

Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems for Nutrition - OEWG Meeting 14 April 2020

CSM Written Inputs

The Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSM) would like to thank the efforts by the OEWG Chair, Ms. Lilian Ortega, in pulling together a revised draft and her continued attempts to advance the process in spite of significant political complexities.

To our great regret in learning the decision of Ms. Ortega not to continue in her role as OEWG Chair, we would like to use this occasion to express our deep appreciation for her continued efforts to raise the ambition of the process and maintain a steady direction despite heavy winds and political complexities. In particular, her presence in all Regional Consultation in a limited amount of time demonstrated how a participatory and inclusive process should be and can take place. We can only commend and applaud the work Ms. Ortega has done and would like to wish her every best in her future endeavours.

Overarching comments regarding the process - Strong appeal to re-schedule the negotiations:

The world is confronted with a human crisis of inestimable proportions, which will impose its heaviest tolls on the marginalized and most vulnerable. Once again, women will be exposed to multiple burdens, being under/un-paid and overrepresented in care, social, domestic, frontline health and food systems roles, as well as in the informal economy and small enterprises. The health emergency is triggering multi-layered challenges, including a dramatic food crisis, all rooted in patterns of hyper-globalization that amplified structural disparities and ossified a global division of labour focused on the extraction of wealth and resources from the Global South.

Our constituencies, particularly small-scale food producers, indigenous peoples and agricultural workers, are completely overtaken by the urgent need to provide immediate responses to the COVID 19 crisis within their localities and communities. In this sense, **if negotiations are advanced with the current schedule and online, it would mean excluding the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSM) from participation.** This would openly violate the CFS' inclusive character established during its reform in 2009.

Moreover, the COVID crisis is exposing the depth of inequalities and vulnerabilities as well as many critical shortcomings of the current food systems. It is essential that the Guidelines build on these lessons and ensure adequate medium-to-longer term responses that increase the resilience, people-centredness and sustainability of food systems. **Advancing the negotiations as initially planned, meaning in midst of the current dramatic situation, would dismiss this critical learning and decrease the relevance of the Guidelines in the post-COVID phase.**

We believe it is urgent for the CFS to play a critical role in the short-term responses to the emergent, if not on-going, food crisis and this requires the re-direction of all its normative and coordination functions to this critical and immediate task.

Finally, we remain extremely doubtful that virtual means can lead to an adequate negotiation space. Every aspect of food system that are being discussed in these negotiations are so complex, that they require much more dialogue to achieve politically significant outcomes, than Zoom or other online platforms allow. Furthermore, online negotiations undermine the abilities of our key constituencies to participate because many of them do not have access to smooth, uninterrupted internet, or even electricity, exposing the inequities that are inherently part of these new technologies. While proposing a postponement of the negotiations, we believe there could be the possibility of intersessional virtual

discussions before the actual negotiations to bridge the depth of the differences exposed by the current process. As CSM, we would like to express our interest to fully engage with these smaller groups of discussions, as well as to join the group of 'Friends of the Chair'. The small groups dynamics should, however, respect the need for translation/interpretation that we, as CSM, have.

Our concrete proposals for rescheduling the negotiations on both the Food Systems and Nutrition and Agroecological and Other Innovative approaches have been shared at the CFS Bureau and Advisory Group Meeting on 17 April.

Comments on structure and content of the Draft for Negotiations & COVID crisis:

The COVID-19 health crisis is increasingly producing a global food crisis as well and, in the process, is dramatically exposing the structural inequalities which shape unhealthy and unsustainable food systems, not only within countries but also across them. The pandemic exposed the fragility and inadequacy of global value chains and the urgent need for locally rooted food systems.

Different modes of food production, food exchange and distribution are key components of food systems. Moreover, food systems are the vehicle for the continued reproduction of living cycles. It has become clear that the structural drivers of zoonotic infectious diseases such as SARS Cov-2 are an elementary part of current food systems as they are closely related to industrial agriculture and livestock breeding. The expansion of agriculture leads to deforestation and the reduction of biodiversity, thus reducing the resilience of ecosystems. The cramped environment in which animals continue to undergo severe genetic experiments increases the risk of transmitting animal viruses to humans. Genetic monocultures of animals, larger population sizes and densities allow higher transmission rates.¹ This exposes that human health is indivisible from the sound ecological foundations for a healthy planet, and thus the urgent necessity to transform our food systems to give comprehensive responses to the food-ecological-health nexus. Re-grounding food in nature – as opposed to in highly processed and artificially fortified food products - to improve its nutritional qualities is of paramount importance for people's health and well-being while at the same time ensuring a regenerative use of natural resources and ecosystems. Agroecology has in this sense proven to be a true transformational pathway towards encompassing food, equity, human and planetary health (see point 4).

More than everything the COVID related crisis exposed the systemic interconnection between health, food, social services, economic performance and financial stability, among others. **The crisis served to remind us, once again, that we need systemic analysis and equally systemic responses, rather than locking policy domains into silos. The attempt of the revised draft to focus narrowly on a reductionist view of nutrition is there completely contradictory to the current reality. Therefore, we completely reject the proposed change of title.**

1. The Voluntary Guidelines should provide guidance for governments to address the unacceptable rise of malnourished people, but also ensure that future food systems do not continue to destroy our environment the way the current ones are so relentlessly doing. Amidst the COVID crisis, **the Guidelines must not be seen as needed to address crises but rather to change the food systems to prevent crises.** They should enable all human beings, including Indigenous Peoples, small-scale farmers, fisherfolks, women, youth, pastoralists, urban food insecure, landless, agriculture and food workers, and consumers to be decision-makers in order to define the political orientations

¹ <https://www.marx21.de/coronavirus-agribusiness-would-risk-millions-of-deaths/>

R.A. Kock et.al, The Lancet. Com, Vol. 4, March 2020.

H. Salcedo, Biodiv 50, No. 19. Nov. 2019.

of development actions in accordance with their social, economic and cultural environment by fully assuming the responsibility for action and resource management in their food systems: identification/diagnosis, planning, production, processing, management, prevention/management/adaptation during times of crises and natural disasters. Some States have failed to meet the needs of the most basic populations due to poor governance, keeping populations in situations of permanent dependence on aid. The need for territorial rehabilitation to enable people to take control of their destiny should be stressed out by the document, making it particularly relevant in times of crisis such as this one.

Malnutrition and poor diets are not only risk factors for Non-Communicable Diseases but are also contributing factors to underlying health conditions that have aggravated the death toll amongst those infected with COVID-19. The relationship between diet and underlying health conditions, such as diabetes, is a well-established one. The use of pesticides across the food systems has a direct impact on the health of agricultural workers as well as end consumers, whose immune systems have been compromised. We can no longer continue to consume unhealthy foods produced by the promotion of foods produced and processed with harmful chemicals throughout the food systems.

In this sense, the lessons which are and will emerge from the COVID crisis, should cut across the entire document and promote the urgent transformation of food systems to make them resilient, sustainable and healthy². In this sense, we do not agree with creating a separate section merely on the COVID crisis, which will only undermine the scope of the Guidelines.

- 2. Holistic view of nutrition, multidimensionality of food and multiple objectives of food systems:** We reiterate our call to consider nutrition as the critical space for systemic convergence and coherence across different policy domains, recognising the multidimensionality of food and the multiplicity of public objectives served by food systems, from health to livelihoods, from ecology to cultural heritage, from social to knowledge systems. No progress can be achieved in nutrition if all these dimensions are not addressed through a profound transformation of food systems, one that moves beyond the exclusively productivist drivers that dominated agricultural policies over the past decades. We therefore consider the new draft guidelines a significant retrogression with the inspiring conversations that took place during the regional consultations, with an attempt to narrowly limit the understanding of food and the scope of the guidelines. In addition, we believe that already agreed instruments need to inform the Voluntary Guidelines, particularly the UN Declaration for the Rights of Peasants and Other People working in rural areas which offer extensive proposals on sustainability of food systems.
- 3. Healthy and sustainable diets versus nutritious food:** Diets are the core pillar of the policy convergence. Diets are not only about what is eaten, but how, where and with whom food is consumed, not only today but tomorrow, and the ecological, social and economic implications of which food is consumed, by whom, in what conditions/circumstances. Diets are therefore profoundly relational concepts as they express our social contract with our producers and workers, with our land and territories, with our ancestors and our future generations, with the health of our communities, and the strength of our democracies and economic systems. Diets are the cornerstone of our systemic response to the multiple crises we are confronted with. They are

² Further guidance on the transformation of food systems has been proposed by the CSM in its Vision Document, in particular in Chapters 3 and 5 (http://www.csm4cfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/CSM-vision-document-FS-N_draft-June-2019-final.pdf).

sub-systems for individual and collective decisions, as unhealthy and unsustainable dietary choices have deep societal consequences. We there reject the attempt to narrow the understanding of diets and shift attention away from healthy and sustainable diets towards nutritious food, an industry-led characterization that aims to distract attention from the wider social, economic and ecological implications towards purely nutritional qualities, often defined in industry-serving terms, of single foods. This calls upon governmental actors to regulate nutritional labelling and consider front-of-pack interpretive labelling (FOPL), for example, warning labelling, to promote healthy diets.

4. **The nexus between food and ecology is still weak, if not weaker.** The step back to separating the definition of sustainable healthy diets from healthy diets medicalized definition leaves the possibility to see diets as a concept completely separated from its ecological aspect. Moreover, there is unclear guidance on sustainable practices. In this regard, Section 3.2 welcomes all approaches to achieve “sustainable” food systems, suggesting that the coexistence of all modes of productions is possible. This lack of guidance on the definition of 'sustainable food systems' is all the more critical as point 2.3. now reads 'Transforming food systems OR promoting sustainable food systems', suggesting that not all food systems need to be transformed, but without explaining what would be considered a sustainable food system. The document should recognize that the same systems that cause malnutrition in all forms also impact on climate crisis, biodiversity and planetary health overall.

The notion of climate change should shift towards planetary/climate collapse or crisis. The category of "change" naturalizes the damage that human societies have caused to the planet and the climate and constructs it as a passing notion.

With profound concerns for a food crisis, we call, once again, for the CFS process on “Agroecological and other innovative approaches” to be fully taken into account by the VGs, as agroecology, also considered as an innovation, provides an immediate solution to the current challenges both by protecting the environment and producers and by enabling the local production of healthy and sustainable food for all. Agroecology offers local solutions and empowers local economies and markets by keeping farmers in the field with improved livelihoods and a better quality of life.

5. We see that the references to science and evidence-based approaches have been strengthened with the inclusion of “peer reviewed publications”, “data management” and “surveillance” throughout the document. **While we believe research is important, we urge not to reduce it to (positivist) science and evidence-based approaches but to include also alternative forms of knowledge based on experiences and also traditional forms of knowledge sharing such as oral transmission.** The uncertainty of today’s crisis implies reviewing the multiplicity of determinants that prevent the full realization of the Human Right to Adequate Food and Nutrition, and these determinants are not only interpretable from the conventional positivist scientific perspective, which is also being questioned today. Agroecology, in this sense, has proven to be an example of objectivity built from other forms of knowledge.
6. **Centrality of public systems:** Lastly, the COVID crisis has exposed the centrality of public systems as bulwarks against public health disasters, and the impacts of decades of undermining of public services through austerity measures, privatization, neoliberal economic policies, and public-private partnerships. We therefore call for the Guidelines to be primarily directed to informing public policies and systems, reclaiming the public nature of food systems, and the centrality of healthy and sustainable diets in reclaiming our commons and advancing a deeper understanding of how public goods and services can strengthen the Right to food, and food security and nutrition.

For the same reasons, we entirely reject the propositions within the Draft Guidelines to advance multistakeholder governance mechanisms that blur the lines between public and private interests, between rights-holders and stakeholders, and between democratic institutions and private corporations. We reaffirm the necessary centrality of human rights in any normative framework agreed by the CFS, not only with respect to the Right to Adequate Food but equally to the right to health, the rights of workers, peasants, fishers and indigenous peoples, the rights of women, and other related rights.

The voluntary nature of the guidelines may be a limiting factor, as it has been shown to be weak lever for change against commercial interests. Legally binding actions, based on human rights legislature, or packaged under a framework convention should also be considered. The guidelines should reference obligations in national and international law more explicitly.