

CSM ASSESSMENT OF VGFSYN

INTRODUCTION

In our view, the Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition (VGFSyN) do not live up to the claim that their content will give guidance on how to accelerate the transformation towards more just, sustainable and healthier food systems. On the contrary, we believe that the document clearly contributes to preserve the status quo of globalised food systems or even expand it.

This document serves as a background document to the short **positioning document of the CSM regarding the VGFSyN**. It aims at explaining more in detail the concerns the CSM has regarding the VGFSyN, regarding content, process and political dynamics. It furthermore aims at giving guidance on how to engage with the guidelines, in the sense that it explains which aspects of the guidelines need a particular attention, as they are contradictory to or far less progressive than already existing norms or policy documents.

Furthermore, all along the years of engaging in the CFS process on Food systems and Nutrition, the CSM has developed its own [vision document](#) which explains thoroughly its vision regarding the transformation of food systems.

CONCERNS REGARDING THE PROCESS OF THE NEGOTIATIONS

In terms of process, we have seen a **lack of inclusiveness**. This was not only because of the online format, which makes it very difficult for those on the ground to follow, but also because considerable amount of the negotiations took place during so-called informal Friends of the Chair sessions, without interpretation, and often scheduled at very short notice in a European centric time zone. As such, the negotiations were an **irregular process** not in line with CFS principles. The CSM also felt a hostile atmosphere where a great part of our interventions was disregarded or sometimes attacked.

In terms of **political dynamics**, we noticed with concerns that the negotiations were largely dominated by a bloc of exporting countries (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Russia, US, and to a certain extent also EU) defending the interests of their transnational corporations and the vision of an increasingly globalized food system with global food supply chains and global trade and investment at its core. Despite those most powerful countries, most Member States seemed to be there not to build a strong, progressive document but rather to defend their core economic interests. Also Asian countries seemed to negotiate in order to defend some specific issues which represent core economic interests for them, in line with the globalized agro industrial food system (specifically Philippines, Indonesia). Countries from the Global South were almost entirely absent from the negotiations with few exceptions such as Senegal and Mali, which strongly supported CSM's proposals and views. However, the request for the so-called "flexibility" was not the same for all actors, it was demanded on almost all occasions to countries that were aligned with our positions.

It was furthermore worrying that **knowledge sources best placed to shape the VGFSyN**— HLPE reports, human rights resolutions, codes and guidance from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and other relevant multilateral bodies, the lived experiences of vulnerable and marginalised peoples, and **even content from CFS's own policy outcomes--were ignored and shockingly undermined** to produce a document that offers no meaningful or substantive input to future policy processes on building sustainable, resilient, healthy and just food systems.

Particularly concerning was that during the last week of the negotiations of the VGFSyN at the end of January, **additionally to undermining previous work and rules and procedure of the CFS itself**, there were **attempts to undermine the international legal system** by restricting the authority of UN Declarations adopted by the UN General Assembly which lead the CSM to abandon the session and later on continue only as observers, which helped to revert this attack.

Throughout the VGFSyN negotiations, a common refrain we heard was the importance of producing a document for the **Food Systems Summit**. The guidelines should have informed the summit but the summit should not have imposed time constraints to the negotiations. We clearly see that, although the VGFSyN and the Food Summit have different starting points, they are converging in the same direction: advancing a market capitalist and corporate friendly conceptualisation and framework of governance of food systems.

During the adoption of the VGFSyN at the CFS 47 Plenary on 10h of February, the **CSM has expressed its deep disappointment and reservations on both the content and process of the VGFSyN**.

All these concerns regarding the process also frame how we assess the guidelines.

You can see CSM's intervention on our concerns regarding the *undermining of international legal systems and CFS language* [here](#) or by clicking the image below



CONCERNS IN TERMS OF CONTENT: ALMOST ALL OUR PRIORITIES ARE NOT REPRESENTED IN THE GUIDELINES

You can access to CSM's final statements during the last sessions of negotiations [here](#), or you can click on the image below to see recording of the final intervention by Isa Alvarez' (co-cordinator of the WG)



You can read CSM's interventions during the CFS 47 Plenary session [here](#), including Shalmali Guttal's intervention during the CSM Policy Briefing and Hamadi Mohammed's intervention during the Plenary.

You can click on the image below to see the recording of Isa Alvarez' (co-coordinator of the WG) intervention during the CFS 47 Plenary session.



No holistic food systems lens and no recognition of the public purpose of food systems	Lack of a holistic human rights approach	Lack of clarification of roles	Omission of key concept of sustainable healthy diets	No prioritization of local and resilient food systems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No recognition of the urgent need for radical transformation of today's dominant food system • No acknowledgement of the negative impacts of industrial food systems in precipitating the climate crisis, ecological destruction and related pandemics; of ultra-processed foods on malnutrition and chronic health problems; and of long supply chains and trade agreements on local/domestic food systems, livelihoods, and access to food and water. • No mention of planetary boundaries and no strong definition of sustainability • No holistic understanding of food systems as matter of public interest. • Almost absence of regulation of trade, investment and corporations for the public interest • Absence of guidance for recalibrating public policies towards addressing power imbalances in society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of human rights as central pillar for food systems transformation • Omission of the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation • Right to health almost absent • Weak section on worker's rights • Gender equality not strong enough 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No clarification of role of state to regulate private sector • No prioritization of those most affected by hunger and malnutrition as rights holders in decision making (throughout the process, not only for consulting) • Fail to recommend strong safeguards against Conflict of Interests in policy-making, monitoring and science and research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concept of sustainable healthy diets was not agreeable for member states. Instead, now the concept is on "healthy diets through sustainable food systems". However, not used consistently throughout document (focusing only on healthy diets in a lot of parts) and no recognition of the need for transition to sustainable food systems as a condition for enabling healthy diets. • No recognition of the ecological dimension as a cross cutting element and a common • The Guidelines fail to recognise the importance of regulating ultra-processed foods. • Undermining of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes in removing all references to Regulations and to the Code's subsequent relevant WHA Resolutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dilution of the importance of agroecology: Agroecology is put at the same level as "other innovative approaches" such as no-till farming • No recommendation of reduction of the use of pesticides. • No promotion of local markets, no recognition of territorial markets as crucial economic spaces for food systems • No recognition of the communal and public economy upon which local and national food systems heavily rely

WHICH ARE POSITIVE POINTS THAT WE MANAGED TO INCLUDE?

The WG has come to the evaluation that the Guidelines do have some (but very few) positive points, but this was succeeded due to our participation and strong resistance as CSM. We believe that if we were not present, the Guidelines could have been much worse.

Please note: If in a way we managed to insert some of our points, in most cases they come undermined later in the same sentence. This is done through the insertion of “as appropriate” or “in accordance with international laws and obligations” or adding systematically the “economic dimension of sustainability”.

For instance, even if we managed to insert a mention of local food systems, we can clearly see that this document is aimed at maintaining the status-quo of globalized food systems, and if not, “push for more”. This becomes clear, for instance, as where we see the mention of small-scale food producers there is also a mention that they should be supported to “be integrated” in the global chain. Furthermore, when local markets are mentioned they are not mentioned alone, but alongside national and international ones; giving no guidance at all to strengthen local markets.

However, we can highlight the following points:

- Food systems framing: multiple objectives, need for policy coherence, sustainable food systems linked to resilience and equity
- Framing of nutrition: Connection of nutrition with poverty, health, sustainability, food systems. However, there is a focus only on nutrition throughout document, and interconnections with ecological dimension are very weak
- The WG has evaluated that even though these framings are not strong, the framework of food systems and nutrition can still be used for groundwork just to be able to speak about these topics beyond nutrition with a more systemic approach. In particular, the recognition of the interlinkages around nutrition are useful to advocate for changes and nutritional/food policies at local, regional, national level. Despite evidence of systemic implications, at the national level nutrition is still generally understood as an individual problem, excepted for specialists and placing all responsibilities on the consumers. The guidelines can help speaking about nutrition in a more systemic way
- Right to Food in objectives, Rights of women, Right to health (only once)
- UNDROP, ILO Declaration on fundamental principles and rights at work are included. However, Paragraph 41’s chapeau weakens the cited resolutions.
- Mention of most vulnerable groups; wording: “indigenous peoples and local communities, vulnerable groups, rural women and young people, smallholders, peasants, family farmers, fisherfolks, pastoralists, farmers, rangers as well as their organizations, cooperatives and networks and landless and food system workers” (good: range of groups named; Peasants as standalone group, not under family farmers)
- Mention of conflicts of interest (CoI) in a lot of paragraphs. However, this is done through the insertion of “identification and management” and not safeguards against CoI. The guidelines also fail to recommend strong safeguards against Conflict of Interests in policy-making, monitoring and science and research
- We managed to avoid the mention of biofortification and any possible implicit reference to it
- Fortification is mentioned with caveat
- Mention of One health Approach
- Participation of indigenous peoples highlighted (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues – UNPRII - has referred positively to a paragraph related to it)
- Local and traditional knowledge mentioned several times (but no dialogue of knowledges)
- A lot of the analysis is OK for being a document that is not in “our” language

GUIDANCE FOR ASPECTS OF THE VGFSYN THAT ARE UNDERMINING OR WEAKENING ALREADY EXISTING DOCUMENTS

Topic/Aspect	Mention in VGFSyN	Already existing norms, policy guidance, expert publications
Human rights norms and approaches	Overall, there are hardly any references to human rights norms and approaches (this becomes particularly clear if, for example, the Guiding Principles of the VGGT Guidelines (3A & 3B), which were also negotiated in the CFS, are compared to the Guiding Principles of VG FSyN 2.3).	CFS VGGT
UNGA resolutions	The mere mention of international law instruments adopted by the UN General Assembly was in some cases fiercely opposed, even if they were mentioned under relativising chapeaus (para 41: "The VGFSyN are intended to be applied, consistent with the following instruments as far as each of these instruments are relevant and applicable and as far as they have been agreed, acknowledged and/or endorsed by respective Member States"). See also the statement of the US regarding UNDRIP/FPIC: <i>"the United States recognizes the significance of the Declaration's provisions on free, prior and informed consent, which the United States understands to call for a process of meaningful consultation with tribal leaders, but not necessarily the agreement of those leaders,"</i> ¹)	
Women`s rights and gender equality	The mention of women's rights enshrined in international law was questioned in a worrying manner and in the relevant paragraph (F 3.6 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment across Food Systems) was only listed once in a highly restrictive, and thus human rights non-compliant, context (para 59). The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) could not even be anchored in the list of reference documents (para 41). No mention of the rights of LGBTI and other non-binary persons.	CEDAW
Right to water	lack of reference to the right to water and to its interdependence with the right to food is a worrying	See https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/ESCR/Pages/Water.aspx
Regulation of Conflicts of interests	There was no support for the CSM's text proposals for robust safeguards against conflict of interest (COI). Although this is an important instrument against undue influence of the private sector on policy and legislative processes, especially in the field of agriculture and food, the soft	CFS VGGT

¹ http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/cfs/CFS47/Statements/CFS47_V_USA.pdf

	<p>phrase "safeguards for the identification and management of potential conflicts of interest" is now included.</p> <p>This is used almost everywhere in a thematically limited way (e.g. "...establishing or strengthening multistakeholder platforms, partnerships, processes and frameworks, with safeguards for the identification and management of potential conflicts of interest..."). (para 62)). More importantly, it also falls short of the already negotiated formulation of the CFS in the VGGT regarding the role of the state ("States should adopt and enforce anti-corruption measures including [...] addressing conflicts of interest and adopting clear rules and regulations. (VGGT 6.9)), as it only speaks of "Governments should develop transparent mechanisms..." (para 54)</p>	
Sustainable healthy diets	Concept absent	<p>Concept widely used, for instance in FAO and WHO:</p> <p>http://www.fao.org/3/ca6640en/ca6640en.pdf</p>
Strengthening local markets	Very weak	CFS PR on connecting smallholders to markets
Agroecology	Dilution of the importance of agroecology: Agroecology is put at the same level as "other innovative approaches" such as no-till farming	<p>FAO 10 elements of agroecology</p> <p>HLPE 14 report on Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition</p>
Regulation of marketing for children	The wording of the existing WHA resolution on regulating the marketing of food to children has been watered down (for instance: "reduce the impact on children of inappropriate marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages" (3.5.1 b) instead of "Settings where children gather should be free from all forms of marketing of foods high in saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, free sugars, or salt" (WHA)).	WHA resolution A63.14 on marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children
International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes	Undermining of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes in removing all references to Regulations and to the Code's subsequent relevant WHA Resolutions	https://www.who.int/nutrition/netcode/resolutions/en/