

**Policy Areas to be Included in the Zero Draft**  
*Data collection and analysis tools for food security and nutrition*  
**CSIPM Comments to the OEWG**

*15 December 2022*

The HLPE report on “Data collection and analysis tools” presents important perspectives and incorporates some of the suggestions put forward by the CSIPM; for this, we would like to express our appreciation for this ambitious report.

Importantly the HLPE report places data governance at the heart of its proposed framework, opens up the discussion about digitalization, discusses digitalization tools, and raises serious questions regarding the balance of benefits and risks. It acknowledges that emerging digital technologies must be addressed and elaborates a comprehensive framework for democratizing data collection and data-informed decision-making. It also mentions the importance of grounding the conceptual framework for data collection and analysis in human rights, including the right to food, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas.

However, while the report itself has many good elements to contribute towards a set of potential policy recommendations, we are very concerned that the five specific areas of recommendation at the end of the report are limited to addressing only a narrow slice of the issues brought up by the report as well as earlier inputs in the workstream.

Currently, the HLPE report makes the following recommendations:

1. Create greater demand for data for decision-making among governments, policy makers and donors;
2. Optimize and, if needed, repurpose current data-related investments, while increasing collaboration between international organizations, governments, civil society, academia, and the private sector, to harmonize and maximize the sharing of existing data;
3. Increase and sustain investment in the collection of essential data for FSN;
4. Invest in human capital and in the needed infrastructures to ensure the sustainability of data processing and analytic capacity;
5. Improve data governance at all levels, promoting inclusiveness to recognize and enhance agency among data users and data generators.

These five areas focus on only one aspect of the interaction of data with the food system: the collection of statistical quantitative data to inform policy making. However, today, data collection and use through digital technologies is being integrated into all aspects of food system activity—from food production to distribution through to consumption—with the ostensible goal of

“optimizing” food systems to make them sustainable and efficient while ignoring the impacts on human rights, ecosystems, animal health and welfare and connected power imbalances. Through the selection of which data to collect and which technologies to use to collect this data, the agri-food businesses and the financial sector are setting the direction for the future of our food and agriculture systems. This, in turn, is influencing and shaping the real world of food policy making.

Data-driven technologies are being introduced by agribusiness companies, often through partnerships with large tech companies. As a result, data on food systems is now emerging as one of the most valuable commodities. This massive accumulation of digital information—on land, seeds, plant genetics, livestock, workers, production systems and consumer behavior—as well as the unequal capacity to analyze and process data is concentrating power and wealth into the hands of a few and putting future food security in jeopardy. The report spends an entire chapter exploring these technologies and acknowledges their risks, including but not limited to concerns over bias and discrimination embedded in algorithms, the lack of transparency, privacy, unethical tracking and targeting and digital lock-ins. This ‘data revolution’ has the momentum to drive our food systems in the wrong direction. It is disappointing therefore that the recommendations did not engage with this important and far reaching dimensional change in our food systems and their implications for food security and nutrition.

**The Open Ended Working group should urgently rectify this oversight. The evaluation of the impacts of data-driven digital agrifood technologies and their proper evaluation, governance and oversight must be a key plank of any policy recommendations work on this topic.**

With this missing element in mind and building from the current 5 proposed recommendations we suggest the following re-arrangement and consolidation into 4 themes:

1. **Governance:** Establishing inclusive data governance for enhanced data agency
2. **Assessment:** Assessing data-driven technologies in the food system (an essential missing element)
3. **Justice and equity:** Strengthening and aligning data collection infrastructures in a fair, open and appropriate basis
4. **Capacity building:** Improving capacity building, human capacities and participation in data assessment, data governance and collection

Below we offer more specific recommendations of what should be considered under each of these four themes:

**A. Governance:** Paramount to the CFS’ work is establishing policy guidelines that provide guidance for establishing inclusive data governance that enhance data agency. This theme of data governance was put as the fifth recommendation of the HLPE report, but it needs to come first.

The HLPE report provides a productive framework for approaching data governance that is inclusive in every step of data collection and the data-driven decision-making cycle from the determination of what kind of data should be collected to its analysis and storage. Data governance must be driven by already agreed upon normative frameworks including the human right to food, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP), International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA - ART. 5-6-9) and ILO Convention 169, as well as emerging guidelines such as the FAIR and CARE principles described in the HLPE report.

Governance of data must ensure that digitization is oriented to the common good and will aim to “guarantee individual and collective rights, promote democratic, open and decentralized structures of digital technologies, prevent all forms of surveillance and social control, and promote the equitable distribution of their benefits, non-discrimination, decolonization and sovereignty”, as stated by Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, in developing the draft policy guidelines, the Secretariat should consider merging the HLPE recommendation #5 with recommendation #2 on increased collaboration and sharing between sectors and focus on providing guidance on fostering inclusive data governance and enhanced data agency by addressing the following:

1. The role of inclusive data governance at all points along the data-informed decision-making process, as suggested by the HLPE report;
2. The different rights, responsibilities, and capacities of different actors, considering the deep differences between actors such as private entities that develop digital technologies and farmers, peasants, local communities and other key actors in the food systems that are the main subjects of data recollection for Food Security and Nutrition. This needs to include the strong prohibition on the resale of data as recommended by the HLPE and other forms of misuse of the data recollected.
3. Key principles of data governance, including:
  - a. A human rights-based approach: “including for example the consideration of the right of Indigenous Peoples to self-determination, which includes the right to food as per the conjunction of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (A/RES/61/295) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, by virtue of which Indigenous Peoples freely determine their political status and economic, social and cultural development. Consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other

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<sup>1</sup> “20 points towards a digital future that is free and sovereign” 17 October 2022. <https://cloc-viacampesina.net/una-agenda-de-20-puntos-hacia-un-futuro-digital-justo-y-soberano>

People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), adopted by the UNGA in 2019 (A/RES/73/165), the framework provides for the inclusion of rural peasants and other local food system actors as important agents in FSN-related policy decisions” (p. 15);

- b. A participatory approach that includes directly-affected communities: The report highlights the importance of inclusive and participatory approaches to data governance “Multi-stakeholder approaches are critical for data governance and sharing. Governance mechanisms established through dialogue between stakeholders (data contributors, collectors, processors, providers and users), whether state or non-state, increase trust, which is a precondition for effective collaboration and, therefore, for implementing feasible governance solutions” (99). However, these should emphasize the priority of *rights-holders* in this process with safeguards that protect against power imbalances and undue influence in these very technical spaces, including rigorous conflict of interest (COI) policies.
- c. States have to ensure that data is collected with ‘privacy protection,’ anonymity, and the necessary prohibition that no data or information derived from the data can be turned into a private marketable product. States should create a framework (legislation and regulation) that ensures that private actors that produce data collection programs and sell predictive products comply with regulations that prevent abuse, the privatization of information derived from data collected in an unauthorized or automated way (AI), and the concentration of such companies in cartels or dominant positions.
- d. The requirement of informed consent of all communities and Free Prior and Informed Consent for Indigenous Peoples for data sharing (ILO Convention 169) in addition to the FAIR and CARE principles.

In addition to these considerations, the policy recommendations should provide guidance on data ownership. The policy recommendations should require governments to clearly specify that governments should establish regulations on data privacy and data governance *before* the widespread introduction of new technologies. The HLPE makes a strong recommendation that data should not be resold, which should be included in the recommendations. However, rather than assuming that data should be open by default, it should rather specify inclusive mechanisms of data governance that should prioritize the voice of those most marginalized. It should also specify clear guidelines to avoid data lock-ins.

The question of open data relates to the above, as handling and processing of big data can be done at this stage only for actors with powerful tools that can ensure benefiting from the flow of digital information. Therefore it is not enough to mention the importance of keeping open data sources in

general. Loss of data ownership and control can lead to loss of decision-making capacity, local knowledge and economic value. The value systems of local knowledge and agribusiness are different and therefore require different understandings of data ownership.

**B. Assessment:** Assessing Data-Driven technologies in the food system. (Essential missing element)

The food system refers not only to the things and objects that are part of it, but to the myriad relationships between cultures, societies, their geographies, resources and history. Food security and nutrition have political, historical and economic dimensions that data-driven technologies are unable to convert into digital information. These dimensions cannot be lost or ignored when considering the use of data collection and analysis tools for food security and nutrition.

Data collection tools are only one part of the digital tools and processes that are impacting all food production, agri-food value chains and even small-scale food production. Increasingly, many of the tools, methods, and platforms of data collection and analysis for food security and nutrition are in the hands of the corporate sector, including agribusiness. Such tools and methods often are encouraged and supported by governments and heavily influence which food production methods are funded and implemented. In addition, the tools, methods, and platforms of data collection tend to have an “extractive approach”, that do not take into consideration the needs of the country in which they operate. Governments, public institutions, and people, all depend increasingly on cloud services, satellites and under-sea cables that are developed and managed by big business. Governments should consider this context when deploying tools for data collection for food security and nutrition.

An assessment of the whole digital food chain and its future needs should be developed to avoid excluding key aspects of the diversity of food systems as well as to protect those elements of food systems that may be eroded by the digitalization of food production, processing and distribution processes. A first step in this direction would be to ensure that data collection will avoid the potential bias embedded in algorithms, disaggregated data and data categories that reflect only partially the reality of the local contexts. This assessment must include methods in which the digital food chain may enhance and support agroecology, food sovereignty, human rights and environmental justice.

The extent of impacts digitalization in general and data collection in particular are not yet fully assessed, especially on food systems of local communities. Regulation at local, regional and international levels is imperative to prevent asymmetries of power as well as the extraction of local knowledge to benefit global value chains. The concentration of data in private entities has unknown and potentially grave impacts on food systems and should be approached with the precautionary principle.

Transferring total reliability and accountability to private data systems for the critical issue of food security is deeply problematic and dangerous to future food security and food sovereignty. Instead, the assessment of data appropriateness must be the role of all actors, and especially rights-holders.

**C. Justice and equity:** Recommendations 1 and 3 both address generating demand and strengthening the data-collection systems. However, data collection infrastructures must be strengthened in a way that is concretely fair, equitable, open, and appropriate. The following are areas that should be considered in the Zero Draft:

1. The conflicts of interest that are inevitable when the private sector is involved in data collection;
2. The importance of strengthening public infrastructures, such as National Statistical Offices and incorporating principles of inclusive data governance in these agencies' work;
3. The incorporation of inclusive data governance principles in data initiatives of the Rome-Based Agencies of the UN;
4. The significance of multiple forms of data beyond quantitative and machine-readable data, such as qualitative data, and multiple methodologies of information collection and analysis that may not rely on technology and are already developed by communities, including Indigenous communities;
5. Data collection on issues of inequality; and
6. Lack of access to data as a component of inequity: Countries are developing policies that take digitalization for granted, while communities with diverse connectivity needs can't cope with the pace of changes in services and demands of digital literacy so they can claim their rights. Basic human rights can be impacted by the spread of digitalization. This segues directly into **capacity building**.

**D. Capacity building:** Finally, the policy recommendations must address improving capacity building and human capacities to enable participation in data quality assessment, governance and collection. Recommendation #3 should therefore be elaborated with a focus on improving human capacities to enable for different points of view on data and avoid bias.

Policy recommendations must support and enhance the capacities of small-scale food producers and their organizations and communities to:

1. Identify the data they need
2. Collect and analyze the collected data

Small-scale food producers and their organizations and communities need to identify and share existing models and develop new organizational models to allow data gaps identification, data collection and data analysis; they should be encouraged and supported in these efforts by public authorities at all levels.

The report notes that “promoting data literacy for the general population would also be a potent way to promote agency on the part of those whose FSN is at stake” (107). The policy recommendations should offer specific recommendations for strengthening the capacity for participatory data assessment, collection, and governance to enable inclusive data governance. This may include developing participatory platforms for technology and data systems assessment at national, regional, and transnational scales.

Farmers need to produce digital information useful to them, to the reality in which they operate and guide data collection based on their own needs to support their farming activity. As a component of capacity building, farmers, peasants, and other food producers need to be able to design their autonomous collection and recollection for what is important for them and their communities in alliance with the digital community with shared values.

Finally, part of capacity building is ensuring access to data and technologies. Initiatives that assume access by rural populations may reproduce existing exclusions and inequalities. The policy recommendations must therefore both address access to data and technologies as part of enabling community capacity building to engage in effective governance of data.