

Background note for informal discussion #4: Right to Food; Gender; Agency

Thursday 4 June 2020, 15:00-17:00

Zoom link: <https://fao.zoom.us/j/94617831989>

Meeting ID: 946 1783 1989

Password: CFSmeeting

Overview

1. The third informal discussion (held on 27 May) showed different views among stakeholders regarding the categorization of agroecological and other innovative approaches to sustainable food systems that enhance food security and nutrition. Regardless of these differences, the discussion this week focuses on a number of thematic areas that may be relevant to all food systems and all innovative approaches: the right to food, gender, agency, and sustainable healthy diets.

HLPE report evidence base

2. **Right to food.** The [HLPE report](#) starts from the recognition of human rights as the basis for ensuring sustainable food systems. It states that the seven PANTHER principles¹ (Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination, Transparency, Human dignity, Empowerment and the Rule of law) should guide individual and collective actions to address the four dimensions of FSN at different scales. The report proposes that rights-based solutions could be useful in negotiating outcomes on controversial issues related to innovative approaches for sustainable food systems that enhance food security and nutrition.
3. **Gender.** The report highlights the need to empower women, and to address gender inequality in food systems, in order to design institutional environments to support transitions towards sustainable food systems. It defines “gender transformative actions” as those that aim to challenge the underlying causes of gender inequality rather than merely addressing their symptoms. The report recommends recognizing “gender equity as a key driver of agroecology and other innovative approaches” and supporting “gender transformative policies, programmes and actions that challenge the underlying causes of gender inequality within food systems with respect to norms, relationships and institutional structures, in particular by ensuring that laws and policies improve gender equality and address gender-based violence.”

¹ The PANTHER principles have been included in various parts of the *Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security*, and have guided the elaboration and implementation of food security policies in a number of countries (see [FAO. 2011. Right to Food. Making it Happen. Progress and Lessons Learned through Implementation, Rome](#)).

4. Agency. According to the HLPE report, “agency” refers to the capacity of individuals or communities to define their desired food systems and nutritional outcomes, and to take

action and make strategic life choices in securing them. The report proposes that the concept of agency could address a gap in the four pillars of food security that research is increasingly uncovering. This concerns the importance of the prevailing institutional environment and the ability of different people to access and influence it. Relevant questions would be: who controls, decides and benefits from agrifood systems? and, how to ensure that people have access to critical public goods such as water, land, seeds, forests and knowledge that are essential for agricultural production? The report recommends that the CFS consider the emerging importance of the concept of ‘agency’ and the opportunity to add it as a fifth pillar of FSN with the view to progress towards the realization of the right to adequate food.

5. Sustainable healthy diets. The report places great importance on diversification, and states that diversification of food systems is not only related to production systems but also consumption patterns. It calls for the promotion of “healthy and diversified diets”. The report refers to “sustainable diets” in relation to the contributions of agroecology. It includes “healthy, diversified, seasonally and culturally appropriate diets” under cultural coherence in its transition principles (Table 2). It also notes that reduction of meat, salt, sugar, ultra-processed foods and other unhealthy dietary practices in many diets can lead to better nutrition and health outcomes, as well as greater sustainability. The Zero Draft refers to the [FAO/WHO definition of sustainable healthy diets](#).

Details of stakeholder feedback on the Zero Draft and comments from the open meeting (April 14)

6. Right to food. A number of stakeholders sought to strengthen references to the right to food, especially in the preamble, by recognising that the right to food provides a basis for ensuring sustainable food systems, and to subsequently use the right to food to frame the entire document. A proposal was made to limit any reference to the right to food to internationally agreed text. Other stakeholders proposed including references not just to the right to food, but also to the right to water, right to a healthy and sustainable environment, right to safe and healthy working conditions, rights of Indigenous peoples, peasant rights, and food sovereignty. Others said that in light of the current global crisis generated by COVID-19, it would be incumbent upon the CFS to proactively develop future safeguards and human rights-based solutions for the global food system.
7. Gender. A number of stakeholders had very opposed positions, from a recommendation to remove most references to gender issues and to eliminate “gender transformative policies”, to calls for the document to recognize the centrality of women’s rights and the role of women in knowledge accumulation and agriculture production, as well as strengthening gender equality throughout the policy recommendations.
8. Agency. Various stakeholders are for and others are against including the concept of agency in the recommendations. Some have asked for clarification of its meaning and scope.

9. Sustainable healthy diets. A number of stakeholders rejected the use of the term “sustainable healthy diets” as it is not agreed UN language, while other stakeholders affirmed its inclusion.

Questions to guide discussion to explore convergences

1. How do different innovative approaches for sustainable food systems that ensure food security and nutrition contribute to the right to food?
2. Do each of the various innovative approaches for sustainable food systems that ensure food security and nutrition contribute to gender equity and equality?
3. Do you think that the 4 pillars of food security (availability, access, utilization, and stability) are adequate to cover all important aspects of how food security is achieved? Could the concept of agency fill in any gaps that may exist?