



Terms of Reference for CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment in the context of Food Security and Nutrition

Version approved by the OEWG

A. Background and rationale

1. Advancing gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment is critical to achieving CFS' vision of ending hunger and ensuring food security and nutrition for all, and for the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security.
2. In order to transform this vision into reality, at its 46th Session in October 2019, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) took the decision to develop *Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the context of Food Security and Nutrition* (referred to as the "Guidelines" in this document), as part of its Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPoW) for 2020-2023¹.
3. Gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment is essential to achieving all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as ensuring food systems that are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. The importance of gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment for sustainable development was acknowledged by the international community through the adoption of gender equality as a stand-alone goal in the 2030 Agenda (SDG5). Realizing gender equality and empowering women and girls will make a crucial contribution across all of the Agenda's goals and targets. Thus, systematic mainstreaming of gender equality in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is critically important.
4. Currently, the global food system produces enough food to feed every person on the planet. However, due to a range of diverse challenges, an increasing number of people are failing to realize their right to adequate food and meet their daily food and nutrition needs. In 2019, almost 690 million people were estimated to be hungry, up by nearly 60 million since 2014, representing 8.9% of the total population.² The COVID-19 pandemic may add an additional 83 to 132 million people to the ranks of the undernourished in 2020³, disproportionately affecting women and girls in part as a result of gender inequality and discrimination. Malnutrition in all its forms - undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and overweight and obesity - is now the number one factor contributing to the global burden of disease and reduced life expectancy. In this challenging global context, addressing gender inequality and ensuring women's and girls' rights is urgent and more important than ever to achieve food security and nutrition for all.
5. A large body of evidence demonstrates the positive links between gender equality and food security and nutrition. Gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment is not only fundamental to the realization of human rights, it is also essential for poverty reduction, economic growth, sustainable natural resource management, mitigating and adapting to climate change,

¹ CFS 2020-2023 Multi-Year Programme of Work, CFS 2019/46/7.

² The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI), 2020.

³ SOFI, 2020.

protecting ecosystems and conserving biodiversity. Empowering women is one of the most effective ways to improve nutrition outcomes not only of women but of all family members, lowering infant mortality and reducing child malnutrition, thereby helping to break intergenerational cycles of malnutrition, with special attention to the nutritional needs of pregnant and breastfeeding women. Measures are also required to improve women's maternal health while recognizing women's sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.⁴ Investing in women and girls and promoting gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment are not only the right things to do to achieve food security and nutrition, they are the smart things to do.

6. Discrimination against women and girls, pervasive gender inequalities and exposure to violence result in unequal access to food, with higher prevalence of food insecurity and malnutrition among women and girls. Rural girls face the triple disadvantage of location, gender and age. The gender gap in accessing food increased from 2018 to 2019⁵ and is expected to widen as the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures to contain it are having a negative and gender-differentiated impact on food security and nutrition.⁶
7. Achievement of gender equality is positively correlated with increased production and improved efficiency in many sectors, including in agriculture, whereas inequality and discrimination in access to, and control over, resources continue to undermine economic performance, leading to below-potential economic outcomes. Women play active roles as agents in food systems as farmers, producers, processors, traders, wage-workers and entrepreneurs throughout the value chains. Giving women the same access as men to agricultural resources would raise total agricultural output by 2.5–4 percent, and potentially reduce the number of hungry people by 12–17 percent.⁷ Providing adequate support to women in food systems is critical for the planet to feed nine billion people in 2050 and produce 50 percent more food.⁸
8. Despite positive progress made over decades, gender inequalities persist as women continue to face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination in many areas. This manifests itself in unequal access to and control over key productive resources, assets, technologies, services, economic opportunities, and participation in decision-making processes at household, community and national levels, as well as unbalanced and unrecognized responsibilities in terms of unpaid care and domestic work - all negatively impacting various dimensions of food security: availability, access, utilization and stability.
9. Gender inequality disproportionately impacts women and girls, who continue to have lower social status and economic and political power in many parts of the world. However, discriminatory barriers and limiting societal gender norms and expectations prevent everyone from fulfilling their full potential. Thus, changing gender roles and relations towards equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities will benefit the whole society. It is crucial that all actors, including men and boys, take joint responsibility and have an active role in this process.

B. Objective of the Guidelines

⁴ GA Resolution 70/1 2015. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, 1994. Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, 1995. CSW 62 and 63 Agreed Conclusions.

⁵ SOFI, 2020.

⁶ [FAO Policy Brief on Gendered Impacts of COVID-19 and equitable policy responses in agriculture, food security and nutrition](#), FAO, 2020.

⁷ The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11. WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE - Closing the gender gap for development, FAO, 2011.

⁸ The future of food and agriculture – Trends and challenges, FAO, 2017.

10. The objective of the Guidelines is to support Member States, development partners and other stakeholders to advance gender equality, women's and girls' rights, and women's and girls' empowerment, as part of their efforts to eradicate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition, towards the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security.
11. The Guidelines will provide concrete policy guidance based on good practices and lessons learnt on gender mainstreaming, gender transformative interventions and innovative solutions. They aim to contribute towards a gender-responsive approach, improving legal and policy frameworks, institutional arrangements, national plans and programmes, and promoting innovative partnerships and increased investments in human and financial resources that are conducive to promoting gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment.
12. The Guidelines aim to foster greater policy coherence among gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment, and food security and nutrition agendas, and promote mutually reinforcing policy measures. Generating and disseminating evidence on the diverse situations and experiences of women and girls, men and boys and recognizing their differentiated opportunities, constraints and outcomes in the context of food security and nutrition helps to transform societal norms, raise awareness and supports appropriate responses including targeted development of policies and programs.
13. The Guidelines will contribute to accelerating action by all stakeholders at all levels, including farmers' and women's organizations, to achieve the vision of CFS and the goals of the 2030 Agenda, as part of the United Nations Decade of Action for Sustainable Development (2020-2030). Given the important roles that women and girls play in agriculture⁹ and food systems, family farming as well as in household food security and nutrition, the Guidelines will also contribute to the implementation of the Action Plans of the UN Decades of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025), on Water for Sustainable Development (2018-2028), on Family Farming (2019-2028), on Ecosystems Restoration (2021-2030) and will benefit from the 2021 Food System Summit.

C. Scope of the Guidelines

14. The Guidelines will:
 - 14.1. Review the underlying causes of gender inequalities and their impact on food security and nutrition.
 - 14.2. Outline women's and girls' fundamental contributions to, and roles in, achieving food security and nutrition, as well as to reducing poverty, addressing mitigation and adaptation to climate change, disaster risk reduction and biodiversity loss, and fostering sustainable development and sustainable management of natural resources. The Guidelines will emphasize that fulfilment of full and equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for all is essential for achieving these objectives.
 - 14.3. Consolidate all previous work of the CFS on gender, including the CFS Policy recommendations on Gender and Food Security (2011), and the agreed outcomes of the 2017 CFS Forum on Women's Empowerment in the Context of Food Security and

⁹ Agriculture includes crops, forestry, fisheries, livestock and aquaculture. UNGA Resolution A/RES/74/242. Paragraph 20.

Nutrition.10

- 14.4. Build on the latest gender statistics, including sex-disaggregated data, evidence and research and on concrete experiences and good practices of all CFS Member States and other stakeholders, including lessons learned and knowledge generated by relevant programmes being implemented by UN agencies and bodies, including the three Rome-based Agencies (FAO, IFAD, WFP), and other development partners.
- 14.5. Recognizing and promoting women as agents of change, identify opportunities to promote gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment and suggest strategies to overcome institutional and structural barriers and discrimination against women in the context of food security and nutrition, including in (but not limited to) the following areas:
- Women's participation in decision-making, leadership, representation in shaping public policies;
 - Women's economic empowerment, considering gendered division of labour and the gender roles in food security and nutrition and agriculture throughout the food systems, with a focus on production, utilization, commercialization, and consumption;
 - Recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work;
 - Access to markets and decent work;
 - Access to and control over natural and productive resources, such as land, water, forests, agricultural inputs, productive and advisory services, and credit and other financial services;
 - Access to education, capacity building, training, knowledge and information;
 - Access to appropriate technologies, including ICT-based, digital and agri-innovations;
 - Safety and security of women and girls, and eliminating violence and discrimination against them; and,
 - Social protection schemes and food and nutrition assistance.
- 14.6. Recognize the important role and potential of civil society, farmers and women's organizations, and their collective action in promoting gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment.
- 14.7. Underline the importance of collecting, analysing and using relevant sex- and age-disaggregated data, qualitative information and gender-sensitive indicators and analysis to support evidence-based policies, programmes, plans, strategies and adequate monitoring, reporting, and impact evaluation.
- 14.8. Promote context-specific actions with a focus on women in vulnerable situations recognizing that women are not a homogenous group, and often experience different multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination across and throughout countries due, for instance, to age, race, ethnicity, social class, religion, gender, migration status and disabilities that impact food security and nutrition outcomes.
- 14.9. Advocate, promote and strive for the use of transformative approaches that are able to tackle both the symptoms and the structural causes of gender inequalities with the aim of achieving lasting change in terms of the power and choices women have over their

¹⁰ The full version of the outcomes of the 2017 Forum on Women's Empowerment in the context of Food Security and Nutrition is provided in [Document CFS 2017/44/7](#). Only the text included in 2017 Final Report has been agreed by CFS.

own lives, rather than just temporary increases in opportunities.

- 14.10. Draw attention to the need for governments to stand behind their commitments to ensure the equal rights of men and women, boys and girls in the context of food security and nutrition by translating those commitments into national policies, programmes, and investments with sufficient human and financial resources.¹¹
- 14.11. Reference the mandates and commitments expressed in international fora (e.g. article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); and general recommendation No. 34 (2016) of CEDAW on the rights of rural women) and other regional agreements and strategies (e.g. the Gender Strategy of the CELAC Plan for Food Security, Nutrition and Hunger Eradication 2025; the Gender Strategy of the African Union 2017-2027, etc.).^{12, 13}
- 14.12. Acknowledge the conclusions of the 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) regarding the empowerment of rural women and girls.
- 14.13. Complement, and contribute to, the effective implementation of existing CFS policy products.
- 14.14. Include guidance on the monitoring and evaluation of the use and application of the Guidelines within the framework of the CFS monitoring mechanism.

D. Type of instrument

15. The Guidelines will be voluntary and non-binding and should be interpreted and applied consistent with existing obligations under national and international law, and with due regard to voluntary commitments under applicable regional and international instruments. These guidelines, once endorsed by the CFS, are to be interpreted and applied in accordance with national legal systems and their institutions.
16. The Voluntary Guidelines are complementary to and support national, regional and international initiatives, which aim at addressing all forms of discrimination against women and girls that negatively impact upon food security and nutrition. In particular, CFS guidance should build upon and integrate existing instruments adopted on this topic within the context of the UN system.
17. Notwithstanding the voluntary nature of CFS products, the dissemination, use and application by all stakeholders of the Guidelines will be encouraged at all levels, as appropriate, to support countries in achieving gender equality and food security and nutrition objectives.

E. Intended users

18. The Guidelines are intended for all stakeholders that are involved in addressing food security and nutrition, gender equality and women's empowerment. They primarily address governments at all levels to help design and implement public policies, as their main objective is to provide concrete instruments to build policy coherence between and across public sector policies at national,

¹¹ CFS/2017/44.

¹² CFS 2020-2023 MYPoW, CFS 2019/46/7.

¹³ Intergovernmentally agreed texts include: Resolution 1325 of the Security Council on Women, Peace and Security (2000); the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).

regional and global levels. They are also of value to other actors involved in policy discussions and policy implementation processes. Therefore the intended users include:

- a) Governments;
- b) Intergovernmental and regional organizations, including UN agencies and bodies;
- c) Civil society, including women's, farmers' and small-scale food producers' organizations, trade unions of domestic, rural and agricultural workers, and indigenous peoples;
- d) Private sector, including small and medium-sized enterprises (SME);
- e) Research organizations and universities;
- f) Development agencies, including international financial institutions; and
- g) Philanthropic foundations.

F. Process, tentative timeframe and budget estimate

19. The development of draft Guidelines is planned for 2021-2022, after approval of Terms of Reference (TORs) by Plenary at CFS 47 in February 2021. The Guidelines are targeted for adoption at CFS 50 in October 2022. The Guidelines will result from an inclusive consultative process open to all interested stakeholders, inclusiveness being a core principle of CFS, which will bolster their shared ownership and validity.
20. The Open Ended Working Group on Gender (OEWG) will provide guidance for the consultation process that will be organized and implemented by the CFS Secretariat which is tasked with drafting the Guidelines with the assistance of a Technical Task Team on gender equality and women's empowerment (TTT) and facilitated by the Co-Chairs appointed by the Bureau. The TTT is composed of technical experts nominated by the representatives of the CFS Advisory Group. They will provide inputs to the Secretariat to prepare background documents for the OEWG and successive versions of the Guidelines. Regular updates on the status of the policy convergence process will be provided to the CFS Bureau and Advisory Group.
21. OEWG meetings will be held regularly to advance the preparation of the guidelines, chaired by the two co-chairs appointed by the CFS Bureau. Members and other CFS stakeholders will be encouraged to actively participate in all stages of development of the Guidelines.
22. Regional consultations with representatives of countries and other constituencies in six regions (Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Near East, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America) are planned in order to obtain inputs, comments and suggestions on how best to align the Guidelines with regional and national priorities and needs. Additional opportunities, such as e-consultations and calls for written inputs, will permit other interested stakeholders to contribute to this process.
23. The various versions of the Guidelines at the different stages of the process (Zero Draft, First Draft and subsequent version(s) for negotiation) will be made available in FAO's six official languages (Arabic, Chinese English, French, Russian and Spanish). Interpretation in those languages will be provided during formal negotiation of the final version of the Guidelines.
24. The budget estimate to finalize this process amounts to USD 700,000. It covers the planned organization of regional multistakeholder consultations, the translation of background documents for the OEWG meetings, interpretation of the policy negotiation process, and the organization of an expert meeting (to be confirmed) and e-consultation. Adequate financial and human resources will be secured to enable a successful policy convergence process.