



CONTRIBUTION TO DRAFT ONE OF THE CFS VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES ON FOOD SYSTEMS AND NUTRITION (VGFSyN)

5 February 2020

The International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food) welcomes the first draft of the CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition (VGFSyN). The CFS has succeeded so far in making this process inclusive and transparent. IPES-Food considers that this process has great potential to deliver clear guidelines in support of a transition to sustainable food systems that provide food security and nutrition for all. Through this contribution, IPES-Food seeks to support the process, and in particular to underline current gaps and shortcomings that must be addressed:

1. A truly holistic food systems lens is required to identify the underlying problems that lead to poor nutrition.

- **Including all dimensions of a food systems approach.** IPES-Food welcomes the adoption of a “food systems” approach in this process. However, the current draft remains focused on the economic dimensions of the food system, i.e. the food chain. Food systems refer not only to market transactions and connections between different points in the food chain, but also to a broader web of institutional and regulatory frameworks, and the prevailing conditions in which science and knowledge are generated. Furthermore, the various components of food systems (e.g. trade policies, agricultural subsidies, market structures and prices, research and educational priorities) have co-evolved over time to become mutually-reinforcing, with powerful coalitions of interest evolving along-side them.^{1 2} Achieving food security and nutrition; tackling climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental pollution; reducing poverty and inequality, inter alia, are deeply

¹ De Schutter, O. (2017). The political economy of food systems reform. *Eur. Rev. Agric. Econ.* 44, 705–731. <https://doi.org/10.1093/erae/jbx009>.

² IPES-Food (2015). The new science of sustainable food systems. Overcoming barriers to food system reform. International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems.

interconnected, self-reinforcing and complex challenges³ that can only be addressed with a truly holistic food systems lens.

- **Clarifying the root causes of the crises in our food systems.** A holistic food systems lens helps to reveal harmful dynamics that are embedded across food systems — including lack of transparency in policy-making, unequal power relations, and concentration of corporate power. These dynamics reflect the prevalent 'industrial' paradigm:⁴ ⁵ highly-specialized, input-intensive and uniform farming systems, and the long and unaccountable supply chains that have developed alongside them, have failed to put an end to hunger. Meanwhile, this industrial model has generated negative and self-reinforcing outcomes on other multiple fronts: widespread degradation of land, water and ecosystems; high GHG emissions; biodiversity losses; micro-nutrient deficiencies alongside the rapid rise of obesity and diet-related diseases; and livelihood stresses for smallholder farmers around the world,⁶ many of whom are among the food insecure.⁷ Identifying the root causes of food systems failures is key to avoid repeating the errors of the past. Furthermore, the VGFSyN should help to understand how different food systems interact, especially when one food system compromises the sustainability of other food systems. This understanding is crucial to underpin systemic recommendations.

2. Holistic solutions that improve access to healthy diets and deliver co-benefits for sustainability should be prioritized.

- **Recognising agroecology as a key strategy to deliver food security and nutrition.** As noted above, the challenges in food systems are deeply interconnected: these challenges can only be solved if addressed in a coordinated and

³ IPES-Food (2015). The new science of sustainable food systems. Overcoming barriers to food system reform. International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems.

⁴ IPES-Food (2017). Unravelling the food-health nexus: Addressing practices, political economy, and power relations to build healthier food systems.

⁵ IPES-Food (2016). From uniformity to diversity: a paradigm shift from industrial agriculture to diversified agroecological systems.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ FAO (2019). The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2019: safeguarding against economic slowdowns and downturns.

comprehensive manner.⁸ A series of landmark international reports^{9 10 11 12} have identified agroecology as a solution that can provide a number of benefits across different dimensions of sustainability.¹³ Agroecology can guarantee adequate nutrition through the provision of diversified, safe, and balanced diets, based on local fresh products which are sustainably produced, accessible, and culturally appropriate. It can improve the incomes of small-scale farmers, particularly in developing countries, by lowering the costs of production and improving resilience of farming systems against weather-related events, including those linked to climate change. It can preserve and enhance soil health and agrobiodiversity, allowing soils to function as carbon sinks and to maintain their function of regulating water cycles. IPES-Food notes that agroecology is only mentioned once in draft one of the guidelines, in the context of management of natural resources (3.2.1), while its potential to address the root causes of hunger (poverty, inequality, inaccessibility, insufficiently diverse diets) and thus to deliver food security and nutrition,¹⁴ are generally overlooked. IPES-Food therefore recommends that support for agroecology be included in the next draft of the report as a key recommendation. In making such a recommendation, the VGFSyN can draw on the scientific evidence and analysis provided in the CFS HLPE 14th report¹⁵ and the policy convergence process.

- **Strengthening access to land.** In order to ensure food security and nutrition, it is critical to secure access to and control of land and related natural resources, particularly for small-scale food producers — including farmers and farm workers, fishers and fishworkers, herders and pastoralists, and forest workers — and the many other people whose labour and other investments sustain local and territorial

⁸ IPES-Food (2019). Towards a Common Food Policy for the European Union. The policy reform and realignment that is required to build sustainable food systems in Europe.

⁹ IPBES (2018). Summary for policymakers of the assessment report on land degradation and restoration of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services [Scholes, R. J., Montanarella, L., Brainich, E., Barger, N., ten Brink, B., Cantele, M., ... & Kohler, F.]

¹⁰ IPCC (2019). Summary for Policymakers. In: Climate Change and Land: an IPCC special report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems [P.R. Shukla, J. Skea, E. Calvo Buendia, V. Masson-Delmotte, H.- O. Pörtner, D. C. Roberts, P. Zhai, R. Slade, S. Connors, R. van Diemen, M. Ferrat, E. Haughey, S. Luz, S. Neogi, M. Pathak, J. Petzold, J. Portugal Pereira, P. Vyas, E. Huntley, K. Kissick, M. Belkacemi, J. Malley, (eds.)].

¹¹ Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, Global Sustainable Development Report (2019). The Future is Now – Science for Achieving Sustainable Development. United Nations, New York.

¹² Global Commission on Adaptation (2019). Adapt now: A global call for leadership on climate resilience.

¹³ HLPE (2019). Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 43-45.

¹⁵ HLPE (2019). Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome.

food systems. Support for diverse land tenure systems and their related practices, including customary systems, is clearly underlined in the VGGT. Land access should be included in the VGFSyN, in line with the recommendations of the VGGT. This should include specific measures to prevent the many and diverse forms of land grabbing that undermine local and territorial food systems, including water grabbing and green grabbing. IPES-Food also underlines the need to consider group approaches to land access and farm production, which can empower and ensure higher productivity among small producers, especially women.¹⁶

- **Strengthening the rights-based approach by refocusing on food sovereignty.** Food sovereignty is a concept focused on people's right to control their own food systems. It is a key component of the rights of peasants, proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in Resolution 73/165 of 17 December 2018, adopting the Declaration on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas. Key elements of food sovereignty include: more equitable trade relationships; land reform; protection of peasant knowledge; indigenous land rights; gender equity; and participation of people in defining policies.¹⁷ Food sovereignty as a right is linked to access and ability to procure adequate food. Food sovereignty and rights-based approaches help us to understand the socio-economic and political aspects of hunger and malnutrition. Food sovereignty underlines the need to reform food systems governance, which is pivotal to unlock transition. Examples of successful food security and nutrition policies based on governance reform and food sovereignty are documented in the HLPE report on nutrition and food systems.¹⁸ IPES-Food strongly recommends including the food sovereignty framework in future drafts, in line with the VGFSyN guiding principles c), e), g). This implies recognising the importance of local and traditional foods, and the principle of prioritising local food needs before considering selling to a distant market.¹⁹
- **Avoiding techno-fixes.** Narrowly-focused approaches that entail trade-offs and potentially reinforce current power relations — approaches such as biofortification and nanotechnologies — should not be prioritised on the same level as systemic approaches. For example, enhancing biodiversity in food systems has the potential to address inadequate diets through improved dietary diversity, while at the same time reducing chemical inputs and delivering ecosystem services.

¹⁶ Agarwal, B. (2018). Can group farms outperform individual family farms? Empirical insights from India. *World Development*, 108, 57-73.

¹⁷ Appendix A. HLPE (2019). *Op. cit.* p. 147-148.

¹⁸ HLPE (2017). *Nutrition and food systems. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security*, Rome, p. 115.

¹⁹ This also means not losing the agrobiodiversity that local systems have had in the past to meet local needs, which usually has meant that market crops (especially distant urban markets) want foods that are not normally grown in these traditional, local or indigenous systems.

3. Improving food security and nutrition requires a holistic approach to policy development and implementation.

- **Promoting integrated food policies through improved governance tools.** Improving diets requires a range of policies to be realigned, including the policies affecting food production and supply (e.g. agriculture, trade) and those shaping food access and consumption (e.g. public procurement, marketing, social policies). Policies operating at different levels — from local to supra-national — must also be aligned. A transition towards sustainable food systems that ensure food security and nutrition for all will not happen fast enough if policies remain in 'silos' and answer to different and sometimes conflicting objectives. It is therefore crucial to build on the promising examples of integrated food policies.²⁰ Long-term, cross-party, inter-ministerial planning around food systems – reaching across political boundaries and transcending electoral cycles – should be supported. Crucially, integrated food systems planning must be based on broad participation, bringing together the various constituencies and groups with a stake in food systems reform. The VGFSyN should include the key recommendation to develop integrated food policies at multiple governance levels, in line with the VGFSyN guiding principle b).
- **Underlining the importance of healthy 'food environments'.** Strategies for the promotion of healthy and sustainable diets need to include a focus on food environments. There is growing scientific consensus and understanding regarding the role of food environments - physical, economic, political and socio-cultural surroundings – in shaping people's diets. As noted in the HLPE report on nutrition and food systems, the key elements of the food environment that influence consumer food choices are: physical and economic access to food; food promotion, advertising and information; and food quality and safety.²¹ The VGFSyN should aim to deliver clear recommendations to governments in all these areas, allowing them to build food environments in which the healthy option is the easiest. This implies using and combining tools such as healthy and sustainable public procurement (including school meals), educational initiatives (e.g. school gardens), VAT and other fiscal incentives, restrictions on junk food marketing, zoning and licensing rules, and labelling and consumers information, thereby shifting the incentives in favour of healthy and sustainable diets.²²

²⁰ An example of integrated food policy has been developed in IPES-Food (2019). This policy vision is in line with the EU Farm to Fork strategy for sustainable food, currently under discussion.

²¹ HLPE (2017). Nutrition and food systems. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome.

²² Concrete examples can be found in IPES-Food, (2019). Towards a Common Food Policy for the European Union. The policy reform and realignment that is required to build sustainable food systems in Europe. p. 68-79.

- **Specifying implementation roles and ensuring accountability.** In order to support effective integration of food system policies, the guidelines should identify and suggest when policies would be better addressed at a specific governance level. The guidelines should be clear on the key policy areas where governments are expected to deliver through legislation (e.g. protect ecosystems, ensure land access and the restoration of depleted lands) and other areas where partnerships and strategies can be co-elaborated with civil society and other private or public stakeholders. Furthermore, the general term "stakeholders" should be reconsidered and replaced with more specific language (i.e. rights holders and other stakeholders) that helps to clarify roles, responsibilities and duties. This will help to tackle and overcome, rather than to obscure, the differential power of actors to influence decision-making in food systems.