

CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition (VGFSyN) – Promoting healthy diets through sustainable food systems

June 8, 2021 | 9:00-10:00 AM EST

Link to Recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-uaWqMrQQ&list=UU0RWFeLapScm7FOwZ2EG0uQ&t=5s>

Summary

On June 8, 2021, the CFS held a panel discussion to promote the implementation of the new Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition. The guidelines were approved in February 2021, after a five year process of scientific input and global and regional consultation. The panelists celebrated the guidelines as a unique approach to nutrition from a food systems' perspective, and remarked on the usefulness of the guidelines as a tool for policy makers, member states, the private sector, and civil society leaders.

There were several references to the UNFSS, as these new guidelines are coming amid a period of increased global attention to the relationship between food, nutrition, and the environment. The UNFSS has provided momentum to the conversations surrounding the link between food systems and nutrition. Several of the questions from the question and answer portion of the forum raised the relationship between the CFS and the UN FSS. Some expressed concern the UNFSS might distract from the CFS's work, asking how the CFS will ensure its efforts are not lost in the broader conversation. Another asked how the CFS would prevent the UNFSS from pushing an overly technical approach.

You can access the Voluntary Guidelines here:

Two-Pager: <https://bit.ly/3fFGFTk>

Full text: <https://bit.ly/2QxpSl3>

Detailed Meeting Notes

Moderator: Waiganjo Njoroge, Head of Communications, CFS

Dr. Naoko Yamamoto, Chair of UN Nutrition

- These guidelines are an important contribution to the UN decade of action on nutrition and the global conversation around improving food systems in advance of the UN FSS Summit and the Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit
- UN Nutrition helps provide evidence based input to the updated dietary guidelines
- The goal is to promote interagency coordination at the country and regional level to act on these new dietary guidelines
- Leave no one behind and fight against malnutrition in all its forms

Chris Hegadorn, CFS Secretary

- We are off-track to reach zero hunger, and malnutrition is on the rise

- 130 million people were pushed into chronic hunger by COVID-19
- Diet-related illnesses are the world's number one killer
- The adoption of the voluntary guidelines in February 2021 comes alongside a growing global understanding of the multidimensional relationship between many sectors contributing to nutrition, the UNFSS being one example of this attention
- What is unique about these guidelines?
 - The guidelines emphasize the importance of the health dimension across different sectors and recognizes links between sustainable food systems and healthy diets
 - They call for changes in food supply chains, food environments, and consumer behavior
 - Presents multilateral agreed upon language surrounding concepts such as healthy and unhealthy diets, nutritious food, food systems, and sustainable food systems for the first time
 - Broken down into 7 thematic areas to promote policy coherence and coordination
- Need government, civil society, the private sector, and international organizations to work together to implement the voluntary guidelines
 - Currently working with WHO, WTO, and World Bank to help promote them

Francesco Branca, Director of the Department of Nutrition and, WHO

- In preparation for the UNFSS, WHO has been reflecting on the many pathways in which food systems impact health
 - Unhealthy diets and food insecurity
 - Occupational hazards faced by food system workers
 - Unsafe animal production practices
 - Infectious diseases amplified by intensive food production
 - Unsafe food
- Now it is time to provide member states with support to implement the guidelines
- Guidelines address food procurement, food reformulation, trans fat, sugar, salt, price policies, regulation on marketing of foods and beverages (including breast milk substitutes), front of pack labeling etc.

Gerda Verburg, Scaling Up Nutrition

- 30 trillion per year is the hidden cost of our food systems to health and wellbeing of people worldwide
- The guidelines are very helpful and concise
- The focus on developing countries is too narrow, it should be broadened as many developed countries also face huge problems with their food system
- Around 80% of diseases are food-borne or food related
- Workforce nutrition should be an investment in productivity
- The focus on implementing universal health coverage around the world is also great for the fight against malnutrition
- Suggests CFS broaden their mechanisms, bring in more partners from different angles of food systems

- If the UNFSS is becoming a success, the siloed approach will not work, every sector must be broken down and then brought together

Ferew Lemma, Senior Nutrition Advisor to the Minister, Ministry of Health, Ethiopia

- This is the nutrition year of action
- Provided a country level perspective
 - Ethiopia faces problems with production diversity, nutrient density, resilience of food systems due to climate, accessibility and affordability, and food safety
 - Acknowledge cultural and traditional indigenous practices might have to be modified
- Working on a position paper right now
- Governance is another key - the first food and nutrition policy came out in 2018, food and nutrition strategy just came out just a couple of weeks ago
- Need more education and social movements
- Joining the green revolution, huge tree planting effort
- The voluntary guidelines represent a very useful and important tool to design food system transformation at a country level, as well as to convince policy makers and partners to help beyond the FSS

Mary Mpereh, National Development Planning Commission, Ghana

- The guidelines are very timely and relevant alongside the UN FSS dialogues, helping to set the context for looking at nutrition from a food systems approach
- Remarks on the specifics of the guidelines
 - The inclusion of gender equality in the guidelines was great, but needed more detail
 - The focus on resilience and humanitarian issues is very important
 - Leaving no one behind principle was key
 - Rights to food and labor should have been part of the guiding principles
- Helps Ghana see their policy gaps and fill them
- Ghana is developing a food and nutrition security toolkit, and will now incorporate these guidelines as well as the UN FSS dialogues
- She calls what is happening right now with food systems and nutrition a “paradigm shift”

Question & Answer

Question: How is the CFS ensuring that the strategic directions set in the voluntary guidelines are not lost in the UN FSS process?

Hegadorn

- The UN FSS will come and go but these guidelines and this group are here to last
- CFS is engaged in the summit and ready to continue to promote the product that we have

Question: Will Covid-19 and increased world hunger be an incentive for the expansion of industrial agriculture?

Hegadorn

- Suggests reading the HLPE's report that seeks to help countries make choices about the trade-offs related to food production

Question: What provisions is the CFS taking to prevent the FSS from leading towards technical measures that prioritize increased production over these issues?

Question: What are the next steps in terms of utilizing these guidelines, especially using the UN FSS as a springboard?

They ran out of time to answer all the questions, said they would try to post written responses on the CFS website later

Hans Hoogeveen, Closing Remarks

- The UN FSS country dialogues and the summit itself is giving great momentum to help the implementation of the guidelines, as well as find political commitment from member states, CEOs, leaders of civil society, and academic institutions