase the effectiveness of related interventions by ensuring that mainstreamed values do not disappear into other overarching agendas. In tandem with the mainstreaming activities it presently pursues, FAO may consider experiences in such agencies as UNICEF in developing a corporate strategy that helps it carry out the work in a more coordinated and structured manner at various levels. Such a strategy could define goals and objectives, guiding principles, the means to achieve the goals (including resources and institutional set-up), core activities from the global to the national levels, tools of implementation and provisions for evaluation and monitoring. The strategy will build on completed and ongoing interdepartmental work in which the Right to Food team and its partners are involved.

The development of a corporate or organisational strategy on mainstreaming should take into account the other human rights-related values or issues that fall within the mandate and work of FAO. One of the main criticisms against mainstreaming has been that there are


increasingly too many values that have formed part of the main themes of the mainstreaming approach, including gender equality, human rights, governance, environmental sustainability and HIV/AIDS. In response to this, a broader mainstreaming strategy may lay down a comprehensive framework for the integration of various interrelated values in the different areas of work of the organisation. It could identify the values to be mainstreamed (including gender, governance, nutrition, the right to food, employment, indigenous people’s rights) and the thematic areas of mainstreaming (emergencies, forestry, natural resources, socio-economic development etc.). Such an initiative could depart from an assessment of the state of the art and build on relevant on-going activities within the organisation and may draw lessons from experiences in other UN and development agencies. Lessons learned from the mainstreaming framework and practice in the areas of gender and nutrition in FAO are surely important inputs. In this connection, the collaborative work of the Right to Food team with FAO divisions in charge of gender, nutrition and emergencies on a joint organisational output on mainstreaming gender, nutrition and the right to food in emergencies could be taken into account for the purposes of a broader corporate strategy.\(^{48}\)

**IV.3. Staff capacity**

Effective mainstreaming requires that professionals from a variety of disciplines work together, understand each other’s terminologies and draw on each other’s perspectives and experiences.\(^ {49}\) The involvement of an entire organisation or staff (rather than a specific specialised group) in the implementation of a right to food mainstreaming policy portends difficulties in its operationalisation. First, it obviously requires resources for capacity development. Secondly, it demands the commitment of staff who will have to add the right to food and other related considerations on top of other tasks to which they are primarily devoted. These factors may combine to make mainstreaming a relatively challenging process.\(^ {50}\) Nevertheless, building the capacity and willingness of diverse staff to effectively mainstream the right to food in the work of FAO is a worthwhile undertaking that will pay in the long run.

Staff training could have the objective of creating understanding on the practical implications of the human rights to food in various areas and places of work. Expertise in human rights standards and practices should be developed in the context of designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating programmes. In this connection, particular attention should be given to building the capacity of programme and project review staff so that they consider such issues as participation, marginalisation and grievance mechanisms during project appraisal.\(^ {51}\) Training does not introduce an alien subject, but requires framing or looking at already existing activities in terms of the right to food, governance and HRBA by providing concrete examples or evidence on the positive impacts of human rights

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mainstreaming. For training, the Right to Food Team and its partners at FAO may cooperate with the UN System Staff College, which has accumulated experience from training the diverse staff of the UN on such subjects as HRBA. In the context of a broader mainstreaming strategy, the staff training should also be conducted in a way that aims to infuse the interrelated issues of gender, governance, nutrition, indigenous people’s rights etc. together with the right to food. Capacity building for mainstreaming does not end with staff training; there should be follow-up and monitoring to make sure that the right to food and related values are integrated in the actual work of concerned staff. It should be noted however that there is much to be desired in terms of equipping the FAO staff with the normative and practical aspects of HRBA in general and the right to food in particular.

Those with the right to food mandate at FAO should work on raising the resources required for staff training and follow-up by showing to decision-makers the benefits of mainstreaming the right to food in the work of FAO. This may build, for example, on the recommendation for capacity development on programming principles including HRBA in a Strategic Evaluation of FAO country programming in 201052 and the Learning Programme that is launched as a result.53 An even stronger case may be made based on FAO’s partnership with other UN bodies and intergovernmental agencies, for example, within the framework of the UNDG on human rights mainstreaming. Capacity building and resource allocation generally require organisational support, which is a very important factor in mainstreaming.

IV.4. Organisational support

As mentioned above, mainstreaming is much more than a rhetorical exercise as it has significant practical implications. Implementing a mainstreaming strategy may affect the way an organisation works in terms of internal structure and bureaucratic practices.54 As mentioned previously, the orientation of UNICEF’s work changed with its adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as its frame of reference, whereas the WHO created a new structure with the decision to launch its recent mainstreaming process.55 Of course, the degree of change or accommodation that mainstreaming a certain value requires depends also on whether an organisation has been carrying out work related to the issue. It may, for example, entail the adoption of specific programmes or projects on human rights or the reorientation of existing programmes to human rights. Organisational culture in relation to integrating new ideals or standards and institutional openness to such developments will have significant impact on the extent to which a mainstreaming policy may succeed. In this regard, FAO stands a comparative advantage as the right to food, good governance and HRBA have formed part of its normative and practical work. The mainstreaming of these and related

53At the time of writing, an e-learning course targeting the FAO programming and technical staff was under preparation on three of the five UN Common Country Programming Principles, i.e., gender equality, human rights-based approach and capacity development. The Right to Food Team prepared the part on HRBA.
values at a broader level needs to be carried out through the strengthening of existing interdepartmental collaborations and the creation of new ones. What may be required in some cases is infusing relevant aspects of the right to food in already existing programmes and activities.

Gaining the support of the management and decision-making levels to the right to food mainstreaming, which requires in-house advocacy, is important for three basic reasons. First, the right to food becomes an important part of the organisational strategic objectives and plan of work. Secondly, a supportive tone from above will build staff commitment and catalyse the integration of the right to food and related values in their work. Thirdly, it will have implications for the allocation of sufficient resources for the implementation of a mainstreaming strategy. The political support of the decision-making level and its effect in terms of human and financial resource commitment will be invaluable to the development and implementation of mainstreaming strategy. They will facilitate the work of the specialist unit in mainstreaming. Support at the higher level should also mean that activities relating to right to food mainstreaming are supported by the regular budget than depending solely on extra-budgetary support or the will of donors. The right to food work at FAO clearly needs more organisational support, for example, through the establishment of regular budget posts for the work.

V. Concluding Remarks

Human rights mainstreaming is about the infusion of internationally agreed upon standards in the work of an organisation internally as well as with its partners. It is important for the purposes of addressing critical governance matters in development, humanitarian and other interventions, and to improve targeting, effectiveness and sustainability of such interventions. There is no one best way to mainstream any value or issue in the work of organisations operating in different areas in various parts of the world. This means that mainstreaming work should be contextualised or adapted to the circumstances in which it is implemented. Strategies to mainstreaming any value should take into account, inter alia, the mandate and nature of work of the organisation, organisational culture, institutional and staff capacity and the receptiveness of the partners at operational level. FAO has important bases for mainstreaming the right to food and related human rights and governance principles. It has undertaken related activities. This may be strengthened with more organisational support to such activities, the elaboration of a corporate human rights mainstreaming strategy and the development of staff capacity on the right to food and related principles.

If the work of mainstreaming the right to food in the organisation’s operational activities or advocacy for its integration in a sectoral policy is, for example, undertaken in or with a state whose government is sensitive to human rights, one may focus more on the substantive contents or principles of the right to food rather than framing the intervention or cooperation in the human rights terminology. In this regard, the human rights principles, including participation, accountability, non-discrimination and empowerment, may be more useful in that they may be articulated in a way that does not require highlighting the human rights language. The technical nature of some values may also require “vernacularisation”, i.e., making use of language that relevant officials may easily understand or feel comfortable with. Relating the right to food to some work which is already being undertaken in the area of food security in a particular state may, for example, provide a way to using a language which creates both comfort and understanding in some cases. However, human rights standards should not be watered down under the pretext of their circumstantial technicality
or sensitivity as they are after all based on internationally agreed instruments some of which are adopted by the consensus of states. Last but not least, in advocating for the mainstreaming of a certain value in states’ policies, the approach of an organisation like FAO can be one of offering a menu of possible useful measures so that the countries decide what is best for them.