

COMMENTS ON LATEST VERSION OF THE VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES ON FOOD SYSTEMS FOR NUTRITION (VGFSYN) – 11 MAY 2020

HARVEST PLUS

I would like to commend the working group, and authors, on making such amazing strides on this document. The guidelines are now well structured, have much greater clarity and are much more succinct. This truly is a major step forward - I know this is not easy to do - and I believe they will become significant guidance for policymakers.

That said of course I have comments!!! I note that biofortification has again been reduced to just a statement about research - 3.2.3 f. Yet many of these crops are already adopted and being widely grown in some communities. But equally I am well aware of the push back against biofortification for reasons that are hard to understand. The vast majority are conventionally bred varieties that are no different to other adopted improved varieties, including those for drought, disease, or pest tolerance. It is hard to understand why it is acceptable to adopt a more drought tolerant variety but not a more nutritious variety even when the underlying breeding techniques are the same. Additionally all the conventionally bred biofortified varieties are better performing than the best varieties currently grown, ie they have all the agronomic advantages plus nutrition.

I think making all elements of a diet as nutritious as possible is critical, and that includes cereals, legumes, roots and tubers, made stark by the current global Covid 19 pandemic. Most crises, including the current Covid 19 pandemic, disrupt food systems, and associated loss/reduction of livelihoods disrupts people's economic, and possibly physical, access to foods. What crises have in common with respect to food systems is that the staple food component of the system continues to function better than the high nutrient one. This is due to longer shelf lives of most staple foods making them more resilient to supply chain disruptions, and their lower relative costs even in crisis. This is the critical reason why staple foods should also be as nutritious as possible, notwithstanding the gold standard objective of a diversified diet, to protect the more vulnerable in crisis. Even in the USA and Europe animal source food supply chains are under considerable stress from the impacts of Covid 19 resulting in shortages and rationing.

1. include an addition in 3.2.3 a) **national agricultural policies**, ensuring that all elements of the food system are as nutritious as possible.

2. It may be good to reframe the humanitarian introduction to be broader and include things like pandemics to make this current, and for some developing countries this is not new - thinking about Ebola for example. I think most people believe that these pandemics may be more common in the future and indeed have been over the last 100 years.

So maybe to include a sentence in the framing paragraph that states - Most crises undermine the functioning of food systems, including climatic shocks, such as droughts, economic shocks, and health shocks, including epidemics such as Ebola, Covid 19. Whether these crises trigger a food chain supply disruption or a significant decline in livelihoods, or both, all impact the supply and consumption of high nutrient quality foods more than staple foods, such as cereals, due to their shorter shelf lives and relatively higher costs. This indicates the need to make staple food components of a diet as nutritious as possible to better protect the nutritional status of the most vulnerable.

3. Under 3.7.2 locally produced fortified (including conventionally biofortified, RUSF and RUTF)