

CSIPM's evaluation of the CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls Empowerment

Contextualisation

In the context of the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS), negotiations of Voluntary guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) in the context of food security and nutrition took place over the last 3 years. The text of the Guidelines was finalised in June 2023 and is set to be endorsed by member States during [CFS51 plenary](#) in October 2023. [Read the CFS VGs on GEWE](#)

It is worth noting that this is the first framework on gender equality and women's empowerment within the CFS. The CFS is a unique policy space where civil society, and Indigenous Peoples, through the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSIPM) are admitted participants (not only as observers) and actively negotiate policy outcomes such as the voluntary guidelines. CFS Guidelines are non-binding legal frameworks that guide the elaboration of public policies at national, regional, or local levels, as well as the action of UN agencies such as the FAO, WFP or IFAD.

The CSIPM has assessed the quality of the gender guidelines to determine whether we will actively participate in their dissemination, use them for future advocacy, etc. In our reflections, we have also taken into account the need to strengthen CFS, which is increasingly called into question at international level, despite being the foremost inclusive platform of governance for food security and nutrition.

One of the main expectations of the CSIPM participating organizations was to see an ambitious and transformative policy document that can truly impact people's lives in their communities and territories. The CSIPM advocated for a strong human rights approach within these guidelines, recognizing that the realization of the Right to Food, which is the vision of the reformed CFS, is interdependent and interlinked with the recognition, fulfilment and protection of all human rights. In the context of these guidelines, we highlighted the links between the right to food and the rights of women, girls and persons with diverse genders and sexualities.

While the CSIPM Women and Gender Diversities WG has actively contributed with our knowledge and experiences from territories to the entire policy process, including the Regional Consultations and the different rounds of negotiations in Rome, our positions faced a lot of resistance from different member States and observers.

Through the whole process the WG has collectively decided upon clear demands that should be addressed in the Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment:

- A strong human rights approach within these guidelines, that recognizes the realization of the Right to Food
- A world free from sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination of any kind

- Intersectional perspective to address multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination due to race, caste, ethnicity, age, social class, language, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, migration status and disabilities
- Ensure the right to health, including sexual and reproductive health rights
- A fair, sustainable food system centered on the realization of individual and collective human rights, with agroecology at the heart of our daily work and lives
- Guarantee and protection of the right to land and right to water and natural resources for women, girls and non-cis heteronormative persons from different sectors, Indigenous Peoples, and persons with disabilities
- Promote and encourage locally based food systems and territorial markets
- Inclusion and explicit recognition of diversities of gender identities and sexual orientation
- Protection of women's rights in the context of conflict/occupation
- Universal social protection and equal wages
- Address harmful social norms
- Ensure rights in access to public services and reduction and redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work

The journey of the CSIPM Women and Gender Diversities

Working Group

The [Working Group](#) of the CSIPM has a long history of building and strengthening the struggle for the autonomy and self-determination of women and non-cis heteronormative persons to deconstruct the patriarchal narrative that considers them as mere victims and not agents of change, and to operate a radical transformation of our food systems. The Working Group is a space to exchange demands, visions, struggles, expectations, and ambitions to build convergence within the CSIPM itself but also towards the CFS policy processes. In April 2022 the Working Group has been renamed from Women Working Group to Women and Gender Diversities Working Group to better reflect its members' experiences and needs and include the diversity of gender identities and sexual orientations.

The Working Group helps to advance the gender lens transversally throughout the CSIPM and has been an important actor in strengthening the intersectionality and gender equality perspective for the right to food through different pathways. One important moment was the CFS Forum on Women's Empowerment (2016), where the CSIPM WG brought strongly the women's rights and food sovereignty agenda and was able to shape the [outcomes of the Forum](#) with a formal recognition of food sovereignty, women's agency and autonomy. This led to consolidate a [vision of the WG](#) to guide the internal convergence of the CSIPM for the prioritization of deconstructing patriarchal norms which shape food systems. In the context of COVID-19, the WG published a [report on the impacts of COVID-19 from a feminist perspective](#), which has been an essential source to feed into the start of the CFS policy convergence process on GEWE in 2020.

More recently, participants of the WG have expressed how rich was the experience in building a common positioning towards the negotiations of the CFS Guidelines on GEWE. In doing so, solidarity; mutual learning; new ways of interacting with each other; caring for the space;

recognizing, accepting and supporting diversity; and bringing transformative interventions were some of the feelings expressed for the WG's space out of the evaluation process we have been carrying out. As WG we have built a feminist thread in the CSIPM's and CFS's memory and this has been recorded extensively [through pictures](#), [written](#) and [oral statements](#) and [videos](#).

As WG we want to celebrate this collective memory and build a mosaic of experiences in participating to the WG's space. We want to share this transformative experience with the CSIPM. But also, to the CFS, because our lived experiences and the ones from our communities were the guiding light for our positioning, and they cannot be erased. Let the CSIPM Women and Gender Diversities WG be the living reminder of this.

Knitting our journey as WG - Tejiendo nuestra trayectoria como GT
63 responses



Elements for the analysis of the Voluntary guidelines GEWGE

These initial elements reflect the complexities and challenges faced in the evaluation process. Further analysis and advocacy are necessary to align the VG GEWGE with the vision of a more equitable and just world. In the VG, we note:

- We value the strong recognition of gender equality as fundamental for human rights. The human rights language is relatively strong in this document compared to previous CFS outcomes, including a guiding principle on commitment to human rights, particularly the different references to women's rights and the background and rationale of the Guidelines. Paragraph 1 recognizes gender equality as critical for the CFS
- However, our concerns remain as there has been a complete invisibilization of non-cis heteronormative persons, and spaces for open interpretation have been limited to very low minimum.
- The intersectionality lens has been watered down a lot. Only one direct reference to it, and not in the guiding principles. Discrimination based on gender was reduced to "based on sex", and there was no inclusion of discrimination based on cast. We have

only succeeded to include a footnote with the reference to the right to food guidelines which refer to discrimination based on gender. This could be an opening to have a more inclusive reading and strengthen the understanding possibly next year in the context of the right to food guidelines 20th anniversary.

- The references to “gender transformative” approaches were deleted, the only references in the text are on “gender responsive” approaches, which does not reflect the need to deconstruct the patriarchal nature of food systems
- The objectives of the VGs refer to their aim to work towards gender equality, but the CSIPM believes these guidelines are not enough for that aim
- We appreciate the recognition of discrimination as worsening food insecurity
- We appreciate the recognition of women’s agency in food systems and their autonomy. In the guiding principles, the notion of empowerment is defined through the recognition of women as rights-holders, and their agency and autonomy both individually and collectively
- Sections on social protection and unpaid and unrecognized care work are quite strong. Para 86: universal social protection for all while recognizing individuals as right-holders (could also be open to interpretation for all persons). Para 85: linkages between social protection, school meals and local food procurement. Para 94.iv): patriarchal norms in unjust distribution of care work are described but not mentioned. Role of social protection in re-distributing care work
- We regret the strong focus on partnerships, finance, investment and entrepreneurship type of solutions. We succeeded to include in this capitalistic approach, references to the risks of land appropriation as collateral for loans, indebtedness and debt traps related to loans and microloans, and to solidarity funds to mitigate this focus.
- The whole sub-section devoted to ICTs creates incoherence in the guidelines. It undermines the recognition of more structural recommendations to address gender inequalities, such as public policies and social protection to reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work.
- We welcome the references to the role of women-led organizations, women’s rights organizations, social movements. Recognition of the right to self-association, self-organization. Role of women’s organization in addressing climate change, and support for direct funding to these organizations.
- The section on violence has been moved downwards in the document and has been framed in the binary norm, whenever there are references to gender-based violence “against women” has been added. The section has nevertheless included references to sexual violence. One paragraph that could be more open to interpretation is paragraph 107.v) which refers to COVID-19 “address the gender dimensions of COVID-19” which could be linked up with the [SOGI’s report on the impacts of COVID-19](#) on the rights of non-cis heteronormative persons
- Agroecology as such is only referred to in a footnote. In general, agroecology has been even further undermined in the CFS.
- Indigenous Peoples have been recognized throughout, but there has been an undermining of the advancements in terms of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC). In the Guidelines we can read “free, prior and informed consent, as applicable”, which is an undermining of UNDRIP and other human rights frameworks

- We also regret that multistakeholderism is defended in the document, for more information on the critique of multistakeholderism, visit the resources available at <https://foodsystems4people.org/>
- The section on access and control over natural resources, including the problem analysis, is quite strong, although in some cases instead of referring to land tenure rights, there are references only to property rights. Reference to landless women. We managed to include a reference to CEDAW's recommendation number 34 which refers to food sovereignty
- References to occupation were not included, despite the alarming evidence on how occupation has disastrous effects on the lives of women and diverse persons and their right to food.
- We welcome that the role of cooperatives, territorial markets and producers' organizations has been recognized in a recommendation.
- A recommendation (74.i) in the education section urges governments to address social norms that perpetuate gender inequality by challenging gender stereotypes and discrimination in education, capacity building, training, knowledge access and generation, and information. This could be another space for pushing an open interpretation for all persons.
- There were inclusions to "respect national context/cultural context/ national priorities", which could serve as open interpretation for countries resisting the advance of the gender equality agenda to not prioritize it
- Patriarchy has unfortunately not been referred to directly, but several inclusions refer to the need to transform/address discriminatory social and cultural norms. The guiding principle on non-discrimination (paragraph 20) is strong and does not fall into the binary framing. There is also a cross-cutting recommendation to address gender discriminatory norms (32.iii) that is also open for a non-binary interpretation

Initial elements emerging from the discussion on the evaluation of the Voluntary Guidelines

In the first evaluation call (August 2023), second evaluation call (September 2023) and third evaluation call (October 2023) of the Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment (VG GEWGE), the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSIPM) working group discussed various important aspects. These elements aim to capture the essence of the discussions:

1. **Long historical context and commitment.** The CSIPM struggle to include women's rights in the CFS started many years ago. 2016 marked a significant milestone as it was the first time women's rights were mentioned within the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). Recognizing the lengthy journey undertaken since then is essential, including the internal changes to become a more inclusive space and advance an intersectional agenda in the CSIPM, but also within the CFS. The participatory process for changing the WG's name was an important step to visibilize the struggle for the rights of all persons outside the binary and heteronormative norm.

2. **Commitment to the process/value of participating in CFS.** The CSIPM working group is very committed to the process of the VG GEWGE, with a determination to influence policy outcomes and advocate for real transformative change to de-construct patriarchal and colonial norms through the lens of intersectionality.
3. **Diverse participation and representation.** Within the CSIPM working group, there exists a rich diversity of participants. This diversity of regions, cultures, gender identities, constituencies, age, race and ethnicities brings a multitude of perspectives and lived experiences to the evaluation process. We need to recognize the complexities of such a process, but also celebrate the richness that this diversity brings to the CSIPM voice. This WG has the responsibility and mandate to facilitate political convergence while bringing together the differences without cancelling them.
4. **A CSIPM evaluation that doesn't fall into a dichotomy of good/bad document.** Throughout the evaluation we need to care for the diversity within the working group. While this policy document might contain advancements (see analysis section), the rights of non-cis heteronormative persons are entirely disregarded. As collective, we cannot celebrate if the lives of a part of our WG are invisibilized and under threat, and some of us are unable to access natural resources, food, healthcare.
5. **Participation in the CFS Gender process.** The CFS continues to be an important space for CSO and IPOs participation into policy making. Our active engagement within the CFS has yielded significant impact, which could be evidenced throughout the entire process of the Voluntary Guidelines, including the regional consultations. It is clear that July 2022 marked a difficult moment where the power dynamics of patriarchy in decision making were deeply experienced. A resistance to advancing a document centred on human rights, based on evidence and intersectionality blocked the CFS process and evidenced how, unfortunately, gender is perceived as contentious by a big group of actors, including Member States, participants and observers. The final version of the Guidelines has been definitely enriched by inputs from Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Indigenous Peoples' Organizations (IPOs) from where it left off in July 2022 (see analysis section). However, many challenges persist, as it was clear from the strong objections to women's rights and the cancellation of the rights of non-cis heteronormative persons. The VGs GEWGE fall short of expectations, in fact they avoid using the term "transformative".

In the evaluation process, it has become evident that the group tends not to walk towards a non-endorsement of the entire document, as the advancements that we can see in the final VGs can be used by the CSIPM's constituencies for their dissemination. We can therefore imagine a positioning by the CSIPM that goes beyond a simple endorsement/non-endorsement, but that actually brings in the complexity that Member States avoid. This could be done through a strong call to the insufficiency of these guidelines for a human-rights based gender analysis for food security and still push for having gender anchored in the future work of the CFS. We could think about the support by the CSIPM for the guidelines' implementation through our own CSIPM interpretation, including our critique to elements that undermine the progress made in

recent years (eg. Agroecology, FPIC). This is why the work on the 'alternative guidelines' becomes ever-more important.

6. **Ongoing and future work.** There is no cause for celebration; rather, the work must continue to eliminate gender discrimination, revert the patriarchal system of oppression and transform policies for gender equality. The continuation of the WG's vision needs to happen within the CFS itself (eg. CFS policy convergence process on inequalities which is upcoming), but also beyond (eg. Through public event(s)). In fact, the GEWGE Guidelines can be considered a first step for the CFS and the discussions on gender are set to continue very soon in the reducing inequality process. This process will be based on an HLPE report (which was not the case for the GEWGE process) that not only defines concepts that proved to be contentious for Member States, such as intersectionality, patriarchy, or social norms, it also builds a strong case for transformative action to reduce inequalities for food security and nutrition. With this report, the science and knowledge basis on inequalities, including among genders, has already been broadened for the CFS, reinforcing the legitimacy of this topic to be discussed in this space. The Right to Food guidelines anniversary next year could be an opportunity to deepen the understanding between the Right to Food, discrimination and intersectionality. The work with FAO's implementation of the VGs might also be an opportunity to visibilize our interpretation of the Guidelines).