

## **2014 RTAF Watch**

<http://www.fian.org/library/right-to-food-and-nutrition-watch/>

### **Laying the Ground for the Food Framework Law in the Philippines**

By: Aurea G. Miclat-Teves<sup>1</sup>

#### Background

Clear and comprehensive policies that promote the right to adequate food (RtAF) in the Philippines are urgently needed. It is in this backdrop that the National Food Coalition (NFC) was formed. It has issued an urgent call to President Benigno Aquino III and Congress for the immediate adoption of a RtAF framework law.

The NFC established a working group that has drafted a food framework bill. The proposed law adopts a rights-based approach and provides for a comprehensive framework that will harmonize provisions of different laws related to food or RtAF. More specifically, it will clarify the scope and content of the right to adequate food; establish standards for compliance; cite principles that will guide the process of realizing the right; and penalize RtAF violations. The bill is founded upon the principles of participation, accountability, non-discrimination, transparency, human dignity, empowerment and the rule of law – the PANTHER principles.

#### The Right to Adequate Food Framework Bill

There are several salient provisions of the bill. Section 3 defines the RtAF while Section 10 targets achieving Zero Hunger in ten years and increasing the area devoted to food production to 50% of all prime agricultural lands in every region. Section 4 stipulates that the RtAF shall be realized progressively and Section 6 provides for freedom from hunger, whereby every person suffering from hunger or malnutrition, or at risk of suffering from these, would be entitled to a minimum amount of food. There should also be regular, reliable and timely delivery of the minimum amount of food as stipulated in Section 15. All proposed government actions, plans and projects, including any development plan, will take into account the RtAF and will undergo objective impact assessments prior to their adoption and implementation in accordance with Section 11. Section 26 directs the harmonization of existing policies concerning food. The proposed law will create a Commission on the RtAF with an Inter-Agency Council (Sections 13–14). An Integrated Monitoring System in all government agencies at all levels will be established (Section 10). Criminal, civil and administrative penalties will be imposed on violators of the RtAF law (Sections 22–23).

The proper implementation of the proposed Food Framework Law will make a major impact on poverty reduction by directly addressing hunger and extreme poverty in the country.

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<sup>1</sup> Aurea Miclat-Teves is the Convenor of the NFC and president of FIAN-Philippines. She was formerly vice president of FIAN International and now sits as a member of the COMELEC in the International Executive Committee of FIAN International. She also serves as the Executive Director of the Peoples Development Institute.

## The Legislative Process

The RtAF framework bill as drafted by the NFC was filed separately as House Bill No. 3795 at the House of Representatives and as Senate Bill No. 2137 at the Senate - with the strong support of NFC members, particularly representatives of the sectors that suffer most.<sup>4</sup> The House and Senate bills were referred to the House Committee on Human Rights (CHR) and the Senate Committee on Agriculture, respectively.

The first House Committee hearing on the bill was held on 27 May 2014. The seven members of Congress present endorsed the bill. The representatives of government line agencies also indicated support of the bill, but not without expressing some reservations about several sections of the bill; they will submit their position papers to the CHR. As this issue of the Right to Food and Nutrition Watch was being finalized, the next committee hearing was still to be set, and the Senate committee in charge of the bill was yet to schedule a hearing.

The bill still has a long way to go and it's too early to tell when it may be approved by Congress. Under the Philippine legislative system, any proposed law will have to first pass through the relevant committees. If the committee members are satisfied with the contents following debates and discussions, the bill is put out for debate on the floor before it is finally approved or rejected by the House or the Senate. If the House and the Senate versions of the same bill are passed, a conference committee composed of representatives of the Congress and Senators will work on a final version which will then be sent back to the respective chambers for final approval or rejection. If passed, the bill goes to the president for signing into law. The president, however, can still veto the bill.

## Campaigning for the Adoption of the Bill

Learning from the Brazil experience, the NFC has taken crucial steps in creating a nationwide constituency to push for the adoption of a national food policy with the full and active participation of all stakeholders, particularly those who are most vulnerable to hunger. While NFC builds a pro-RtAF mass movement, it is fully aware that there are individuals and/or groups in both the public and the private sector who want to maintain their monopoly over land and other natural resources that are critical to food production, and will therefore at the very least attempt to block or resist the proposed law.

The NFC is preparing the ground for a broad campaign to support the RtAF. It has found “champions” in Congress who will push for the passing of the RtAF bill. There is also ongoing research on RtAF. A broad public information campaign has been launched through press events and a website will be created to promote studies on the RtAF – and encourage public interest and discussions on RtAF. The NFC will form a “speakers bureau” will also attend Congressional hearings, appear in television programs, and participate in press conferences, public forums and debates on the RtAF. The rights holders, particularly farmers, indigenous groups and the urban poor, are at the forefront of the campaign. To empower them, training on the human rights-based approach to food issues and workshops on lobbying methods and negotiations are being

conducted. The research base of the campaign is being established to back the “speakers’ bureau” and the bill’s supporters and “champions” in Congress in order to ramp up information that will allow them to discuss RtAF more authoritatively. Plans for creative activities to spark the interest of legislators and stakeholders (e.g. photo exhibits in Congress, poster-making in schools and communities) and to popularize the RtAF campaign are underway.

Other advocacy measures include establishing strong communication lines with the secretariats of the two Congressional committees handling the bills. Lobby work with members of the House and Senate committees is being strengthened while committee hearings are ongoing. The NFC is networking with supporters from civil society organizations and also identifying allies within local governments.

The NFC and its supporters inside and outside Congress have to ensure that the RtAF bill advances through the legislative mill. Moreover, the NFC must be conscious of the various obstacles that could potentially derail its efforts. Among them are the internal constraints within the Philippine legislature, especially given the tradeoffs made in the inherent bargaining and negotiations system between the Senate and the House, and between the executive and the legislative branches on what bills should be given priority. The NFC must make an effort on multiple fronts to make legislators accept it as a national priority that is also in their interest.