

# Women farmers and Indigenous women's views on climate change, Covid-19 and the CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment

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## Women farmers and Indigenous women's views on climate change, Covid-19 and the CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment

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October 12, 2021  
12:45-14.15 CEST

**Speakers:**

Reema Nanavaty, Director, SEWA  
H.E. Tomás Duncan, Panama  
Susan Kaaria, FAO Gender Senior Officer, Mariam Wallet Aboubakrine, Tuareg, Mali  
Kailashben Chauhan, Grassroot worker  
Quinter Akinyi Oginga, GROOTS Kenya  
Muzna Alvi and Claudia Ringler, IFPRI  
Marcela Villarreal, Director, FAO  
Partnerships and UN collaboration Division

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## SUMMARY

### *Background*

Advancing gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment is critical to achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Vision of the Committee of World Food Security (CFS) of ending hunger and ensuring food security and nutrition for all.

Women farmers and indigenous women have been uniquely affected by the dual crises of climate change and Covid-19. They play important roles across the food system and often carry the double burden of both domestic and productive responsibilities. The violation of their right to food and to feed their families became particularly visible during the Covid-19 pandemic; and their lack of agency exposes women farmers even more to the adverse impacts of climate change shocks and stresses. Key among structural injustices women face are their lack of access to information, resources and assets.

However, women farmers and Indigenous women are not vulnerable population *per se*. They are food providers, custodians of seeds, keepers of medicinal plants, and guardians of biodiversity. Unfortunately, discrimination, inequality and the systematic lack of respect for their human rights places them in situations of vulnerability. In particular, Indigenous women face specific constraints based on the intersectionality of gender and indigenous status, including the systematic lack of respect for their collective rights to land and natural resources, the persistent lack of disaggregated data that

makes them invisible to research and policies, and an usual under representation in decision-making processes. These gender gaps undermine food generation and agricultural productivity and the well-being of rural households, and negatively affect rural development, food security and poverty reduction.

To guide the progress on gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment, CFS at its 46th Session in October 2019 decided to develop [Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment in the Context of Food Security and Nutrition](#). The Guidelines are intended to support governments, development partners and other stakeholders to advance gender equality, women's and girls' rights and empowerment, as part of their efforts to eradicate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition, through appropriate policies, investments and institutional arrangements. They aim to foster greater policy coherence between gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment, and food security and nutrition agendas, and promote mutually reinforcing policy measures. This session aimed to assess the draft guidelines and to identify changes that would be needed in the guidelines to better reflect the challenges women farmers and indigenous women and girls are experiencing.

### ***Key Interventions***

The side event was chaired by Ms. **Muzna Alvi**, from the Delhi office of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). She provided background on the session and an overview of the proceedings.

Ms. **Susan Kaaria**, the FAO Senior Gender Officer then laid out the important roles of women and indigenous women in agricultural systems, including as custodians of seed, as well as in the entire food systems, including as key managers of food preparation. However, many agricultural and rural structures do not work for women. They are often in precarious work conditions, and are left without social security systems. Covid-19 showed that women were not at decision-making tables. The gender gap in food insecurity has grown as the result of the pandemic and is now 10% compared to 6% in 2019. So despite numerous global commitments progress has been very slow. The voluntary guidelines have an important role to play in addressing this gender discrimination. We hope they educate of why gender equality is important, they provide insights on how to redress adverse structures, and that they serve to mobilize key resources to address this discrimination. The guidelines call for programs, policies and dialogues to support these processes. Today's session will help ensure that the guidelines reflect indigenous women's voices as well as the voices of poor women farmers.

In a further intervention, Ms. **Reema Nanavaty**, the Director of Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), stressed the crucial importance of women farmers as key actors in food systems, from production to processing, consumption and even waste disposal and recycling. As part of her intervention, Ms. Nanavaty shared a recent video that reflects women's voices as well as SEWA's reason behind their engagement in agriculture and food systems <https://youtu.be/XEt5jgy7GhM> She called for more decentralized food systems with stronger involvement of women as entrepreneurs in all elements of food value chains. The enabling environment needs to be adjusted so that all women can benefit from the food system.

Following these introductory interventions, **H.E. Tomás Duncan Jurado**, Permanent Representative of Panama to FAO, WFP and IFAD provided an overview of the Zero Draft VG on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment in the Context of Food Security and Nutrition. He noted that the objectives of the guidelines are to support member states and other stakeholders with advancing

gender equality, women's and girls' rights and women's and girls' empowerment, to provide concrete policy guidance, to set out a case for gender-responsive food security and nutrition policy and practice, to foster greater policy coherence between food security and nutrition agendas and those focused on women's and girls' empowerment and to contribute to other key CFS agendas. Moreover, **H.E. Tomás Duncan Jurado** specifically introduced the nine action areas of the draft guidelines, specifically 1. Women's participation, voice and leadership, 2. Elimination of violence and discrimination, 3. Access to education and information, 4. Women's economic empowerment, 5. Access to and control over resources, 6. Access to decent work, 7. Recognition of unpaid work, 8. Agency to make strategic nutrition decisions, and 9. Social protection and other assistance.

This was followed by three grassroots/indigenous voices, specifically: Ms. **Mariam Wallet Aboubakrine**, of the **Tuareg people, Mali** on the Arramat concept and the specific challenges of Indigenous women in the context of food security and nutrition; Ms. **Kailashben Chauhan**, a SEWA grassroots worker on Insights on how SEWA strengthened women farmers' voices and Ms. **Quinter Akinyi Oginga**, a Program Officer, GROOTS Kenya on insights on how GROOTS Kenya strengthened women farmers' voices.

Specifically, Ms. **Mariam Wallet Aboubakrine** noted the importance of not only collecting gender-disaggregated data but to also collected data disaggregated by indigenous groups, as girls and women from certain indigenous groups experience dramatically worse discrimination and outcomes than women and girls from other groups. She also calls for a technical dialogue with indigenous people only from the 7 sociocultural regions of indigenous peoples as an opportunity to unpack all the recommendations and to hear additional diversity from indigenous women. She also calls for the addition of free and prior informed consent in Section 3.1. of the guidelines and to include a specific reference to the violence that indigenous girls and women face in Section 3.2. In Section 3.4, she calls for an explicit mentioning of indigenous people's foods and indigenous women's knowledge and the need to elevate this traditional indigenous knowledge. In section 3.5, she calls for adding the importance of collective rights of indigenous women, as well as indigenous rights to self-determination. Moreover, specific actions to eliminate the systemic discrimination of women including their access to resources are needed. Finally, she stressed that indigenous women are not vulnerable. They do not want to be patronized, only having their rights recognized.

Ms. **Kailashben Chauhan** focused on the multiple roles that women farmers were carrying out as well as the multiple challenges they faced and called for a greater recognition of these roles. She also described the many important services that support program that SEWA has been implementing. Ms. **Quinter Akinyi Oginga**, a Program Officer, GROOTS Kenya, supports, similar to SEWA the organization of women farmers in groups to grow their voice and support adaptation to climate change and advance many other goals that rural women are seeking. This kind of organization has also increased extension toward a stronger demand focus. Women are trained in advocacy and leadership skills to strengthen accountability of agricultural investments.

## **Results**

Following this very detailed findings on challenges that indigenous women and women farmers face, the close to 100 participants were invited to contribute their own suggestions and ideas on how to improve the draft VGs by adding these to online storyboards or the chat.

The specific questions participants were asked to consider were:

- 1.) Do the action areas reflect the challenges and concerns indigenous women face? (If not, please add proposed changes)
- 2.) Do the action areas reflect the concerns of poor rural women farmers? (If not, please propose changes)
- 3.) What action areas or items in areas are missing?

The storyboards were available in English, French, Spanish and Gujarati.

Example: Partial English storyboard

 Claudia Ringler + 13 1d  
DRAFT VGs on Gender Equality & Women's and Girl's Empowerment  
please add your comments below

ACTION AREAS	Are poor rural women farmers' and girls' concerns reflected? If not, propose changes	Are indigenous women's and girls' concerns reflected? If not propose changes	Is anything else missing?
1. Women's participation, voice & leadership	Area 9-No specific measures that would address severe crises, such as Covid-19 and climate change are included. Covid-19 should be specifically mentioned due to the severe impact on rural women and the increase in inequity.	Indigenous women and girls have community responsibilities that are different from rural women.	I cannot identify yet what is missing. Thank you for all this hard work!
2. Elimination of violence & discrimination	There needs to be greater recognition of more resilient and equitable food systems including agroecological approaches based on food sovereignty	address the consequences of indigenous peoples criminalization and lack of access to land tenure as a key factor that affects indigenous women and girls food security and safety. Indigenous Peoples are in the frontlines defending the environment with consequences such as violence, criminalization and killings.	Intersectionality, and gender diversity language and approaches need to be stronger throughout. Recognition and Inclusion of LGBTQI people
3. Access to education & information	Reference need to be made to barriers to women's land ownership	intercultural health and intercultural education is key for indigenous women and girls.	indigenous women food systems are holistic and usually do not fit in the dominant concept of value chains.
4. Women's economic empowerment	Women access and control over productive resources is a great challenge to food security,	indigenous languages should be protected as key to maintain indigenous peoples food systems.	Women and children in conflict areas
5. Access to and control over resources		Really key to focus on FPIC and collective rights, as well as	migrants especially in Europe
6. Access to decent work			As beautifully said by Mariam-- disaggregate data not only by gender and age but also by ethnicity.
7. Recognition of unpaid work			
8. Agency to make strategic nutrition decisions			
9. Social protection and other assistance			
10. Missing areas			

Key messages that were shared from the storyboards include:

- It is important to add into the VG that indigenous women's voices need to be included in decision making, as needs the right to self-determination by indigenous women
- Reference should be made on the knowledge that indigenous women hold around food and medicinal plants
- The narrative about indigenous women as vulnerable populations should be changed toward removing structures that are responsible for these vulnerabilities
- Note should be made that hunter/gatherers and pastoralists are key for food security and nutrition but do not necessarily consider themselves as farmers.
- The right to intercultural health and reproductive services (free of racism) should be added
- The specific constraints that rural women face in access to land should be added.

- The holistic perspectives of food from indigenous peoples and indigenous women should be considered
- Mechanisms outside dialogues that are more accessible for indigenous women should be considered
- Rather than looking at social protection, specific support to address severe crises should be considered
- Agroecological approaches based on food sovereignty should be considered
- Indigenous women's roles in seed systems need to be reflected in the VGs
- The role of indigenous people in preserving the environment that underlies food systems should be reflected in the VGs
- LGBT should be recognized as well as other forms of intersectionality
- Women and child migrants and their specific challenges and opportunities in accessing and supporting food and nutrition security
- The notion that poverty is violence should be reflected, and the violence reflected should make it clear that this goes beyond physical violence
- Women's roles in each element of food value chains should be recognized to help them gain access to services

Participants were invited to share additional insights for another 24 hours after which the boards were converted into png and pdf files and summarized for submission as part of the Voluntary Guideline consultation process that ends November 23/2021.

In the closing remarks, Ms. Megha Desai from SEWA notes that the sister-to-sister approach is essential to achieve transformational change. Ms. Claudia Ringler, Deputy Director, EPTD, at IFPRI stresses the importance to collect data on indigenous groups in addition to gender, to continuously reduce women's time poverty and to change structures to make them work for women and not against women. She also stated that the VGs will need clear guidelines and clear milestones and workplans to support progressive change. Ms. Ms. Marcela Villarreal, Director, FAO Partnerships and UN collaboration Division closes the event by noting that the VGs are long overdue and have great promise for transformational change and recognition of women's roles in food systems. She also stresses that women are not homogenous and they are not vulnerable groups. She supports that separate consultations should be added with women from the seven socio-cultural regions. She also notes that the right of indigenous women's self-determination and collective rights and collective strengths need to be reflected in the Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment.

**Appendices:**

Messages from storyboards in four languages