

# Why we need Agroecology for human and planetary health

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*“With over-nutrition, many countries and urban communities in the developing world are experiencing the nutrition transition – going from under-nutrition to obesity related to insufficient exercise, sedentary lifestyles and unhealthy diets.”*

(Hunter, D., Fanzo, J., 2013)<sup>1</sup>

The [State of Food Security and Nutrition Report \(2019\)](#) confirms that hunger is on the rise (821 million people) and that we are off-track to reach SDG 2 seeking to end malnutrition in all its forms. A new indicator (SDG 2.1.2) on the *prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity* states that 1.3 billion people are food insecure. In parallel to insufficient quantity of food, the nutritive quality of food has decreased as a consequence of various phenomena such as reduction of agrobiodiversity or lower diet diversity. Indeed, today 50% of the worlds’ energy needs relies on 4 crops (rice, wheat, maize, potatoes) and 90% of the worlds’ calories intake relies on 30 crops<sup>2</sup>.

## **CFS 46: Making a difference in food security & nutrition**

These global issues are discussed yearly during the plenary session of the [Committee for World Food Security](#) (CFS), which is the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform that enables all stakeholders to work together to improve the global governance on food security. The CFS develops and endorses policy recommendations and guidance (Voluntary Guidelines) on a wide range of food security and nutrition topics, which are developed on evidence-based reports produced by a [High Level Panel of Experts](#) (HLPE).

Last October 14<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>, the Swiss delegation present at the 46<sup>th</sup> CFS advocated for it’s clear position concerning agroecology considered as one major pathway towards sustainable food systems as it is one of the most comprehensive and systemic approaches to accelerate the transition. In parallel to agroecology, adequate nutrition delivered by sustainable food systems is considered as a way of achieving *human and planetary health*, as there will be no transformation to sustainable food systems without sustainable diets and healthy people. These links have been recently articulated by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) that published together a guidance document for countries on “[sustainable healthy diets](#)”. This collaboration between the health and agriculture sector on an international level, should inspire Ministries at national level to break the silos and tackle the detrimental impact of current food systems on the planet and on public health.

## **Voluntary Guidelines for Food System and Nutrition (VGFSN)**



Chair of the VGFSN Liliane Ortega  
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The [Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition](#) are developed to play an essential role in assisting countries to achieve the SDGs. The goal of the VGFSN is to “*ensure that food that contributes to healthy diets is available, affordable, acceptable, safe and of adequate quantity and quality while conforming with beliefs, cultures and traditions, dietary habits and preferences of individuals in accordance with national and international laws and obligations*”<sup>3</sup>. Liliane Ortega from Switzerland is chairing the process to elaborate these VGFSN.

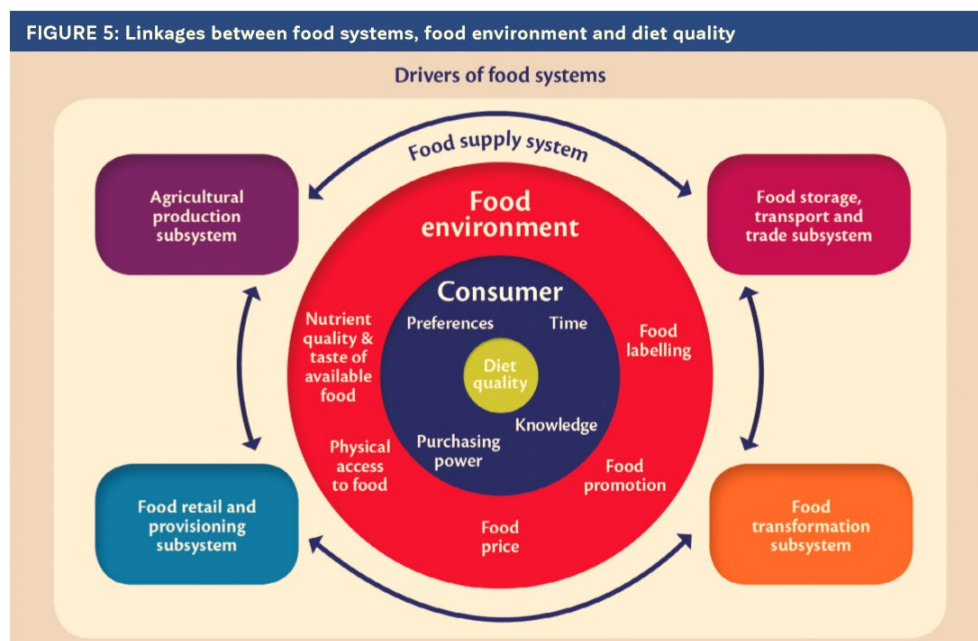
<sup>1</sup> Hunter, D. and Fanzo, J. (2013) Agricultural biodiversity, diverse diets and improving nutrition. In, *Diversifying Food and Diets: Using Agricultural Biodiversity to Improve Nutrition and Health* (Fanzo, J. and Hunter, D. et al eds) *Issues in Agricultural Biodiversity*, Earthscan, UK p. 1-13.

<sup>2</sup> Hunter, D. and Fanzo, J. (2013)

<sup>3</sup> [Zero draft](#) on the Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition

## Women and nutrition – key entry points for the food systems’ transformation

Diets must change and evolve to a better quality, as underlined by numerous reports such as the [Global Nutrition Report \(2018\)](#) attesting that inadequate diet has become the first factor for health challenges of people. Malnutrition costs the world’s economies trillions of dollars due to higher health costs and loss of productivity. Investing in nutrition is thus both a moral imperative and a sound economic investment ([FAO](#)). Women and essentially *rural women* play a central role to achieve SDG2 as they are the “household keepers”, often responsible for cooking, producing subsistence crops and the seed keepers. A food system approach to address malnutrition requires comprehensive programs and coherent public policies that address both the supply and demand sides of food, as well as the *food environment* where consumers engage with a food system to make their food-related decisions ([FAO](#)). As shown in the figure below, the food environment refers to “*the physical, economic, political and sociocultural context in which consumers engage with the food system to make their decisions about acquiring, preparing and consuming food*”<sup>4</sup>.



© Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition ([GLOPAN, 2016](#))

Policies, programs and investments need to be “nutrition-sensitive”, which means nutrition must be mainstreamed across sectoral policies. Examples of food system policy measures that intend to support the promotion of healthy diets are:

- ❖ Incentives to encourage fruit and vegetable production,
- ❖ Reformulation of processed foods to deliver better nutritional profiles,
- ❖ Regulations controlling retail and food service chains,
- ❖ Food labelling policies or procurement policies for food served in public places.

### What is next on the agenda?

By the end of 2019, the 1st Draft of the VGFSN should be available. The Final version of the VGFSN should be endorsed during the CFS 47 in October 2020. This CFS achievement will be a **key input** for the [Tokyo Nutrition Summit for Growth](#) that will take place in December 2020 and the [UN food systems summit](#) that will take place in 2021. One thing is clear, nutrition and agriculture must remain very prominent on the political agenda during the next decades as they are entry points for the transformation of our food systems.

« *The world is at crossroads. And we cannot afford, not to change direction.* »

<sup>4</sup> [Zero draft](#) on the Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition