



*“Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”. (World Food Summit, 1996)*

This widely accepted definition points to the following dimensions of food security:

- **Food availability:** The availability of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality, supplied through domestic production or imports (including food aid).
- **Food access:** Access by individuals to adequate resources (entitlements) for acquiring appropriate foods for a nutritious diet. Entitlements are defined as the set of all commodity bundles over which a person can establish command given the legal, political, economic and social arrangements of the community in which they live (including traditional rights such as access to common resources).
- **Utilization:** Utilization of food through adequate diet, clean water, sanitation and health care to reach a state of nutritional well-being where all physiological needs are met. This brings out the importance of non-food inputs in food security.
- **Stability:** To be food secure, a population, household or individual must have access to adequate food at all times. They should not risk losing access to food as a consequence of sudden shocks (e.g. an economic or climatic crisis) or cyclical events (e.g. seasonal food insecurity). The concept of stability can therefore refer to both the availability and access dimensions of food security.

## Changing Policy Concepts of Food Security

Concepts of food security have evolved in the last thirty years to reflect changes in official policy thinking (Clay, 2002; Heidhues et al, 2004). The term first originated in the mid-1970s, when the World Food Conference (1974) defined food security in terms of food supply – assuring the availability and price stability of basic foodstuffs at the international and national level:

*“Availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices”.*

In 1983, FAO analysis focused on food access, leading to a definition based on the balance between the demand and supply side of the food security equation:

*“Ensuring that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food that they need” (FAO, 1983).*

The definition was revised to include the individual and household level, in addition to the regional and national level of aggregation, in food security analysis. In 1986, the highly

influential World Bank Report on Poverty and Hunger (World Bank, 1986) focused on temporal dynamics of food insecurity (Clay, 2002). The report introduced the distinction between chronic food insecurity, associated with problems of continuing or structural poverty and low incomes, and transitory food insecurity, which involved periods of intensified pressure caused by natural disasters, economic collapse or conflict. This was complemented by Sen’s theory of famine (1981) which highlighted the effect of personal entitlements on food access i.e. production, labour, trade and transfer based resources.

The widely accepted World Food Summit (1996) definition reinforces the multidimensional nature of food security and includes food access, availability, food use and stability. It has enabled policy responses focused on the promotion and recovery of livelihood options. Initially made popular by academics such as Chambers and Conway (1992), livelihood approaches are now fundamental to international organizations’ development programmes. They are increasingly applied in emergency contexts and include the concepts of vulnerability, risk coping and risk management. In short, as the link between food

security, starvation and crop failure becomes a thing of the past, the analysis of food insecurity as a social and political construct has emerged (Devereux 2000).

More recently, the ethical and human rights dimension of food security has come into focus. The Right to Food is not a new concept, and was first recognized in the UN Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. In 1996, the formal adoption of the Right to Adequate Food marked a milestone achievement by World Food Summit delegates. It pointed the way towards the possibility of a rights based approach to food security. Currently over 40 countries have the right to food enshrined in their constitution and FAO estimates that the right to food could be judicial in some 54 countries (McClain-Nhlapo, 2004). In 2004, a set of voluntary guidelines supporting the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security were elaborated by an Intergovernmental Working Group under the auspices of the FAO Council.