



# CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT ON THE RIGHT TO FOOD IN ESWATINI







## THE RIGHT TO FOOD

The right to food is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Article 11 of the ICESCR upholds the fundamental rights of everyone to be **free from hunger** and calls upon States **"to ensure an equitable distribution of world food supplies in relation to needs"**.

Agenda 2030 on sustainable development aspires to achieve zero hunger by 2030 by meeting various targets, including on ending hunger, ending all forms of malnutrition, and ensuring sustainable food systems, under **Sustainable Development Goal 2**. Advancement on SDG 2 will advance enjoyment of the right to food and vice versa, since Agenda 2030 is firmly grounded in human rights.

**Eswatini's National Constitution (2005)** indirectly recognises **the right to adequate food**. Article 59 provides that:

(1) The state shall take all necessary action to ensure that the national economy is managed in such a manner as to maximize the rate of economic development and secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every person in Swaziland and to provide adequate means of livelihood and sustainable employment and public assistance to the needy.

(2) The state shall, in particular, take all necessary steps to establish a sound and healthy economy whose underlying principles shall include: (e) the recognition that the most secure democracy is the one that assures the basic necessities of life for its people as a fundamental duty.



**2** ZERO HUNGER



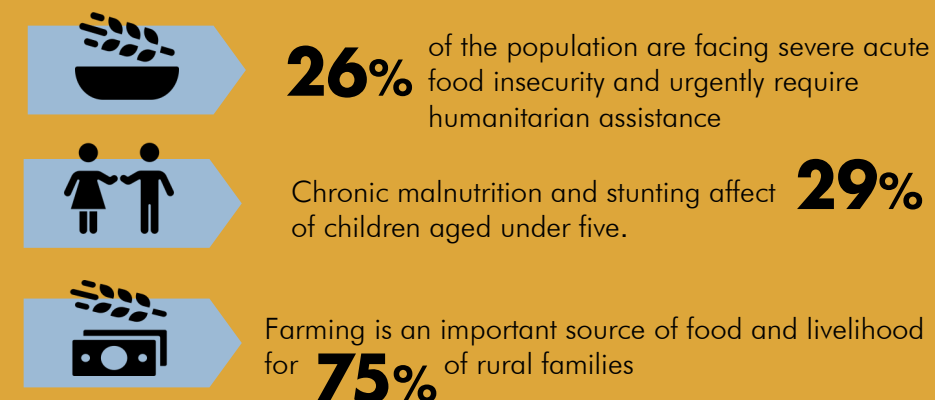
### WHAT IS THE RIGHT TO FOOD?

The right to food is a fundamental human right and is related to people's socio-economic wellbeing and their access to the basic necessities of life. This right means that every person has the right to access sufficient, safe and nutritious food. **Food must be available, accessible and adequate.**



### KEY STATISTICS IN ESWATINI\*

*Eswatini has made progress in economic growth and sustainability since 2010. However, it is estimated that...*



\*World Food Programme 2024

### Glossary of Abbreviations

CE: Citizen Engagement  
NDS: National Development Strategy  
NDP: National Development Plan  
OHCHR: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights  
RDF: Rural Development Fund  
SDG: Sustainable Development Goal  
WB: World Bank  
YERF: Youth Enterprise Revolving Fund







This policy brief discusses the right to food and the challenges Eswatini faces in achieving food security for all its citizens.<sup>1</sup> It examines the impact of climate change and land issues and proposes a number of recommendations to respond to the situation, including greater citizen engagement to ensure inclusion and greater collaboration between government, citizens, civil society and development partners.

The right to food is a critical concern in Eswatini. Currently, the most reliable means to attain food security is to have sufficient income to buy food. According to the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(ICESCR\)](#) the right to food is an inclusive right, meaning it includes the right to an adequate diet providing all the nutritional elements an individual requires to live a healthy and active life and the means to access them. The [General Comment No. 12 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#), underscores the right to adequate food as encompassing the availability, accessibility, and adequacy of food in both quality and quantity. Similarly, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food emphasized that the right to food goes beyond the right not to starve—it includes access to a nutritionally adequate diet necessary for a healthy and active life. In Eswatini, a persistent shortage in satisfying domestic requirements has caused a significant proportion of the population to suffer from under-nutrition and [malnutrition, which has greatly impacted children, with 25% of](#) children under 5 years of age affected by chronic malnutrition and an estimated 60,257 children being stunted.<sup>2</sup>

Eswatini continues to face challenges driven by food insecurity, as well as related economic pressures and the impacts of climate change.<sup>3</sup> A sizeable proportion of the population depends on subsistence farming and Eswatini's maize production declined by 12% between 2022/23 and 2023/24,<sup>4</sup> adding to the challenge of food insecurity in the country. As a result of a prolonged drought since 2016, 29% of Eswatini's population faces food insecurity, ranking it the highest in food vulnerability among Southern African Customs Union (SACU) members.<sup>5</sup> For this reason, [the 2022 Universal Periodic Review \(UPR\)](#) and [the Committee on the Rights to Child \(CRC\)](#) (2021) for Eswatini reinforced the need to prioritize food and nutrition security.

Despite Eswatini's commitments to the right to food including through the 20-year-old National Food Security Policy of 2005 and the recent "Nkwe" program of action, the implementation of food security policies has been hampered by challenges, including **lack of meaningful citizen engagement**. To address these issues, it is important to empower the citizens as rights holders and foster their active and meaningful participation in the design, allocation and monitoring of food security interventions including land allocation within constituencies to ensure the right for [all who reside in Eswatini](#).

## OBJECTIVES OF THIS POLICY BRIEF

### *The key objectives of this policy brief are to:*

- Emphasize the importance of the right to food.
- Outline the challenges that constrain the full realisation of the right to food, particularly for marginalised groups.
- Highlight the importance of citizen engagement in fulfilling the right to food.
- Summarize the legal and policy framework on the right to food in Eswatini.
- Provide recommendations for strengthening the right to food in Eswatini

### *It is hoped that this policy brief will facilitate:*

- Relevant government action in strengthening the policy and legal framework related to the right to food, including climate change and land issues.
- The integration of citizen feedback mechanisms in food security, climate change and land usage programs.
- Increased government support to community-led food security and climate change adaptation initiatives.
- Legal recognition and institutionalization of citizen engagement and participation in the right to food.

<sup>1</sup>In accordance with the World Bank Strategic Framework on Citizen Engagement in World Bank Projects, in this context, the term citizen is not used in a legal sense but is understood in the broad sense, referring to all people in a society or country in an inclusive and non-discriminatory way.

<sup>2</sup>WFP 2024

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC). Eswatini Country Profile. 2024

<sup>5</sup>WFP Country Brief 2024





# ESWATINI'S POLICIES AND FRAMEWORKS RELATING TO THE RIGHT TO FOOD



## **National Development Plan (2023/24-2027/28)**

Building on the National Development Strategy (1997-2022), which emphasized the importance of sustainable agricultural practices within the long-term development goals of Eswatini, the current NDP also includes goals related to enhancing food security and access to nutritious food.



## **"Nkwe!" Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini Policy Statement (2024)**

This policy statement proposes an ambitious pathway for the transformation of the entire economy of the Kingdom of Eswatini and includes specific sections of poverty alleviation, strengthening agriculture and achieving food security.



## **The Poverty Reduction Strategy and Action Plan (PRSAP) (2007)**

PRSAP aims to enhance food security by prioritising poverty reduction in the national development strategy of 1998. It prioritizes agricultural development by improving access to agricultural inputs, promoting sustainable farming practices, and supporting smallholder farmers to increase productivity. The plan also emphasizes investments in infrastructure and skills-building to support agricultural activities and ensure efficient food production, storage, and transportation.



## **Comprehensive Agriculture Sector Policy (2005)**

This policy focuses on transforming agriculture into a sustainable, diversified, and commercial production system. It aims to enhance food and nutrition security, create jobs, and promote economic development. The policy includes strategies for improving agricultural productivity, supporting smallholder farmers, and ensuring sustainable land and water management.

## **The Constitution of Eswatini of 2005**

Indirectly recognizes the right to food by providing for various rights related to welfare and wellbeing.



## **The National Food Security Policy (2005)**

This policy, now 20 years old, outlines Eswatini's strategy for food security for the population.



## **The National Climate Change Policy (2016)**

This policy aims to ensure a sustainable, climate-resilient, inclusive, low-carbon and green growth society by strengthening climate change adaptation and mitigation measures, enhancing climate-resilient investments, raising awareness, and improving coordination and partnerships.



## **Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) of 2017**

This act mandates the government to involve citizens in budgeting processes, which can enhance transparency and accountability in the allocation of resources for food security. The PFMA provides a framework for participatory budgeting, allowing communities to identify and prioritize their specific needs.



## **National Environmental Policy**

This policy emphasizes sustainable land use, climate resilience and environmental protection. With the connection between climate change and agriculture, the policy supports practices that ensure the availability of food.



## **International and regional commitments**

Eswatini is committed to various international and regional agreements related to food security, including the African Union's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), SADC protocol on Food Security, SADC Regional Agricultural Policy (RAP) and the United Nations Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), among other commitments.







# CORE ELEMENTS OF THE RIGHT TO FOOD <sup>6</sup>



*Having committed to implement the right to food, Eswatini is obligated to undertake measures to make the right a reality for the Kingdom's people.*

## 1 Legal entitlement

The right to food requires the Government of Eswatini to provide an enabling environment which citizens can use their full potential to produce adequate food for themselves and their families. However, if they are not able to feed themselves, the state must provide food.

## 2 State obligation

The right to food places the state at three main obligations: the obligation to protect the right to food, the obligation to respect the right to food and the obligation to fulfil the right to food that requires the state to provide access to adequate food.

## 3 Participation and democracy

The creation of food policy must be **participatory** and allow for citizen engagement. The governance of food systems must continue to be democratic and involve the participation of all citizens.

## 4 Progressive realizations

The government of Eswatini is required to gradually, but purposefully, achieve the full realization of the right to food over time (article 2 (1) ICESCR)

## 5 Focus on marginalized groups

This right to food requires the Eswatini Government to focus on **marginalized groups** (the rural and urban poor, indigenous peoples, women, children, persons with disabilities) and put in place special programs to address vulnerabilities and the realization of their right to food.

## 6 National strategy/law

The government of Eswatini should make use of national strategies, policies and legislative frameworks to ensure the right to food.

<sup>6</sup> Food Security Canada, Policy Brief: Legal Obligation and right to food





*There are a range of factors that hinder the enjoyment of the right to food in Eswatini. These include poverty, the impact of climate change and issues relating to land.*

### Poverty and the right to food

Despite the progress made by the country, Eswatini's social indicators are lagging behind those of other lower middle-income countries. The Integrated Labour Force Survey (ILFS, 2023) placed unemployment at 35.4% (up from 33.3% in 2021), the highest rate recorded in over a decade. Over 50% of the population continue to live below the lower-middle-income country poverty line (\$3.56/day) in 2017, the last year in which reliable data is available, resulting in 29% of the population facing acute food insecurity and requiring humanitarian assistance. The household expenditure of food purchase is 21.4% (SHIES 2010). The Voluntary National Review (2022) observes that because of Cyclone Eloise, COVID-19, and the 2021 civil unrest, the poverty situation is expected to have worsened across marginalised groups in situations of vulnerability in Eswatini. While much of Eswatini's produce is grown by smallholder farmers, citizens remain largely unengaged in decision-making processes, programs, and systems that work to increase their access to adequate food. This lack of citizen engagement on the issue of food security governance has become glaring.

### Climate change

Eswatini is highly exposed to climate shocks and is impacted by frequent drought, erratic rainfall, variability in temperature and water scarcity. The country ranks 72nd out of 163 countries in the Children's Climate Risk Index which places Eswatini at low-medium severity. Due to a combination of political, geographical and social factors, Eswatini is recognized as highly vulnerable to climate change impact, ranked 137 out of 181 countries in the 2020 ND-GAIN Index. The country lacks accessible inclusive platforms to allow citizens to engage in climate change. While there are some programs the government implements aiming at mitigating climate change, there is insufficient support for community-driven adaptation strategies.

### Land issues relating to food insecurity

According to the IPC Acute Food Security Analysis (2022), access to arable land in Eswatini is comparatively low, as 60% of the households reported having no access to arable land. Fourteen percent (14%) of households did not harvest and 29% have food stock that will last less than two months. Over 75% of small-holder subsistence farmers in Eswatini rely on rain-fed agriculture for their livelihoods. The over-exploitation of the remaining arable land, deforestation, mining and unsuitable farming practices have contributed to soil erosion and the depletion of soil

fertility. This makes it more difficult for farmers who grow food to feed their families and sustain their livelihoods. While Eswatini's Constitution recognises the rights of all citizens, customary practices, particularly those which inhibit women, often take precedence in land issues. There is lack of community engagement in the increased commercialization of land particularly for large-scale agriculture or mining which has led to the displacement of some small-scale farmers. Many rural communities face the risk of losing their land (usually Swazi Nation Land held in trust) to large projects, undermining their food security and livelihoods.

### Citizen Engagement issues

The country lacks accessible inclusive platforms to allow citizens to engage in climate change. While there are some programs the government implements aiming at mitigating climate change, there is insufficient support for community-driven adaptation strategies.

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agriculture or mining which has led to the displacement of some small farmers. Many rural communities face the risk of losing their land to large projects, undermining their food security and livelihoods.

### Lack of institutional capacity for citizen engagement (CE) on the right to food

In Eswatini, citizens engagement is often conducted through traditional structures like the Sibaya (People's Parliament) and gathering at Imiphakatsi (Chief's Council), where citizens share views and deliberate on socioeconomic matters including the right to food and climate change. Social norms and cultural dynamics inhibit open discussion about the right to food. Many citizens are not aware of their right regarding food security or mechanisms available for advocacy. There is lack of institutional frameworks to support CE, transparency and accountability. This results in the government starting development projects without the involvement of the community members whose livelihoods depend on the project.



<sup>6</sup> Food Security Canada, Policy Brief: Legal Obligation and right to food

<sup>7</sup> OHCHR, The Right to Adequate Food, Fact sheet 34

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> World Bank, 2024

<sup>11</sup> UN World Food Programme

<sup>12</sup> SHIES 2010





## KEY PRIORITY AREAS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND DECISION MAKERS

Key Priority Area	Recommendations
Create greater mechanisms for citizen engagement in achieving the right to food, with a focus on people at risk of being left behind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The review of the Nationally Determined Contributions of the Paris Agreement (due 2025) should be very consultative, including drawing on community members' voices.</li> <li>Transparent use of RDF and other funding channels for community and rural development such as the YERF for food security issues and to ensure access to information and education.</li> <li>Develop a National Adaptation Plan, and four Regional Adaptation Plans, informed by extensive CE</li> <li>Invest in school feeding schemes in the budget and develop sustainability roadmap for this initiative</li> <li>Strengthen mechanisms for involving communities in agriculture, mining, allocation of land for food production, access to agricultural inputs and climate change adaptation strategies.</li> <li>Develop and implement feedback and monitoring mechanisms for food security programs. These mechanisms will hold the government and other actors accountable for the realization of the right to food.</li> </ul>
Invest in inclusive land policies and equitable access to resources and ensuring citizen participation in their development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen legal and policy frameworks for citizen engagement on the right to food</li> <li>Develop and implement comprehensive laws and policies that protect citizen's right to food, which will focus on securing land, especially marginalized groups such as women and persons with disabilities.</li> <li>Implement land reform to ensure equitable access to land including for women, and address known land disputes and unfair compensation of displaced community members due to development projects.</li> <li>On the next revision of the Constitution, recognize the right to food and its links to the right to land</li> <li>Draft and review new laws to include community consultations and participatory policy making to ensure that the policies consider the needs and rights of the citizens.</li> </ul>

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTERS AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

Key Priority Area	Recommendation
Community awareness and access to information on the right to food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide accessible, accurate and relevant information to citizens about their right to food including knowledge on climate change adaptation Empower citizens to demand their right to food and hold the government of Eswatini accountable.</li> </ul>
Community participation in land use decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish local food committees or farmers associations that will engage with the government (Ministry of Agriculture) on land use.</li> <li>Ensure that the right to food policies integrate change adaptation strategies. These strategies should be collaboratively developed with community members.</li> </ul>
Collaboration with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen the support of grassroots movements, local civil society organizations working on food security issues. These organizations will play a role in advocating for policy reform, raising awareness and community mobilization.</li> </ul>
Implementing gender-responsive approaches to food security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address gender inequalities by ensuring that women have equal access to land, agricultural resources and decision making.</li> <li>Organize gender-focused workshops and dialogues to address the unique challenges women face on their right to food and land.</li> <li>Ensure that women have equal access to resources, training, and decision-making in agriculture</li> </ul>
Conducting research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct community-based research on Food Security Solutions (especially traditional) / strengthen citizen participation in agricultural planning.</li> <li>Explore, research and invest in viable drought and climate change resistant food stuffs / cultivars / technologies</li> </ul>
Leveraging on technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leverage technology / media as a tool for civic education (utilize digital platforms and mobile technology to facilitate effective citizen engagement.</li> </ul>
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocate for the institutionalization of food security programs (WFP recently significantly scaled back operations in Eswatini)</li> </ul>





## CONCLUSION

In order to effectively implement the below recommendations, these actions must be guided by the principles of transparency, participation, accountability and the protection, respect and fulfilment of human rights. This further requires the government of Eswatini to promote citizen engagement and collaboration with all stakeholders at various levels of public decision making for any community development projects, paying particular attention to grassroots and marginalised groups in situations of vulnerability will help to realize the right to food and other economic, social and cultural rights. Prioritizing inclusivity and engagement of marginalized communities will ultimately lead to more sustainable development outcomes.

*Prioritizing inclusivity and engagement of marginalized communities will ultimately lead to more sustainable development outcomes.*

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**“We will ensure  
that our agriculture  
systems are adapted to  
climate change while  
fostering resilience and  
ensuring food security  
and sovereignty.”**

*Government of the  
Kingdom of Eswatini  
“Nkwe!” Policy Statement,  
s.24, Sept 2024.*



**SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT GOALS**



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