

# A Review of Food Security in Ethiopia from the Perspective of the Human Rights-Based Approaches

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## Abstract

*Ethiopia, the second-most populous country in Africa following Nigeria, exhibits a rapidly expanding economy, marked by a growth rate of 6.06% in Fiscal Year 2020/21. However, it is still one of the world's most food-insecure countries, and a significant number of its population suffers from hunger and malnutrition. The Global Hunger Index (GHI) score for the year 2022 rises rapidly to 27.6, signifying a severe and critical state of hunger and malnutrition. To address this problem, the Government of Ethiopia (GoE) has already launched the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), the largest social safety net programme on the African continent. The programme has significantly reduced drought impacts by 57% while simultaneously lowering the national poverty rate by 2%. However, its effectiveness in both rural and urban areas has been hampered by the incomplete adoption and application of the human rights based approaches (HRBAs). This article presents a rigorous critical review of Ethiopia's food security endeavours through the productive safety net programme, delving into the intricate ramifications of the country's food security challenges being exacerbated by the incomplete integration of rights-based approaches. The assessment used a systematic literature review and identified a considerable number of challenges in the operational implementation of the productive safety net programme, including biased area selection, exclusion of vulnerable individuals, weakened institutional connections, gender bias, and limited community participation. These challenges are believed to stem from the absence of rights-centred approaches. Furthermore, the absence of adequate legislative and judicial tools to enforce the right to food has exacerbated the country's food insecurity crisis.*

**Keywords:** Ethiopia, rights based approaches, food insecurity

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## **Introduction**

The topic of food security is currently attracting the interest of both academics and the general public (Lang & Barling, 2012). There has been a noticeable upsurge in interest after the global food price shocks of 2007–2008 and 2010, as well as the impactful 2008 World Development Report that promoted increased investments in agriculture in developing countries. These incidents proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that food insecurity still poses a serious threat, even after massive efforts over many decades to end hunger and malnutrition (Candel, 2014). Furthermore, there is a growing realisation of the interdependence of the policy landscape and the complicated relationship of food security with critical global challenges such as environmental changes and energy markets. Consequently, due to these factors and others, the concept of food security has gained significant support in both policy discussions and academic circles (Candel, 2014; Mooney & Hunt, 2009).

Food, along with clothing and shelter, is regarded as a fundamental requirement for human survival (Fawole et al., 2015). Extensive study in the area demonstrates that the existing global food supply is adequate to meet the nutritional needs of the world population, and estimates indicate that it will remain so for the foreseeable future, stretching well into the next generation (UNICEF, 2021). However, around 821 million people experience hunger every day because of poverty, inequality, large-scale food waste, ineffective international food distribution systems, trade policies, and violent war (El Bilali, 2019; GHI, 2022). Today, it has become an indisputable fact that food insecurity and malnutrition continue to be major global challenges and countries strive to meet international obligations to ensure food availability, accessibility, and quality while simultaneously striving to attain the best standard of health for their citizens (Ayala & Meier, 2017). Furthermore, over 2 billion people worldwide suffer from hidden hunger or micronutrient deficiency (Lowe, 2021). The 2022 Global Hunger Index (GHI) score indicated that the world is in a severe state of hunger because of several crises. Despite the devastation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, violent conflict remained the primary source of world famine in 2021 (GHI, 2022).

Food security in Africa is also under severe threat because of a variety of factors, including war and political instability, urbanisation, population growth, and climate change (Fawole et al., 2015). Ethiopia, Africa's second-most populous country after Nigeria, has one of the fastest-growing economies, with a 6.06% growth rate in Fiscal Year 2020/21 (Planning and Development

Commission, 2020). By 2025, it aspires to become a lower-middle-income country. Its Ten-Year Development Plan (2021-2030) focuses on agriculture programmes to boost the economy and ensure food security. On the other side of the country's profile, roughly 40 million Ethiopians suffer from hunger and malnutrition (FAO, 2017). Moreover, Ethiopia's Global Hunger Index (GHI) score for the year 2022 has risen to 27.6, indicating a severe and critical state of hunger and malnutrition (GHI, 2022). It was 24.1 as per the GHI 2021 annual report.

Ethiopia launched the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) in 2005 with the primary aspiration of enabling chronically food insecure people to achieve food security and substantially improving the food security situation (Rahmato et al., 2013). However, difficulties occurred during the PSNP's implementation process such as bias in area selection, the exclusion of the poor in favour of the rich (which is against the UPSNP targeting guideline revised in 2022), reduced ties between organisations and a lack of active community involvement in the decision-making process (Fekadu & Ignatius, 2009; UPSNP, 2022). The lack of adequate integration of rights-centred frameworks in the operational execution of the PSNP has resulted in the aforementioned issues. These challenges would have significantly been minimised if the programme had been integrated with HRBA because it has its own PANTHER principles encompassing participation, accountability, non-discrimination, transparency, human dignity, empowerment, and rule of law (FAO, 2005). This article examines how the absence of a full-fledged implementation of human rights-based approaches exacerbates Ethiopia's food insecurity situation.

As far as we are aware, this systematic review is the first of its kind to examine Ethiopia's efforts and the challenges encountered in achieving food security through the productive safety net programme in the absence of a comprehensive HRBAs application.

## **Methodology**

### **The rationale to carry out a systematic literature review**

Systematic review methods are increasingly being used to address conventional literature reviews' inherent susceptibility to intentional and unintentional bias and to provide a comprehensive and transparent examination of the current state of knowledge by extracting findings from a body of scientific literature (Pettigrew & Roberts, 2006). Using a systematic literature review requires following a methodical approach, selecting pertinent data with explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, and retaining transparency in data analysis and findings

reporting (Candel, 2014). Thus, in order to improve the validity of earlier research and the veracity of its assertions, this study attempts to apply the systematic review approach for the aforementioned compelling justifications (Gough et al., 2012).

### **Sources of data and the review protocols**

The initial stage of organising the analysis and guaranteeing a transparent and rigorous selection of eligible topics involved creating review protocols. The review focused on examining Ethiopia's efforts and challenges in attaining food security through the productive safety net programme without fully implementing HRBAs. Three primary inclusion criteria were used to select the appropriate literature:

- a) First, peer-reviewed journals that have been published online and released in open-access databases are included in the review process just to ensure the papers' quality.
- b) Second, papers are also included that specifically intend to show how the failure to fully implement human rights-based approaches has worsened Ethiopia's food insecurity.
- c) To provide an exhaustive assessment of the existing knowledge on rights-based approaches to food security in relation, the review includes both empirical studies and theoretical literature (Biesbroek et al., 2013).

The analysis focused on papers from 1997 to 2023, even though the search was not confined to a particular time. A significant turning point in the evolution of HRBAs occurred in 1997, when UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan urged all UN agencies to integrate human rights into their development activities and programmes. Consequently, many UN agencies have adopted human rights-based approaches in their development cooperation and gained experience in implementing them. The discussion that follows attempts to reach this understanding based on aspects of the human rights-based approach that are shared by the policy and practice of the UN bodies that took part in the Interagency Workshop on a Human Rights-Based Approaches in the Context of UN Reform from May 3–5, 2003 (UN-Habitat, 2003).

### **Data collection and analysis**

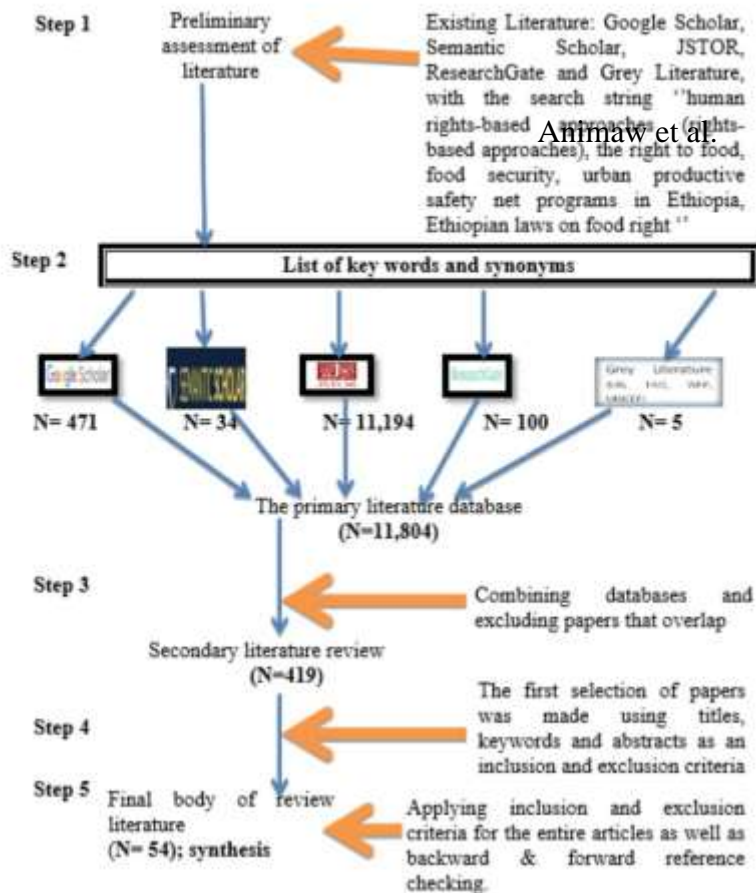
To achieve the principal aim of the paper, a systematic review of extant literature written in English and published from 1948 to 2023 was accessed from open-access databases including JSTOR (<https://www.jstor.org>), Semantic

Scholar (<https://www.semanticscholar.org>), Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com>) and ResearchGate (<https://www.researchgate.net>).

In addition, the search was expanded to include the websites of important UN agencies to get access to open grey literature. The initial search yielded a total of 11,804 scholarly articles and related publications. Following that, 419 journal articles and other literature were chosen based on the following pre-set criteria:

- Titles like "HRBA to food security"; "HRBA's implementation in Ethiopia's food security framework"; "integration of HRBA and PSNP in Ethiopia", and
- Keywords "HRBA", "PSNP", "Food Right", "Food Security".

Out of the 419 materials selected, 49 journal articles and 5 grey literatures were reviewed. The selection of these 54 literature sources was the result of a thorough screening procedure. The screening procedure involved reviewing titles, abstracts, conclusions, and complete texts to determine eligibility based on pre-set standards. By considering time constraints and the need for focused analysis, this comprehensive approach ensured that the final selection of 54 literature sources achieved a balance between depth and feasibility, enabling a thorough examination without becoming overwhelmed.



**Figure 1:** Graphic representation of the systematic review process based on Biesbroek et al. (2013) and Candel (2014)

### **Structure of the article**

Besides the introductory section, the article comprises five sections. The second section briefly reviews concepts regarding food security and food right. Section three examines the Ethiopian legal framework regarding food security and food right. The fourth section explores the incorporation of rights-based approaches in the formulation and enforcement of food security policies and Section five provides brief concluding remarks.

### **Theories and concepts: Food security and human rights**

Food security entails the nature, quality, and accessibility of food, as well as the causes and strategies used to cope with food shortages (Messay, 2010). The terms "food security" and "food insecurity" are used to characterise whether or not individuals have access to food that is of sufficient quality and quantity. In the 1960s and 1970s, the phrase "food security" was coined in global literature. Since then, a multitude of definitions of food security have been put forth. Concerns over food security can be traced back to the 1972-1974 world food crises (Abi & Tolossa, 2015).

The World Food Summit's definition of food security presented in 1996 is the one that is most frequently used, and it goes as follows: "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (FAO, 1996). This definition is now being utilised as a workable definition of food security in several publications.

Development is increasingly tied with human rights. Between the years 1950 and 1970, the concept of development mainly focused on economic growth and placed a strong emphasis on poverty reduction. However, starting from approximately 1970 up until 1999, there was a shift in the understanding of development, which began to encompass broader aspects beyond just economic output. Since 1999, development, including food security, is increasingly expressed in terms of human rights and related concepts such as fundamental human capabilities and multidimensional poverty (Thorbecke, 2007). The issue of Human Rights Based Approaches (HRBAs) became the agenda for the global community when the former UN Secretary-General called on all agencies of the UN to mainstream human rights into their various operations and initiatives within the context of their respective mandates in the UN Programme for

Reform, which was launched in 1997. Since then, several UN agencies have embraced a development cooperation approach that prioritises human rights at its core and has collected knowledge in its practical application (HRBA, 2013).

Following the third wave of democracy that followed the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, there was a significant change in the mind-set of policymakers and practitioners regarding the interconnectedness of development and human rights (Huntington, 1993). Consequently, there were endeavours by scholars and policymakers to incorporate human rights into development programmes and interventions (Vandenbogaerde, 2013). Amartya Sen was a pioneer in explaining how human rights and development are related, connecting it to the ideas of capability and freedom (Sen, 1999).

Food rights issues were first raised in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHRs), which acknowledged the right to food as a fundamental component of a decent quality of living (Mechlem, 2004). The 1966 Covenant on the right to adequate food defines food right as sufficient, safe, culturally acceptable food that is accessible in sustainable ways without compromising other fundamental human rights and freedoms (ESCR, 1999b). Food right rests upon four pillars of food security: availability, access, utilisation, and stability. It also encompasses legal components of human rights and the PANTHER principles—participation, accountability, non-discrimination, transparency, human dignity, empowerment, and the rule of law—all support the right to food (Guiné et al., 2021).

The state has three legal obligations in relation to food rights: the duty to respect, protect, and fulfil (ESCR, 1999a). This means that governments must respect people's current access to food, protect against interference by outside parties, and proactively facilitate people in exercising their right to eat. They also must provide direct support when individuals face uncontrollable circumstances that hinder their ability to access food (ESCR, 1999a; Sassi, 2018).

Three approaches are frequently mentioned in the discourse on the evolution of food right. The first approach is often known as the *Charity Model*, which is characterised by emotional and instinctive responses. It is also referred to as the *Generosity Model* and has been the dominant approach to addressing social issues for centuries. It is based on the belief that philanthropists or donors are aware of the needs of the poor and would fulfil those needs through acts of generosity (Berg & Gibson, 2022). In order to mitigate immediate suffering, the Charity Model traditionally involved offering financial aid, food, clothing, housing, and medical care. However, critics contend that the Charity Model is an



inadequate remedy for extensive and systemic challenges such as food insecurity since it depends on the goodwill of donors and fails to tackle the underlying causes of the problem (Berg & Gibson, 2022).

The second approach that becomes dominant in the middle of the twentieth century is the *Needs-Based Approach*. This approach prioritises interventions based on the needs of the poor as recognised by them. It also ensures the participation of the poor in identifying solutions. Consequently, this approach represented a significant improvement compared to the Charity Model although its short fall of establishing rules and regulations that ensure the inclusion of the poor in the planning and implementation of interventions meant to support the poor (Chilton & Rose, 2009).

The third approach, known as the *Rights-Based Approaches*, define poverty as the denial of crucial human rights including food, health, education, information, and participation. It states that poverty is a sign of exclusion and powerlessness rather than a lack of resources. In this framework, human rights and socio-economic development are not mutually exclusive. Development is understood as an element of human rights (Chilton & Rose, 2009). In this regard, Amartya Sen, a Nobel laureate in economics, argued that the role of human rights and democracy in addressing famine is crucial. He emphasised that famines are not simply a result of food scarcity but rather a failure of entitlements and political systems. Sen stated that human rights recognition and building democratic institutions are essential in preventing and mitigating famine, as they enable people to voice their concerns, hold governments accountable and ensure equitable distribution of resources (Sen, 1982). From the theoretical perspectives on food security discussed so far, it is evident that all three approaches recognise the critical significance of food for human survival.

Gauri and Gløppen (2012) developed a typology that distinguishes four types of human rights-based approaches depending on their underlying justification. The *Global compliance approach* aims to hold states accountable for development assistance through ratifying instruments, but major human rights treaties don't impose obligations on rich countries. According to this approach, compliance is more effective at the national level with domestic pressure from civil society, courts, and political mechanisms (Gauri & Gløppen, 2012; Simmons, 2009). The *programming approach* advocates for strengthening human rights efforts through policies, programmes, awareness campaigns, and accountability institutions. Legal documents prioritise rights-based development, including the WHO constitution's focus on achieving the highest standard of health. Developing nations face challenges in delivering comprehensive

healthcare (Gauri & Gloppen, 2012; WHO, 2002). The *rights talk approach* aims to promote rights talk in areas lacking it utilising politics from below, social accountability, and activism. Human rights norms empower civil society organisations to pressure governments and assist the poor driving societal transformation (Merry, 2003; Gauri & Gloppen, 2012). Lastly, the *legal mobilisation approach* employs domestic court litigation to advance social and economic rights, particularly in addressing food rights violations. Factors such as legal support, court accessibility, receptiveness and litigant reactions determine the impact and scope of this approach whereby trust is put in the progressive impact of constitutional litigation on marginalised groups and government prioritisation of essential services for the poor (Gauri & Gloppen, 2012).

### **The connections and distinctions between food security and food rights**

Food security and the right to food both aim to provide access to an adequate and nutritious food supply by addressing availability, accessibility, utilisation, and sustainability (Mechlem, 2004). According to the FAO (1996), Food security occurs when everyone has continuous access to an adequate supply of safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and preferences allowing them to live an active and healthy life. This definition of food security is consistent with the definition of the human right to food. According to the ESCR (1999a), everyone has the right to adequate food when he or she consistently has physical and financial access to enough food or the means to get it regardless of the socioeconomic situation.

However, the right to food and food security are not the same thing. The former is founded on human rights and places legal requirements on the state, whereas food security programmes do not subject governments to the same obligations. Food rights imply that states must respect, protect, and fulfil the right to food, empowering people to claim their freedom from hunger and pursue remedies for violations. It acts as a guiding principle to shape policies aimed at eradicating hunger and malnutrition (Kent, 2005). The rights-based approaches promote that food security policies should be created and carried out in accordance with the PANTHER principles as defined earlier. Moreover, in contrast to food security, which is based on the government's acknowledgement of the population's needs, the right to food or human rights-based approaches refer to the government's recognition of human rights, which has important legal implications. Human rights are non-negotiable, despite the fact that policy

objectives can shift in response to changes in the political environment (HRBA, 2013).

According to Sepulveda et al. (2012), a human rights framework for social protection must include the establishment of an appropriate legal and institutional framework and the adoption of long-term strategies; the adoption of comprehensive, coherent, and coordinated policies that uphold the principles of equality and non-discrimination and incorporate a gender perspective; the promotion of transparency and access to information and the establishment of meaningful and effective paternity leave. Moreover, they contend that social protection programmes can be relevant and effective only if vulnerable and disadvantaged groups are included in the planning and implementation processes. The right to participate is a critical human right because it enables vulnerable and marginalised groups to have their views heard in life-changing decisions (Sepulveda et al., 2012). In order for social protection to have a positive transformative influence, the core causes of vulnerability must be re-envisioned and re-conceptualised. It takes courageous political leadership as well as commitment to universalise social protection services for groups like the elderly and people with disabilities who are not currently covered by formal social security or pension programme in Ethiopia

Vulnerable and marginalised groups are sections of the society who are disadvantaged and need increased access to food, education, housing, health and social care, and support systems. The best way for reducing their vulnerability is to implement a variety of interventions, such as expanding their access to support systems, food, job opportunities, housing, health, education, and training opportunities (Gauri & Gløppen, 2012).

### **The legal foundations for food security and food right in Ethiopia**

It is noted that Ethiopia is a signatory to several human rights treaties that protect the rights of its citizens, more specifically the right to food (Maluwa, 2012; Tura, 2020). Therefore, in order to fully realise this right, the government shall ensure that it is protected from non-state interference and that people's access to productive resources is unconstrained. To this end, the government shall implement the necessary laws, policies, budgetary allocations, judicial actions, promotional initiatives, and other measures (ESCR, 1999a; Biesbroek et al., 2013).

It is important to note that the current constitution, which was adopted in 1995, establishes a normative obligation to safeguard and enhance citizens' fundamental human and democratic rights, including people's rights. In this

aspect, it differs very little from the previous constitutions of 1931, 1955, and 1987 as it stipulates that basic liberties and rights will be interpreted in accordance with international covenants, agreements and treaties Ethiopia has accepted (FDRE Constitution, 1995; Yeshewas, 2019).

Ethiopia also ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) on 11 June 1993. As a result of this, its domestic legal system has the obligation under international law to observe these human rights treaties as the country has already expressed its acceptance by ratifying them all. One of the clear manifestations of such influence is Article 9(4) of the FDRE Constitution of 1995, which states that all international agreements ratified by Ethiopia are an integral part of the law of the land. Furthermore, Article 13 of the same Constitution states the fundamental rights and freedoms shall be interpreted in a manner conforming to the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on human rights and international instruments adopted by Ethiopia.

The right to life is recognised in Article 15 of the 1995 Constitution. The right to life entails the right to a dignified life and all that comes with it, including [at a bare minimum] the right to food, clothes, and shelter (Yeshewas, 2019). The right to personal security (protection against bodily injury) and the right to liberty are recognized in Articles 16 and 17 respectively. A broad and generous interpretation of the phrase security of a person may include safeguarding against any bodily injury including that generated by systemic and systematic malnutrition. The right to liberty can be considered to include the freedom to move around and seek a living without being restricted in any way (Yeshewas, 2019).

The prevailing Constitution on Article 41 states that all Ethiopian residents have the freedom to freely engage in economic activities and pursue their desired livelihood within the country's borders (FDRE Constitution, 1995). The right to a decent quality of living and sustainable development is likewise enshrined in the FDRE Constitution. According to Article 43 of the Constitution "the People of Ethiopia as a whole, and each Nation, Nationality, and People in Ethiopia, in particular, have the right to improved living standards and sustainable development"(FDRE Constitution, 1995).

Here, it is clear that the right to an appropriate standard of living includes the fundamental right to have an adequate amount of food (Husen, 2019). In addition, chapter 10 of the current constitution under Article 90 outlines the state's obligation to provide food and it says "to the extent the country's resources

permit, policies shall aim to provide all Ethiopians access to public health and education, clean water, housing, food and social security" (FDRE Constitution, 1995).

Article 90 of the FDRE Constitution clearly identifies food access as one of the official policy direction principles and mandates that the government create and implement measures to provide social security and food access (Tura, 2020).

Concisely, despite the absence of an official explicit statement of the right to food in its bill of rights chapter, the same constitution recognises the human right to food in four ways. *First*, Article 90 of the constitution emphasises the state's commitment to the human right to food, namely, to provide food to the poor based on the availability of resources at its disposal. *Second*, it implicitly safeguards the right to food through Ethiopia's adherence to international treaties like (ICESCR) that make direct reference to the human right to food via Article 9 (4) and Article 13. *Third*, it also safeguards, among other things, the human right to life (Article 15), which includes the human right to food (Yeshevas, 2019). *Fourth*, Article 43(1) underlines that "the Peoples of Ethiopia as a whole, and each Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia in particular have the right to improved living standards and to sustainable development".

Even though directive principles of state policy obligate the government to design and carry out measures that could improve access to food, they cannot create legal claims since they are not declared under the FDRE Constitution's bill of rights (Tura, 2020). Some of these directive principles include: Providing all Ethiopians access to public health, education, clean water, housing, food, and social security to the extent possible with the country's resources; Ensuring the right to improved living standards; and Enhancing the capacity of citizens for development (FDRE Constitution, 1995).

In general, Ethiopia lacks the necessary legislative and judicial frameworks, as well as clear constitutional provisions, to effectively carry out the right to food on a national level. The country's subordinate legislation lacks explicit provisions that would establish a legally enforceable right to food, and the country's prevailing constitution does not explicitly recognise the right to food as a justiciable human right. Ethiopia hasn't yet enacted a comprehensive food security framework law that would localise the state's commitments under international human rights treaties covering the right to food, unlike nations like Brazil, India, and Kenya. Furthermore, Ethiopia's national courts are often ineffective and do not place a high priority on protecting human rights, especially when it comes to cases involving violations of the right to food (Tura, 2020).

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**The implications of HRBAs' integration with PSNP: A critical analysis**

Ethiopia, a country with significant levels of food insecurity, is one of the most vulnerable in terms of the availability of sufficient and nutritious food. It relies largely on commercial imports and food aid to address its persistent food crises (Gebreselassié, 2015). Food insecurity is a persistent challenge in the country and the government has implemented various national policies, plans and strategies to address the root causes of recurring food insecurity (Mekete, 2019). No country in the world faces the threat of starvation more painfully and regularly than Ethiopia and for many Ethiopians, its association with hunger provokes personal embarrassment and official resentment (Gill, 2010). It is clear that food insecurity has become one of the defining features of poverty in Ethiopia and poverty is widespread in both rural and urban areas (Berhanu, 2012 cited in Rahmato et al., 2013). There are, in fact, frequently cited factors as primary causes of food insecurity, which include the land tenure system, political instability, war and policy failures that contributed significantly to the country's food insecurity. Access to agricultural inputs, finance, and credit are significant variables adversely influencing the realisation of the human right to food in Ethiopia's rural context (Yeshewas, 2019). Despite the fact that there are many factors that contribute to Ethiopia's food insecurity, population pressure, a lack of employment opportunities, and low levels of agricultural technology and productivity account for the majority of the country's continued food insecurity (Adenew, 2004).

To potentially reduce the country's susceptibility to severe hunger and malnutrition, a productive safety net programme (PSNP) was introduced in 2005 and 2016 in rural and urban Ethiopia respectively as a key component of the nation's food security endeavours. The primary objective of this programme was to ensure food consumption and prevent asset depletion among food-insecure households in chronically food insecure Districts or *Woredas* (MoUDH, 2016).

The Ethiopian Productive Safety Net Programme significantly reduced drought impacts by 57% while simultaneously lowering the national poverty rate by 2%. It also played an important role in ensuring stable consumption patterns, protecting assets, improving rural infrastructure, and preserving the environment, highlighting its critical contribution to fostering resilience and sustainable development (Messay et al., 2022; SPEC, 2021).

However, numerous challenges have arisen during the PSNP's implementation including challenges with geographical, administrative, and community targeting; biassed area selection; weakened and insufficient

institutional linkages; limited community engagement in decision-making; nepotism and corruption; high inclusion of non-poor households in the programme; dependency syndrome of beneficiaries; stakeholder disengagement; poor manual implementation; gender bias; premature graduation as well as budget and infrastructure deficiencies, all of which contribute to the programme's shortcomings (Messay et al., 2022; Nigussa & Mberengwa, 2009). These operational problems are being observed because Ethiopia's food security efforts are being carried out through a productive safety net programme in the absence of a full-fledged adoption of human rights-based approaches. As noted earlier, HRBAs have guiding principles that can significantly minimise the potential operational problems in the implementation of PSNP.

In situations where such operational problems are being observed, PANTHER principles like participation, accountability, non-discrimination, transparency, human dignity, empowerment and the rule of law will definitely provide effective solutions. For instance, bias in area selection is a serious challenge that results in an unfair distribution of resources. Furthermore, nepotism and corruption can damage the programme's effectiveness and limit its ability to serve the most vulnerable people. Such violations damage public trust, jeopardise programme integrity, and divert resources away from their intended purpose.

To solve these issues, it is critical that the rule of law be incorporated into the PSNP project implementation manual. This entails developing specific policies and procedures that prioritise transparency, fairness, and accountability. However, simply putting the rule of law into the manual is inadequate. It must be implemented in practice with stringent enforcement and monitoring measures. This includes holding people in charge of programme implementation accountable for their actions and investigating and addressing any deviations from the specified rules as soon as possible. Furthermore, encouraging transparency and active citizen participation can aid in the reduction of prejudices and malpractices. The programme can benefit from varied viewpoints, input, and oversight by incorporating local communities and civil society organisations in decision-making and monitoring processes.

Likewise, the exclusion of the poor, lack of community participation, poor geographical targeting, and insufficient institutional links can be resolved by using fair, transparent, and objective indicators of poverty and vulnerability while selecting the programme beneficiaries. By doing so, the programme can effectively reach people who need help the most by prioritising the needs of the most vulnerable individuals and households.

The lack of community participation, poor geographical targeting, and insufficient institutional links can be addressed by incorporating active community engagement in the implementation process and forming community-based groups or platforms that allow local individuals to participate in programme planning, execution, and assessment. By directly involving communities, their unique expertise, viewpoints, and needs can be taken into account, resulting in more successful and long-lasting initiatives.

The capacity building of the institutions can help address insufficient institutional linkages among stakeholders. Strengthening the capacity of government institutions involved in programme implementation can improve their ability to coordinate and interact effectively with other key stakeholders such as governmental organisations, donors, and the local communities. The programme will maximise its impact and ensure a more holistic and integrated approach to addressing food security and poverty reduction by creating strong institutional links, information sharing, and collaboration. The involvement of World Bank in the PSNP project is to build the capacity of the Ethiopian government in both financial and non-financial terms (MoUDH, 2016). So, almost all the issues observed in the operational implementation of PSNP can significantly be resolved if HRBAs are integrated in the project implementation manual and in practice as well. Moreover, the UN's Statement of Common Understanding on HRBAs encourages the treaty parties to improve their capacities as "duty-bearers" and/or empower citizens to exercise their rights as "rights-holders" (UN, 2003).

Researchers and scholars that looked into the status of the right to food in Ethiopia came to the conclusion that the country has not yet adopted the necessary legislative and judicial actions to successfully operationalize the right to food at the national level (Husen, 2019). Furthermore, Ethiopia depends extensively on policy tools to provide food security, but this does not provide a framework for the communities living in poverty to have legal empowerment. These laws and initiatives usually neither grant rights to people nor place equivalent obligations on the government. In this regard, Yeshewas (2019) identified that the Ethiopian state has failed to fully recognise, respect, protect, and fulfil the human right to food for people living in various socioeconomic circumstances, particularly for those who are food insecure.

Besides, in Ethiopia's human rights framework, the right to food is not clearly and firmly recognized. As a result, Yeshewas (2019) recommended that the state, as the principal duty bearer, take corrective actions, including



mobilising the state's optimal capacity and resources to achieve the people's human right to food to the extent that the state's available resources allow. He further added that courts are hesitant to uphold the right to food in litigation since there is no judicially recognised right to food provision in the FDRE Constitution. The rights to life, land (ownership), and property are all recognised; however, the right to food cannot be asserted. Access to remedies is consequently limited. Due to the lack of a legal framework, individuals who have experienced violations of the right to food are discouraged from seeking judicial redress, resulting in the exceptional situation in which no cases involving such violations have been litigated in Ethiopia (Husen, 2019). Such a legal framework gap necessitates the introduction and implementation of HRBAs with all PANTHER principles into the Ethiopian food security system just to realise the objective of food security (Johnson, 2016).

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of this paper was to examine how Ethiopia's food insecurity is exacerbated by the absence of a full-fledged implementation of human rights-based approaches in the policy design and operational execution of the productive safety net programme.

The results of the thorough review indicated that Ethiopia has ratified important human rights covenants, conventions, and treaties. Consequently, the FDRE Constitution implicitly acknowledges the right to food. However, Ethiopia needs to move towards the enactment of a comprehensive framework law to properly implement the right to food. Due to the inadequate legal and judicial frameworks in Ethiopia, the right to food is not adequately protected at a national level, resulting in discouraged victims seeking justice. As a result, Ethiopia has not yet experienced court cases involving violations of the right to food.

The review underscored the significant distinction between the right to food and food security, stressing that the former imposes a legal obligation on the government and there has been a recent convergence of human rights policies and food security programmes, integrating human rights into the development agenda.

According to the review, Ethiopia's significant reliance on policy instruments to achieve food security has failed to develop a mechanism for empowering the poor through legal methods. These policies and programmes frequently fail to establish rights and associated government obligations. The state, as its primary duty bearer, must take corrective actions, employing its

optimal capacity and resources, to fulfil people's right to food within the constraints of available resources.

To address the difficulties encountered during PSNP implementation such as biased area selection, exclusion of the poor, weakened institutional ties, and limited community participation in decision-making, food security policies, including PSNP, must be designed and implemented in accordance with human rights principles. This approach can effectively assist food security measures while reducing the problems stated above, creating inclusion, and ensuring active community participation in the process.

In conclusion, it is recommended that Human Rights-Based Approaches (HRBAs) be fully integrated into the Ethiopian food security system, since the integration has the potential to effectively address the identified challenges in PSNP implementation.

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