



# COMMITTEE ON WORLD FOOD SECURITY

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**ZERO DRAFT OF THE CFS VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES ON GENDER  
EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT IN THE  
CONTEXT OF FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION**

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## I. PART 1 - INTRODUCTION

### A. 1.1 Background and rationale

1. Advancing gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment is critical to achieving CFS’ vision of ending hunger and ensuring food security and nutrition for all, and for the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security.
2. In order to transform this vision into reality, at its 46th Session in October 2019, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) endorsed a policy process that will result in Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women’s and Girl’s Empowerment in the context of Food Security and Nutrition (referred to as the “Guidelines” in this document).
3. Gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment is essential to achieving all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as ensuring food systems that are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. The importance of gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment for sustainable development was acknowledged by the international community through the adoption of gender equality as a stand-alone goal in the 2030 Agenda (SDG5). Realizing gender equality and empowering women and girls will make a crucial contribution across all of the Agenda’s goals and targets. Thus, systematic mainstreaming of gender equality in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is critically important.
4. Currently, the global food system produces enough food to feed every person on the planet. However, due to a range of diverse challenges, an increasing number of people are failing to realize their right to adequate food and meet their daily food and nutrition needs. In 2020, between 720 and 811 million people in the world faced hunger, up to 161 million more than in 2019 considering the upper bound of the projected range<sup>1</sup>. The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected women and girls in part as a result of gender inequality and discrimination<sup>2</sup>. Malnutrition in all its forms - undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and overweight and obesity - is now the number one factor contributing to the global burden of disease and reduced life expectancy. In this challenging global

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<sup>1</sup> The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI), 2021.

<sup>2</sup> SOFI 2021.

context, addressing gender inequality and ensuring women's and girls' rights is urgent and more important than ever to achieve food security and nutrition for all.

5. A large body of evidence demonstrates the positive links between gender equality and food security and nutrition. Gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment is not only fundamental to the realization of human rights, it is also essential for poverty reduction, economic growth, sustainable natural resource management, mitigating and adapting to climate change, protecting ecosystems and conserving biodiversity. Empowering women is one of the most effective ways to improve nutrition outcomes not only of women but of all family members, lowering infant mortality and reducing child malnutrition, thereby helping to break intergenerational cycles of malnutrition, with special attention to the nutritional needs of pregnant and breastfeeding women. Measures are also required to improve women's maternal health while recognizing women's sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.<sup>3</sup> Investing in women and girls and promoting gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment are not only the right things to do to achieve food security and nutrition, they are the smart things to do.

6. Discrimination against women and girls<sup>4</sup>, pervasive gender inequality and exposure to violence result in unequal access to food, with higher prevalence of food insecurity and malnutrition among women and girls. Rural girls face the triple disadvantage of location, gender and age. The gender gap in accessing food increased from 2018 to 2019<sup>5</sup> and is expected to widen as the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures to contain it are having a negative and gender-differentiated impact on food security and nutrition.<sup>6</sup>

7. Achievement of gender equality is positively correlated with increased production and improved efficiency in many sectors, including in agriculture, whereas inequality and discrimination in access to, and control over, resources continue to undermine economic performance, leading to below-potential economic outcomes. Women play active roles as agents in food systems as farmers, producers, processors, traders, wage-workers and entrepreneurs throughout the value chains. Giving women the same access as men to agricultural resources would raise total agricultural output by 2.5–4 percent, and potentially reduce the number of hungry people by 12–17 percent.<sup>7</sup> Providing adequate support to women in food systems is critical for the planet to feed nine billion people in 2050 and produce 50 percent more food.<sup>8</sup>

8. Despite positive progress made over decades, gender inequality persists as women and girls continue to face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination in many areas. This manifests itself

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<sup>3</sup> GA Resolution 70/1-2015. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, 1994. Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, 1995. CSW 62 and 63 Agreed Conclusions.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, 1979. 'Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women' (CEDAW), Article 1 - Discrimination against women is defined as: "*Any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.*" Discrimination can stem from both law (de jure) or from practice (de facto). The CEDAW Convention recognizes and addresses both forms of discrimination, whether contained in laws, policies, procedures or practice.

<sup>5</sup> SOFI, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> [FAO Policy Brief on Gendered Impacts of COVID-19 and equitable policy responses in agriculture, food security and nutrition](#), FAO, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11. WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE - Closing the gender gap for development.

<sup>8</sup> The future of food and agriculture – Trends and challenges, FAO 2017.

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in unequal access to, and control over, key productive resources, assets, technologies, services, economic opportunities, and participation in decision-making processes at household, community and national levels, as well as unbalanced and unrecognized responsibilities in terms of unpaid care and domestic work - all negatively impacting various dimensions of food security: availability, access, utilization and stability.

9. Gender inequality disproportionately impacts women and girls, who continue to have lower social status and economic and political power in many parts of the world. However, discriminatory barriers and limiting societal gender norms and expectations prevent everyone from fulfilling their full potential. Thus, changing gender roles and relations towards equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities will benefit the whole society. It is crucial that all actors, including men and boys, take joint responsibility and have an active role in this process.

## **B. 1.2 Objectives of the guidelines**

10. The objective of the Guidelines is to support Member States, development partners and other stakeholders to advance gender equality, women's and girls' rights, and women's and girls' empowerment, as part of their efforts to eradicate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition, towards the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security.

11. The Guidelines will provide concrete policy guidance based on good practices and lessons learnt on gender mainstreaming<sup>9</sup>, gender transformative interventions and innovative solutions. They aim to contribute towards a gender-responsive approach, improving legal and policy frameworks, institutional arrangements, national plans and programmes, and promoting innovative partnerships and increased investments in human and financial resources that are conducive to promoting gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment.

12. The Guidelines aim to foster greater policy coherence among gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment and food security and nutrition agendas, and promote mutually reinforcing policy measures. Generating and disseminating evidence on the diverse situations and experiences of women and girls, men and boys and recognizing their differentiated opportunities, constraints and outcomes in the context of food security and nutrition helps to transform societal norms, raise awareness and supports appropriate responses including targeted development of policies and programs.

13. The Guidelines will contribute to accelerating action by all stakeholders at all levels, including farmers' and women's organizations, to achieve the vision of CFS and the goals of the 2030 Agenda, as part of the United Nations Decade of Action for Sustainable Development (2020-2030). Given the important roles that women and girls play in agriculture<sup>10</sup> and food systems, family farming as well as in household food security and nutrition, the Guidelines will also contribute to the implementation of the Action Plans of the UN Decades of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025), on Water for Sustainable Development (2018-2028), on Family Farming (2019-2028), and Ecosystems Restoration (2021-2030) and benefit from the 2021 Food System Summit.

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<sup>9</sup> Gender mainstreaming is, as defined in the ECOSOC agreed conclusions 1997/2 - Mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system, "the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in all areas and at all levels. It is a way to make women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality".

<sup>10</sup> Agriculture includes crops, forestry, fisheries, livestock and aquaculture. UNGA Resolution A/RES/74/242. Paragraph 20.

### C. 1.3 Nature of the voluntary guidelines and their intended users

14. The Guidelines are voluntary and non-binding and should be interpreted and applied consistently with existing obligations under national and international law, and with due regard to voluntary commitments under applicable regional and international instruments. These Guidelines are intended to be interpreted and applied in accordance with national legal systems and their institutions.

15. The Voluntary Guidelines are complementary to and support national, regional and international initiatives, which aim at addressing all forms of discrimination against women and girls that negatively impact upon food security and nutrition. In particular, CFS guidance should build upon and integrate existing instruments adopted on this topic within the context of the UN system.

16. The Guidelines are intended for all stakeholders that are involved in addressing food security and nutrition, gender equality and women's empowerment. They primarily address governments at all levels to help design and implement public policies, as their primary objective is to provide concrete instruments to build policy coherence between and across public sector policies at national, regional and global levels. They are also of value to other actors involved in policy discussions and policy implementation processes. These actors include:

- a) Governments;
- b) Intergovernmental and regional organizations, including UN agencies and bodies;
- c) Civil society, including women's, farmers' and small-scale food producers' organizations, trade unions of domestic, rural and agricultural workers, and indigenous peoples;
- d) Private sector, including small and medium-sized enterprises (SME);
- e) Research organizations and universities;
- f) Development agencies, including international financial institutions; and
- g) Philanthropic foundations.

## II. PART 2 – CORE PRINCIPLES THAT UNDERPIN THE GUIDELINES

17. The Guidelines are intended to build upon and complement the work and mandate of other international bodies, and related guidance contained in other policy products developed by CFS as well as other institutions, including:

- [Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development](#) (2015);
- ECOSOC – AC 1997/2 - [Mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system](#);
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights – adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948 and human rights treaties which are binding for the respective State Parties;
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights;
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), including the [General Recommendation 34](#);
- Security Council Resolution 1325;
- International Conference on Population and Development, 1994;
- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995;
- [Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of the national food security](#) (2004);
- All other endorsed CFS policy recommendations, Frameworks for action and voluntary guidelines.

18. The Guidelines are based on the following core principles:

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19. **Commitment to Human Rights and Realization of the Right to Adequate Food.**

Achieving gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment is fundamental to the realization of human rights, including the right to adequate food. The Guidelines promote the right to adequate food in line with CFS vision of ending hunger and ensuring food security and nutrition for all, through accessible and affordable diets, and for the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security.

20. **Empowerment of women and girls.** The Guidelines rest integrally on strengthening women's and girls' empowerment, recognizing them as right holders and agents of change. They build on the positive relationship between women's and girls' empowerment and achieving food security and nutrition. They recommend actions to ensure women's and girls' self-determination and autonomy and for them to gain voice and agency, taking active and meaningful part in decision-making to control their own lives and to strengthen strategic choices affecting their lives and livelihoods.

21. **Gender transformative approaches.** The Guidelines promote the application of gender transformative approaches that tackle both the symptoms and the structural causes of gender inequality and identify unique opportunities for change in gender norms and power relations for sustainable improvement in welfare for all. This requires engaging **men and boys** to strengthen their joint responsibility for successful transformation of unequal power relations and discriminatory social systems, institutions and structures.

22. **Strengthening policy coherence.** The Guidelines promote policy coherence between gender equality policy and institutionalized multi-sectoral policies related to sustainable food systems, food security and nutrition. This will help to enhance synergies, avoid duplication, mitigate risks and prevent unintended or contradictory effects from one policy area to another, including on gender equality and food security and nutrition.

23. **Context-specific gender analysis and approaches.** The Guidelines promote inclusive and participatory context-specific gender analysis and actions that take into account the national, regional and local context and its impact on gender relations, roles and norms.

24. **Gender mainstreaming combined with targeted actions.** Alongside the transformative approach, the Guidelines support mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and interventions while recognizing that achieving gender equality requires complementing gender mainstreaming with targeted interventions that focus specifically on women and girls.

25. **Reinforcing the collection and use of gender-disaggregated data.** The Guidelines promote regular collection and use of sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive statistics and indicators. Quantitative data will be complemented by qualitative data derived from women's and men's traditional, indigenous and local knowledge on more context-specific information including on attitudes and norms on which quantitative data is hard to collect but is indispensable for correct interpretation. Sound evidence enables informed decision-making and the development of evidence-based M&E systems and effective responses and policies

26. **Inclusiveness and participation in policy-making.** The Guidelines promote policies that are people-centered and based on participatory approach. Enabling and promoting the participation of women in marginal and vulnerable situations, including indigenous women, is not only critical to ensure that policy goals respond to their priorities, but also offers a strategic means for overcoming social exclusion.

27. **Intersectionality and multidimensional approach.** The Guidelines recognize that women and girls often experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination due, for instance, to age, race, ethnicity, social class, religion, gender, indigenous and migration status, and disabilities, affecting their food security and nutrition outcomes. The Guidelines promote a multidimensional approach that addresses these interrelated and mutually reinforcing deprivations.

28. **Multi-stakeholder collaboration and partnership.** The Guidelines recognize the importance of promoting effective multi-stakeholder collaboration and partnerships in food systems. Particularly vital is the role of the civil society, e.g. farmers', water users' and women's organizations, and the potential of their actions in promoting gender equality and women's and girls' collective empowerment. Another important set of actors in the food system recognized by the Guidelines come from the private sector. The Guidelines aim to provide support for their gender approaches and to demonstrate how public-private partnering can bring about positive change on food security and nutrition through accessible and affordable healthy diets in sustainable food systems.

29. **Adequate financial, technical and human resources, supported by political commitment and public policies** that promote an enabling environment to generate social, economic and cultural changes with specific gender-responsive policies, programmes and institutions. Changes should include adaptation of public services to support women, gender budgeting and advocacy campaigns to deal with the various forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, particularly in rural areas. The Guidelines raise attention to the fact that ensuring sufficient gender-responsive resources is a pre-requisite for making progress on gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment.

### **III. PART 3 – THE VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES ON GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION**

30. The following text in Part 3 is intended to frame the discussions in the regional and electronic consultations in September-November 2021 and inform the preparation of the upcoming versions of the document. The language of this section does not represent suggested text for the Voluntary Guidelines but initial ideas regarding the issues and topics to be considered and discussed by CFS stakeholders.

31. Part 3 of the Zero Draft is organized in accordance with the [Terms of Reference of the Guidelines](#), approved by CFS Plenary in February 2021, along each of the themes identified in the Scope of the Guidelines (Section C). Each section presents a problem statement, a narrative and the related policy areas for discussion.

#### **A. 3.1 Women's participation, voice and leadership in policy- and decision-making at all levels**

32. **Problem statement:** *Women are insufficiently represented in decision-making processes for food security and nutrition at all levels. This contributes to the design and implementation of policies which fail to recognize their key roles in food security and nutrition, and to deliver the realization of their rights and the promotion of their interests, needs and priorities. Promoting women's effective participation and leadership and supporting them as agents of change are vital to advancing food security and nutrition for themselves, their household and society.*

33. Women's voice and active participation in decision-making enable them to influence policies, strategies and investment plans, so that they are more responsive to their needs, take into account their specific knowledge and expertise, address their constraints and allocate funding taking into account their priorities,.

34. Evidence also indicates that women's decision-making power on household spending patterns is associated with healthier diets and better child nutrition outcomes<sup>11</sup>. When women have control over the family income, it is more likely to be spent on food and well-being for their children.

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<sup>11</sup>[Is women's empowerment a pathway to improving child nutrition outcomes in a nutrition-sensitive agriculture program?](#), IFPRI, 2019.

35. Globally, the participation of women in high-level decision-making bodies on food security and nutrition in public and private sectors has increased, but remains low in many countries. Also at the household level, several key decisions related to food security and nutrition - e.g. division of labour and distribution of work, access to and control over productive and financial resources, household spending patterns on food, health services and education, engagement in income-generating activities and participation in producer and community associations - are affected by unequal power relations, gender roles and social norms, and discriminatory practices. Rural women in particular face many obstacles, due to heavy workload and persistence of traditional views about women's and men's roles in society.

36. Violence against women is one of the most serious barriers to women's leadership and full participation in public life. Together with other factors, such as discrimination, limited access to education and heavy workload including unpaid care and domestic work, it prevents women from unfolding their full potential and participation in society, in line with national legislation and universally agreed human rights instruments. Sexual and gender-based violence persist in all countries.

37. **Policy areas for discussion:**

- i. *Full engagement and participation of women and their organizations in all dimensions of policy design for food security and nutrition, including agroecological, and innovative approaches, supporting women's leadership through training and capacity building.*
- ii. *Strengthening of women's organizations and women's collective action. The importance of self-association and the role of social movements to promote gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment in decision-making at all levels is recognized.*
- iii. *Application of positive discrimination measures, such as gender quotas to ensure women's representation in leadership positions in the public and private sectors, access to education and participation in community organizations.*
- iv. *Changing discriminatory social norms and addressing sexual and gender-based violence.*

## **B. 3.2 Elimination of violence and discrimination against women for improved food security and nutrition**

38. **Problem statement:** *Discrimination and violence against women and girls and lack of safety and security for them represent a significant barrier to their human development, shaping women's lives and opportunities, at great cost to food security and nutrition for themselves, and their families, communities and societies, and economic development. Sexual and gender-based violence is an extreme manifestation of gender inequality and fundamental human rights violation. Women living in contexts of conflict or disaster are at heightened risk of violence<sup>12</sup>.*

39. Every human being has the right to live a life free from all forms of violence. However, in reality, multiple forms of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls persist in every country, constituting one of the most widespread and under-reported forms of human rights violations.

40. Sexual and gender-based violence is a universal problem, as 35 percent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime<sup>13</sup>. Women and girls with disabilities, indigenous peoples and persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, forcibly displaced, migrant women and girls,

<sup>12</sup> [How can we protect men, women and children from gender-based violence? Addressing GBV in the food security and agriculture sector, FAO, 2018.](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Gender-Based Violence \(Violence Against Women and Girls\), World Bank, 2019.](#)



economically and socially deprived women, and human rights defenders are at heightened risk of violence.

41. Sexual and gender-based violence severely undermines women's physical, emotional and mental health, dignity and well-being, sometimes leading to women's death. Yet, it often remains shrouded in a culture of silence. It affects primarily women and girls in their productive and reproductive years, compromising their capacity to take advantage of opportunities to further contribute to food security and nutrition, as earners and caregivers, due to illness, injury and stigma.

42. Sexual and gender-based violence reinforces the vicious cycle of poverty and food insecurity. Rooted in harmful social norms and stereotypes across cultures and social classes, it affects all communities at tremendous cost for victims, their families, societies and economies.

43. Humanitarian crises, including those resulting from climate change, conflicts, disasters and pandemics often exacerbate the underlying gender inequality, vulnerabilities and the risks of many forms of sexual and gender-based violence. For example, the social and economic stress brought on by COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in increased domestic violence. Therefore, attention should be paid to preventing and addressing violence from the very onset of crises, with centered approaches on survivors of violence, and special attention to the most disadvantaged women, suffering from multiple forms of discrimination.

44. Rural women often face violence in carrying out their daily responsibilities, such as collecting water and fuelwood. Their shortages often force women to travel ever longer distances, putting them at higher risk of violence. Food insecurity itself can exacerbate tensions within the household, leading to domestic violence.

45. Women, out of necessity, especially in crisis contexts, may have to adopt negative coping strategies in order to survive, engaging in transactional sex for money to buy food or pay school fees, exposing them to more violence and increased susceptibility to HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases as well as unintended pregnancies.

46. In order to combat sexual and gender-based violence, strengthened efforts are required to fully implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)<sup>14</sup> as an essential instrument to ensure gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment and respect for human rights.

47. **Policy areas for discussion:**

- i. ***Prevention and support to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls including harmful practices, in the context of food security and nutrition, with the engagement of men and boys for a world without sexual and gender-based violence.***
- ii. ***Laws and public policies and their enforcement, with adequate institutional capacities to implement behavior change interventions and eliminate sexual and gender-based violence with men's and boys' involvement.***
- iii. ***In crisis contexts, measures to ensure the security and safety of women and girls from the onset, promoting their protection, dignity and integrity, with special attention to women and girls at heightened risk of violence.***
- iv. ***Changes in social norms and stereotypes that generate and perpetuate sexual and gender-based violence, promoting positive masculinities and elimination of harmful practices.***

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<sup>14</sup> CEDAW, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>.

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### C. 3.3 Access to education, capacity building, training, knowledge and information services

48. **Problem statement:** *Women's and girls' education correlates positively with reducing child malnutrition and improving family diets. Despite the significant progress in access to education made over the past 20 years, girls still remain more likely to stay out of school than boys or drop out early. Women account for two thirds of the 750 million illiterate adults while literacy can be powerful tool for fighting hunger. Lack of education and training limit female producers' opportunities to adopt improved farming methods and practices.*

#### 3.3.1 Access to formal education

49. Women's and Girls' education is a strategic development priority. Yet, persistent inequality in education continue to affect the lives of millions of women and girls worldwide. The primary enrolment rate of girls over the past 25 years has increased ten percentage points from 78% to 88%, less than half a point per year<sup>15</sup>. At this rate, getting every girl into primary school will not happen until 2050.

50. Women with more years of schooling tend to be more informed about nutrition and adopt healthier dietary practices for themselves and their families. They are more likely to participate in the formal labour market and earn higher incomes<sup>16</sup>. Every additional year of primary school increases girls' eventual wages by 10-20%. All these factors combined can help lift households, communities, and countries out of poverty, hunger and malnutrition.

51. Girls' education is associated with future economic and social prospects. However, while significant progress has been made in reducing the gender gap in education, large differences remain between rural and urban areas, leaving rural girls in most disadvantaged position. Obstacles often include poverty, child and early marriage and pregnancy, inadequate school infrastructure, unsafe environment, discriminatory laws and policies, social norms, gender-based stereotypes and violence. COVID-19 pandemic is also having a very negative impact on girls' education.

52. Low literacy and schooling levels restrict women's ability to access information and knowledge, limit the possibility to participate in decision making and fully benefit from the services supporting production. Evidence indicates that literacy correlates with greater understanding of nutrition, breastfeeding, better farming practices and improved crop production methods, including increased likelihood of using improved crop varieties and fertilizers. Literate farmers also have greater negotiating capacity to deal with actors in the agriculture value chains.

53. The often lower percentage of women in higher agricultural education translates into a limited pool of available women extensionists, agricultural technicians, researchers, planners and policy makers. Agricultural researchers are critical to improving farm productivity for all farmers, and gender balance among them is key to ensuring that both women and men's farming challenges are recognized. Yet, in many countries, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, female agricultural researchers are scarce, often less than a quarter. Female graduates from post-secondary and tertiary education would be instrumental in bringing women's reality and knowledge to institutions across the food systems,

54. **Policy areas for discussion:**

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<sup>15</sup> [Gender gap in primary school enrolment halved over past 25 years](#), UNESCO, 2020

<sup>16</sup> [Missed Opportunities: the High Cost of not Educating Girls](#). Children's Investment Fund, Global Partnership for Education, The Malala Fund, World Bank, 2018.

- i. **Addressing social norms** that perpetuate gender inequality in education, capacity building, training, knowledge access and generation, and information, including with the support of media promoting images and programmes which challenge and expand gender social norms.
- ii. **Gender-transformative education systems** to promote gender equality and deliver more equitable education results for girls and boys through safe and healthy learning environments.
- iii. **Elimination of barriers and prioritization of efforts to support girls to go through secondary school and beyond**, addressing the constraints they face to enter and stay in school, and enroll in **higher education and vocational education and training in agriculture**.
- iv. **Female literacy programmes by governments, development partners and civil society** that integrate women's literacy classes into agriculture and nutrition programmes.

### 3.3.2 Access to advisory and extension services

55. **Problem statement:** *Women have less access to rural advisory and extension services, and those they can access are often not well adapted to their needs and realities reducing their productivity and associated incomes.*

56. Women often lack access to agricultural advisory services. Capacity building, training, knowledge and access to information are crucial tools for female producers, workers, entrepreneurs, traders and worker to make informed choices. Female farmers, in particular small-scale food producers, receive little direct agricultural extension provision<sup>17</sup>. Women may not have sufficient and timely access to climate information and climate services. It is often assumed that they will access information through their husbands. Women also often have limited access to market information, affecting their ability to make informed trading choices, realizing their potential as producers, entrepreneurs and traders.

57. Agricultural extension services and research are critical to support farmer education, improve the dissemination of agricultural information and increase productivity through research and evidence, in particular of small-scale food producers. Gender balance among the practitioners is key to ensuring that both women and men have access to information and that their farming challenges are recognized and addressed.

58. **Policy areas for discussion:**

- i. **Gender-responsive and transformative rural advisory services, training and research** that consider women's specific needs and constraints.

### 3.3.3 Access to financial services and social capital

59. **Problem statement:** *Women's limited access to financial services and social networks results in lower returns on their productive resources and limits their ability to invest in their farms, add value to their postproduction activities and recover from climate shocks.*

60. Lack of financial capital is a significant constraint to women's entrepreneurial activities and rewardable engagement all along the food system and value chains, from investment in land to agri-food businesses. Constrains to women's access to financial services such as credit and insurance include policy, legal barriers and cultural norms that prevent women from developing and growing their enterprises and productivity.

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<sup>17</sup> [The Gender and Rural Advisory Services Assessment Tool](#), FAO, 2018.

61. Women often have limited knowledge of, and access to, financial services<sup>18</sup>, constraining their use of natural and productive resources. When they do have access, they face more restrictive collateral requirements, shorter maturity of loans, and higher interest rates than men. Even when requirements are the same, they are often unable to fulfill them. Women need improved access to markets, facilitated by financial services that are tailored to their specific needs and circumstances, to improve productivity and translate it into improved incomes and livelihoods, which in turn support food security and nutrition and wellbeing of their families, especially children.

62. Lack of financial inclusion for women also limits their ability to access financing for climate-related disaster risk management and recovery including agricultural insurance. This in spite of the fact that women and girls are often more exposed to climate-related agricultural risks, which are amplified due to climate change, and their assets are more likely to be sold first to cope with shocks.

63. A key aspect of women's access to physical and other necessary complementary resources and services are determined by their inclusion in networks and their social capital. Producer groups, agricultural extension agents, and transportation are often more available to men because they are better connected to those who control them and have fewer security concerns using them than women. For example, men may obtain lifts to local towns on trucks picking up commercial agricultural produce, which is unavailable to women. Agricultural extension agents, who often facilitate access to markets and services, are often male and less likely to make these connections for women farmers.

64. Developing networks for women and women's organizations, such as cooperative models, can contribute to real change towards financial autonomy of women, by facilitating low-income rural women coming together, fostering empowerment and offering opportunities for employment, enhanced livelihoods, knowledge exchange, and access to productive resources and services. While these networks often begin informally, experience has shown, that they can grow into organized structures that enable effective bargaining with suppliers and retailers to get better services, generating profits for their farm and rural enterprises<sup>19</sup>.

65. **Policy areas for discussion:**

- i. *Specific financial programs for rural female entrepreneurs, with more flexible collateral requirements, alternative data to assess credit risk, and customized disbursement schedules that fit women's crop and cash flow needs.*
- ii. *Women's participation in social and economic networks, including cooperatives, with recognition and support to local traditional financial systems familiar to women, and attention to effective participation and leadership of women when in mixed networks.*
- iii. *Addressing legal barriers, gender norms and gender biases for women's financial inclusion.*

### 3.3.4 Access to appropriate ICT-based, digital and innovative technologies

66. **Problem statement:** *Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and the digital revolution can accelerate progress on gender equality and women's empowerment in many areas, such as education, employment and entrepreneurship, and preventing and combating gender-based violence. However, these technologies are not gender neutral, but mirror the societies that they are transforming. Applying a gender lens is crucial to reap the transformational potential and guard against potential risks that technologies can offer women and girls. Efforts have to be made to overcome gender-related digital divide and ensure data privacy in the use of ICT.*

<sup>18</sup> [Gender and financial inclusion](#), ILO, 2018; [Financial inclusion](#), World Bank, 2018.

<sup>19</sup> [Guideline advancing gender equality the co-operative way](#), ILO, 2015.

67. ICT and digital technologies and solutions can benefit women<sup>20</sup> in many ways. Through online information resources, women can gain access to credit, capacity building and new economic and employment opportunities. ICT can help women in rural and remote communities to achieve access to new markets and consumers, to sell their produce. ICTs can also facilitate cash transfers and mediate secure transactions, including the receipt of remittances and purchase of inputs.

68. Through digital messaging, women can receive crucial information that they would not access otherwise, for example with respect to health care or agriculture, including pricing of the produce, inputs and early warning messages related to weather conditions. However, the knowledge gained through use of ICT cannot replace agriculture advisory services. With the plethora of Internet of Things (IOTs) applications, women can monitor and regulate various management actions (e.g. mobile activated irrigation), which can save time and reduce exposure to harassment.

69. Digital technologies and solutions can help women to cope with emergencies, as demonstrated in the COVID-19 pandemic, mitigating the social and economic consequences. They can also contribute to increase women's safety and security, and help women protect themselves and their families, through sharing information about disasters

70. Digital technologies can also exacerbate existing gender inequality in the food systems, if gender aspects are not given sufficient attention. Consideration should be given to the digital divide that affects people's abilities to participate and grasp the opportunities of the digital age.

71. Access to ICT varies significantly across regions and between women and men. Women located in rural or remote areas experience a triple (digital, gender and rural) discrimination, facing significant barriers in access and use of digital technologies, due to unaffordability, low digital literacy and social norms. Currently, women in low- and middle-income countries are 10 per cent less likely than men to own a mobile and 23% less likely to access mobile internet, due to a variety of factors, including education, literacy level, skills, unequal power relationships in marketing networks, and availability of time and resources. The gender gap in access to ICT needs to be urgently addressed if the benefits of ICT to gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment are to be achieved.

72. Moreover, digitalization also brings new risks and challenges, for instance, new forms of sexual and gender-based violence. It is important to address the structural barriers that underpin the digital gender divide and support an inclusive and fair digital transformation, bringing benefits to all, while protecting human rights, both online and offline, and ensuring a safe and secure cyber space, and data protection.

73. **Policy areas for discussion:**

- i. *Access of girls and women to affordable, accessible, safe and secure digital connectivity, reaching out to rural and remote areas, with the aim of closing the digital gender gap.*
- ii. *Digital literacy for women and girls in education, addressing the gender norms and stereotypes that steer women and girls away from technology;*
- iii. *Design of agri-tech platforms and tools with equal participation of men and women as co-designers to address and recognize women's and girls' needs, preferences, opportunities and constraints.*
- iv. *Digital contents and messages targeted to both men and women, and relevant to their needs and realities.*

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<sup>20</sup> [Gender and ICTs. Mainstreaming Gender in the use of Information and Communication Technologies \(ICTs\) for Agriculture and Rural Development](#). FAO, 2018.

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#### D. 3.4 Women's economic empowerment in the context of sustainable food systems

74. **Problem statement:** *Women play active roles across food systems. However, legal inequality together with discriminatory institutional frameworks, social norms, and cultural practices result in women earning lower returns on natural and productive resources, and on their labour throughout the food systems and value chains. This affects negatively women's productive and entrepreneurial potential and the overall performance of the production chains and household food security and nutrition.*

75. Women are actively engaged across food systems. However, gender inequality in food systems reduces women's and girls' ability to reach their full potential. It limits women's access to resources, affecting productivity and women's ability to manage risks; women's participation and voice in farmer groups, reducing the adoption of climate mitigating and resilient agricultural practices; women's access to, as well as time and energy for, remunerated activities, constraining their contribution to their family's income; and mobility and educational attainment, to mention a few. Gender inequality and the limitations it generates has a negative impact on efforts to improve the sustainability of food systems and food security and nutrition, through accessible and affordable healthy diets.

76. Promoting gender-equitable and sustainable food systems and value chains requires an accurate understanding of existing gender relations and the way they condition men's and women's roles, responsibilities, bargaining power, distribution of resources, labour allocation, decision-making. It also requires an understanding of the benefits men and women derive from agriculture and food production, including income, combined with effective programme design to address the challenges women face for economic empowerment. Improving interventions requires applying a gender analysis with quality data and information throughout the value chains, in a specific legal, social, environmental and cultural context, focusing on production, processing, storage, transportation, distribution processes and retail from a gender perspective.

77. The analysis will assure the identification of the constraints that limit women's entry and full participation in more profitable nodes of the value chain, including to participate in producer organizations and cooperatives, which influences their ability to engage as business partners and access lucrative markets. Needs and priorities of women from different socio-economic backgrounds (e.g. age, ethnicity, disability, economic status) should be taken into account, with a special attention to rural women, who are less likely than men to benefit from investments in agriculture and food value chains. This is because they often occupy low wage positions in the food systems and their own enterprises are often small-scale and in low profit sectors<sup>21</sup>.

78. Production from crops managed by women is often retained for household consumption, offering marginal income opportunities. Moreover, as agricultural produce moves from farm to informal market, evidence indicates that women often lose control and opportunities for income generation along value adding processes. In some contexts, men sell crops grown for commercial purposes at the market, including those grown by women, reducing women's return on their labour. Furthermore, even if women often grow high-value horticultural crops, such as vegetables for urban centers, lack of packing materials, cold chains and transportation result in high losses and low earnings.

79. As smallholders move into more intensified agricultural systems the gender gap widens. Agricultural intensification is more capital intensive and requires access to productive assets, services, technology, crop diversification and markets which are more challenging for women.

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<sup>21</sup> [Food security and nutrition: building a global narrative towards 2030](#). A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, CFS HLPE, 2020.

80. Women's engagement in value-adding food processing activities is constrained by lack of financial services, knowledge and advisory services, technology, and training that can build women's technical capacity as well as leadership and entrepreneurship skills in food systems. Socio-cultural factors often add to the problem by restricting women's mobility, which reduces their ability to access lucrative markets. Lack of investment in technologies, including time-saving technologies, rural infrastructure and transportation along the value chain, such as crop drying, storage and transportation, results in food losses.

81. Although the human rights of women are legally enshrined at the international level in the CEDAW, women still face many legal constraints that restrict their ability to access and benefit from productive resources including land and opportunities. Globally in 2019, women enjoyed only about 75% of the legal rights of men, across a range of indicators including mobility, workplace, pay, marriage, parenthood, entrepreneurship, assets and pensions. Equal legal rights are usually associated with better and more secure income in the labour market for women and consequently with higher spending on food and nutrition for themselves and children<sup>22</sup>.

82. **Policy areas for discussion:**

- i. *Promotion of **legal rights** that support women's ownership, access to and control over natural and productive resources, as well as their access to services and knowledge to capitalize on them.*
- ii. *Addressing **social norms that condition women's involvement in agricultural investments, value chains and access to markets.***
- iii. ***Participation of women in agricultural investments as business actors**, including in small-scale agro-industrialization, in collaboration with other actors such as private enterprises, through cooperatives and producer organizations, providing an enabling environment.*
- iv. ***Investments in technologies, rural infrastructure, transport and women's specific activities** (across food systems and along value chains) that support women's activities, informed by a context analysis that applies a gender lens, and strengthen women's capacities to use technologies or methods that reduce their work burden.*

**E. 3.5 Access to and control over natural and productive resources**

83. **Problem statement:** *Improving women's access to, use of and control over natural and productive resources is essential for ensuring gender equality and upholding women's rights. It will significantly improve women's agricultural production and reduce the prevalence of hunger. Despite the crucial productive roles women play across food systems, inequality persists. Lack of access to and control over key natural and productive resources has detrimental impact on women's rights and productivity and efficiency of the agricultural sector. Women are often disproportionately affected by climate change, climate-related shocks and loss of biodiversity.*

*3.5.1 Access to and control over natural resources, including land<sup>23</sup>, water, fisheries and forestry*

84. **Problem statement:** *Women tend to have unsecured land tenure and access, which limits options to sustainably manage and benefit from land. When women do have access to agricultural*

<sup>22</sup> [Resource guide on Gender issues in employment and labour market policies - Working towards women's economic empowerment and gender equality](#), ILO, 2014.

<sup>23</sup> [CFS Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security](#), CFS, 2012.

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*land, their plots are usually smaller, and of poorer quality than men's, and often with less secure use rights.*

85. Around the world, land serves as a foundation for security, shelter, income and livelihoods. However, rights to land are not equitably distributed and women encounter persistent barriers to land rights in over half the countries in the world, sometimes despite laws and policies that enshrine those rights.

86. Women's access to water is crucial for both agriculture, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture production and for household and domestic purposes. Fisheries and aquaculture account for 10-12 percent of global livelihoods and are key contributors to food security and nutrition<sup>24</sup>. Women represent up to half of the labour force in aquaculture, largely involved in processing and trading, but women receive lower labour returns and income than men.

87. Forests, and their resources, provide different services for women and men. Men's activities are often driven by commercial objectives, including timber extraction. Women's activities are more diverse, often linked to the household well-being, including collecting fuelwood for domestic use, and a range of non-timber forest products, e.g. food and medicine for the family and fodder for livestock.

88. The differential uses of land, water, fisheries, trees and forestry resources by men and women lead to different specialized knowledge of resource management needs of those resources. Failure to take into account women's specialized knowledge in land, water, fisheries, and forestry policy and planning can lead to poor outcomes, including loss of biodiversity, water pollution, soil degradation, loss of forest cover, and a failure to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Lack of women's adequate representation in natural resource governance systems, including community management and user groups, results in women being excluded from resource use, undermining the imposed community rules, and consequent suboptimal management of the resources.

89. Climate-induced weather-related events have severe impacts on the availability of natural resources, which will directly affect women, for example by increasing the time they need to use for fetching water and fuelwood. The impacts of climate change on women and men can differ, due to existing gender inequality and multidimensional factors and can be more pronounced for rural communities and indigenous peoples.

90. When climate-related disasters result in male outmigration, women are obliged to assume additional on-farm responsibilities without commensurate resources and with limited decision-making power over land - often not legally registered in their name - limiting their ability to request government subsidies or financial services.

91. It is important that women actively participate in the discussions and decisions over climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity – as women are custodians of knowledge of the local seeds and plants that are vital for food and agriculture - and related issues, women having unique knowledge and skills to help respond to climate change effectively and sustainably. This includes discussions under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) that, inter alia, supports climate change activities in developing countries, and in similar climate related policy dialogues in their countries and communities.

92. Special attention should be paid to the legitimate tenure rights of Indigenous Peoples, as they safeguard 80 per cent of the world's remaining biodiversity, and to the importance of free, prior and informed consent, critical for their food security, livelihoods and culture.

93. Agroecological approaches are increasingly prominent in the debates around the sustainability of agriculture and food systems because of their holistic approach and emphasis on equity, embracing

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<sup>24</sup> [The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture](#) 2020. Sustainability in action, FAO, 2020.



the economic, social and environmental dimensions of the food systems. Gender norms and inequality have distinct impacts on all three dimensions of sustainability. Failure to recognize this will undermine this impact.

94. **Policy areas for discussion:**

- i. *Equal tenure rights and access to land, water, fisheries and forests for women and men, independent of women's civil and marital status.*
- ii. *Women's participation in the **management and governance of natural resources** at all levels, including customary institutions, recognizing the importance of traditional knowledge and local crops.*
- iii. *Inclusion of women and girls in the development of **Emergency Preparedness and Response Programmes (EPRP) and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) strategies.***
- iv. *Equal participation and leadership of women in **all aspects of climate policy formulation and actions** at all levels, including in the UNFCCC process and in national and local levels.*

3.5.2 Access to and control over productive resources

95. **Problem statement:** *Women have less access to agricultural inputs, improved technology, mechanized tools and livestock.*

96. Men and women often grow different crops and/or different varieties and have different uses for the crops they grow. Typically, breeding and crop management programmes largely work with male farmers and tend to focus on improving traits and management of commercial crops mostly managed by men. Women's priorities in breeding programmes are rarely considered<sup>25</sup>.

97. Most farm implements, including mechanized tools, have been designed based on the height, strength and body type of men, inappropriate for use by, or even harmful to, women. Moreover, mechanization for women's activities in drying, storage and processing may be unavailable.

98. Livestock, poultry and farmed fish are key assets for rural households, often representing a wealth accumulation instrument, a buffer in case of crisis, as well as a key nutrient source for households. Depending of the cultural context, both women and men participate in the animal care, with women often taking more prominent role in the care of small livestock, poultry and farmed fish.

99. **Policy area for discussion:**

- i. *Adapted and appropriate practices, approaches, tools and technologies for female farmers, in particular small-scale food producers.*

## F. 3.6 Access to labour markets and decent work

100. **Problem statement:** *Globally, women are more likely to be employed in vulnerable, informal and insecure jobs, often as part-time seasonal and casual workers. Consequently, they are less likely to have access to social protection, including unemployment insurance, health insurance, maternity benefits and pensions, and are more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Progress in closing the global gender gap in labour force participation has stalled, and pay and income gaps put women at a*

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<sup>25</sup> State of the Knowledge for Gender in Breeding: Case Studies for Practitioners. Lima (Peru). CGIAR Gender and Breeding Initiative. Working Paper. No. 3, CGIAR, 2018.  
[www.rtb.cgiar.org/gender-breeding-initiative](http://www.rtb.cgiar.org/gender-breeding-initiative)

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*further disadvantage. Women often earn less than men for the same work, which limits their incomes and thus contribution to the food security and nutrition of themselves and their household. Women can also face hard choices between healthy and nutritive practices, such as breastfeeding, and work.*

101. Access to secure employment in conditions of dignity and safety is vital to human welfare and well-being. Around half of the world's women and three quarters of the world's men are in the labour force. However, women are more likely to struggle to find paid work, due to discrimination in its multiple and intersecting forms, their higher participation in unpaid household and care work, and limitations on their mobility and decision-making power in many contexts. Women's paid jobs are often concentrated in service sectors, vulnerable employment and insecure jobs that are lowest paid, often in the informal economy. Rural and urban women can be vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation and violence in the workplace, especially when their employment is insecure.

102. Generally, agricultural workers - including women - suffer from lack of adequate health and safety measures, which may lead to higher rates of fatal accidents, injuries and diseases. Agriculture is one of the most hazardous occupations given exposure to agrochemicals, machines and equipment and livestock care, and women often lack access to social protection systems and to information and training that would enable them to protect themselves.

103. Women also have less access to off-farm rural employment opportunities, critical to supplementing low farm incomes. However, when such an opportunity is there, they are frequently affected by a gender wage gap, also in high-income settings, due to sectoral and occupational segregation, leading to women's overrepresentation in low-wage and part-time jobs. In rural areas, women are more likely to be employed in labour-intensive tasks, earning lower wages than men, and to be paid a piece rate than a daily wage.

104. Gender-biased social norms, laws and practices also limit women's participation in workers' and producers' organizations and in organized labour institutions such as trade unions.

105. Migrants including migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees, are more vulnerable to severe labour exploitation and other forms of abuse. In the case of women, this situation is further compounded by gendered dynamics, power relations and multiple and intersecting forms of vulnerability.

106. **Policy areas for discussion:**

- i. Legal framework to prevent and address violence and harassment in the workplace, for the redistribution of unpaid domestic and care work, and for equal pay and protection of women's labour rights, including for women migrants, asylum seekers and refugees<sup>26</sup>.*
- ii. Promotion of decent work and women's transition from informal to formal economy with access to social protection systems, reducing labour market segregation.*
- iii. Policy interventions across sectors by governments and the private sector to promote decent work, living wages, and improvement of working conditions in food systems for adult women and young women of working age, with attention to safety and social protection, eliminating gender-specific barriers and discrimination.*
- iv. Reconciliation of paid work and unpaid care responsibilities, rebalancing women's paid work and unpaid care and domestic responsibilities between men and women through national employment policies that address the main challenges related to female employment. Setting of targets for professions with flexible work arrangements and childcare facilities.*

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<sup>26</sup> Consistent with the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, GA Resolution 45/158, December 1990, as agreed, acknowledged and/or endorsed by respective Member States.

### G. 3.7 Recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work

107. **Problem statement:** *In addition to their productive roles, women carry significant responsibilities in terms of unpaid care and domestic work. This work often goes unrecognized and is not considered in national statistics. Unpaid care and domestic work places heavy demands on women's time use and hamper their ability to participate in paid productive activities. In many countries, the COVID-19 pandemic has further increased women's work burden, including home schooling and caring for the sick.*

108. Unpaid care and domestic work are critical to food security and nutrition through healthy diets. It includes preparation of food for the family and processing, cleaning, feeding and caring for children, the elderly and sick members in the household and community, and many other activities essential to human well-being and society as a whole.

109. However, this work is not equally shared. On average, women do nearly three times as much unpaid work as men. These unpaid activities place a heavy burden on women by taking a significant portion of their time and energy and hampering women's participation in paid activities in labour market and decision-making processes. These activities are often not recognized while they contribute on average the equivalent of 35% of Gross Domestic Product (of 90 countries studied). Measures are required to measure and recognize the financial value of unpaid work, and ensure its inclusion within national statistics.

110. In many low-income countries and in the context of limited infrastructure, rural women and girls spend an enormous amount of time accessing water and fuel wood for domestic and agricultural use<sup>27</sup>. Such time-consuming chores not only keep girls away from school but, particularly in fragile contexts, put women and girls at risk of violence and sexual abuse. Many girls also face the double burden of performing household chores within their own households, combined with agricultural activities, frequently working more hours than boys. Community attitudes, such as not valuing girls' education and not considering household chores as work, pose additional challenges to improve the situation of girls in rural areas.

111. Equitable redistribution of unpaid work between women and men and reducing women's unpaid work are vital for women's and girls' empowerment. Public investments and enabling regulatory environment for the private sector are needed in welfare, social protection, productive and labour-saving technologies, and rural infrastructure, including to improve water supply, sanitation and hygiene facilities, access to electricity and mechanization of processing activities.

112. There is a need to change gender norms that put a disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work on women for a more equitable distribution of household tasks and child care. This requires active engagement of men and boys. Public policy has a role to play for instance by providing child-care facilities and appropriate social protection instruments. Bringing men into the caring economy will foster greater gender equality and cooperation and support maternal and child health and nutrition.

#### 113. Policy areas for discussion:

- i. *Changing constraining gender norms with respect to the distribution of unpaid care and domestic work, and redistributing unpaid care work more equally between women and men within the family, with the engagement of men and boys.*

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<sup>27</sup> WHO and UNICEF 2017 Progress on household drinking water, sanitation and hygiene 2000-2017 <https://www.unicef.org/media/55276/file/Progress%20on%20drinking%20water,%20sanitation%20and%20hygiene%202019%20.pdf>.

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- ii. **Recognition, valuation and monitoring** of unpaid work and inclusion in national statistics.
  - iii. **Reduction of unpaid work** through public investments in welfare, social protection, provision of child and elder care services, rural infrastructure and household technologies that make unpaid work less time and energy consuming.

## H. 3.8 Women and men's ability to make strategic choices for healthy diets and good nutrition

114. **Problem Statement:** *Women are affected by all forms of malnutrition. Worldwide and in all regions the prevalence of food insecurity is higher among women than men, reflecting inequality and discrimination in access to adequate food. Globally, nearly one in three women of reproductive age were still affected by anemia in 2019, and no progress has been made since 2012<sup>28</sup>. Almost 40 percent of women are overweight and 15 percent are obese, a main cause of diet-related non-communicable diseases<sup>29</sup>. Women's and girls' nutritional status has an impact on the nutrition and well-being of all members of the household.*

115. Women and girls are more likely to suffer from different forms of malnutrition than men and boys, including undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and overweight and obesity, due to a combination of social, economic and biological factors. Therefore, policies and inter-sectoral interventions to support women's and girls' specific nutritional needs are of critical importance.

116. Social and economic inequalities between men and women often stand in the way of good nutrition, limiting women's access to healthy diets. These include, for instance, women's lack of control over the household income and food purchases, unequal intra-household distribution of food, poor labour conditions and women's heavy work burden and lack of access to health services and sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.

117. In the context of scarcity, due to social norms and gender roles, women tend to prioritize the food needs of their children and family members, reducing the number of their own meals per day and food uptake, with a detrimental impact on their own nutritional status.

118. Women's nutritional needs vary depending on their life course and labour activities, with for instance special needs in iron and folic acid, micronutrients like iron and iodine for pregnant women and adolescent girls.

119. Women's own nutritional status, especially during pregnancy and breastfeeding, impacts the nutritional status of their child. Women have additional nutritional needs, in quantity or quality, when pregnant or breastfeeding and when they engage in physically-demanding work. Malnutrition in pregnant or breastfeeding women can set up a cycle of intergenerational deprivation that increases the likelihood of low birth weight, child mortality, serious disease, poor classroom performance and low work productivity.

120. Initiatives that promote gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment can significantly improve nutrition and well-being for the entire household. There is evidence that women's and girls' empowerment is a pathway to improved nutrition due to positive links between women's empowerment and child and maternal health. The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index data from various countries shows a correlation between different indicators of women's empowerment and nutrition. For example, in Ghana women's empowerment was strongly associated

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<sup>28</sup> At the global level, the gender gap in the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity has grown even larger in the year of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity being 10 percent higher among women than men in 2020, compared to 6 percent in 2019. SOFI 2021

<sup>29</sup> Global Nutrition Report, 2020.

with diet quality and women's aggregate empowerment and participation in credit decisions was positively and significantly correlated with women's dietary diversity score.

121. Women should be empowered to make decisions over their own nutrition and be able to contribute to the improvement of their families' nutrition – this requires access to resources, adequate nutrition knowledge, and addressing the gender norms that prevent their voice in household decision-making.

122. While some aspects of the decisions on food production, procurement, and preparation of food may be part of women's domain and part of their traditional roles as mothers and caregivers, in many societies some of the key decisions are predominantly male-dominated due to social norms and structural inequality. Conventional approaches to nutrition education tend to reinforce existing gender roles, focusing on women's roles as mothers and caregivers of young children. To address this, nutrition education programs must recognize that men must also play a role in ensuring adequate nutrition for all.

123. **Policy areas for discussion:**

- i. *Policies and interventions that acknowledge women and girls' **specific nutritional needs** linked to their life course.*
- ii. ***Adequate nutrition knowledge** for both women and men to strengthen ability to make strategic choices over their own and their family's healthy diets and good nutrition.*
- iii. ***Gender norms that perpetuate women's and girls' malnutrition** and prevent their voice in household decision-making on matters related to food security and nutrition.*

### I. 3.9 Social protection and food and nutrition assistance

124. **Problem statement:** *The majority of the world's population are unprotected against shocks, hazards and risks by any form of social protection, women being over-represented in this group<sup>30</sup>. Social protection schemes can address women's and girls' specific risks and constraints, related to their life course and tackle the intergenerational transmission of poverty<sup>31</sup>. It can also contribute to transforming gender relations, including through women's and girls' economic empowerment.*

125. Social protection programmes can support communities, households and individuals to prevent poverty, overcome social exclusion and manage risks in relation to different types of shocks and constraints throughout their life course. In many households, the shock absorbers are women, who respond to the challenging situation by using different coping strategies, for example by selling their assets, reducing their own food consumption and selling of assets, to protect the food security of their children and other family members.

126. Social protection can also address risks faced by women and girls over their life course and support them with measures including, among others, child and family support payments, maternity protection and paid parental leave, employment injury benefits, sickness and health protection, including universal access to sexual and reproductive rights, in accordance with UNGA resolution on

<sup>30</sup> Empowering rural women through social protection, FAO, 2015.

<http://www.fao.org/3/i4696e/i4696e.pdf> FAO. Social Protection and Resilience. Supporting Livelihoods in Protracted Crises and in Fragile and Humanitarian Contexts. 2017.  
<http://www.fao.org/3/i7606e/i7606e.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> UNICEF. Social Protection and Its Effects on Gender Equality: A literature review. By Elena Camilletti, Office of Research - Innocenti Working Paper WP-2020-06, August 2020.  
<https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/WP-2020-06-Social-Protection-and-its-Effects-on-Gender-Equality-Literature-Review.PDF>

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universal health coverage<sup>32</sup>, as well as pensions, unemployment insurance, and labour market and livelihood enhancement interventions.

127. A comprehensive set of social policies and programs can significantly contribute towards advancement of gender equality in a society and address the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and disadvantage faced by women and girls. Social protection can be also a transformative lever that can be used to challenge and transform gender relations, for example when used for unpaid care work redistribution.

128. Social protection programmes in the form of cash or in-kind food and nutrition assistance, together with education and training programmes on nutrition can have a direct positive impact on food security and nutrition by giving access to more food and healthier diets nutrition for women and their families. The first 1,000 days are critical for children's nutrition. Therefore, interventions that support a healthy pregnancy, safe child birth, exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months and diversified nutritious complementary feeding are crucial.

129. School feeding, one of the most common social protection programmes, incentivizes parents and caregivers to send children, especially girls, to school. Nutritious and healthy school meals can improve students' growth, development, concentration and, consequently, learning; when delivered with nutrition education, they can lead to a lifetime of healthier diet choices. When school food is sourced from local smallholder farmers/food producers, especially women farmers/producers, it can foster increases in local production.

130. **Policy areas for discussion:**

- i. *Social protection programmes to be universal, comprehensive and responsive to shocks, paying attention to women's and girls' special needs, including nutritional needs.*
- ii. *Social protection programmes that address **women's and girls' specific life course transitions and risks and the diversity of women's experiences, based on the collection of sex- and age-disaggregated data.***
- iii. ***Equitable benefits for all** from food assistance and opportunity to participate equally in the decision-making and the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes and policies.*

#### **IV. PART 4 - IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF THE USE AND APPLICATION OF THE VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES**

##### **A. 4.1 Policy formulation and implementation of the guidelines**

131. Governments are encouraged to stand behind their commitments to ensure the equal rights of men and women, boys and girls in the context of food security and nutrition and translate them into national policies, programmes, and investments with sufficient human and financial resources.

132. All CFS Members and stakeholders are encouraged to support and promote at all levels within their constituencies, and in collaboration with other relevant initiatives and platforms, the dissemination, use and application of the Guidelines to support the development and implementation of coordinated and multisectoral national policies, laws, programmes and investment plans to achieve gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment in the context of food security and nutrition.

133. Governments are invited to use the Guidelines as a tool to undertake initiatives toward achieving gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment in the context of food security and nutrition. These include implementing national strategies and programmes, identifying policy

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<sup>32</sup> [UNGA Resolution A/RES/74/2](#), UNGA, October 2019.

opportunities, fostering a transparent and open dialogue, promoting coordination mechanisms, enhancing policy coherence, supporting innovative technologies, and establishing or strengthening multistakeholder platforms, partnerships, processes and frameworks, promoting and supporting the involvement and engagement of all relevant stakeholders, including representatives of most vulnerable groups.

#### **B. 4.2 Building and strengthening capacity for implementation**

134. Governments are strongly encouraged to mobilize adequate financial, technical and human resources, and encourage international cooperation, to increase the human and institutional capacity of countries to implement the Guidelines and to identify priorities toward their operationalization and monitoring at the international, regional, national and local levels. Technical agencies of the UN, bilateral cooperation agencies and other development partners can assist in this regard.

#### **C. 4.3 Monitoring the use and application of the guidelines**

135. Governments, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, are encouraged to define national policy priorities and related indicators, mobilize regional and local structures to report on these indicators, and establish or strengthen, where appropriate, existing monitoring and reporting systems in order to assess the efficiency of policies and regulations, and implement appropriate remedial actions in case of negative impacts or gaps.

136. CFS is encouraged to include the Guidelines in its ongoing work and its existing funding resources on monitoring, as defined in the CFS Global Strategic Framework for Food Security and Nutrition (GSF).