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AGRI 33
FAO 9
ENV 58
FOOD 6
CONSOM 30
SAN 53
VETER 5
PHYTOSAN 2
SUSTDEV 12
DEVGEN 17
CONUN 8
RELEX 76

NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Coordination Working Party (FAO)

Subject: Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition to be presented for endorsement by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) at its 47th plenary session (8-11 February 2021): final draft - deadline to react: 5 February 2021, midday

Delegations will find in annex the final draft of the Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition agreed by the CFS Open-Ended Working Group on Food Systems and Nutrition on 4 February 2021, which will be presented to the CFS for endorsement at its 47th plenary session (8-11 February 2021).

Any delegation that has a major difficulty with the final draft set out in the annex is invited to inform the Presidency (luis.coelho@consilium.europa.eu) and the Council Secretariat (LIFE.FAO@consilium.europa.eu) by **Friday 5 February, midday**.

In the absence of comments by the above deadline, the final draft set out in the annex will be considered agreed by the Coordination Working Party (FAO).



VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES ON FOOD SYSTEMS AND NUTRITION

PART 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

1. Hunger and malnutrition in all its forms – undernutrition, including wasting and stunting, micronutrient deficiencies, overweight, and obesity – are major challenges that countries face and are a potential result of food insecurity¹ and unhealthy diets along with many other factors and causes. Malnutrition, in at least one of its forms, affects every country in the world and most countries are affected by multiple forms. The number of people who suffer from hunger has increased in the last years, and obesity is on the rise in almost all countries². The impacts of malnutrition have profound consequences on people’s health and wellbeing, physical and cognitive development, and livelihoods throughout their lifetime and across generations.
2. Hunger and malnutrition in all its forms are major challenges to the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security and for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
3. The heavy health, social and economic impacts of hunger and malnutrition in all its forms are transmitted across generations. Undernourished women are more likely to have lowbirth-weight babies who are at an increased risk of becoming malnourished as children – and into adulthood - as well as overweight or obese as adults. Maternal obesity poses short- and long-term risks for maternal and child health and wellbeing including poor cognition and increased risk of neurodevelopment disorders early in life, and an increased susceptibility to overweight in school-age and pre-school age children and obesity and noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) in adult life. Malnutrition in children may result in reduced stature, diminished physical and mental health, and poor school performance, reduced economic productivity in adulthood, and increased vulnerability to NCDs and other chronic diseases in all stages of life. These diseases may lead to early death and increased morbidity and disability which require higher spending on health care, and place significant burdens on national health care systems and economies.

¹ “Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, economic and social access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”. FAO, 1996. Rome Declaration on World Food Security and World Food Summit Plan of Action.

² FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2020. [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020. Transforming food systems for affordable healthy diets](#). Rome, FAO.

4. Malnutrition in all its forms has many interrelated and underlying causes that need to be addressed simultaneously. The causes of malnutrition manifest differently and affect people in different ways depending on their gender, age, wealth, or any other social factors. These causes can include, amongst others, the lack of stable access to adequate, safe, sufficient and nutritious food and healthy diets³, lack of information concerning dietary recommendations, inadequate infant and young child-caring and feeding practices, poor sanitation, and hygiene and insufficient access to safe drinking water, insufficient access to quality education and health services, low socio-economic status, gender inequality, marginalization, insufficient support to vulnerable local producers as well as smallholders and family farmers as well as lack of access to markets, trade, and innovations and technologies. Basic causes of poor nutrition are systemic and interdependent, and include the economic and societal structures that prevent the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security⁴, perpetuate poverty and deepen already existing inequalities, and fail to make healthy diets readily accessible, limiting or denying the access to essential resources and services for achieving adequate nutrition and health.

5. Those most affected by malnutrition in all its forms typically include those living in poor and marginalized communities, people with increased nutrient requirements and those who have less control over their dietary choices. This includes, amongst others, young and school-aged children, youth, pregnant and lactating women, women of reproductive age, and adolescent girls, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, as applicable. In addition indigenous peoples and local communities, seasonal informal workers, subsistence farmers, peasants, urban and rural poor, landless, pastoralists and fisher folks, food and agriculture workers, upland and remote communities, migrants, refugees and displaced people, among others, are particularly vulnerable to malnutrition in case of their persistent or temporary poverty and marginalization.

6. Malnutrition in all its forms are associated with various forms of ill health and increased mortality. Undernutrition is a major cause of death among children under the age of five years, and a source of increased susceptibility to infectious diseases and NCDs in adulthood. Wasting, also known as acute undernutrition, poses a significant risk of increased morbidity and mortality in children. Stunting, largely a result of chronic malnutrition, is associated with delays in both physical growth and cognitive development.

Undernutrition, stunting and wasting represent significant challenges to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

³ Healthy diets are described in paragraph 17.

⁴ As noted in the Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security, human rights are universal, indivisible, interrelated and interdependent.

7. Micronutrient deficiencies related to the inadequate intake of food rich in iron, vitamin A, iodine, folate, vitamin D, and zinc, and other essential nutrients, affect a large proportion of the global population with serious consequences on health, well-being, and development. Nutritional needs vary across the lifecycle. Children under the age of five years, youth, women and girls, women of childbearing age, and pregnant and lactating women are particularly vulnerable to micronutrient deficiencies, including among others, iron deficiency anaemia, which is one of the most prevalent micronutrient deficiencies in the world. Also referred to as “hidden hunger,” micronutrient deficiencies increase a person’s vulnerability to infection, birth defects, impaired development, and lower life expectancy.

8. Overweight and obesity represent major and increasing risk factors globally for diet-related NCDs such as some forms of cancer, cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes type II. Undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies are still the main forms of malnutrition among children under the age of five years globally but overweight and obesity are increasingly prevalent among young and school-aged children, youth and adults, and increasing in every region, with rural areas catching up to urban settings. In addition, as with undernutrition, optimum growth in the first 1,000 days is essential to the prevention of overweight; children who suffered from undernutrition are more susceptible to become overweight or obese later in life.

9. Poverty and inequalities at the global, regional and national levels are important underlying causes of hunger and malnutrition in all its forms. Insecure employment, and underemployment, informal employment, low wages and incomes, and decreased purchasing power, and lack of access to land and other natural resources and assets, have negative consequences on nutrition and health outcomes. International, regional and national negative economic trends and political factors limit the capacity of national governments to deliver essential services linked to nutrition, such as amongst others social services and health care. In this context, inequality in income and asset distribution as well as in access to nutrition-relevant services contributes to marginalization and social exclusion, and further increases vulnerability to malnutrition. Under-resourced and unequally distributed food assistance programmes, nutrition relevant services, and other social services and health care further contribute to poor nutrition and health outcomes.

10. Complex and protracted crises⁵ also have short, medium and long-term adverse consequences on the nutritional status of impacted populations, particularly children under five, pregnant and lactating women, women of reproductive age, and adolescent girls, as applicable. Conflicts, fragility and susceptibility to natural disasters, climate change, epidemics, pandemics, and other cyclical health crises, are also serious factors that affect food systems preventing the availability and access to nutritious foods for healthy diets through sustainable food systems⁶. At the same time, malnutrition and food insecurity in specific cases can be important drivers of social unrest and migration.

11. Zoonotic and other pathogenic infectious diseases, and epidemics and pandemics, such as COVID-19, and the strategies adopted to reduce their transmission can significantly worsen global food insecurity and malnutrition even when these are not transmitted via food or food packaging. Without multisectoral, multilevel and evidence-based coordinated actions and policies, including mitigation measures, in accordance with paragraph 41, such crises have the capacity to disrupt food systems, impacting all actors, especially the most vulnerable and food and economically insecure people, reducing incomes among smallscale producers, including family farmers, negatively impacting food access due to loss of critical income sources, lockdowns, closure of markets and disruption of food environments. Disruption to food markets and supply chains, can increase extreme price volatility, and creating and increasing market distortions which affect food security and nutrition of the poorest populations, cause fluctuations in high-value commodity markets and food loss and waste. Furthermore, measures like lockdowns and school and other child care facilities closures, impede access to school meals for children and may increase food insecurity and hunger for children.

12. To prevent and reduce negative impacts to food systems as a result of a crisis or pandemic, governments have a leading role in collaboration with private sector, civil society and all other relevant stakeholders, to ensure food supply chains and food systems continue to function, the rights and health of all people with particular focus on food system workers are protected, the most vulnerable have access to social protection programmes, and that humanitarian assistance and food safety are prioritized.

⁵ Protracted crisis situations are “*characterized by recurrent natural disasters and/or conflict, longevity of food crises, breakdown of livelihoods and insufficient institutional capacity to react to crises*”. [2010 State of Food Insecurity in the World Report](#). FAO. 2010

⁶ Healthy diets are described in paragraph 17. The complex and multidimensional interlinkages between healthy diets and sustainable food systems are described in paragraph 18.

13. Climate change, agriculture, food systems, diets and nutrition are interconnected. Climate change affects temperature and precipitation, as well as the frequency and severity of weather events. Increases in temperature, heat waves, droughts, floods, cyclones, forest fires and land degradations negatively impact agriculture, including through amongst others decreased crop yields and livestock productivity, as well as declines in fisheries and aquaculture and agroforestry production in areas already vulnerable to food insecurity. Climate change also affects all the dimensions of food security, as well as food quantity, quality, safety and ultimately food prices, with significant implications for the availability of and access to healthy diets. Climate change can also contribute to changing nutrient composition of major staple crops, including decreases in proteins, and some essential minerals and vitamins. While agriculture is not the preeminent emitter of GHG emissions, agriculture and food production and consumption influenced by, among others consumer behaviour and food environments, contribute, amongst others, to the total of greenhouse gases and other environmental impacts, including on water quality, quantity and availability and biodiversity. Agricultural and forestry activities of sustainable food systems can contribute to the sequestration of carbon in the soil and to the maintenance of healthy ecosystems and biodiversity

14. Biodiversity for food and agriculture is important as a safeguard against hunger, a source of nutrients for improved dietary diversity and quality, and strengthening sustainable food systems. Enhancing biodiversity for food and agriculture enhances the sustainability of food systems and their resilience and contributes to safeguarding healthy diets for current and future generations. As described in paragraph 18 healthy diets and sustainable food systems are interlinked in complex and multidimensional ways. Enhancing the sustainability of food systems and their resilience plays a fundamental role for healthy diets for all and is part of the key concept of healthy diets through sustainable food systems as described in paragraph 18.

15. The process towards achieving sustainable food systems, recalling that transformation of food systems should be encouraged in a coherent manner, as appropriate and in accordance with and dependent on national contexts and capacities⁷, to enable healthy diets and improve nutrition for all should be inclusive, equitable, and resilient, and should contribute to, among others, enhancing the livelihoods of farmers and food system workers, the sustainable management and use of ecosystems, natural resources, water and biodiversity, and minimize food loss and waste.

16. Profound dietary changes, both positive and negative, are occurring due to a variety of socioeconomic and environmental factors, including people migrating to urban centers, changing food systems and food environments, increasing purchasing power and preferences of newly middle-class consumers and changing consumer choices and lifestyles, informed amongst other factors by the level of nutrition knowledge.

⁷ FAO Council, [Final Report of the 164th Session \(2020\)](#), paragraph 15k.

1.2 KEY CONCEPTS⁸

17. Healthy diets are those diets that are of adequate quantity and quality to achieve optimal growth and development of all individuals and support functioning and physical, mental and social wellbeing at all life stages and physiological needs. Healthy diets are safe, diverse, balanced, and based on nutritious foods. They help to protect against malnutrition in all its forms, including undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, overweight and obesity and lower the risk of diet-related non-communicable diseases. The exact make-up of healthy diets varies depending on an individual's characteristics (e.g. age, gender, lifestyle and degree of physical activity), geographical, demographical, cultural patterns and contexts, food preferences, availability of foods from local, regional and international sources, and dietary customs. Healthy dietary practices start early in life – breastfeeding fosters healthy growth and improves cognitive development and has long-term health benefits. WHO publishes guidance for healthy diets⁹. Many national health authorities publish specific dietary guidance. Regional health organizations, where applicable, may publish documents related to healthy diets and specific dietary advice as well¹⁰.

18. Healthy diets and sustainable food systems are interlinked in complex and multidimensional ways. The key concept of healthy diets through sustainable food systems entails the following elements. Sustainable food systems¹¹ provide food and enable healthy diets, while achieving the three dimensions of sustainable development, for current and future generations. Sustainable production, including sustainably managing and using natural resources, biodiversity and ecosystems, while at the same time improving economic and social conditions and livelihoods of farmers, can support and contribute to healthy diets. Advancing innovative pathways to achieve sustainable consumption and production, in accordance with paragraph 38, significantly contribute to sustainable food systems. Context-specific changes, in line with national priorities and relevant international obligations, are needed across multiple sectors and policy areas in the process towards achieving sustainable food systems and improved nutrition for all.

19. Nutritious foods are safe foods that contribute essential nutrients such as vitamins and minerals (micronutrients), fibre and other components to healthy diets that are beneficial for growth, health and development, guarding against malnutrition. In nutritious foods, the presence of nutrients of public health concern is minimized.

⁸ This section provides background information on key concepts that appear throughout the document. This section does not define these concepts and for many of them different definitions have been used internationally.

⁹ WHO guidance for a diet to be healthy [are available at https://www.who.int/who-documentsdetail/healthy-diet-factsheet394](https://www.who.int/who-documentsdetail/healthy-diet-factsheet394)

¹⁰ The VGFSyN does not reference any specific dietary guidance from those regional organizations.

¹¹ As described in paragraph 21.

20. Unhealthy diets are a major risk factor of multiple forms of malnutrition and poor health outcomes globally. Unhealthy diets include those of insufficient quantity and quality of nutrients and are a driver of hunger, micronutrient deficiency and undernutrition. Furthermore, unhealthy diets relate to the excessive intake of food and beverages high in fat, especially saturated and trans-fats, sugars and salt/sodium¹², which can have an impact on increased risk of overweight, and to higher susceptibility to obesity and diet-related NCDs¹³.

21. Food systems shape people's dietary patterns and nutritional status. Food systems are complex and multidimensional webs of activities, resources and actors involving the production, processing, handling, preparation, storage, distribution, marketing, access, purchase, consumption, and loss and waste of food, and the outputs of these activities, including social, economic and environmental outcomes. Food systems are constantly being shaped by different forces, drivers and structural changes and decisions by many different stakeholders that could affect their sustainability. Sustainable food systems have a fundamental role to play in promoting healthy diets and improving nutrition and enabling other public objectives of food systems. Sustainable food systems are food systems that enable food safety, food security and nutrition for current and future generations in accordance with the three dimensions (economic, social and environmental) of sustainable development. Sustainable food systems must be inclusive, equitable and resilient.

22. Agriculture includes crops, forestry, fisheries, livestock and aquaculture¹⁴. Agriculture and food systems encompass the entire range of activities involved in the production, processing, storage, marketing, retail, consumption, and disposal of goods that originate from agriculture, including food and non-food products, livestock, pastoralism, fisheries including aquaculture, and forestry; and the inputs needed and the outputs generated at each of these steps¹⁵.

23. The functionality of food systems and their ability to deliver healthy diets is influenced by a number of drivers which indicate that, in order to ensure food security and improve nutrition, context specific changes are needed not only in agriculture and food policies, but also across multiple sectors and policy areas that address, for example, national development priorities, economic policies, and social norms¹⁶. These context specific changes may require tailoring approaches to address the different drivers of poverty and inequities across populations.

¹² [Rome Declaration on Nutrition](#), ICN 2 (2014) – paragraph 7.

¹³ Research continues to develop the understanding of the properties, risks and benefits associated with all nutrients. Such research contributes, among others, to balanced, science and evidence-based health reporting and advisories.

¹⁴ [UNGA Resolution A/RES/74/242](#). Paragraph 20

¹⁵ [CFS Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems](#) (CFS RAI), 2014. Paragraph 2

¹⁶ HLPE. 2017.

24. The process towards achieving sustainable food systems that meet the dietary needs of populations, recalling that transformation of food systems should be encouraged in a coherent manner, as appropriate and in accordance with and dependent on national contexts and capacities, require policy, institutional and behavioural changes which are context-specific among food system actors. Food system-related policies should focus on their direct and indirect economic, social, environmental, cultural, nutritional, and health impacts, paying special attention to the poorest and most vulnerable to all forms of malnutrition and addressing barriers they face in accessing food for healthy diets through sustainable food systems.

25. Changes are needed within and across food systems, and their constituent elements food supply chains, food environments, consumer behaviour - to generate positive outcomes along the three dimensions of sustainable development – social, economic, and environmental, with inclusive approaches for all relevant stakeholders.

26. Coordinated policies and processes are required to enhance policy coherence and coordination in addressing policy fragmentation across sectors such as health, agriculture, education, environment, water, sanitation, gender, social protection, trade, employment, and finance – all of which impact on food systems and nutrition outcomes, along the three pillars of sustainable development.

27. The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) has undertaken a policy process to produce Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems for Nutrition* (VGFSyN). The preparation of the VGFSyN is informed by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition's (HLPE)¹⁷ Report on Nutrition and Food Systems, additional literature as well as an inclusive consultation process that took place between May and November 2019 which involved the participation of CFS stakeholders¹⁸.

¹⁷ The HLPE is the science-policy interface of CFS and provides a structured evidence base to inform CFS policy discussions drawing on existing research and knowledge, experiences, and policies at different scales and in different contexts.

¹⁸ With meetings in Italy, Ethiopia, Thailand, Hungary, Egypt, Panama, and the United States of America, as well as through an electronic consultation.

28. Food systems and nutrition are receiving increased attention from the global community, including the United Nations (UN) and its Member States, and are recognized as essential co-determinants for achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In 2014, at the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), members of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) committed to ending hunger and malnutrition in all its forms¹⁹. In 2016, the General Assembly of the UN (UNGA) proclaimed the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025)²⁰ and called upon FAO and WHO to lead its implementation, in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), using coordinated mechanisms such as UN Nutrition and multistakeholder platforms such as the CFS in line with its mandate. In 2017, the UNGA proclaimed the United Nations Decade of Family Farming (2019-2028)²¹. Specific attention to nutrition has been given by a number of UNGA Resolutions²², the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)²³, the UN Environment Assembly²⁴, the World Health Assembly (WHA)²⁵, the CODEX Strategic Plan 2020-2025²⁶, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food²⁷, UNGA Resolution on the Prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (A/RES/73/2, October 2018).

29. In 2021 the UN Food Systems Summit will provide an opportunity for all stakeholders to discuss more inclusive and sustainable food systems for healthy diets for all. Likewise, the 2021 Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit will represent an opportunity to discuss how to strengthen the link between diets, food systems and health.

¹⁹ FAO/WHO. 2014. ICN2, [Rome Declaration on Nutrition](#).

²⁰ UNGA Resolution [A/RES/70/259](#) - The [Work Programme of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition](#)

²¹ [UNGA Resolution A/RES/72/239](#).

²² UNGA Resolutions, on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases [A/RES/73/2](#), on global health and foreign policy [A/RES/73/132](#), and on agriculture development, food security and nutrition [A/RES/73/253](#).

²³ [Ministerial Declaration of the 2018 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development](#)

²⁴ [Ministerial Declaration of the 2019 United Nations Environment Assembly](#)

²⁵ The World Health Assembly has endorsed the [Comprehensive implementation plan for maternal, infant and young child nutrition](#), and the [WHO Global action plan for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases 2013-2020](#), which delineate policy options for the prevention of malnutrition in all its forms and the promotion of healthy diets.

²⁶ [Codex Strategic Plan 2020-2025](#), Codex Alimentarius - FAO, WHO

²⁷ [A/71/282 “Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food”](#) and [A/RES/74/149 “The Right to Food”](#).

30. The VGFSyN are expected to contribute to and complement these international initiatives with a view to promoting policy coherence, coordination and convergence across different domains. They provide science and evidence-based guidance to help countries and other relevant stakeholders operationalize ICN2's Framework for Action²⁸ recommendations in support of the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security, and other relevant rights, as applicable, including the right of everyone of the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and to achieve the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

²⁸ FAO/WHO. 2014. ICN2, [Framework for Action](#).

PART 2 – OBJECTIVES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

2.1 – OBJECTIVES AND PURPOSE

31. The objective of the VGFSyN is to contribute to the process towards achieving sustainable food systems and improved nutrition, recalling that transformation of food systems should be encouraged in a coherent manner, as appropriate and in accordance with and dependent on national contexts and capacities, in accordance with the three dimensions of sustainable development. The aim is also to present a set of guidelines that help ensure that diets needed for adequate nutrition are accessible, available, affordable, safe and of adequate quality and quantity, conforming with beliefs, culture and traditions, dietary habits, and preferences of individuals, in accordance with national and international laws and obligations²⁹. The VGFSyN are intended to provide guidance mainly to governments as well as specialized institutions and other stakeholders on appropriate policies, responsible investments and institutional arrangements needed to address the key causes of malnutrition in all its forms from a food systems perspective. The VGFSyN contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security for all, particularly for the most vulnerable and affected groups.

32. The VGFSyN are intended to support the implementation of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025) with the objective of increasing the visibility, coordination and effectiveness of nutrition actions at all levels, as key aspects toward the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

33. The VGFSyN present a comprehensive, systemic, and science and evidence-based approach to achieving healthy diets through sustainable food systems by addressing policy fragmentation with a special emphasis on the food, agriculture, and nutrition sectors, while also addressing economic, social and environmental sustainability issues and direct and indirect impacts. The VGFSyN consider the diversity and complexity of food systems with the aim of promoting policy coherence and coordination, considering benefits, costs and trade-offs, while recognizing national capacities and priorities, and fostering and guiding an inclusive dialogue among different institutions, sectors and all relevant stakeholders in the food system.

34. The VGFSyN are intended to be global in scope and to provide guidance to governments and relevant stakeholders when designing context-specific policies, laws, regulatory frameworks, strategies, plans and programmes. They take into consideration different national realities, capacities, and levels of development, as well as different types of food systems and the many drivers impacting them.

²⁹ FAO/WHO. 2014. ICN2, [Rome Declaration on Nutrition](#). Paragraph 5.b.

35. The VGFSyN recognize that shocks, economic, social and environmental crises and pandemics present strong challenges to the functioning of food systems, and emphasize the importance of sustainable and resilient food systems, for example through a range of sustainable innovative approaches such as agroecology, sustainable intensification, no-till farming, organic agriculture, mainstreaming biodiversity across agricultural sectors, and all other innovations and technologies to promote sustainable food systems. The VGFSyN provide guidance to minimize potential negative impacts on food systems and food security and nutrition³⁰.

36. The VGFSyN take evidence from a range of rigorous studies, based on scientific, interdisciplinary, traditional, indigenous and local knowledge, sustainable practices and experience, including those resulting from dialogues on different forms of knowledge - at global, regional and national levels - and apply the evidence through a broad lens.³¹ Much of the evidence in the VGFSyN comes from the HLPE 2017 report, various UN technical documents, and peer-reviewed scientific literature.

2.2 – NATURE, SCOPE AND INTENDED USERS

37. The VGFSyN are voluntary and non-binding.

38. The VGFSyN are intended to be interpreted and applied consistently with existing obligations under relevant national and international law, with due regard to voluntary commitments under applicable international and regional instruments. Nothing in the VGFSyN should be read as limiting or undermining any legal obligations to which States may be subject under international law³².

39. The VGFSyN are intended to be interpreted and applied in accordance with national legal systems and their institutions. They should be implemented within countries and at regional and global levels, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities³³.

³⁰ In the VGFSyN, these approaches could be referred to as agroecological and other innovative approaches. Further analysis, information and recommendations on agroecological and other innovative approaches can be found in the expert publications, such as the CFS HLPE Report on Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition. Agroecological and other innovative approaches are the subject of a CFS policy convergence process, as described in the CFS MYPoW 2020-2023.

³¹ Because situations can vary widely, the generalizability of evidence to other situations is often important, but not always available, for food system actions that address diets and nutrition. Additional research is needed to contribute to the evidence-base of policymaking. The VGFSyN bring together evidence from different methodologies: some of which is experiential that holds promise for real-world relevance, some comes from the evaluation of programmes and policies that provide guidance on implementation in specific settings and contexts.

³² CFS RAI, paragraph 13

³³ CFS RAI, paragraph 14, and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, paragraph 21.

40. The VGFSyN are intended to build upon and complement the work and mandate of other international bodies, and related guidance contained in other policy products developed by CFS as well as by other institutions, including:

- Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (2015);
- United Nations Rio Declaration on the Environment and Development (1992);
- Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of the national food security (2004);
- CFS Voluntary Guidelines on the responsible governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forests in the context of national food security – VGGT (2012);
- CFS Global Strategic Framework for Food Security and Nutrition - GSF (201[7]);
- WHA Six Global Nutrition Targets for 2025 (2012);
- CFS Policy Recommendations on Investing in Smallholder Agriculture for Food Security (2013); [[FAO/WHO] International Code of Conduct on Pesticides Management 2013);]
- CFS Principles for responsible investment in agriculture and food systems – RAI (2014);
- CFS Policy Recommendations on Food losses and waste in the context of sustainable food systems (2014);
- CFS Policy Recommendations on Sustainable fisheries and aquaculture for food security and nutrition (2014);
- FAO/WHO Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), Rome Declaration on Nutrition (2014);
- FAO/WHO Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2), Framework for Action (2014);
- FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (2014);
- CFS Framework for Action for food security and nutrition in protracted crises – FFA (2015);
- CFS Policy Recommendations on Water for food security and nutrition (2015);
- CFS Policy Recommendations on Connecting smallholders to markets (2016);
- CFS Policy Recommendations on Sustainable agricultural development for food security and nutrition: what roles for livestock? (2016);
- FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management (2017);
- Political Declaration on the Third High Level meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases (2018);
- WHO Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases 2013-2020;
- FAO Ten Elements of Agroecology (2019);
- [FAO] International Code of Conduct for the Sustainable Use and Management of Fertilizers (2019);

- United Nations Environment Assembly Ministerial Declaration on Innovative Solutions for Environmental Challenges and Sustainable Consumption and Production (4, 19).

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:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights – adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948 and human rights treaties which are binding for the respective State Parties;
- International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights;
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP);
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP);
- UN Resolution A/RES/70/259, United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition (20162025);
- United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development;
- ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work;
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD);
- Convention on Biological Diversity;
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change;
- International Plant Protection Convention;
- International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture;
- FAO/WHO International Code of Conduct on Pesticides Management;
- Standards, guidelines and recommendations adopted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission, World Organization for Animal Health, OIE and the IPPC;
- Relevant international multilateral trade instruments, including WTO agreements such as WTO Technical Barriers to Trade agreement (TBT) and WTO Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS).

42. The VGFSyN are intended to support governments, including relevant ministries and national, sub-national, and local institutions and authorities, and parliamentarians, to develop processes for the design and implementation of holistic, multisectoral, science and evidence-based and inclusive public policies as well as to be used in policy discussions and implementation processes by relevant stakeholders such as:

- a) Intergovernmental and regional organizations, including specialized UN agencies;
- b) Civil society and non-governmental organizations, 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;]

- c) Private sector organizations, including but not limited to small and medium enterprises, agribusiness, food and beverage manufacturers, food retailers including supermarkets, food service providers, industry trade associations, food wholesalers, food distributors, traders, and the advertising and marketing sector³⁴;
- d) Research organizations, academic institutions, and universities;
- e) Development partners, including international financial institutions;
- f) Private donors, foundations, and funds;
- g) Consumer associations.

43. The VGFSyN support States' obligations regarding the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security, and all intended users' responsibility to respect human rights.

44. In implementing the VGFSyN governments are urged to refrain from promulgating and applying any unilateral economic, financial or trade measures not in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations that impede the full achievement of economic and social development, particularly in developing countries³⁵.

45. In implementing the VGFSyN governments are urged to correct and prevent trade restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets, including through the parallel elimination of all forms of agricultural export subsidies and all export measures with equivalent effect, in accordance with the mandate of the Doha Development Round³⁶.

³⁴The private sector is made up of many different types of companies with a wide range of sizes, scales, human and financial resources, as well as varying reach into local, domestic and international markets.

³⁵ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, paragraph 30. [UNGA Resolution A/RES/70/1 \(2015\)](#).

³⁶2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, paragraph 2.b

2.3 – GUIDING PRINCIPLES

46. The VGFSyN include six guiding principles³⁷ that emerged from the consultation process as foundational when considering the different actions that should be followed to contribute to the process towards achieving sustainable food systems and improved nutrition for all.
47. Food systems serve and support multiple objectives within the three dimensions of sustainable development. While food systems might differ greatly, they offer different opportunities for public policies, mechanisms, instruments and investments that aim to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
48. These principles draw on the need to ensure human dignity, equality, nondiscrimination, participation, accountability, transparency, empowerment, and the rule of law in order to contribute to the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security.
 - a) Systemic, multisectoral, science- and evidence-based approach. Promote a systemic, multisectoral, and science and evidence-based approach that considers food systems in their totality and varied cultural dimensions, appropriately integrates indigenous and traditional forms of knowledge, seeks to maximize outcomes across all sustainable development dimensions, and looks at the multidimensional causes of malnutrition in all its forms.
 - b) Coherent, coordinated, context-specific and inclusive policies. Contribute to the formulation and implementation of coherent, coordinated, context-specific and inclusive policies and related responsible investment through coordinated actions among different actors and across all relevant sectors at international, regional, national, subnational, and local levels.
 - c) Accountability, transparency and participation. Support efforts in strengthening governance, including accountability mechanisms, fostering citizen and stakeholder participation in national debates on food security and nutrition and on food systems, and transparent and inclusive decision-making processes, which are based on transparent rules of engagement including safeguards for the identification and management of potential conflicts of interest.
 - d) Healthy and prosperous people, healthy planet. Promote policies and actions that enhance the livelihoods, health, and well-being of the population, as well as sustainable food production and responsible consumption of safe, diverse and nutritious foods to enable healthy diets and to protect and promote sustainable use of natural resources, biodiversity and ecosystems, and support mitigation and adaptation to climate change, as appropriate.

³⁷ These guiding principles are consistent with already agreed international documents and tools, such as the Rome Declaration on Nutrition and the Framework for Action of ICN2 and the 1996 World Food Summit Declaration.

- e) Gender equality and women's empowerment. Promote equitable access to sufficient, safe and nutritious foods that meet dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life independent of social or demographic factors such as race, gender, income or geographic region. Promote gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment, and respect, protect and fulfill their rights in the context of food security and nutrition, creating the conditions for women's involvement in decisionmaking as well as their participation in all economic, political and social sectors and strong engagement in shaping sustainable food systems that improve nutrition, recognizing their critical role in care, education, agriculture, health promotion and food production and consumption. This may entail targeted strategies to support women in their existing roles in areas such as care, education, agriculture, health promotion and food preparation, production, consumption and preservation of indigenous, traditional and local knowledge. However, it also requires changes in business as usual to actively engage men and boys to promote nutrition as a joint household responsibility.
- f) Youth empowerment and engagement. Promote strategies, policies and investments aiming at strengthening education and capacity building programmes for youth, enabling their autonomy, decision-making and empowerment, increasing their access to decent work opportunities including in rural areas, living wages and social protection, and innovative practices as well protecting them from hazardous and inappropriate work, as ways to stimulate their roles as change agents towards sustainable food systems for current and future generations.

PART 3 – THE VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES ON FOOD SYSTEMS FOR NUTRITION

49. With the aim of fostering the achievement of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, the VGFSyN provide a framework to promote policy coherence and coordination and to bring various stakeholders who are involved in food systems to work together to achieve healthy diets for everyone through sustainable food systems.
50. To achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and its Sustainable Development Goals, taking into account other international commitments and obligations, relevant agreed World Health Assembly (WHA) resolutions and decisions, as well as to fulfill national commitments to end malnutrition in all its forms, in accordance with the three dimensions of sustainable development while safeguarding natural resources, economic growth and social wellbeing, a food systems approach is needed that recognizes that the various parts that make up food systems are interconnected. Any action or decision to address one aspect of a food system will likely impact other aspects, and food systems respond and are impacted by other systems, situations, and contexts. Thinking systematically and interdisciplinarily about the process towards achieving sustainable food systems, recalling that transformation of food systems should be encouraged in a coherent manner, as appropriate and in accordance with and dependent on national contexts and capacities, can foster that challenges are tackled from multiple perspectives. Thus, the VGFSyN provide guidance on a range of science and evidence-based policy actions spanning the diversity of food supply chains, food environment and responsible consumption, as well as the drivers and people that shape those actions.
51. During the consultation process, CFS stakeholders identified a number of cross-cutting factors that are relevant for improving diets and nutrition that determined the seven focus areas around which the VGFSyN are structured: i) transparent, democratic and accountable governance; ii) sustainable food supply chains to achieve healthy diets in the context of economic, social and environmental sustainability, and climate change; iii) Equal and equitable access to healthy diets through sustainable food systems; iv) food safety across sustainable food systems; v) people-centered nutrition knowledge, education and information; vi) gender equality and women's empowerment across food systems; and vii) resilient food systems in humanitarian contexts.
52. The first focus area, the governance of food systems, which establishes the foundation of the remaining policy recommendations of the VGFSyN, is interwoven across the six other areas. Three focus areas (ii, iii, and v) cover the main components of food systems while an additional area (iv) is based on the recognition of the increased importance of collective action in addressing food safety. Special attention is focused on women because of the vital role they play in food systems (focus area vi). The humanitarian context serves as a standalone focus area (vii) because it will continue to be a significant global issue in the context of climate change, protracted crises, conflict and migration.

53. The guidance is principally addressed to governments who should consider it in relation to national and sub-national priorities, needs and conditions, and assess the relevance of the policy in each food system contexts, paying due attention to all direct and indirect costs or benefits of economic, social and environmental impacts. It is important for countries to implement a diagnostic lens to their food systems in a systematic and holistic way. This would entail, amongst others, understanding the types of food systems that exist, the make-up and complexity of their food systems, and the major drivers for change, disruption, exclusion/inclusion and growth. With the aim to achieve sustainable food systems and healthy diets in accordance with the Agenda 2030, Governments are encouraged to systemically analyze and monitor costs, benefits, trade-offs, and impacts of their actions, across sectors and actors within their own context of economic, socio-cultural and environmental conditions and objectives.

3.1– TRANSPARENT, DEMOCRATIC AND ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNANCE

54. This section lays out the importance of governance mechanisms, leadership and accountability across the range of actors, at global, regional, national and local levels, within food systems. Governments are responsible for developing sound, science and evidence-based, coherent and coordinated, context-specific public policies, and regulatory and legislative frameworks that govern food systems, promote awareness, and set priorities for impactful action. Governments also should develop transparent mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the distribution of transition costs, cost and benefits of policy actions across sectors and actors, manage conflicts of interests, safeguards against power imbalances, and other safeguards to put public interests before other interests.

3.1.1 Promoting policy coordination and coherence by integrating food systems and nutrition into local, national and regional development:

a) Governments should foster policy coordination and coherence across sectors and agencies to reduce all forms of malnutrition from a food systems perspective. These sectors and agencies may include those impacting health, agriculture, education, environment, water, sanitation, gender equality, social protection, trade, employment, and finance. Governments should include the sustainability of food systems as a priority in order to effectively align relevant sectors around a common set of goals.

- b) Governments should integrate and promote sustainable food system strategies and actions that enable healthy diets and improved nutrition into national and local development, health, economic, agricultural, climate/environment, and disaster risk and pandemic diseases reduction policies. Governments should consider increased and improved budgetary allocations, where appropriate, to food system activities and components, assessing and taking into account all positive and negative environmental, economic and social impacts of the various food systems activities and components, considering, as appropriate, indicators of the 2030 Agenda, with clear and transparent objectives of improving diets and nutrition, to address malnutrition in all its forms.
- c) Acknowledging that a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable, multilateral trading system will promote agriculture and rural development in developing countries and contribute to achieving food security and improving nutrition³⁸. Also, governments, intergovernmental and regional organizations should implement national, regional and international strategies to promote the inclusive participation of farmers and fishers and fish workers, including small-scale farmers, indigenous peoples and local communities, peasants and other small-scale food producers, food systems workers, including women, in community, national, regional and international markets³⁹.
- d) Governments should identify opportunities within food systems to achieve national and global food security and nutrition goals, monitor and measure progress against targets, and indicators set out by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development⁴⁰ and the WHO 2025 Global Nutrition targets⁴¹.

3.1.2 Strengthening multisectoral, multistakeholder and multilevel coordination and actions:

- a) Governments, intergovernmental organizations and development partners, across sectors at all levels, should work to enable healthy diets and improved nutrition through sustainable food systems, strengthened policy and legal frameworks and institutional capacities that address the multiple causes and consequences of malnutrition in all its forms and food-related economic, social and environmental challenges. This coordination should establish and/or strengthen multisectoral, multilevel and multistakeholder mechanisms⁴² that oversee the design and implementation of evidence- and science-based, context specific policies, strategies, and interventions respecting cultural diversity that contribute to improved nutrition outcomes at national, sub-national and local levels.

³⁸ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, paragraph 17.10

³⁹ UNGA resolution A/c.2/75/i.23, paragraph 31.

⁴⁰ https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E

⁴¹ <https://www.who.int/nutrition/global-target-2025/en/>

⁴² Further information about multistakeholder partnerships can be found in expert publication [HLPE report on Multistakeholder partnerships to finance and improve food security and nutrition in the framework of the 2030 Agenda \(2018\)](#).

- b) Governments and intergovernmental actors should facilitate an inclusive and transparent dialogue ensuring the participation of all relevant stakeholders and actors in the food system, giving special attention to small-medium enterprises and smallholder producers and to the most affected by hunger and malnutrition in all its forms. This dialogue should include all dimensions of sustainable development in food systems.
- c) Governments, intergovernmental organizations, and civil society organizations, indigenous peoples and local communities should encourage increased commitment to action with responsible investment⁴³ from the public and private sectors, and donors to support sustainable food systems that enable healthy diets, while considering synergies and trade-offs with other policy priorities.

3.1.3 Creating accountability mechanisms and tools for, monitoring and evaluation:

- a) Governments should establish or strengthen science- and evidence-based, regulatory and context-specific policy frameworks to guide private and public sector activities related to food systems and nutrition. They should institute effective, inclusive and transparent accountability mechanisms that promote good governance, public deliberation, independent bodies that monitor compliance and performance, individual complaint procedures, actions to improve accountability, identify and manage conflicts of interest and vested interests, safeguards against power imbalances, and capacity to settle and remediate disputes that may undermine public health and wellbeing. Governmental actors should ensure that dialogue with all stakeholders is transparent and follows clear roles and responsibilities for engagement to safeguard the public interest.
- b) Governments, also in partnership with research organizations and intergovernmental organizations, with increasing research projects, where appropriate, should work to strengthen existing national statistical and monitoring systems that capture, harmonize and disaggregate data by key sociodemographic characteristics, and where possible use, and improve the availability and quality of existing indicators, including within SDGs, across all aspects of food systems and outcomes related to food security, diets⁴⁴, food composition, food safety, nutritional status⁴⁵, and gender and other relevant social factors, for improved policy development and accountability, and better targeting of public programmes. Governments and other stakeholders should properly safeguard personal and collective data on food systems.
- c) Governments should invest in research and sharing of knowledge on the interconnections between food, nutritional, behavioral, economic, social, and environmental dimensions and market dynamics, to better enable the assessment of the cross-sectional impacts of the policies and programmes implemented and the complexity of the interactions between supply and demand at different scales throughout the whole supply chain.

⁴³ In line with the CFS Principles for responsible investment in agriculture and food systems, RAI (2014).

⁴⁴ Particularly dietary intake, dietary diversity and dietary quality.

⁴⁵ Including the measurement of micronutrient deficiency status and anthropometry.

- d) Governments, with the support of all relevant stakeholders including intergovernmental organizations, indigenous peoples and local communities, as appropriate, should promote investment in human, system, and institutional capacity to analyze food system information in a comprehensive manner to support the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of programmatic actions, taking into account the need of developing interdisciplinary approaches embracing technical, economic and social issues.

3.1.4 Strengthening participation and inclusion of indigenous peoples and local communities in food systems:

- a) Governments and relevant stakeholders should strengthen full and effective participation of indigenous peoples and local communities, in particular women, girls, marginalized groups and peoples with disabilities, in the governance of food systems and nutrition by means of dialogue, as appropriate, consultation, and by strengthening community mechanisms for inclusive participation at local, sub-national, national and regional level. For indigenous peoples this should be based on an effective and meaningful consultation, through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- b) Governments and relevant stakeholders should support capacity building and strengthen capacities including those of indigenous peoples and local communities so that they can fully and effectively participate in formulating policies and strategies regarding food systems.

3.2 SUSTAINABLE FOOD SUPPLY CHAINS TO ACHIEVE HEALTHY DIETS IN THE CONTEXT OF ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY, AND CLIMATE CHANGE

55. Food supply chains play a crucial role in human health, and resilience and economic, social and environmental sustainability of food systems, including ecosystem restoration. Food supply chains - from production, storage and post-harvest handling, processing and packaging, distribution to the point of consumption, and marketing - operate at multiple and assorted scales, structures, and levels, from simple to highly complex, from local to global, involving many food system actors. The decisions made by the actors at any stage have implications on the availability, affordability, accessibility, acceptability and safety of nutritious food for healthy diets⁴⁶. This section complements the goals outlined in the UN Decade of Family Farming and highlights the importance of promoting nutrition across the food supply chain, and suggests ways to create sustainable and resilient food supply chains and sustainable consumption and production in the midst of climate change and natural resource degradation, recalling the need to simultaneously take into account the economic, environmental, and social dimensions of sustainability and the health of individuals, animals, plants and ecosystems in a One Health Approach. The VGFSyN should serve governments and other stakeholders to strengthen vulnerable local producers as well as smallholders and family farmers, including in their involvement in food supply chains.

⁴⁶ As described in paragraphs 17 and 18.

3.2.1 Mainstreaming climate adaptation and mitigation across sustainable food supply chains:

- a) Governments, development partners, civil society and non-governmental organizations and private sector should collaborate with food producers and their organizations for them to achieve decent livelihoods and to enhance the resilience of food supply chains to climate change impacts by managing risk and building preparedness and resilience and by mitigating food supply chains negative impacts on the environment. This can include building on local knowledge and innovation and increasing access to finance, extension services, insurance, weather forecasting, early warning systems, capacity development, knowledge sharing and information dissemination and assistance through service application. It could also include protecting crops, livestock, and fisheries and overall production systems, in terms of nutritional content and productivity from the anticipated impacts of climate change in the form of pests, diseases, and weather-related shocks. This could entail disseminating good practices of resilient farming and locally adopting varieties resistant to drought, frost, heat, pests, or diseases caused or exacerbated by climate change as well as reducing post-harvest and other food losses and developing productive-asset creation initiatives.
- b) Governments, intergovernmental organizations, private sector, civil society and other relevant stakeholders should promote sustainable agriculture such as agroecological and other innovative approaches, at different scales in the process towards achieving sustainable food systems that enhance food security and nutrition. They also should collaborate with and support farmers and other food producers to reduce the environmental impact of food systems, enhancing also biodiversity and recognizing the positive efforts of farmers that adopt sustainable practices. This could be done by fostering the adoption of appropriate technology and on-farm management practices to optimize the efficiency of crop production yields and by promoting responsible and sustainable production and use of pesticides and fertilizers in order to maximize their benefits while minimizing their negative impacts on the environment and human health. Governments should promote optimization of agricultural outputs per unit of water, soil, energy, labor and land, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity loss, and natural resource degradation (including deforestation), in accordance with their Nationally Determined Contribution to the Paris Agreement, and other relevant national planning instruments.
- c) Governments should institute, where appropriate, monitoring systems (including early warning systems), quality indices (e.g. integrated diversification and agro-biodiversity targets, soil health, water quality, farm income and food price) and other food system and dietary metrics as part of the environment and climate-related target setting policies to monitor changing conditions and the effectiveness of policy responses.

d) Governments, research organizations, academic institutions, and universities should promote the generation and use of science and evidence-based knowledge, including indigenous, and traditional and local knowledge, that demonstrate climate change mitigation, adaptation and resilience strategies for sustainable food systems and enabling healthy diets. Research should be science and evidence-based, open to local and traditional knowledge, include safeguards for the identification and management of possible conflicts of interest. Research should focus on potential interventions and policy entry points to ensure sustainable agricultural production and productivity including in terms of nutrition, including practices that enhance the resilience of food supply chains, improve livelihoods and promote carbon sequestration, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, processing and packaging, retail and markets, market access and responsible consumption, contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as to reduce negative environmental impacts and protect, conserve, sustainably manage and use natural resources.

3.2.2 Promoting sustainable use and management of natural resources in food production:

- a) Governments, farmers and their organizations, private sector and other relevant stakeholders should address soil health as central to agricultural production systems, with due attention to the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management. Governments should encourage the use of integrated soil fertility and nutrients management practices as well as ecosystem services productivity for sustainable production, and promote the use of sustainable land management services and agricultural practices to maintain soil biodiversity and nutrient balance, reduce soil erosion, improve water management, and promote carbon storage and sequestration.
- b) Governments should promote and improve the sustainable management and sustainable use of water resources for agriculture and food production through, where appropriate, improved regulation, integrated water resource management at watershed scale, inclusive and participatory approaches, and enhanced water cooperation approaches that involve civil society organizations, farmer organizations, peasants and other small-scale food producers, indigenous peoples and local communities, private sector, and other relevant stakeholders, that take into account the variety of water needs across different sectors. These approaches should foster irrigation systems that use water resources sustainably, the reduction of water wastage, support the systematic use of appropriate water saving technologies, minimize water pollution stemming from agriculture, promote the multiple safe and environmentally-sound uses and re-use of water for domestic and productive purposes without compromising the ability of farmers and food producers to grow sufficient nutritious foods, while recognizing the crucial importance of access to water for all people living and working in rural areas for personal and domestic use.
- c) Governments and other relevant stakeholders should protect, conserve and sustainably use biodiversity for food and agriculture to strengthen the resilience of food systems. This should be complemented through the adoption and application of sustainable food production and natural resource management practices such as agroecological and other innovative approaches.

- d) Governments should recognize and respect all legitimate tenure right holders and their rights including, as appropriate and in line with national legislation, the legitimate tenure rights of indigenous peoples and local communities with customary tenure systems that exercise self-governance of land, fisheries and forests, with special attention to the provision of equitable access for women, in line with the CFS VGGT⁴⁷. The traditional, collective knowledge and practices of these right holders should be respected, their traditional diets should be protected, and their nutrition and wellbeing should be a priority.
- e) Governments should recognize the importance of pastoralists and sustainable rangelands management and grazing systems for nutrition, healthy ecosystems, rural livelihoods and resilient food supply chains as well as encourage low inputs pastoral systems to produce healthy animal source food that contribute to reducing poverty and hunger.

3.2.3 Promoting nutrition within agriculture and food supply chains:

- a) Governments should, where appropriate, budget for and integrate nutrition objectives into their national agricultural and other relevant policies to achieve healthy diets through sustainable food systems.
- b) Governments and private sector and other relevant stakeholders should encourage and promote responsible agricultural investment⁴⁸, and support food producers in the adoption of sustainable production practices and in the production of diverse food that contributes to healthy diets, while ensuring a decent income, livelihoods and resilience for fishers, farmers, particularly smallholders and/or family farms, and farm workers. This should include supporting and encouraging sustainable crop production practices, livestock, agroforestry, animal and fishery systems (including artisanal fisheries and aquaculture).
- c) Governments should, where appropriate integrate urban and peri-urban agriculture and land use into national and local food systems and nutrition development strategies and programmes, as well as urban and territorial planning, as a viable input into enabling healthy diets through sustainable food systems and support stable supply of safe and nutritious food.
- d) Governments, private sector, research centers and universities and other relevant stakeholders should promote enabling environments to assist and facilitate food producers' access to affordable, innovative technologies and practices, including traditional knowledge, technical assistance, skill training, inclusive and sustainable business models adapted to local needs and priorities, and information about nutrition and healthy diets through sustainable food systems within agriculture and other extension technical services/programmes, to enable them to promote sustainable production, protect biodiversity, ensure food safety, and improve the nutritional quality of foods for markets.

⁴⁷ In particular with paragraphs 3.1.1, 9.2 and 9.4.

⁴⁸ In line with the CFS Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems and CFS Policy Recommendations on Investing in Smallholder Agriculture.

- e) Governments should support market information systems that provide timely, accessible, transparent information about food-related market transactions, including enhanced tracking of current and future supply stocks and price data including for local and territorial markets, where possible and appropriate. Governments should support agricultural economic research on topics which may include trade and impacts of government policies. Further monitoring and market studies on underreported commodities including those with a major impact on nutrition and neglected and underutilized crops should also be developed.
- f) Governments, private sector, donors and other relevant stakeholders should invest in research, knowledge transfer and innovation for producing diversified nutritious foods, such as fruits and vegetables, legumes and pulses, whole grains and roots and tubers, seeds and nuts, and animal source foods.
- g) Governments should promote strategies, guidelines or instruments that support appropriate measures to enable healthy diets, in accordance with paragraph 17, and promote nutrition within agriculture and food supply chains taking into account WHA Resolutions 57.17⁴⁹, paragraph 22, and 66.10⁵⁰ as well as national legislations, contexts and capacities.

3.2.4 Improving food storage, processing, packaging, transformation and reformulation:

- a) Governments, private sector, and other stakeholders should, where appropriate, invest in infrastructure (e.g. storage facilities, transport infrastructure, physical markets and market information systems) and logistical support to prevent postharvest loss and waste and support the ability of food producers, including smallholders and micro, small and medium-size enterprises to deliver diverse, perishable and safe food to local, regional, international markets in sustainable ways, in accordance with paragraph 41, 43 and 3.1.1c.
- b) Governments, private sector, and farmers and other producers and their associations should promote minimizing food loss and waste on farms, during post-harvest storage, and throughout processing, transportation, and retail. This includes demand-driven training and capacity to improve management practices and foster the adoption of appropriate technologies⁵¹. They should intensify efforts to quantify and investigate how to lessen food loss in the food storage, processing, transformation and reformulation stages and food waste in retail and consumer stages in order to halt the decrease of food quality and quantity and economic loss, but also could lead to a more efficient use of natural resources with positive impact on climate change.

⁴⁹ Resolution WHA57.17. https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA57/A57_R17-en.pdf

⁵⁰ Resolution WHA66.10. https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA66/A66_R10-en.pdf?ua=1

⁵¹ Technologies include cold chambers storage units, solar walk-ins, refrigerators, dry storage, storage drums and drying facilities.

- c) Governments, private sector and research centers should support research, monitoring, development and scaling up the use of innovative processing technologies and practices in accordance with the three dimensions of sustainable development that can retain the nutrient content of food, minimize post-harvest nutrient losses, create, where appropriate, new value added products from food processing by-products, and promote longer-term storage of food, particularly during periods of drought, flooding, and insufficient production. Particular attention should be given to processing by small-scale and family farmer producer associations, especially women, and small and medium enterprises. Food fortification should be evidence and science-based and could be part of nutrition-specific actions, when necessary, in specific contexts, to address micronutrient gaps of public health concern, in line with national legislations. Public policies and programs should only promote fortification when there is a firm science and evidence base and this should not detract from long-term promotion of diverse healthy diets through sustainable food systems.
- d) Governments, according to national contexts, should foster strategies, guidelines, and instruments for nutrition labelling and support appropriate evidence and sciencebased measures, including considering diverse science and evidence-based FOPL schemes, (which could include interpretive and informative labeling), taking into account Codex Alimentarius Commission standards, guidelines and recommendations and other agreed relevant international and national standards, and marketing, to help consumers to make informed and healthy choices⁵² with special emphasis on the impact they have on children.
- e) Private sector should contribute to public health goals including those set out in the 2030 Agenda aligned with national legislations, regulations, priorities and laws and with national food-based dietary guidelines by producing and promoting nutritious and safe food that contribute to a healthy diet and are produced sustainably, increasing and preserving nutrient content and should make efforts to reformulate foods, when necessary, by reducing the content of nutrients of public health concern.
- f) Governments, where appropriate, should encourage private sector food actors, including local private sector, to work towards more environmentally sustainable and safe packaging of products.

3.2.5 Improving nutrition and health of farm and food system workers:

- a) Governments should ensure that the right to work⁵³ is respected, protected and fulfilled for all farmers and other food producers and workers (including migrants and undocumented workers), that these populations are protected and safe, and that there is no unnecessary burden which could negatively impact their health status, including involvement of children in harmful tasks (e.g. child labour).

⁵² World Health Assembly (WHA) Resolution 57.17, paragraphs 40.4 and 61, and WHA Resolution 66.10.

⁵³ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) - articles 23 and 24.

- b) Governments should provide, and intergovernmental organizations, private sector and other relevant stakeholders should promote, where applicable, social protection programmes to food producers and workers helping them to be food secure, have decent income and wages and sufficient livelihoods, and access and afford healthy diets and adequate health services.
- c) Private sector should improve the nutritional status of its workers and ensure their access to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation and to nutritious foods in the workplace, facilitate access to nutrition-related health services and encourage the establishment of facilities for breastfeeding.
- d) Governments, private sector and other relevant stakeholders should promote the health and wellbeing of food system workers, including seasonal and migrant workers, and adopt measures, including early warning systems, to prevent spreading of infectious diseases, including providing protective equipment by ensuring appropriate working conditions and, where appropriate, living conditions including for seasonal and migrant workers. Workers should be trained on how infectious disease spreads and how they can protect themselves and their coworkers and the food and the materials they handle. Governments and private sector, in accordance with relevant national and international laws, should recognize the role that farmer and worker organizations play in promoting the health and wellbeing of farm and food system workers.

3.2.6 Empowering youth across food systems:

- a) Governments, intergovernmental organizations, private sector and other relevant stakeholders should engage, encourage and empower youth, acknowledging their diversity, to be actively involved in food systems by enhancing their access to land, natural resources, inputs, tools, information, extension and advisory services, financial services, education, training, markets, and promote their inclusion in decision-making processes in accordance with national legislation and regulations.
- b) Governments, intergovernmental organizations, private sector, non-governmental organizations, and communities should invest in appropriate vocational and skill trainings, formal education, and mentorship programmes for youth to increase their capacity and access to decent work, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, as well as in demand side enabling policies and instruments to create decent work opportunities, to stimulate and be drivers toward sustainable food systems for the next generation. Investments could also include research and actions to support youth in addressing their own nutritional needs and strengthen the role of youth play as change agents influencing the consumption of healthy diets within societies both as contributors in food systems and as influencers in the households and communities.

c) Governments, intergovernmental organizations and private sector should promote development, rural-urban linkages, and access to information, social innovations, resource hubs, and new technologies and practices for youth along food supply chains that enhance the sustainability of food systems, improve nutrition and support social enterprises and of youth entrepreneurship (particularly in countries experiencing high rates of youth internal and external migration). Governments, intergovernmental organizations and private sector should, in accordance to national legislations, enable youth active engagement and participation in policy-making across sectors and support the individual and collective capacities to shape food systems by recognizing their agency.

3.3 EQUAL AND EQUITABLE ACCESS TO HEALTHY DIETS THROUGH SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

56. Food environments comprise foods available and accessible to people in their surroundings and the nutritional quality, safety, price, convenience, labelling and promotion of these foods. These environments should ensure that people have equal and equitable access to sufficient, affordable, safe and nutritious foods that meet dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life⁵⁴, considering the various physical, social, economic, cultural, and political factors that influence that access. For many people, access to healthy diets can be problematic as they may not be available, accessible, or affordable for a variety of reasons. This section outlines some potential policy entry points to improve physical and economic access, and availability of healthy diets through sustainable food systems in the places where people shop, choose, and eat food.

3.3.1 Improving access to food that contributes to healthy diets:

- a) Governments should improve the availability of and access to safe and nutritious food that contributes to healthy diets through sustainable food systems, and ensure that it has a positive impact on the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security, including through trade that should be in accordance with a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable, multilateral trading system under the World Trade Organization.
- b) Governments should take into consideration the guidance developed by FAO and WHO to ensure that in times of crisis (e.g. pandemics), the integrity and resilience of food systems are maintained, and adequate and safe food supplies are available and accessible for all people. Governments should recognize the importance of local smallholders and family farmers in this respect.
- c) In times of crisis, governments should recognize the essential nature of food production, distribution, processing and to keep markets, including local markets, and trade corridors open, to ensure workers' rights and to maintain continuous functioning of critical aspects of food systems in all countries.

⁵⁴ FAO. 2004. Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security. Paragraph 15.

- d) Governments should take equity and equality into consideration when acting to address food environments and ensure members of vulnerable communities, indigenous peoples and local communities, peasants, pastoralists, small-scale fisher folks, agricultural and food workers, rural and urban women and youth, people with disabilities, and people facing constraints due to age and illness, have sufficient access to diverse food that contribute to healthy diets.
- e) Governments should minimize barriers so that people can grow, transport, preserve, purchase, order or otherwise access diverse types of foods, including fresh and seasonal foods, that contribute to healthy diets through sustainable food systems in a given food environment. This can be done by, inter alia, instituting rural and urban planning policies, facilitating internet access and innovative service delivery,, policies and instruments that encourage retail outlets and local, street and wet markets to sell a variety of safe, affordable nutritious foods that contribute to healthy diets through sustainable food systems, and that promote , as and when appropriate, local production, including home, community, and school food production and gardens, as well as national and international markets where appropriate.
- f) Governments should examine measures to encourage farmers and fishers markets, mobile food retailers, street food vendors and other retailers that sell a variety of foods, both locally grown and globally sourced, that contribute to healthy diets through sustainable food systems.
- g) Governments, in consultation with consumer associations and local residents, can promote local food retailers and markets to increase the number, variety, and sale of sustainably produced safe and nutritious foods, both locally grown and globally sourced, that contribute to healthy diets through sustainable food systems. This can be done by creating local food policy councils to give residents a voice in how best to improve availability, access and affordability of healthy diets in their communities, giving special attention to those people that are most affected by hunger and malnutrition in all its forms.

3.3.2 Improving the availability and affordability of food that contributes to healthy diets through sustainable food systems:

- a) Governments should, where appropriate to national circumstances and consistent with international commitments and obligations, take measures, including policies and instruments, to support and promote initiatives that improve and seek to ensure the affordability and accessibility of healthy diets through sustainable food systems and to promote policies and programmes aiming at preventing or reducing overweight and obesity.
- b) Governments, with the support of intergovernmental organizations, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders, should strengthen public procurement systems by ensuring healthy diets are available, accessible, affordable and convenient in public settings and institutions, including kindergartens and other childcare facilities, schools, hospitals, foodbanks, government offices and workplaces, military bases and prisons, nursing homes, and care settings, in line with national food-based dietary guidelines, and engaging with, where available, smallholders and family farmers and vulnerable local food producers.

- c) Governments should link the provision of healthy school meals through sustainable food systems with clear nutritional objectives, aligned with national food-based dietary guidelines and adapted to the needs of different age groups, with special attention to those most affected by hunger and malnutrition.
- d) Governments, intergovernmental organizations, private sector and other relevant stakeholders should consider promoting home grown school meals, where food served in schools and other child care facilities is procured, where appropriate, from smallholder and/or family farmers to support local communities and provide educational opportunities for students.
- e) Governments, intergovernmental organizations, private sector and other relevant stakeholders should facilitate the affordability of healthy diets through sustainable food systems for poor households through social protection programmes, such as vouchers for nutritious foods, cash transfers, school feeding programmes or other community meals programmes. These should be linked to clear nutritional outcomes, aligned with national food-based dietary guidelines and adapted to the needs of different age groups.
- f) Governmental actors and intergovernmental organizations should promote the readiness and resilience of social protection programmes to cope with pandemics and other systemic shocks that negatively impact food security and nutrition.
- g) Governments, consumers, farmers and other food producers organizations should promote the availability of safe and nutritious and sustainably produced food that contributes to healthy diets including nutritious and sustainably produced food from smallholders and family farmers and fishers markets, social organizations and other community-building efforts that engage people around local food cultures.

3.3.3 Monitoring new technologies and promoting trends for healthy diets through sustainable food systems:

- a) Governments should acknowledge and monitor the influential roles of the internet, social media, and online marketing of foods, and should encourage media companies to promote nutritious, safe and sustainably produced foods that contribute to healthy diets on social media spheres.
- b) Governments should recognize the growing trend of food purchased online and consumed away from home (including street food) and could, as appropriate to national circumstances, promote policies to encourage restaurants and online outlets to offer prepared dishes made from nutritious, safe and sustainably produced foods that contribute to healthy diets, display information about food on menus (i.e. calories, product composition, and other nutritional content as well as other relevant science and evidence-based information such as related to sustainable production and consumption, based on, where appropriate, indicators of 2030 Agenda), avoid food loss and waste, and respect food safety regulations.

3.4 FOOD SAFETY ACROSS SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

57. Food safety is foundational to all parts of the food system and is critical to prevent and control the introduction of potential food safety hazards, including biological, chemical, and physical hazard, which may result in illness and death, such as food-borne pathogens, naturally occurring toxins, contaminants, including heavy metals, pesticides residues, residues of veterinary drugs, residues of antimicrobials, recognizing and using the CODEX Alimentarius Commission standards, guidelines and recommendations about food safety, OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code and OIE Aquatic Animal Health Code as well as national regulations and capacities. Animal and plant diseases are likewise threats to the safety and resilience of food systems and to human health and nutrition. Food cannot be considered nutritious if it is not safe, and poor food safety hinders the adoption of healthy diets. There is an increased urgency to improve the ability to track food safety to monitor the food supply flow, and facilitate food recalls across coordinated networks. This section highlights the need for international and national cooperation on food safety, recognizing the importance of effective risks assessments, risk communication and risk management leading to control systems that are appropriate for different scales, contexts and modes of production and marketing.

3.4.1 Strengthening national and international cooperation on food safety:

- a) Governments should promote food safety within their food systems policies and develop science-based and context-specific food safety policies and programmes that consider actions across the entire food systems - concerning production, processing, handling, preparation, storage, and distribution of food.
- b) Governments should develop, establish, strengthen and enforce, as appropriate, food safety control systems, including reviewing, adopting, updating and enforcing national food safety legislation and regulations to ensure that food producers and suppliers throughout the food supply chain operate safely. Governments should implement, as appropriate, and with the support of intergovernmental organizations, internationally adopted standards, in accordance with paragraph 41 of the VGFSyN.
- c) Governments and the FAO/WHO International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) should participate in, share and contribute, where appropriate, data and evidence to official international networks that exchange food safety information, including the surveillance of foodborne hazards and disease outbreaks and management of emergencies to improve food safety across a range of issues such as water quality, pesticide residues, food-borne pathogens, naturally occurring toxins, contaminants including heavy metals, pesticides residues, residues of veterinary drugs, residues of antimicrobials, food additives, pathogenic bacteria, viruses, toxins, parasites, zoonoses, and fraud/adulteration of food products.

3.4.2 Ensuring food safety across food production systems:

- a) Governments, private sector and other relevant stakeholders should implement a One Health Approach⁵⁵ to food safety along the entire food and feed supply chain, where appropriate, recognizing the interconnection between food safety and human, plant, animal and environmental health particularly to prevent and mitigate all food-borne illnesses, including those from zoonotic origin, and other food-borne diseases.
- b) Governments, in collaboration with intergovernmental organizations, should continue to develop and implement science and risk-based national plans taking into account the “Antimicrobial resistance: A manual for developing national action plans” to combat antimicrobial resistance in livestock, aquaculture, and in plants, including in feed production, recognizing and using international standards, guidelines and recommendations, adopted by the international standard setting bodies including those recognized by the WTO SPS agreement to promote and support prudent and appropriate use of antimicrobials, and recalling relevant FAO Conference resolutions⁵⁶, and recognizing and using Codex Alimentarius Commission standards, guidelines and recommendations, and taking note of the work of UN Interagency Coordinating Group on Antimicrobial Resistance (IACG), where appropriate. A collaborative One Health approach, taking into account the Global Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance, is necessary to reduce AMR, including awareness raising as well as developing the capacity of monitoring AMR and AMU (Antimicrobial Use) in food and agriculture, as appropriate⁵⁷.

3.4.3 Protecting consumers from food safety risks in food supplies:

- a) Governments, private sector, intergovernmental organizations, development partners and other relevant stakeholders should promote and enhance traceability in food supply chains, early contamination detection, and leverage the opportunities that new technologies offer for traceability solutions.
- b) Investment by governments, private sector and other relevant stakeholders should support training for food producers, handlers and processors to implement national, science and evidence-based, risk-based measures that can provide safe food while retaining their nutrient content.

⁵⁵ One Health is an approach to designing and implementing programmes, policies, legislation and research in which multiple sectors (such as public health, animal health, plant health and the environment) communicate and work together to achieve better public health outcomes. Reference:

<https://www.who.int/features/qa/one-health/en/>

⁵⁶ FAO Conference Resolutions 4/2015 and 6/2019

⁵⁷ Taking note of the current work of the ad hoc Codex Intergovernmental Task Force on Antimicrobial Resistance (TFAMR).

- c) Governments are invited to acknowledge, and adapt legislations, regulations and guidelines, to assess and manage emerging and potential health risks as well as possible benefits for food security and nutrition including for new food products created by emerging technologies as appropriate taking into account, other relevant factors in the risk management process as described in Codex Alimentarius Commission Procedural Manual, scientific risk assessments and Codex Alimentarius Commission standards, guidelines and recommendations, where available, as with any new food product.

3.5 PEOPLE-CENTERED NUTRITION KNOWLEDGE EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

58. It is important to consider, establish, maintain and protect the range and diversity of food cultures, social norms, relations, and traditions that contribute to healthy diets through sustainable food systems without undermining progress in gender equality. This section outlines the policy entry points to promote healthy diets through supporting people to improve their knowledge, awareness, education, and the quality of information available, motivations, skills and sustainable practices empowering key actors. Context-specific programmes and promotion of the healthy aspects of traditional diets and knowledge originating from diverse food systems are vital to ensuring equal, positive and sustainable impacts on nutrition and the environment. Social and behavior change can also shift patterns around food and food consumption and empower people to make better choices for themselves and their families and the three dimensions of sustainable development.

3.5.1 Utilizing policies and tools to provide education and information on healthy diets and sustainable food systems:

- a) Governments, in cooperation with scientific institutions, should support and develop, where appropriate, evidence-based food-based dietary guidelines for different age groups and people with special dietary requirements that define context-specific healthy diets by taking into account social, cultural, ancestral, scientific, economic, traditional, ecological, geographical and environmental drivers. It is also important to invest, where appropriate, in public health nutrition tools to improve nutrition education and promote healthy diets and sustainable food systems.
- b) Governments should take approaches that reduce the impact on children of inappropriate marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages as recommended in resolution WHA 63.14, in accordance with relevant multilaterally agreed rules and national legislation, where applicable and safeguarding for the identification and management of potential conflicts of interest. Such measures could include, where appropriate, regulation on selling and advertising such food near schools, and childcare facilities, where necessary.

- c) Governments and other stakeholders should protect, promote and support exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and continued breastfeeding with appropriate complementary feeding up to two years and beyond, as well as encourage the establishment of milk banks and protect and support breastfeeding for working mothers, supporting and promoting maternity protection and paid parental leave.
- d) Governments should implement measures or national mechanisms related to the marketing of commercial infant formula and other breast milk substitutes aimed at giving effect to the International Code of Marketing of Breast-Milk Substitutes⁵⁸, as well as other WHO evidence-based recommendations, where applicable, in line with national legislations. Governments should monitor and continue to assess the impact of their measures.
- e) Governments should promote and support science and evidence-based food and nutrition labelling, including considering diverse science and evidence-based FOPL schemes, (which could include interpretive and informative labelling⁵⁹), to support healthy diets. Food labelling should include safeguards for the identification and management of potential conflicts of interest and be aligned with national public health and nutrition policies and food regulations. The objective of nutrition labelling, is to allow consumers to identify the amount of nutrients in products correctly. Interpretive labelling including FOPL, should allow consumers to quickly and easily identify nutrients in the interest of public health.
- f) Governments should develop policies to encourage private sector to produce more nutritious foods and design food outlets, including markets, restaurants, and other places where food is sold or served, that encourage the placement of safe and nutritious and sustainably produced foods that contribute to healthy diets.
- g) Governments, intergovernmental organizations, private sector, civil society and nongovernmental organizations and other relevant stakeholders, including medical and health practitioners, should promote the integration of science-based nutrition education and counseling practices in different settings, with safeguards for the identification and management of potential conflicts of interest, including for populations participating in maternal and child nutrition programmes and information programmes based on food-based dietary guidelines, and other policies related to food systems. The inclusion of nutrition education and information within agriculture extension technical packages should be considered as a way to support producers in increasing the production of nutritious foods.

⁵⁸ [International Code of Marketing of Breast-Milk Substitutes. WHO, 1981](#). Geneva.

⁵⁹ Examples of different FOPL schemes can be found in WHO Guiding Principles and Framework Manual for Front-of-Pack labelling for Promoting Healthy Diets. Geneva, 2019

- h) Governments, intergovernmental organizations, private sector, civil society and nongovernmental organizations and other relevant stakeholders, including medical and health practitioners, should promote a range of activities such as social and behavior change communication (SBCC), food and nutrition education, interpersonal communication and community dialogues, and social marketing initiatives to promote breastfeeding, indigenous and traditional food cultures as a way to positively influence knowledge, attitudes and social norms, and coordinate messaging on nutrition and sustainable consumption and production across a variety of communication channels to reach multiple levels of society (e.g. mass media campaigns).
- i) Governments, intergovernmental organizations, civil society, private sector and other relevant stakeholders should support the education of all food system actors to prioritize the reduction of food loss and waste. Actions could include awareness campaigns at national, regional and global levels, food date labelling, and monitoring of food loss and waste.

3.5.2 Encouraging local food knowledge and culture:

- a) Governments, civil society organizations, private sector, intergovernmental organizations, academia and other relevant stakeholders should use science and evidence-based as well as cultural, traditional and ancestral knowledge resources to promote and support education and knowledge of healthy diets, sustainable food systems, nutrition, physical activity, diversified production systems, food loss and waste prevention, intrahousehold food distribution, food safety, optimal breastfeeding and, where needed, complementary feeding, taking into consideration cultural and social norms and adapting to different audiences and contexts, including those of indigenous peoples with their voluntary consent on the sharing of their own knowledge as well as participating in broader knowledge and education. Safeguards for the identification and management of potential conflicts of interest should be put in place.
- b) Governments, intergovernmental organizations, civil society organizations, private sector, community leaders, social workers, health professionals, academia and other relevant stakeholders should encourage food cultures, culinary skills and nutrition education and recognize the importance of food in cultural heritage across communities This can be done through community and consumer associations and educational institutions, targeting men and women.
- c) Governments should, appropriately, protect and promote the knowledge that indigenous peoples and local communities have with regard to local traditions, ancestral customs and methods of sustainably producing food, preparing, and preserving local and traditional food that has nutritional and environmental benefits, promotes food safety, and improves livelihoods and enhances social conditions.

3.5.3 Promoting “hubs” for food and nutrition knowledge, education and information:

- a) Universities, schools, technical and vocational education and training centres as well as teaching schools should institute nutrition education curricula for students on the areas of food studies including food technology, health and agriculture during their training.
- b) Governments, civil society organizations, private sector, intergovernmental organizations, universities, schools, organizations of small-scale producers and workers, communication media and other relevant stakeholders should promote nutrition knowledge and culinary skills among school-age children, youth and adults (including promoting communal mealtimes, socializing around food, consuming healthy diets, and reducing food waste) in a variety of settings, including safeguards for the identification and management of potential conflicts of interest.
- c) Governments, with the support of intergovernmental organizations upon request, should, as appropriate, implement comprehensive school and pre-school food and nutrition policies, review education curricula to incorporate nutrition and sustainability principles and sustainable practices, involve communities, especially local communities including, where possible, small-scale food producers and workers and their organizations, in promoting and creating healthy food environments and healthy diets through sustainable food systems in schools, kindergartens and other childcare facilities, and support school health and nutrition services.
- d) Governments, intergovernmental organizations, private sector, civil society and nongovernmental organizations, small-scale food producers and workers and their organizations, and other relevant stakeholders should support food and nutrition dialogues with indigenous peoples and local communities, farmer field schools and agriculture extension services by sharing the knowledge, experience and insights of individuals who are not usually regarded as members of the nutrition community (e.g. community and religious leaders, chefs, food systems suppliers, retailers and consumers, youth leaders, farmers and food producers, young entrepreneurs, smallscale food producers and workers and their organizations, health care workers, mayors and local communities).

3.6 GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT ACROSS FOOD SYSTEMS

59. Gender relations and cultural norms are among the most significant drivers of hunger, malnutrition and unhealthy diets, particularly for women and girls. In many countries, women and girls produce food, make decisions about the household's diet and influence the nutritional status of household members. Women are important agents for sustainable development as food system actors, but also as actors in their households, communities and countries. At the same time, women and girls are unequally burdened with responsibilities for unpaid care and domestic work and often face significantly higher levels of food insecurity and worse nutrition outcomes than men. Women's and girl's empowerment and ensuring women's rights through redistribution of such unpaid work, education, and access to information, resources and services are needed to improving nutrition. This section highlights the importance of improving women's wellbeing, ensuring direct access to financial, technical and biophysical resources, improving and enabling agency and participation in decision-making, and balancing the power relationships and overcoming legal impediments that limit equality and choices.

3.6.1 Empowering women:

- a) Governments should ensure equal opportunities and promote equal participation between women and men in policy decision-making, supporting women especially in rural context, and ensuring gender equality in leadership roles in decision making bodies – parliaments, ministries and local authorities at district and community levels. Governments and stakeholders should foster strategies to engage with men and boys to support women and girls in nutrition as a joint responsibility.
- b) Governments should promote an enabling environment to generate social, economic and cultural changes towards gender equality with specific gender responsive policies, programmes, institutions which should include adaptation of public services to support women, and advocacy campaigns to deal with the various forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, particularly in rural areas. This should include the active engagement of men and ensuring access to adequate support services for women.
- c) Governments, intergovernmental organizations, private sector, civil society, particularly women's organizations and other relevant stakeholders should promote the empowerment of women and girls by supporting equitable and equal access to primary and secondary education, literacy programmes, comprehensive health services and other social services to increase household nutritional status.

3.6.2 Promoting and acknowledging women as entrepreneurs and key actors in food systems:

- a) Governments and other stakeholders should attach a great importance and are encouraged to promote gender equality and create the necessary conditions for women to fully realize their potential, in line with national legislation and universally agreed human rights instruments. Measures to achieve this should support the optimal combination and reconciliation of family and work life, including through economic empowerment of women, social protection programmes, including among others child and family support payments, and parental leave, establishment of minimum wages, reduction of the gender pay gap, and quality job and pensions as well as redistribution of unpaid care work.
- b) Governments, in accordance with national legislations, should ensure women's equal tenure rights and promote their equal access to and control over productive land, natural resources, inputs, productive tools, and access to education, training, markets, and information in line with the CFS VGGT.
- c) Governments, private sector, intergovernmental organizations and other relevant stakeholders should enhance women's roles in agriculture by promoting their participation and decision-making] over what and how they choose to produce crops/food. Women should be offered equal access to extension and advisory services for crops and animal products that they produce or process, capacity-building to engage with traders, financial services (e.g. credit and savings mechanisms), and entrepreneurial opportunities across food systems.
- d) Governments, non-governmental organizations, private sector and other relevant stakeholders should promote and increase access of women to time saving technologies⁶⁰ that could help improve their livelihoods.
- e) Governments should promote the design of context-specific policies to reduce digital gaps among rural women and promote cooperation schemes to facilitate rural women's access to the application of digital tools, digital infrastructure, and technological solutions to improve their productive activities.
- f) Governments, private sector, civil society and other relevant stakeholders should facilitate women's equal access to entrepreneurship and employment opportunities across food systems and related activities, leveraging existing business platforms to generate adequate income, as well as increase women's participation in decisionmaking on the use of household income and opportunities to build and manage savings. This could include business management training, decision-making skill development, scaling of financial services and products both accessible and relevant to women's needs, and tools to help men and women strengthen their intra-household communication.

⁶⁰ These include food preservation and processing equipment, cold storage, heat and thermal processing, grinding/blending devices, energy saving stoves, and modern farm equipment for ploughing, cultivating and harvesting nutritious crops/food and raising small ruminants and poultry.

3.6.3 Recognizing and addressing women's nutritional status and deprivation:

- a) Governments, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, development partners and other relevant stakeholders should acknowledge and advance the nutritional well-being of women and girls throughout the lifecycle, including through the provision of health, nutrition and other essential services. This can be done by promoting and supporting that national development strategies are informed by participatory gender and age analyses, and that women and girls throughout the lifecycle, with compromised nutritional status and higher levels of deprivation, access gender-responsive social protection programmes and benefits.
- b) Governments and other key stakeholder should acknowledge and value women's crucial contributions as caregivers, in agriculture, food production and preparation, recognizing women's significant time and workload commitments, including unpaid care work and domestic chores at the household level. This should be addressed through the effective implementation of gender-sensitive and transformative policies, social protection programmes and other benefits, and the promotion of equitable sharing of domestic chores.
- c) Governments should create an enabling policy framework, as appropriate, and supportive practices to protect and support breastfeeding, ensuring that decisions to breastfeed do not result in women losing their economic security or any of their rights. This should include promoting and implementing policies and programmes ensuring maternity protection and paid parental leave and removing workplace-related barriers to optimal breastfeeding (lack of breaks, facilities, and services).

3.7 RESILIENT FOOD SYSTEMS IN HUMANITARIAN CONTEXTS

60. Linking food security and nutrition during humanitarian crises (human induced, conflicts, disasters including those induced by climate change, natural disasters, epidemics/pandemics,) with long term strategies in accordance with international humanitarian law, universally agreed human rights instruments, and national legislation, is essential to strengthen the resilience of food systems. Short or protracted crises displace millions, and increase their risk of food insecurity and malnutrition. The critical focus in these crises is identifying the balance between immediate food security and nutrition needs and impact that response efforts may have on the system.

Considering the importance of resilient food systems, this section highlights the importance of strengthening the continuum of the humanitarian response and development, particularly local development, efforts and ensuring coordination among all actors, taking into account the CFS Framework for Action on Food Security in Protracted Crises⁶¹.

3.7.1 Protecting the most vulnerable to malnutrition in humanitarian contexts:

- a) Governments and intergovernmental organizations should pay particular attention, to protection issues, and ensure safe and unhindered access to safe, nutritious food and nutritional support to the most vulnerable groups and implement community based nutrition education activities to address malnutrition in humanitarian contexts and should foster access to productive resources and to markets that are remunerative and beneficial to smallholders. This could include using local and sustainably produced food, when possible and when conditions permit. Food should never be used as an instrument for political or economic pressure, and governments should undertake efforts to ensure access to safe and unhindered access to safe drinking water for all, including those in emergency situations, and reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity.
- b) Governments, parties involved in conflicts, international humanitarian organizations and other relevant stakeholders should, where appropriate, ensure safe and unhindered access of all members of affected and at-risk populations to food security and nutrition assistance, in both acute and protracted crises, consistent with internationally recognized humanitarian principles, as anchored in Geneva Convention of 1949 and other UNGA Resolutions after 1949.

⁶¹ Implementation of the VGFSyN should be consistent with Humanitarian Guiding Principles of the UNGA Resolution 46/182 and should take into account the work of the Food Security and Nutrition Clusters.

- c) Governments, with the support of intergovernmental organizations and international assistance and cooperation where appropriate, should ensure safe and unhindered access to safe and nutritious food and nutritional support for refugees, internally displaced people, host communities, and asylum seekers in their territory, in accordance with governments' obligations under relevant international agreed instruments. This could include using local and sustainably produced food, when possible and when conditions permit. Governments should have, in accordance with national priorities and capacities, emergency preparedness plans in place to ensure food security and nutrition of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups as well as emergency nutrition surveillance with appropriate indicators during crises such as epidemics and pandemics, conflicts and disasters including those induced by climate change.

3.7.2 Improving the quality of food and nutrition assistance:

- a) Governments, all parties involved in conflicts, disasters including those induced by climate change, epidemics and pandemics, and food assistance, including intergovernmental organizations, should underline and support that food security and nutrition assessments and analyses include appropriate safeguards for the identification and management of potential conflicts of interests, are undertaken throughout a crisis to inform food assistance and nutrition response as well as any components of the local food system requiring rehabilitation or improvement.
- b) Governments should acknowledge nutrition as an essential need and humanitarian assistance should aim to meet and monitor nutritional requirements of the affected population, particularly the most vulnerable to malnutrition. Any food items provided should be fit for purpose, of appropriate nutritional quality and quantity, be safe and acceptable. Food should conform to the food standards of the host country's government, in accordance with para 41 of the VGFSyN.
- c) Governments and intergovernmental organizations should support social protection mechanisms and programmes to prevent and manage wasting, that include, safe, nutritious and, where possible, locally produced food, and that achieve adequate coverage during times of crisis. Food fortification can play a complementary role in humanitarian contexts and should be evidence-based, and context-specific. Social protection mechanisms should be in support of local markets and accessibility of nutritious food in the longer term.
- d) Governments should implement policies on infant and young child feeding (IYCF) in emergencies including the protection of optimal breastfeeding practices and, together with intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, and should support the promotion, coordination and implementation of such policies on IYCF practices, and promoted during humanitarian crises.

- e) Governments and intergovernmental organizations should support, when implementing cash and voucher assistance, that the minimum expenditure basket and transfer value promotes, nutritious and safe food, if possible, sustainably produced, that is preferably locally, or regionally procured and sufficient to provide a healthy diet for all stages of the lifecycle consulting existing guidance from WFP and other UN relevant intergovernmental organizations. Such assistance programmes should include safeguards for the identification and management of potential conflicts of interest.

3.7.3 Ensuring food systems are resilient in humanitarian contexts:

- a) Governments in partnership with intergovernmental and other relevant organizations should, where appropriate, undertake food system analysis, develop and use early warning systems, climate information services, and food and agriculture information systems, including food price monitoring systems, that detect and monitor threats to food production, availability and access as well as food safety hazards and tampering. These early warning systems should be integrated into broader food analysis systems including the monitoring of the availability and affordability of nutritious foods that contribute to healthy diets through sustainable food systems at the local level.
- b) Governments and intergovernmental organizations should, as appropriate, and in line with national legislation, invest in disaster risk reduction measures that benefit those most at risk/need. In particular, productive assets should be protected from severe weather and climate impacts and other disasters in a way that strengthens the resilience of affected populations and their ability to cope with shocks due to conflicts and disasters including those induced by climate change as well as economic shocks. Measures may include social safety nets, investment in protecting affected livelihoods, emergency fiscal and food reserves, reduction of transaction costs, and identification of platform for integrated programmes. Governments should aim to restore local food production and market accessibility as rapidly as possible.
- c) Intergovernmental organizations and development partners should, with the consent of governments, where appropriate, involve local non-governmental organizations, private sector and other relevant stakeholders, including appropriate safeguards for the identification and management of potential conflicts of interests, in the implementation of humanitarian food assistance and livelihood programmes to support economic recovery and development, strengthen sustainable local food systems and foster the ability of smallholders and/or family farmers to access resources to bolster production and markets.

PART 4 - IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF THE USE AND APPLICATION OF THE VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES

4.1 POLICY FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VGFSyN

61. All CFS Members and stakeholders are encouraged to support and promote at all levels within their constituencies, and in collaboration with other relevant initiatives and platforms, the dissemination, use and application of the VGFSyN to support the development and implementation of coordinated and multisectoral national policies, laws, programmes and investment plans to achieve sustainable food systems that deliver healthy diets and improve nutrition.

62. Governments are invited to use the VGFSyN as a tool to undertake initiatives to achieve healthy diets through sustainable food systems. These could include implementing national strategies and programmes, identifying policy opportunities, fostering a transparent, participatory and open dialogue, promoting coordination mechanisms, enhancing policy coherence, supporting innovative technologies, and establishing or strengthening multistakeholder platforms, partnerships, processes and frameworks⁶², with safeguards for the identification and management of potential conflicts of interest, promoting and supporting the involvement and engagement of all relevant stakeholders, including representatives of most vulnerable groups.

63. Parliamentarians and their sub-national, national, and regional alliances play a key role in promoting the adoption of policies, establishing appropriate legislative and regulatory frameworks, raising awareness and promoting dialogue among relevant stakeholders, and allocating resources for the implementation of policies and programmes to achieve healthy diets through sustainable food systems.

4.2 BUILDING AND STRENGTHENING CAPACITY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

64. Governments are strongly encouraged to mobilize adequate financial, technical and human resources, and encourage international cooperation, to increase the human and institutional capacity of countries to implement the VGFSyN and to identify priorities toward their operationalization and monitoring at the international, regional, national and local levels. Technical agencies of the UN, bilateral cooperation agencies and other development partners can assist in this regard. Meaningful participation of the most affected by hunger and malnutrition as well as the development of user-friendly and technical guides, are important to contextualizing approaches and adapting them to local contexts.

⁶² These frameworks include the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement and Nutrition for Growth (N4G).

65. To accelerate and scale up, it is essential to strengthen the resilience and adaptive capacity of food systems, including mobilization of financial resources as well as capacity-building and the transfer of environmentally sound technologies to developing countries on favorable terms as voluntary and mutually agreed, consistent with the elements of paragraph 41 of the 2030 Agenda, as appropriate and relevant. Public finance, both domestic and international, will play a vital role in providing essential services and public goods and in mobilizing other resources of finance for the implementation of the VGFSyN⁶³.

66. The implementation of VGFSyN should be consistent with the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and its' sustainable development goals, in particular SDG 2 and SDG 12, and recalling the shared principles and commitments of the 2030 Agenda, including paragraphs 10, 11, 12⁶⁴ and 13, as well as paragraphs 24, 40 and 41, to the extent relevant.

67. The mobilization of additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources should be strengthened, including through North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation⁶⁴. International organizations, especially international financial institutions, and all stakeholders should strengthen their support, in line with their mandates, and as appropriate, to developing countries in implementing the VGFSyN.

68. Donors, financing institutions, intergovernmental organizations and other funding entities are encouraged to apply the VGFSyN when formulating their policies for loans, grants, investments and programmes to support relevant stakeholders' endeavors. The VGFSyN should contribute to the design of responsible investments that aim to increase the sustainable production, affordability, and access to safe, diverse, nutritious food, as well as to promote the integration of environmental, economic, social, nutrition and health aspects into agriculture and food sector investment plans.

69. Development partners, intergovernmental organizations, including the Rome-based Agencies, and regional organizations, private sector, civil society and other relevant stakeholders are encouraged to support, within their existing resources and mandates, efforts by governments to implement the VGFSyN. Such support could include research and technical cooperation, financial and humanitarian assistance, the provision of evidencebased policy advice, institutional capacity development, development of monitoring frameworks, knowledge sharing and exchange of experiences, and assistance in developing national and regional policies. Actions could be taken to improve partners' capacity to design, manage and participate in multistakeholder partnerships, with robust safeguards for the identification and management of potential conflicts of interest, to ensure transparency and accountability and promote good governance for effective results. Moreover, UN interagency coordination mechanisms dealing with various aspects of food systems and nutrition are encouraged to harmonize their work and to leverage and support the uptake of the VGFSyN at country level upon the request of member states.

⁶³ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, paragraph 41

⁶⁴ Reaffirm all the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, including, inter alia, the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, as set in principle 7 thereof. UN Resolution 70/1

69. Governments, national and international research organizations, intergovernmental organizations, universities and other academic institutions, are encouraged to support the availability and accessibility of knowledge, including indigenous, traditional and local knowledge, with the voluntary consent of indigenous peoples, innovation, including through digitalization, science and evidence on all dimensions of food systems to enable the development of monitoring frameworks, examination of the evidence, prioritization of issues to be considered, evaluation of impacts, and addressing potential synergies and trade-offs.

70. The dissemination and uptake of the VGFSyN can be facilitated through the identification of “champions” and “change agents”, especially among private enterprises, civil society organizations and indigenous peoples and local communities, with safeguards for the identification and management of potential conflicts of interests, that could raise awareness and organize advocacy campaigns across sectors and different governmental levels while respecting cultural diversity.

4.3 MONITORING USE AND APPLICATION OF THE VGFSyN

71. Governments, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, are encouraged to define national policy priorities and related indicators, mobilize regional and local structures to report on these indicators, and establish or strengthen, where appropriate, existing national monitoring and reporting systems in order to assess the efficacy and effectiveness of policies and regulations, and implement appropriate remedial actions in case of negative impacts or gaps. Governments are encouraged to use science and evidence based monitoring and evaluation approaches focused on learning what works and adaptation to achieve maximum results.

72. By applying the VGFSyN, governments can contribute to the achievement of the six Global Nutrition Targets (2025) endorsed by the WHA in 2012⁶⁵ and its diet related NCD targets⁶⁶. The VGFSyN can support countries in defining priority actions and formulating specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound commitments⁶⁷ to achieve nutrition, health and economic, social and environmental objectives to accelerate and align efforts linked to the Nutrition Decade and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This can be done through advocating for policies and legislation, allowing the exchange of best practices and experiences, highlighting successes and lessons learned, and providing mutual support to accelerate implementation. Governments should promote access to transparent and effective mediation, grievance, and dispute resolution mechanisms, particularly for the most vulnerable and marginalized.

73. CFS is encouraged to include the VGFSyN in its ongoing work and its existing funding resources on monitoring, as defined in the CFS Global Strategic Framework for Food Security and Nutrition (GSF).

⁶⁵ <https://www.who.int/nutrition/global-target-2025/en/>

⁶⁶ <https://www.who.int/beat-ncds/take-action/targets/en/>

⁶⁷ In the context of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition and ICN2 follow-up process, country commitments for action should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. https://www.who.int/nutrition/decade-ofaction/smart_commitments/en/