

**CSM Positioning on the Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition endorsed by
Member States on the 47th Plenary Session of the CFS
April 2021**

We, the constituencies¹ of the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSM), are highly committed to the work of the Committee on World Food Security. We have been actively participating for the last 5 years in the preparations and in the negotiations on the Voluntary Guidelines on Food systems and Nutrition, with a lot of expectation for the final outcome. The development of such guidelines has been crucial in our view, as the transformation of the current dominant food systems is more urgent than ever, in order to address the ecological, climate, justice, sanitary, nutritional and hunger crisis we are witnessing.

Now, we have come together to collectively assess CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition as endorsed by Member States.

It is not with easiness that the CSM expresses its disappointment and disheartenment vis-à-vis the outcomes and the deviation of this policy convergence process. The Guidelines fail to meet the ambition, mandate and aspirations that this process should have had. They are far from the CSM expectations and priorities² and could even undermine progress achieved so far. Despite currently being in the midst of a health and planetary crisis, they fail to give guidance for the transformation of food systems that is needed to address this crisis on top of pre-existing ones, and which negatively affect the lives of so many while benefiting only a few.

This evaluation has also been deeply marked by the way we have experienced the negotiation process since May 2020: careless methodologies, accelerated timings, hostile atmosphere and strong power plays have exacerbated and brought under the spotlight the cracks developing in the CFS, which was founded and has operated as the most inclusive intergovernmental platform for food security and nutrition. The CSM had warned at the very beginning of the process that the virtuality could not replace in-presence negotiations. In fact, the choice to continue from remote under the context of such a health emergency made it almost impossible for our constituencies to participate.

This result, however, does not come unexpectedly. CSM had been re-iterating the need to revert the modalities of this process in order to guarantee that the CFS principles could be maintained. It was however unfortunate to see how a reformed CFS, whose prerogative is to put those most affected by hunger and malnutrition at the center, was clearly ignoring and side-lining the fact that dominant agro-industrial food systems have been and still are responsible for the ecological, social and nutritional calamities that have worsened with COVID-19. The process' deviation has not permitted to the identification of the problems and possible formulation of guidance for a transformation towards more sustainable, healthy and just food systems. Instead, we have assisted a clear powerplay and an inclination to avoid drawing attention to the responsibilities of those actors who clearly engaged in the negotiations with the main aim of defending their economic interests.

The Guidelines state that they are evidence-based but fail to recognise the value of the scientific knowledge demonstrating the need for a radical transformation of the dominant food system.

¹ The CSM consists of 11 constituencies: smallholder farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolks, Indigenous Peoples, agricultural and food workers, landless, women, youth, consumers, urban food insecure and NGOs.

² CSM's priorities for the negotiations have been: 1. Holistic food systems approach which recognizes and protects the public objectives of food systems; 2. Holistic human rights approach as central pillar for food systems transformation; 3. Clarification of roles, prioritization of those most affected by hunger and malnutrition and regulations in the public interest; 4. Sustainable healthy diets; 5. Prioritization of local, resilient, agroecological food systems.

Evidence collected by parallel CFS processes and other UN agencies³, evidence that challenges the interests of the industrial agriculture or food and beverage companies is at best ignored and at worst undermined.

This statement serves also as a broader call of awareness for the CFS. We see the fast-paced advancement of the export-oriented and market-led solutions to address Food Security and Nutrition concerns and corporate takeover of food systems' knowledge generation and governance spaces. This declaration intends to protect the reformed CFS, but also the UN as a whole, from this trend that threatens multilateralism and human rights, of which the Food Systems Summit is a clear example of.

We find ourselves mourning for this critically important missed opportunity to rectify a broken system. We deeply regret that Member States have decided to endorse a document that is more oriented to maintain the status quo than committed to the ambitious, profound and comprehensive transformation that is so urgently required. Instead, the document perpetuates the accumulating failures by ushering in a decision-making process that blurs identities and responsibilities in relation to governance, decision making and democratic accountability.

The Guidelines reveal this increasing tendency and the CSM has [collectively analyzed it](#). Although not exhaustive, the following points reveal it:

- 1) **The guidelines do not give guidance for transforming and redirecting current dominant food systems:** They do not acknowledge the negative impacts of today's dominant food systems, do not recognize planetary boundaries, place agroecology on the same level as sustainable intensification and fail to recommend reducing the use of pesticides.
- 2) **The guidelines do not embrace a holistic food systems lens and do not recognize the public interest of food systems:** They rarely mention regulation of trade, investment and corporations and fail to give guidance for reframing public policies towards addressing power imbalances and safeguarding them against conflicts of interest.
- 3) **The guidelines lack a holistic human rights approach:** The Guidelines mention the fulfilment of the right to food as objective but depart from the holistic view of human rights as universal, interdependent and indivisible. A clear example is the omission of the right to safe drinking water and sanitation. How could we possibly ensure the right to food, without also ensuring the right to access safe drinking water?
- 4) **The guidelines do not promote or protect sustainable healthy diets:** They don't recognize sustainable food systems as a necessary precondition for enabling healthy diets. They don't consider human and planetary health and well-being as inseparable. The complete missed opportunity to include the concept of healthy and sustainable diets and the subsequent failure to adequately and consistently recognize the link between environmental and human health throughout the document is a main limitation of the document.

The Guidelines fail to acknowledge the harms **caused by current agriculture and trade policies**. **They also fail to recognize the damage caused by** ultra-processed edibles and beverages and anti-microbial use for growth promotion – nor, despite the fact that they are already voluntary, acknowledge the need to regulate these products and substances with the aim to achieve sustainable diets. Critically, the Guidelines undermine the need for regulation and implementation of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent World Health Assembly resolutions and other strategies to end harmful marketing.

- 5) **The guidelines fail to prioritize local, resilient and agroecological food systems:** They do not protect or promote food production for adequate nutrition and healthy diets for all, local markets,

³ For example, the HLPE reports on “Agroecological approaches and other innovations for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition” and on “Food security and nutrition: building a global narrative towards 2030”

the food exchange networks that secure the livelihoods of 80% of our population, falling behind CFS policy recommendations such as the CFS PR on connecting smallholders to markets. By mentioning local markets alongside national and international ones, there is no guidance on how to address the current discrimination of local markets.

The CSM's priorities come from our collective vision document, co-created by all our consistencies as a roadmap for ensuring food sovereignty for people in all territories. It has been and continues to be built around the lived experiences and struggles led by our constituencies on the ground. It is the document that will still orient the CSM constituencies. Unlike the Voluntary Guidelines, the [CSM Vision document](#) does offer a path towards food systems that respond in a fair and equitable manner to the good living of ourselves and Mother Earth.

The CSM has collectively decided that the Voluntary Guidelines for Food Systems and Nutrition endorsed by Member States are not sufficient for the food system transformation we urgently need and some parts of it might even put at risk the work and livelihoods of our people. On any occasion that we might be asked to engage with this CFS policy outcome, we will do so critically, raising our concerns not only in terms of content but also within which conditions and unbalances these Guidelines were developed.

Due to the continuous engagement of some members states, CSM and some other participants, the Guidelines include some positive points, which may contribute to uphold our ongoing work at national or local level, despite the fact that in most cases these positive points are conditioned with caveats intended to weaken them.

The CSM will continue to disseminate its own vision for food systems and proclaim its critical positioning towards the VGFSyN. In order to protect the reformed CFS, the CSM will continue to engage with it and continue to monitor the work around food systems and nutrition, notably the implementation of the VGFSyN at national and regional level. Circumventing CSM's critical positioning on the Guidelines would pose an even greater risk on the legitimacy of this process, and the CFS overall. Therefore, the CSM remains committed and attentive to the follow-up mechanism and actions, both by the CFS and its actors, in the implementation of the guidelines at all levels in order to formulate preventive advice and limit the negative impacts on our populations of some of the provisions disseminated in the chapters of the VGFSyN approved in February 2021.

We recall States of their responsibility as duty bearers to respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of all, and call on the CFS to monitor the effects that these guidelines will have. We will continue to work on the protection and transformation of our food systems, based on human rights, food sovereignty, agroecology, equity, respect for people and planet in order to ensure the multiple public objectives they serve for our health, livelihoods, culture, and ecosystems...