



Open Ended Working Group on Food Systems and Nutrition
CHAIR'S SUMMARY – CFS OEWG-NUTRITION/2020/04/02

CFS Food Systems and Nutrition OEWG meeting
14 April 2020, 14.00-15.30 – Zoom

CHAIR'S SUMMARY

The meeting was opened by CFS Chair, Mr Thanawat Tiensin, who highlighted the long journey since the launch of HLPE report number twelve in October of 2017, and commended the extensive consultation process which has led to the finalization of a strong draft of the Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems for Nutrition (VGFSyN) in anticipation of negotiations later this year. The CFS Chair warmly thanked the outgoing OEWG Chair, Ms Liliane Ortega, for her excellent work and her leadership throughout the process.

1. Presentation of the revised draft of the Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems for Nutrition by the OEWG Chair

The OEWG Chair underlined that while COVID-19 and the current complex and challenging period makes the task of finalizing the VGFSyN more difficult, it also underscores that the content of the VGFSyN is even more relevant and important. The current crisis shows, once again, the critical need for strong multisectoral and multistakeholder collaboration. In this context, the strong engagement and commitment demonstrated by CFS stakeholders is a promising signal for continued momentum and the successful conclusion of this policy process.

Dr Ortega presented the revised draft of the VGFSyN which incorporates written contributions submitted by CFS stakeholders on Draft One and comments provided during the last OEWG meeting of 29 January. OEWG members were informed of the challenges faced in attempting to accommodate all the inputs included in 66, often divergent, contributions received by the CFS Secretariat.

The OEWG Chair expressed her satisfaction regarding the quality and relevance of the draft document, which represents a good basis for negotiations in order to get a substantial and meaningful instrument, fulfilling the expectation expressed by the CFS members during CFS 45 and 46.

2. Initial reactions from stakeholders

The revised version of the VGFSyN was generally well-received by OEWG members, most of whom highlighted its quality, appreciated its revised structure, and acknowledged that the document provided a very good basis for commencing negotiations. Several comments have been provided on matters to be addressed and improved in different parts of the document during the negotiation. OEWG members also underlined that several controversial issues are still in the document. While some participants pointed out that a few valuable elements of the previous version are now missing, many new elements that have been included in the revised VGFSyN were recognized and supported by OEWG members.

Questions were posed on the “food system” approach taken in the document. In this regard, reference should be made to paragraphs 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 which reference the role of food systems in delivering healthy diets, the factors that impact their functionality, and the types of changes required to promote sustainable food systems, as well as steps to ensure policy coherence and avoid policy fragmentation. The food system perspective is introduced and explained in paragraph 34, which refers to interconnections between the different elements of food systems, as well as to the need to promote holistic and interdisciplinary approaches that consider policy entry points to improve nutrition across these different elements. This should give policy makers a useful tool with which to tackle existing challenges from different policy perspectives, understanding the different actors and sectors involved, and considering potential impacts on and across various sectors.

The importance of the VGFSyN in the context of the upcoming Nutrition for Growth Summit and UN Food System Summit was highlighted. There was a request to ensure that specific terminology, especially that found in Parts 2 and 3, is in line with language used in international agreements.

As one OEWG member asked a specific question on the possible impact of COVID-19 on the VGFSyN, it was answered that more attention could be devoted to the resilience of food systems and to food safety.

Discussions took place on next steps for the policy convergence process. While various stakeholders raised the importance of presenting the VGFSyN for endorsement at CFS 47 in October 2020 as scheduled, a request was made by one constituency to postpone and adjust the timeline considering the difficulties for their members to participate in virtual negotiations. CFS stakeholders were reminded that the timeline of the two ongoing CFS policy convergence process would be debated by the CFS Bureau on 17 April.

The OEWG Chair repeated that a further revision of the current version has not been foreseen; however, CFS stakeholders were given the possibility to submit written statements to the CFS Secretariat by 16 April.

3. Any other business

The CFS Chair and the CFS Secretary, Mr Chris Hegadorn, informed OEWG members of Ms Ortega’s decision to step down from her role as OEWG Chair and thanked her for leadership and commitment since her appointment in October 2018. The Bureau will appoint her successor at the CFS Bureau meeting of 17 April.

Dr Ortega closed the meeting by thanking all CFS stakeholders for their strong engagement and commitment, as well as for the support to her provided throughout the process.