

CSM Comments on Preliminary Version of the Zero Draft of the Voluntary Guidelines

This document conveys the comments of the Food Systems & Nutrition Working Group of the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) for relations with the CFS on the Preliminary Version of the Zero Draft of the Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition.

Key Comments

- **Human rights framing of guiding principles (Section II)**: It is imperative to strengthen human rights foundation of the Guidelines by including more prominently the human rights framework within the guiding principles. The CSM firmly believes that this is the framework in which the Guidelines should be developed, and which should guide the transition towards sustainable and healthy food systems. Specifically, the CSM proposes to include a reference to the right to adequate food and the indivisibility of human rights (given that the right to food cannot be realized in isolation from related rights) in the objective and principles of the guidelines (see specific suggestions in the document). It is equally essential to make explicit reference to the rights of women and girls, the right to health, the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas as per the recently adopted UN Declaration, the rights of workers. The CSM would also like to emphasise that the main purpose of the guidelines is to address the multiple food systems challenges faced by people - who at the same time are the main agents within food systems. It is therefore key that the Guidelines and the process of elaborating, implementing, and monitoring them is people-centred.

The CSM therefore submits the following proposals with respect to the guiding principles:

- a. Add a new principle such as “Policies and other measures to reshape food systems should be aligned with and contribute to the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of the indivisibility of human rights. Such policies should also respect, protect and fulfil the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas respect, in accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas”;*
 - b. Add a reference to the right to health in the principle currently listed as (c);*
 - c. Add a new principle such as “Recognize the centrality of people, particularly small-scale food producers and women, and their agency in shaping food systems and nutritional outcomes. The primary focus should be on the people most affected by malnutrition in all its forms and overcoming the challenges they face”;*
 - d. Add a new principle on - or integrate within current principles - the realization of workers’ rights to living wages and decent working conditions;*
 - e. Add a principle on - or integrate within current principles - the two-way relation between human and planet’s health, as human health is intrinsically connected to the conditions, resilience and regenerative capacity of our ecosystems and their associated biodiversity;*
 - f. Add a principle to ensure that, in accordance to the ICN2 outcomes, public interest is protected through robust safeguards against conflicts of interest in the elaboration and implementation of public policies to promote the transition of food systems.*
- **Definitions (Section II)**: The Guidelines present a new framework and therefore offer a precious opportunity to establish new definitions and/or review established ones to adapt them to the comprehensive and multidimensional approach that this process requires. Rather than technical and prescriptive definitions, the CSM would like to see political definitions that capture the essence of the concepts referred to in the Guidelines.

In this respect, the CSM proposes to adopt a definition of food systems that recognizes the multiple public objectives served by these systems and the importance food systems have to the pursuit of sustainable development agenda.

Secondly, the CSM proposes the following definition for healthy and sustainable diets:

a. Healthy and sustainable diets are diets that are balanced and varied, and provide the nutrients and relations (cultural, social and environmental) required to live a healthy and active life for both present and future generations. They are composed of fresh and seasonal food respecting the variations of the rhythms of nature, wherever possible, and contain a high proportion of foods that are not or only minimally processed. Healthy and sustainable diets are based on production modes that function in harmony with nature and its species, preserve and promote biodiversity, consciously use limited natural resources, respect peasants' and workers' rights and guarantee their livelihoods, while contributing to overall social justice.

They are diets adjusted to the personal needs of individuals (personal characteristics and circumstances), the local context, and cultural and other preferences. Beyond the combination and nutritional content of food, the way food is prepared and consumed are key determinants for a diet to be healthy. A healthy diet also presumes the safety of food in a sense that such must be free from substances potentially harmful to those who produce and consume it. Breastfeeding is an essential component of a healthy and sustainable diet.

- **Structure of Section III:** While the CSM understands that according to the Terms of Reference the three constituent elements of food systems put forward in the HLPE report “serve as policy entry points for nutrition” and as such should be reflected in the Guidelines, this does not condition that the overall structure of Section III be organised around these three elements. Given the integral and systemic nature of the transition envisioned by the Guidelines, the CSM proposes a structure that is based on the key public objectives that food systems are expected to support:
 - a. Governance;
 - b. Protection and regeneration of nature;
 - c. Health and well-being;
 - d. Modes of production, employment and exchange; and,
 - e. Culture, social relations, and knowledge.

This will allow more clarity on public policy objectives and the key measures required to bring about the transition towards healthy and sustainable food systems in all their dimensions. The three constituent elements could then be used as a second layer within this structure, if appropriate, as each of these proposed five areas could address the three components (or those among the three that are relevant to each specific area);

- **Content of Section III:** Given the above-mentioned comment on the structure of Section III, the CSM does not provide here comments on the actual content in the preliminary version of the Zero Draft. Once the structure is clarified, the CSM however believes that the content of the section should be significantly reduced. Section III should only offer a proposed framework to the regional consultations, while the actual drafting should take place after the consultations are completed. The current lengthy text may induce the false impression of being the actual proposed content of the Guidelines, generating significant confusion during the consultation. Following the reframing of the structure, the text should be re-organized and streamlined into a much simpler outline-style content;

- **Policy Coherence (New Section)**: The systemic and integral character of the food systems transition that CFS participants have agreed upon requires policy coherence and dialogue among different institutions and negotiation processes (beyond the CFS). The transition of food systems is integrally connected to issues related to trade and investments, climate change, biodiversity, genetic resources, and food formulation, among others, with their separate normative intergovernmental processes currently undergoing. It is therefore essential to find a proper modality for the CFS to provide its legitimate input from the viewpoint of its mandate (the progressive realization of the Right to Food) while respecting the legitimate boundaries of these intergovernmental processes. Dialogue between different institutions is indeed a critical pillar of policy coherence and the Guidelines could offer a valuable contribution in this respect.

The CSM therefore proposes to add a separate section on Policy Coherence (new Section IV) devoted to this particular purpose, in full respect of the mandate of the institutions and negotiations to which the CFS input is being directed;

- **Section IV**: The CSM believes that Section IV requires much further development to ensure a robust implementation process. This may include some guiding principles for implementation, as also featured by the VGGT;
- **Responsibilities**: Although the document speaks of multiple stakeholders, it must be made clear that the different actors involved in the process do not have the same responsibilities with regard to the development, implementation, and monitoring of public policies needed for the transition towards healthy, social-just, and sustainable food systems. All actors are important, but within the framework of these Guidelines and that of the Committee on World Food Security, the responsibility of States as guarantors of rights as well as citizens as subjects of rights must be placed in a relevant position and be differentiated from what it means to be a mere "stakeholder";
- **Specific comments on Section I**: The following specific comments apply to Section I of the preliminary version of the Zero Draft:
 - a. Para 2: Add "non communicable diseases" to premature death and disability;
 - b. Para 8: The transition to sustainable and healthy food systems will support the realization of most if not all the SDGs beyond SDG2. This should be referred to at the end of the para;
 - c. Para 10: Remove "more" from the first sentence. The Guidelines should aim to transform rather than to simply improve food systems;
 - d. Para 15: This para requires some broader generalization as it is currently exclusively focused on those actors related to malnutrition, rather than the broader set of actors engaged in all levels of food systems.

- **Regional consultations**: The regional consultations must be inclusive and based on the framework and modalities of the CFS, respecting its different mechanisms and guaranteeing the participation of the groups most affected by food insecurity and malnutrition. It is key that the CSM is involved from the very beginning (preparation of the consultations) and that civil society participation is organised autonomously through and according to the principles of the CSM. The CSM suggests that a clear methodology for the consultations is elaborated as well as guiding questions that can be followed across regions. One specific question should relate to the public policy goals to be achieved by the Guidelines, which can then inform the structure of section III (see point above).