

# **Online FOOD SYSTEMS DIALOGUES**

16 June 2020

Co-Organized by FAO North America and CARE

focusing on

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment for Food and Nutrition Security

## **SUMMARY REPORT**

### **Executive Summary**

On 16 June 2020, an online Food Systems Dialogues (FSDs), co-organized by FAO North America and CARE was held. Over 100 participants attended, reflecting a range of actors working in food systems, ranging from civil society to UN agencies, private sector, government, and research institutions.

The digital Dialogue Tables (breakout rooms) were asked to present one or more proposals for action to address a specific area of food systems in the context of COVID-19, with a focus on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment for Food Security and Nutrition.

We are grateful for the excellent facilitators from CARE, FAO, IFAD, WFP, UNSCN, Feed the Truth, GAIN and the World Bank for enabling meaningful discussions.

The discussion topics for dialogue at this event addressed the following areas:

- Women's access to decent work and markets
- Women's voice and decision-making power for nutrition and food security
- Gender justice in relation to productive resources and services for inclusive and sustainable food systems
- Addressing Gender-based violence
- Women's role in nutrition
- Inequalities in the food system
- Empowering Indigenous Women
- Institutions and policy frameworks for gender equality
- Cash-based interventions for food security

Each discussion topic is shown in the report below, followed by the proposals that emerged in response to that topic. Discussion topics are phrased as ambitious 'ideal future states' of food systems. The following is a summary of the tables' proposals for food systems transformation as well as the discussions that led them to their conclusions.

As is the norm at FSDs events, all proposals outlined in this Summary Report are not attributed to any particular individual or organization. Each proposal did not necessarily receive universal support from all participants at the event; rather, the aim of this report is to capture

recommendations made at the event, in order to allow continuity and consensus - a 'red thread' - to emerge across all FSDs events.

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# Proposals

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## **Ideal future state 1: Women have access to decent work and markets within food and agriculture systems**

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*Facilitator: Stella Nordhagen, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)*

**Proposal 1.1: Increase financial inclusion of women, both agricultural credit and credit for small businesses and entrepreneurs within the food system.** It could also include encouraging savings (e.g., through group-based approaches). It would entail removing barriers to accessing credit, such as the need to provide collateral and the lack of financial institutions in rural areas, as well as improving the quality, such as by reducing interest rates and ensuring better repayment plans. Making it feasible for financial institutions to provide this kind of support would require approaches that can de-risk investments in agriculture.

**Proposal 1.2: Reform land title and ownership rights to ensure that there are equal rights to land and other property for men and women,** which would allow women to make longer-term investments in their farms/businesses, enjoy more stability in their livelihoods, and have more access to collateral to obtain financing. It would work to overturn gender-biased laws (e.g., those that assign property rights or inheritance to men by default, those that require men to co-sign important documents with women). An example of one approach could be default joint land titling, which one participant noted was being implemented in Ethiopia.

**Proposal 1.3: Promote women's leadership in agri-food systems, as women need to be more visible and vocal in the public sphere to enact and enable lasting change.** It will be particularly important to ensure women's leadership at the local level, where many decisions related to agri-food systems are made. This would include beginning with what already exists (e.g., cooperatives and farmers' unions) and finding ways to foster women's leadership within those and to promote those leaders upwards, to create a cadre of rising women leaders.

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## **Ideal future state 2: Women have voice and decision-making power in their households, communities, organizations, and governments and become leaders to fight against hunger, malnutrition and poverty**

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*Facilitators: Susan Kaaria and Hajnalka Petrics, FAO*

**Proposal 2.1: At the individual level, raise women's consciousness and capacities for voicing and representing their interests and participating in decision-making and policy-making processes at all levels**

Focus on enhancing women's self-confidence and agency (the capacity to make choices and act upon them), as well as soft and technical skills, including literacy, and legal and financial literacy skills, negotiation, public speaking and leadership skills. Employ mentorship and role modeling strategies as a means of enhancing women's aspirations to take part in decision-making and take up leadership role. Enhance women's solid understanding of policy issues that affect them as citizens and farmers.

### **Proposal 2.2: Holistically address discriminatory social norms, and the patriarchal system through gender-transformative approaches**

Apply gender transformative approaches / to understand, challenge and change the social norms (attitude, beliefs and practices), unequal gender norms and relations that pre-define discriminatory gender roles and women's and men's differentiated abilities (self-perception) and opportunities for decision making and leadership. Addressing discriminatory norms needs to take place not only at the individual level, but also at collective and systemic levels to bring about both individual and systemic change across informal and formal spheres of life. Engage men at all levels of interventions, which is critically important for changing relations at the household, community and institutional, and policy levels. Work with role model men to create opportunities for normalizing the attainment of women by addressing patriarchy from within.

### **Proposal 2.3: Support women's organizations and women's collective action**

Support women's organizations in the fight for the rights of women in general rather than only women's individual needs. This can take shape through 1) greater investment in women's organizations and networks, taking into account the diversity of women; 2) strengthening women's collective action - collective approach as opposed to focus on individual entrepreneurship - for greater social cohesion; and 3) funding advocacy /setting specific budget allocations for advocacy work towards enhancing women's collective action. The stakeholders are funders and women's organizations and alliances in order to create political space for women all the way from the individual to the policy level.

Here are two good examples to promote women's leadership in the agriculture related institutions and women's professional networks. a) Arab Women Leaders in Agriculture, AWLA fellowship is a capacity building program, which aims to develop women researchers who can make a positive impact in their workplaces, communities and countries, b) AWARD strengthens the research and leadership skills of African women in agricultural science, empowering them to contribute more effectively to alleviating hunger and poverty.

### **Proposal 2.4: Affirmative actions at the organizational and policy and legislative levels to promote women's leadership**

Apply quotas to ensure women's representation in leadership positions and to make sure their voice is heard. Promote policies and legislation that require organizations to integrate the principle of gender equality in their organizational policies, mechanisms and practices and develop employees' gender awareness and skills (e.g. including organizational mentoring, support from leaders, accountability and monitoring mechanisms, quotas, and gender equal workplace policies).

Develop policies and laws that are non-discriminatory on the basis of gender or any other social or personal characteristics such as age, ethnicity, etc. Ensure that macro-economic policies are gender-responsive as well as the related public services, in particular those that have the potential to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work, as well as those related to marriage, inheritance and property rights.

Through adequate policies and legislation, support women's access to and ownership over resources and assets as one possible way of improving their decision-making power at household and community levels.

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**Ideal future state 3: Gender justice in relation to productive resources and services for inclusive and sustainable food systems is ensured**

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*Facilitator: Steven Jonckheere, IFAD*

**Proposal 3.1: Ensuring the representation of different voices in decision-making at all levels.** This includes strengthening leadership skills for women, engaging youth and involving men in discussions on gender issues.

**Proposal 3.2: Informing women about their rights.** It is important that men are also aware of women's rights.

**Proposal 3.3: Supporting platforms for collective action.** This is important for sharing knowledge, pooling resources and improving terms of market engagement (including strengthening territorial markets and food sovereignty).

**Proposal 3.4: Promoting social norms change.** Addressing masculinities within food systems, engaging youth and custodians of culture and religion is of utmost importance. This needs to be done within the community context.

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**Ideal future state 4: Gender-based violence is eliminated as a threat to the rights and productivity of food systems actors, including in fragile and conflict settings**

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*Facilitator: Hilary Mathews, CARE*

One of the key inhibitors to eliminating gender-based violence (GBV) within food systems, including in fragile and conflict settings, is the relative invisibility of the issue (due to lack of data and awareness as well as social stigma), paired with food system actors' perception that they don't have the capacity or the mandate to address this complex issue. The following proposals to eliminate GBV as a threat to rights and productivity within food systems therefore focus on increasing availability of data and driving accountability for effective response.

**Proposal 4.1: Require gender analysis and assessment of GBV risk as a part of the development and roll out of all food systems interventions.** Gender analysis identifies how power relations and gender roles in a given context may affect the equity and effectiveness of food system outcomes (i.e. productivity, nutrition) as well as how interventions within food systems may impact gender (in)equality. GBV risk assessments specifically determine whether interventions may increase the risks of gendered violence in a particular setting. These tools are critical to help food systems actors to plan their work in a way that supports men and women equitably and minimizes the potential for harm. In humanitarian settings, rapid gender analysis is the methodology recommended by the Interagency Standing Committee.

**Proposal 4.2: Develop common indicators to support food system actors in assessing GBV as a potential unintended consequence of activities/interventions.** A common set of indicators would help increase the accountability of food system actors, whether governments, businesses, NGOs, or community groups or others, to address GBV and potentially enable data

to be aggregated across a diversity of settings to measure system-wide improvements over time. Indicators should be disaggregated by sex, age, and context-appropriate measures of marginalization (like disability or race/ethnicity, etc.).

**Proposal 4.3: Build capacity for the use of gender markers in the design and implementation of food system activities to drive accountability for gender equality minimum standards.** Gender markers are self-assessment program quality and learning tools that measure the level of integration of gender into programming and enable organizations to track, improve on, and support more effective gender-integrated programming. In combination with effective monitoring, evaluation, and accountability systems, widespread use of gender markers in food systems activities would increase awareness of opportunities to effectively address GBV across food system sectors and settings.

**Proposal 4.4: Adopt a holistic approach to addressing GBV within food systems, including attention to social norms and engagement of men and boys.** Because gender-based violence is a systemic social issue affecting everyone, efforts to eradicate it must be comprehensive and multi-modal, addressing individual, relational, and structural factors. Food systems actors should work with gender experts to adopt evidence-based interventions that engage men and boys alongside women and girls in addressing norms and behaviors that enable violence within food systems.

**Proposal 4.5: Ensure avenues for meaningful women’s participation and leadership, feedback loops and complaint mechanisms in the development and implementation of food system activities.** Women have a fundamental right to participate and lead on issues that affect them. Meaningfully engaging women as agents and leaders across agriculture, food security, and nutrition, and natural resource sectors, among others, is fundamental to enabling the identification of GBV and commensurate risk mitigation and response. Diverse women’s leadership also improves the resilience and productivity of food systems themselves.

**Proposal 4.6: Develop a funding tracking system and potentially target investment levels to support greater accountability for mainstreaming GBV risk mitigation and prevention** throughout food systems activities and interventions, especially in fragile and conflict affected settings.

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**Ideal future state 5: Women are empowered in addressing nutrition issues through policies and programs that change norms around traditional female and male roles and target the whole household**

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*Facilitator: Lucy Sullivan, Feed the Truth*

**Proposal 5.1: Explicitly link women’s empowerment to nutrition programming,** as women are disproportionately affected by malnutrition and are more likely than men to be underweight, obese, and/or anemic.

**Proposal 5.2: Ensure UN agencies, governments, and other global entities prioritize women and adolescent girls in policies, and scale food-based nutrition efforts,** for example food fortification and other interventions.

**Proposal 5.3: Continue to do community level outreach** e.g., reintroduce “Home Economics” type class for youth to learn about food and nutrition and change norms on women’s role in nutrition; or introduce education in women and men farmer cooperatives to help elevate issues in women’s bargaining rights.

**Proposal 5.4: Recognize women’s time and use of time** and that fast food is usually unhealthy. Engage businesses and employers to ensure access to healthy food. Food and agriculture interventions should be mindful of women’s labor and time burden, and rather reduce than increase it.

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**Ideal future state 6: Inequalities are identified and addressed so that all people are well nourished**

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*Facilitators: Stineke Oenema, UNSCN*

**Proposal 6.1: Human rights, especially the right to adequate food, the rights to health and women’s rights, need to be recognized.** This also implies women should have voting rights. In order for this to happen it is essential that more disaggregated and gender sensitive data (subnational) are available so we know where the gaps are.

**Proposal 6.2: Clear political commitments followed by operational policies need to ensure access to basic services:** such as food, education, water and sanitation. Only with access to these basic services can women become leaders.

**Proposal 6.3: More female leadership is needed to challenge the current power dynamics,** which are closely linked with the inequities that are locked-in the food systems. Partnerships with civil society will help to hold governments and other duty bearers to account.

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**Ideal future state 7: Daughters of Mother Earth: Indigenous women are visible, empowered, and have a seat at the table in all relevant policy dialogues regarding food systems and climate change**

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*Facilitator: Mariana Estrada, FAO Indigenous Peoples Unit*

**Proposal 7.1: Bolster indigenous women’s inclusion through the guarantee of full and effective participation in decision-making processes** at local, national, and global levels as key to overcome invisibility and reduce the different forms of discrimination they face.

**Proposal 7.2: Promote research for, with and by indigenous women regarding their irreplaceable knowledge and role in indigenous food systems.** *Why?* There is very little data on indigenous peoples in general, consequently, scarce data regarding indigenous women. There is not disaggregated data on indigenous women, which impedes the adoption of policies and programs that address different forms of discrimination they face. Research is predominantly approached through the lens of vulnerability, which tends to make research difficult to approach. When talking about vulnerability, strengths are not leveraged. *Who?* Governments, research centers, universities, and the international community.

**Proposal 7.3: Stop looking to indigenous women just as vulnerable population.** Recognize their potential and include them in policy debates on food systems and climate change as knowledge holders and take into consideration their great experiences and knowledge of their territories.

**Proposal 7.4: Ensure indigenous women do not remain invisible in the Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the context of Food Security and Nutrition and in the 2021 UN World Food Systems Summit.** *Why?* Indigenous women are engaged in food generation activities, such as farming, pastoralism, hunting, fishing, and forest-dwelling, as well as in the market. Indigenous women play a key role in preserving and managing natural resources and in the transmission of traditional knowledge to younger generations. Indigenous women hold great botanical knowledge regarding edible and medicinal plants of their territories. Indigenous women hold very important and extensive knowledge and carry significant values regarding reliance and climate change. They play a significant key role in transmitting intergenerational knowledge to youth.

How can we position and root this dialogue in the agenda not only of UN Agencies but in other international fora? There might be some platforms in which indigenous women can participate, but sometimes those scenarios ensure a mere formal participation. Consequently, it is crucial to assure those platforms guarantee effective participation. *Who?* FAO, Committee on World Food Security (CFS), CARE, governments, organizations and platforms focused on food systems, such as the Food Systems Dialogues and the 2021 UN World Food Systems Summit.

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### **Ideal future state 8: Institutions and policies are designed to enable women to thrive in the food system**

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*Facilitator: Patricia Van de Velde, World Bank*

**Proposal 8.1: Data - Data and evidence are critical for the formulation of effective and non-gender-blind policies.** Without evidence of participation and the proper recording of constraints, gaps, rates, and more, there can be very little policy-making that targets and improves women's livelihoods and empowerment potential within the food system. Another crucial piece is the evidence that gender inequalities are bad for the performance of the food system. Women's exclusion is bad for economies and food systems, but as with data on roles and participation, the quantitative proof is critical to promoting change. A lot of work has already been done, and there is some very good data available globally, but this availability and necessity should be systematic. A global commitment to funding, gathering and using quantitative data supplemented by qualitative narratives is needed to begin overcoming the challenges of implementing policies designed to empower and support women's lives.

**Proposal 8.2: Participation - Institutions and Policies need more than to focus on women and be non-gender-blind: they need active women's participation.** Without the voice and inclusion of women in the shaping, creating and implementing of reforms and policies that affect their lives; structural changes will only be shallow. Women's inputs into the policies and tools that shape their lives have a twofold purpose of informing policies better, and also by feeding back into the empowerment of women. Inclusion, and harnessing women's voices at all levels: communities, nationally, internationally and more, are critical to creating institutions that then



frame policies that are not only gender equitable but finely tuned to women's needs, wants and constraints. A key indicator of an enabling environment is the true participation of women in decision making, including education, laws, and social behavior. This in turn should also translate to promoting women's leadership over aspects that affect their lives and livelihoods in the food system and should be actively promoted and redressed.

**Proposal 8.3: Political Will and Budgets - Changes to institutions, and reforms to legal frameworks are only made possible through concerted political will and the commitment to funding the redressing of gender imbalances.** International commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals are a good start, but governments, international donors, civil society, and women themselves need to hold the authorizing environments and the political frameworks accountable for change. Without leadership and political commitments, changes to institutions and laws and the formulation and implementation of policies will remain stagnant. For institutions to change, a scale up of financing is also necessary.

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### **Ideal future state 9: More Women and Girls Are Empowered Through Cash-Based Interventions for Better Food Security and Nutrition**

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*Facilitators: Kawinzi Muiu and Deborah Wilson, WFP*

**Proposal 9.1: The various agents involved in cash-based programming should take a 'piloting' approach to first test the various options in designing cash-based programming and identify any gendered impacts.** This would require:

- Thorough monitoring, evaluation and research system which gathers context-specific and gender/age disaggregated data on nutrition and other wellbeing outcomes;
- Commitment to supporting local experts on cash-based programming and gender;
- Partnership-building with governments to encourage demand for sex- and age-disaggregated data & evidence before scaling-up or adopting national-level policies.

**Proposal 9.2: Build national capacity for cash-based transfers as a national safety net, ensuring gender is at the center of national policy and programming.** Gender should be mainstreamed into all cash-based policies and programming, with targeted actions as required based on specific vulnerabilities, needs and capacities. This will require:

- Availability of quality gender/ age disaggregated data, including pregnancy and lactation status, and sound, context-specific cash-based transfer programming information to inform the modality; market analysis, availability of nutritious food;
- Consideration of the wider family as a unit in planning cash-based transfers, understanding the vulnerabilities and needs and ensuring 'do no harm' in targeting and distribution modalities;
- Advocacy and capacity-building for governments to integrate nutrition-sensitive and responsive cash-based transfers into policies and programming, with linkages to targeted social support schemes for specific vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities.

**Proposal 9.3: Provide an integrated package of services, across sectors and departments, acknowledging that cash-based transfers alone will not improve women's empowerment and Food Security and Nutrition.** Many interrelated factors influence food and nutrition security. A package of interventions to improve gender equity and women's empowerment needs to be integrated into cash-based transfer programs.

- Develop an integrated package of interventions, based on sound contextual analysis using gender transformative approaches; ensure that women are included in the whole project cycle and are not overburdened with unpaid workloads, and strongly advocate the sharing of unpaid workloads;
- Establish strong partnerships across sectors (esp. health, food security, nutrition, protection), government departments and the private sector (e.g. e-vouchers), that provide complementarity and coherence. Establish systems between partners for information sharing and referral for sectoral interventions; ensure partnerships have no conflicts of interest in improving food and nutrition security;
- Empower women with access to and use of technology, for example, women and girls in rural settings; ensure that amounts, duration & modality of cash-based transfers don't lead to gender-based violence.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, participants agreed that gender equality and women's empowerment play a key role for food and nutrition security. We cannot achieve inclusive and sustainable food systems, eliminate hunger and malnutrition or achieve sustainable development without the progressive realization of women's rights and the right to food.

Women must be at the center of the COVID-19 response planning and decisions, to build back better and to build back equal. Access to resources, laws and norms reflect power relationships between women and men, which need to be addressed, so that gender equality in decisions - from farm to fork - can work best to reduce all forms of malnutrition.

Women and girls, including from indigenous peoples and rural areas, should have equal opportunities to participate in local, national and international processes and policy discussions, such as Food System Dialogues, the U.N. Food Systems Summit 2021 and other decision processes affecting food systems. Our future of food depends largely on unleashing women's potential.