
Recommendations by UNSCN on the draft CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition (VGs)

The CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition will be the most important contribution of the CFS to the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition and the operationalization of the ICN2 Framework for Action. The objective of the VGs is to address malnutrition in all of its forms.

The rich discussion during the last OEWG on the 30st of May, showed that the elements that are currently mentioned in the “zero-draft” of the VGs have provoked a good debate and proven to be a very useful input for discussion and the VGs itself. Various inputs stressed the need to ensure the elements are seen as a comprehensive set of factors that can lead to more sustainable food systems and to an improvement of diets and nutrition only if they are part of comprehensive and coherent sets of measures and policies. Taken individually the measures may not always have the intended effect, nor the systemic force to transform the food system. Therefore the current chapter three of the zero draft can be reshuffled, as was suggested during the OEWG, to answer to the multiple demands of the various stakeholders as well as to answer to a need for prioritization for the positive impacts on nutrition, equity and sustainability. Maximising policy coherence and reduction/elimination of policy fragmentation are key in order to have positive impact on all three of them and minimize trade-offs.

UNSCN suggests the following four policy areas to be addressed in the VGs, which are cross cutting through most if not all of the elements of the food system. They are also equally relevant to all typologies of food systems. In each areas, one or several suggestions are made for actions that have the potential to address several forms of malnutrition and have impact across the food system.

TERRITORIAL, OR CONTEXT SPECIFIC POLICIES, FOSTER DIVERSITY

In a rapidly changing context that is highly vulnerable to climate change, socio-demographic changes, technological innovations, it is paramount that the VGs are supportive of local food systems – also promoted through the Recommendations of the ICN2 Framework for Action¹ – that are fit to local contexts, local dynamics and cultural identities. One example of local dynamics is the context of rural-urban transformation and rural-urban linkages. The VGs should provide evidence-based guidance on how to build on and support these local dynamics, preserving diversity and promoting nutrition and healthy diets. Promotion and protection of local and regional healthy diets can be a good starting point to foster territorial specificity, as well as a variety of production systems that are fit to certain contexts, as well as resilient to shocks. Renewed attention for indigenous or underutilised crops and species, is helpful as has been acknowledged by the CFS (CFS policy recommendations on Sustainable forestry: <http://www.fao.org/3/I8877EN/i8877en.pdf>).

¹ Recommendation 9: “Strengthen local food production and processing, especially by smallholder and family farmers, giving special attention to women’s empowerment, while recognizing that efficient and effective trade is key to achieving nutrition objectives.”

Also, Recommendation 21 affirms: “Conduct appropriate social marketing campaigns and lifestyle change communication programmes to promote physical activity, dietary diversification, consumption of micronutrient-rich foods such as fruits and vegetables, including traditional local foods and taking into consideration cultural aspects [...]”

GOVERNANCE AND EQUITY

Right to adequate food is an important guiding principle, ensuring no-one is left behind while transforming food systems. Governance of food systems should support the progressive realisation of the right to food and maximise positive impact on nutrition, health and wellbeing and where needed mitigate negative impact on nutrition by other sectors. Food systems encompass all actors, from production to consumption. Whereas all agree that governments should take the lead in policy formulation, other actors are essential. Rules and regulations - including trade - set by governments are essential to ensure a fair “arena” where decisions are made about what to produce, trade and consume and how. In this aspect the roles and positions of poor consumers, small scale producers, ethnic minorities, youth and women are essential. Some policy measures may need to target specific groups to prevent further increases in inequity and vulnerability. Specific measures are needed to protect infants, young children and adolescents AND to sustain their health now and when they grow up. Policy measures may also be needed to mitigate potential negative effects in case of trade-offs.

The [UNSCN Discussion Paper ‘Global Governance for Nutrition and the role of UNSCN’](#) stresses the importance of inclusive governance for nutrition (including all relevant actors, also beyond governments) and careful stewardship to operationalize the necessary transformative action at global, national and local levels to address malnutrition in all its forms. Governments are primarily responsible for implementing effective policy measures while ensuring that everyone has access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger. The [Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of the national food security](#) provide practical guidance to States in this sense and represent a step towards integrating human rights into the work of actors dealing with food and agriculture.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

An important aspect of the VGs is the promotion and protection of environment, including quality of water, soil and air and the preservation of biodiversity as well as the prevention of further climate change and adaptation to it. In a world that is suffering from climate change, biodiversity loss, degraded soils and polluted water, it is paramount to protect the ability to produce healthy diets for current and future generations. Production decisions must be based on sustainability criteria AND on what is needed to nourish people, not simply to feed people with an adequate amount of calories.

The CFS policy recommendations on [Food Security and Climate Change](#) and on [Water for Food and Nutrition](#) recognize that the adverse effects of climate change can pose serious threats to food security and nutrition and stress the importance of sustainable management and conservation of ecosystems to maximize long-term benefits for FSN. The [UNSCN Discussion Paper - Sustainable Diets for Healthy People and a Healthy Planet](#) clearly shows the interdependence of climate change, food systems, diets and malnutrition and health and calls for strengthening the links between the climate and nutrition communities. The [IPCC special report on Climate Change and Land](#) (August 2019) reiterates the importance of reducing greenhouse gases emissions from all sectors, including agriculture and food production, and underlines that healthy, balanced and sustainably produced diets present major opportunities for adaptation to and limiting climate change.

UNSCN would suggest that the ‘healthy people- healthy planet’ nexus might be highlighted even more as a key driver to avoid policy incoherence.

SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION

In the current policy debate, too often sustainable production and consumption are still looked at as separate issues, whereas the one cannot go without the other. Production decisions need to be based on

the nutritional needs of people, and consumers need to make decisions of what to consume based on healthy and sustainable options. Production decisions also entail product composition, including levels of salt, sugar and (trans) fats. The VGs should reconnect production with consumption decisions underpinned with considerations for health, well-being and sustainability. Shift in current consumption patterns or diets of certain groups may be needed for both sustainability and health considerations. National Food based dietary guidelines that contain sustainability criteria may be good tools to reconnect production and consumption, provide guidance to policy makers about what is a healthy diet and which food should be catered for, guide consumers what and how to consume and producers what to produce. Addressing food losses and waste is an important aspect as well. Earlier CFS recommendations ([Food losses and waste in the context of sustainable food systems](#) and [Connecting smallholders to markets](#)) recognize the importance of sustainable production and consumption. For example, Recommendation 4 of Connecting smallholders to markets calls for expanding “...opportunities, including implementing institutional procurement programs for public institutions, food assistance and school feeding where smallholders are linked to structured demand for food and agricultural products and where consumers can access sufficient, safe, healthy, nutritious, and diverse smallholder produced food, including during all cases of protracted crises and conflicts”.

An integrated approach from farm to fork is vital to avoid policy incoherence, and to ensure that policies included in the agricultural production system are followed through in the different steps of the food supply chain, particularly interlinked with the elements of food distribution and retail and consumer policies. Such an alignment could be supported by global policy targets and the CFS might consider establishing global policy targets for the achievement of the overarching targets of addressing malnutrition in all its forms.

ACTIONS OR INTERVENTIONS THAT ARE SUPPORTIVE OF ALL THE ABOVE:

- Development of FBDGs with sustainability criteria
- Institutional buying to support the transformation of food systems. E.g. for schools, hospitals, public institutes
- In addition, the potential positive impact of the two actions above can be supported with food and nutrition education and information.
- Investments that move away from the current emphasis on a limited number of staple crops (maize, wheat and rice) and a few animal breeds. More investments in the production of a diverse range plant-based foods (i.e. fruits and vegetables and pulses) to support the consumption of a healthy and affordable diets are needed, as well as the supporting agricultural research to increase availability and affordability of this diverse range. The [HLPE report on agroecology and other innovations](#) lists a few recommendations to possibly support the transition to more diverse and sustainable food systems.