CSIPM Data Working Group statement during the First Open-Ended Working Group Meeting on Data collection and analysis tools for food security and nutrition

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We, the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism, would like to begin with our appreciation for the ambitious HLPE report. Importantly, this report places data governance at the heart of its proposed framework, opens up the discussion about digitalization, and raises serious questions regarding the balance of benefits and risks. It acknowledges that the many unknown aspects of emerging digital technologies must be addressed, and elaborates a comprehensive framework for democratizing data collection and data-informed decision-making. It also highlights the importance of grounding the conceptual framework for data collection and analysis in human rights, including the right to food, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas.

However, the five specific areas of recommendation at the end of the HLPE report are limited to addressing only a narrow slice of the issues brought up by the report as well as earlier inputs in the workstream. The recommendations fail to address the impact of data-driven and digital tools on food security and nutrition.

These recommendations focus on only one aspect of the interaction of data with the food system: the collection of statistical quantitative data to inform policy making. This approach has the dangerous tendency of narrowing or reducing smallholder farmers, food producers, and Indigenous Peoples and their related territories to simply a source of data instead of strengthening them as *rights holders*. In contrast, today, data collection and analysis through digital technologies is being integrated into all aspects of food system activity with the ostensible goal of "optimizing" food systems to make them sustainable and efficient while ignoring the negative social and environmental impacts.

As more data-driven technologies are being introduced, data on food systems is now emerging as one of the most valuable commodities. This massive accumulation of digital information–on land, seeds, plant genetics, livestock, workers, production systems and consumer behavior–as well as the unequal capacity to analyze and process data is concentrating power and wealth into the hands of a few and putting future food security in jeopardy. The report spends an entire chapter exploring these technologies and acknowledges their risks. It is disappointing therefore that the recommendations did not engage with this important and far reaching dimensional change in our food systems and their implications for food security and nutrition.

The Open Ended Working group should urgently rectify this oversight. The evaluation of the impacts of data-driven digital agrifood technologies and their proper evaluation, governance and oversight must be a key plank of any policy recommendations work on this topic.

With this missing element in mind and building from the current 5 proposed recommendations we suggest the following re-arrangement and consolidation into 4 themes:

1. **Governance:** Establishing inclusive data governance for enhanced data agency
2. **Assessment:** Assessing data-driven technologies in the food system (an essential missing element)
3. **Justice and equity**: Strengthening and aligning data collection infrastructures in a fair, open and appropriate basis
4. **Capacity building:** Improving capacity building, human capacities and participation in data assessment, data governance and collection

We will now offer more specific recommendations of what should be considered under each of these four themes:

Governance:
Data governance must be driven by already agreed upon normative frameworks including the human right to food, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and ILO Convention 169, as well as emerging guidelines such as the FAIR and CARE principles described in the HLPE report.

Governance of data must ensure that digitization is oriented to the common good and will aim to guarantee individual and collective rights, promote democratic, open and decentralized structures of digital technologies. A participatory approach to governance must guard against power imbalances that would inevitably lead to increasing discrimination and data enclosure. States have to ensure that data is collected with 'privacy protection,' anonymity, and the necessary prohibition that no data or information derived from the data can be turned into a private marketable product.

The requirement of informed consent of all communities and Free Prior and Informed Consent for Indigenous Peoples for data collecting and sharing must be upheld.The HLPE makes a strong recommendation that data should not be resold.

Assessment:
An assessment of the whole digital food chain and its future needs should be developed to avoid excluding key aspects of the diversity of food systems as well as to protect those elements of food systems that may be eroded by the digitalization of food production, processing and distribution processes. A first step in this direction would be to ensure that data collection will avoid the potential bias embedded in algorithms, disaggregated data and data categories that reflect only partially the reality of the local contexts. This assessment must include methods in which the digital food chain may enhance and support agroecology, food sovereignty, human rights and environmental justice. Transferring total reliability and accountability to private data systems for the critical issue of food security is deeply problematic and dangerous to future food security and food sovereignty. Instead, the assessment of data appropriateness must be the role of all actors, and especially rights-holders.

Justice and equity:

Recommendations 1 and 3 of the HLPE report on *Data collection and analysis tools for Food Security and Nutrition* address generating demand and strengthening the data-collection systems. However, data collection infrastructures must be strengthened in a way that is concretely fair, equitable, open, and appropriate. The recommendations should acknowledge that conflicts of interest that are inevitable when the private sector is involved in data collection; that there exists multiple forms of data beyond quantitative and machine-readable data, such as qualitative data, and multiple methodologies of information collection and analysis are already developed by communities, including Indigenous communities; and lack of access to data is a component of inequity. Countries are developing policies that take digitalization for granted, while communities with diverse connectivity needs can't cope with the pace of changes in services and demands of digital literacy so they can claim their rights. Basic human rights can be impacted by the spread of digitalization.

Capacity building:
The policy recommendations must address improving capacity building and human capacities to enable participation in data quality assessment, governance and collection. Policy recommendations must support and enhance the capacities of small-scale food producers and their organizations and communities to identify and produce the data they need. Small-scale food producers and their organizations and communities need to identify and share existing models and develop new organizational models to allow data gaps identification, data collection and data analysis; they should be encouraged and supported in these efforts by public authorities at all levels. The policy recommendations should offer specific recommendations for strengthening the capacity for participatory data assessment, collection, and governance to enable inclusive data governance. The policy recommendations must therefore both address access to data and technologies as part of enabling community capacity building to engage in effective governance of data.