

**Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food**  
**Michael Fakhri**

**Comments on CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment Draft 1**

**PART 3**

**3.1 Cross-cutting recommendations**

**30. (iv)** In order to ensure that this paragraph aligns with para. 112, it should mention “universal” social protection. Suggested language could be: “Ensure that universal ~~targeted~~ social protection measures – including cash and food transfers, school feeding, pensions and social welfare measures – are also targeted and in place to...”. Another option would be to move para. 112 up into this paragraph.

**31. (iv)** The Special Rapporteur recalls the significant debate during the *CFS Policy Recommendations on Agroecological and Other Innovative Approaches* negotiations over the relationship between agroecology and “other innovative approaches”. The final CFS Policy Recommendations were an attempt to reconcile the two. However, after the Food Systems Summit it is clear that agroecology and “other innovative approaches” are not reconcilable and should be treated separately. Agroecology is a specific approach to food systems that explicitly attends to human rights obligations and gender equality. “Other innovative approaches” is a catch-all phrase that is vague. At the Food Systems Summit, the “Innovation Lever of Change” reflected that fact by not addressing human rights or gender equality. Moreover, many Summit leaders wanted to exclude agroecology from the Summit entirely. Nevertheless, a number of Member States and stakeholders overcame that opposition and formed an independent “Agroecology” coalition. Therefore, this paragraph should only reference agroecology and remove reference to “other innovative approaches.”

**3.2 Women and girls' food security and nutrition**

***Gender inequitable access to and distribution of nutritious food***

**32. and 33.** These paragraphs could more clearly spell out the intersecting factors that lead to unequal access, poverty, and malnutrition. One dynamic worth noting is the “the cycle of discrimination”: this is the disempowerment of women that discriminates against women as economic agents. This in turn makes women less economically independent, exposing them to violence, and weakening their bargaining position within the household and the community. As a result, they bear more burden within the household. This care work within the household limits women's time; women end up working more hours than men, although this care work is informal, essentially performed within the family, and unremunerated. This leads to lower levels of education for women, and an inability to seek better employment opportunities outside the home.

([https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session22/AHRC2250\\_English.PDF](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session22/AHRC2250_English.PDF) )

The lack of reproductive rights perpetuates this cycle: marrying early means having children early and having to take care of them, even though this may interrupt the education of the mother, or make it impossible or difficult for her to seek employment. Moreover, outside of the household, women face discrimination in the labor market.

**35.** It is also important to recognize the positive role played by women in preserving biodiversity, safeguarding seeds, and granting access to diverse local produced food, as they are often engaged in producing and distributing staple food; while men are usually engaged in commercial crops.

### ***Empowering women and girls for improved food security and nutrition***

It is important to attend to rural women's particular context in this section. For rural women access to natural resources and small-scale food processing equipment is key. Moreover, education on its own does not automatically enhance rights, redistribute the caregiving responsibilities, or enable appropriate nutritional choices. Whereas, for example, rules and programs that enable women to process food at home and sell through informal and formal markets could make a difference.

The Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Adequate Food provides model language:

“Where poverty and hunger are predominantly rural, States should focus on sustainable agricultural and rural development through measures to improve access to land, water, appropriate and affordable technologies, productive and financial resources, enhance the productivity of poor rural communities, promote the participation of the poor in economic policy decisions, share the benefits of productivity gains, conserve and protect natural resources, and invest in rural infrastructure, education and research. States should adopt policies that create conditions that encourage stable employment, especially in rural areas, including off-farm jobs”. (Right to food guidelines, 2.6)

“states may also consider promoting gardens both at home and at school as a key element in combating micronutrient deficiencies and promoting healthy eating” (Right to Food Guidelines, 10.3).

Moreover, the importance of school feeding programs could be stressed in this section, as a vehicle to reach parents and to educate across generations.

### **3.2.2. Policies and strategic approaches**

**42. (ii) and (iii)** The language should be adjusted to emphasize women and girls' agency and subjectivity so that programs should be designed taking into consideration their particular views, knowledge, and culture.

### **3.3 Elimination of sexual and gender-based violence against women for improved food security and nutrition**

In the spirit of being inclusive and leaving no one behind, this section would benefit from a reference to protection against violence and discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation (see Report of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/38/43>).

This section should also reference in a specific paragraph, gender violence and harassment of workers in vulnerable work situations. There is extensive evidence documenting gender-based violence in the agriculture and food sectors. Specific issues include the heightened risk of violence when work in isolation in male-dominated workplaces often managed by male supervisors or in fields/plantations. Women are also exposed to more risk when they travel to and from work and there is a lack of transport forcing women to hitch-hike or walk long distances to and from the fields (Reports by IUF; [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_dialogue/---actrav/documents/publication/wcms\\_546645.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---actrav/documents/publication/wcms_546645.pdf) )

### **3.4 Recognition, reduction, and redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work**

**52. (iii)** Add demand-driven labor-saving technologies

### **3.5 Women's equal and meaningful participation, voice, and leadership in policy – and decision making at all levels**

This section is repetitive and does not really focus on women's leadership. This may be an opportunity to instead focus on women human rights defenders. Women human rights defenders (WHRDs) are all women and girls working on any human rights issue, and people of all genders who work to promote women's rights and rights related to gender equality. (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/women/wrgs/pages/hrdefenders.aspx>)

The Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) recognizes the important role of HRDs, including women human rights defenders, and outlines relevant rights of all HRDs and obligations of States. In recognition of the gender-specific challenges they face; the UN General Assembly furthermore adopted a landmark resolution on the protection of women human rights defenders. (<https://undocs.org/A/RES/68/181>)

### **3.6 Women's economic and social empowerment in the context of sustainable food systems**

#### **3.6.1 Women's access to the labour market and decent work**

This section merits a separate paragraph dedicated to women's exposure to toxic agrochemicals and pesticides. Exposure to pesticides has been reported to cause adverse health effects, hundreds of millions of smallholder farmers and their families in low and middle-income countries are poisoned by pesticides every year. Because of their informal work status and because of double exposure at work and home (domestic cloths cleaning), women's health risks

in the developing world can be underestimated. Pregnant women are particularly vulnerable and at risk for the health of their children.

### **3.6.2 Women's involvement in food systems as producers and entrepreneurs**

In order to align with the UN Decade of family farming, language should be included that notes that women should be rewarded as pillars of the food systems, particularly in developing countries, playing the role of custodian of biodiversity able to reverse environmental degradation and playing ecosystem services:

“Women contribute to food systems not only with their labour but also with their knowledge of agricultural practices and biodiversity. They engage in on- and off-farm activities and play a central role in natural resource management and food production, processing, conservation, and marketing. Rural women diversify income sources and ensure food security, nutrition and well-being for their families and communities.” (UN Decade on Family Farming, Action Plan Pillar 3).

This section only identifies constraints in terms of access to markets, technical training, or resources. There should be some mention of the fact that many women may need the promotion of specific services as care services for children as a pre-condition before they engage in market-based activities. Other sections mention care work, but by only focusing on market-based barriers (or not clearly connecting the issue of care work) can lead to inequality between women: women who can secure child care can more easily access markets than women who cannot.

Indigenous Peoples women merit a specific paragraph, as they are among the most marginalized groups, suffering discrimination not only based on sex but also because of their cultures and class.

### **3.6.4 Policies and strategic approaches**

#### ***Women's access to labour market and decent work***

77. The mention of “private sector” in this section is unclear and inappropriate. In the labour market both management and unions constitute the private sector, whereas in the CFS “private sector” has the more specialized meaning of businesses. Regardless, the reference to “support” of the private sector suggests that businesses should determine conditions for workers.

### **3.7 Women's access to and control over natural and productive resources, including land, water, fisheries, and forests**

87. When describing the crops grown/bred by men as commercial, it is accurate to then describe the crops grown/bred by women as derived from peasant seeds systems. Peasant seed systems are a very important resource for women farmers and these systems are linked to the right to life (see SR on the right to food recent report to the Human Rights Council: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/49/43> )

**93. (ii)** This paragraph should include pastoralism. It is a production system also related to the use of land, often customary uses that if not recognized or in times of scarcity may lead to conflict.

### **3.8 Access to education, capacity building, training, knowledge, and information services**

**95.** Education should not be linked to the use of “improved crop varieties and fertilizers” but to the means for choosing appropriately according to the context of operation, personal aspiration, and will. Suggested language could be: “Evidence indicates that literacy and school attendance correlates with greater understanding of ... improved crop production methods, including increased likelihood of developing and using seeds and crops appropriate for their particular ecological and cultural context ~~improved crop varieties and fertilizers~~”

**97.** Traditional knowledge is also important, as well as ways of integrating this knowledge into scientific research. To maintain coherence with art 26 of the Declaration on the Right of Peasants and other peoples living in rural areas this paragraph should be reviewed.

### **3.9 Social protection and food and nutrition assistance**

**112.** This paragraph could be brought up into paragraph **30. (iv)** thereby setting the vision on universal social protection and human rights.

### **3.10 Gender equality and women’s empowerment across food security and nutrition in humanitarian crises and emergencies**

#### ***Impacts of zoonotic diseases for women and girls***

This section should also take into consideration the positive role women have played during the pandemic: indigenous women producing traditional crops, feeding the communities, and providing traditional medicine; solidarity economy initiatives of fruits and vegetable deliveries through purchase groups, and many other examples have been documented across the globe. These are important leverages, which build upon for food systems transformation and tackling the further crisis.