**Written input from CARE on elements to be included in the Zero Draft of the Policy Recommendations on Reducing Inequalities for Food Security and Nutrition**

CARE confirms its recognition of the relevance of the workstream on "Reducing Inequalities for food security and nutrition". We welcome the general direction of the HLPE report and its analysis of inequalities in food systems, their systemic drivers, and the ways in which they affect food security and nutrition outcomes.
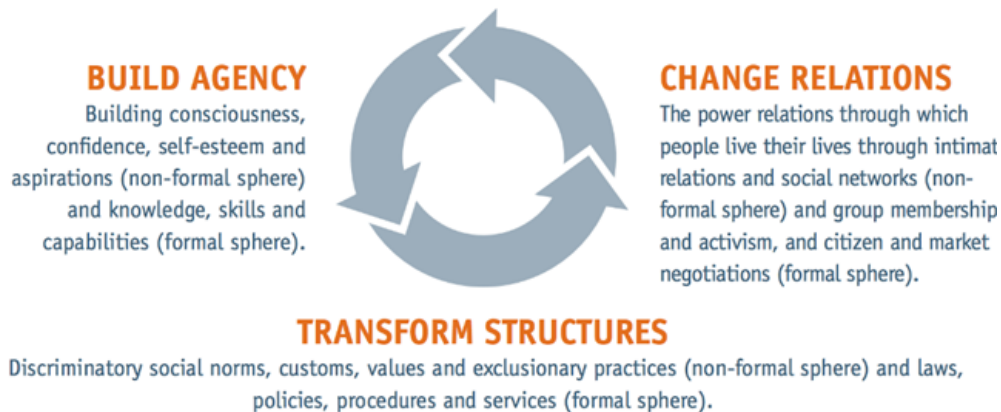
For the upcoming policy recommendations, we would like to emphasize the following points. CARE's areas of expertise are those listed below so we will focus our feedback accordingly.

**General Remarks**

The policy recommendations, based upon the HLPE report, must recognize that inequalities exist on a systemic and structural level, and are growing rapidly within and between countries and within both urban and rural areas. Rural communities face challenges in accessing markets, infrastructure, and social services, affecting their participation in and benefits from food systems.

Unequal distribution of wealth and resources is a major contributor to societal inequality. This includes disparities in income, assets, and access to economic opportunities. The rising levels of food insecurity and malnutrition are not randomized conditions, but rather are the results of social and economic systemic inequalities from local to global levels. Our global food systems contain high levels of economic and power concentration and, due to that reality, addressing inequalities requires addressing uneven distributions of resources, opportunities, and wealth. Policies that aim to reduce inequalities must therefore go further to address the power imbalances that lead to these inequalities. They also must recognize that systemic discrimination and disempowerment is a fundamental issue around which institutions are built. Transforming food systems requires addressing these underlying inequalities and restoring fair, or equitable, access to and ownership of resources, including water, land, and seeds, as well as access to information, technology, and justice. Adopting a human rights- based approach to this transformation, and including that framework in policy recommendations, will help to address the inequalities, discriminatory practices, and unjust power relations that are often undermining sustainable development efforts. Mainstreaming human rights will further reinforce that all food system actors are entitled to decent work, livelihoods, and safe and adequate food.

While the HLPE report recognizes the four pillars of food insecurity —access, availability, utilization and stability — it also emphasizes building "agency" which is a critical component. Advancing equitable food systems requires building agency of the small-scale producers, indigenous people, women farmers, seasonal laborers, etc. including building confidence and consciousness, and also the requisite skills, knowledge and capabilities.

**BUILD AGENCY**
Building consciousness, confidence, self-esteem and aspirations (non-formal sphere) and knowledge, skills and capabilities (formal sphere).

**CHANGE RELATIONS**
The power relations through which people live their lives through intimat relations and social networks (non-formal sphere) and group membership and activism, and citizen and market negotiations (formal sphere).

**TRANSFORM STRUCTURES**
Discriminatory social norms, customs, values and exclusionary practices (non-formal sphere) and laws, policies, procedures and services (formal sphere).

In the policy guidelines, a strong focus on the concept of agency as key to reducing inequalities in food security and nutrition should be prioritized more throughout.

**Gender equality**

As the organization that was commissioned by the CFS Secretariat to develop the scoping paper to inform policy gaps to inform the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Workstream, CARE has been a leader in Gender Transformative Approaches and has contributed to the related work of the CFS at global and regional levels. Appreciating the recently adopted CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the Context of Food Security and Nutrition, our recommendations around gender are not all-encompassing as we do not need to duplicate efforts. Rather, these inequality policy recommendations should highlight the intersectional challenges of gender inequity that compound with other inequalities.

- Women's participation in food production and care/reproductive labor is not being acknowledged, yet they are central to the success of food systems and communities.
- Women role as caretakers and their responsibility to put food on the table needs to be valued. One of the results of women being responsible for ensuring their family's access to food is that their own health and personal access to food is often negatively affected. This has significantly impacted women's health and safety, specifically in places of conflict and places affected by climate change.
- Women in areas of conflict face compounded challenges and gender inequity and access to food is significantly reduced. Furthermore, food insecurity is directly linked to high rates of violence against women and girls. In conflict, women eat last and often less. Gender dynamics greatly shape the spaces within which people live through crises.
- Gender based violence (GBV), in all its manifestations, is both an issue in itself and as a mechanism for maintaining gender inequality. In times of crisis, existing social dynamics surrounding GBV become more intense, breaking down any potentially protective social mechanisms and leaving women and girls particularly exposed to GBV, and too often without support as key services often collapse in emergencies.

- There is a strong recommendation to be gender responsive and include marginalized groups throughout the HLPE report. Strengthening partnerships and institutions to involve disadvantaged stakeholders throughout food systems is a significant step toward achieving equity. Inclusivity and representation are important for long-term positive impact. It is necessary to ensure that the policy recommendations and applied policies address and stress the inclusion of vulnerable groups without imposing additional burdens on them.  This includes an intentional effort to ensure women's time burden is not negatively exacerbated.

Women are often excluded from decision making spaces; comprise a large percentage of seasonal, part-time, and low-wage work; and are primarily employed in the informal sector. On a household level, women's food security and nutritional needs are neglected in countries and regions where discriminatory cultural and social norms exist.  Inequity across gendered lines plays out at the international level, too—global solutions consistently ignore women, their rights, and the critical role women play in food systems.

As the HLPE report cited, a notable data gap is the lack of gender disaggregated data on food insecurity in the subregions with the highest levels of food insecurity. According to CARE's research, of 84 global policies and plans designed to address hunger in 2020 and 2021, only 4% referred to women as leaders who should be part of the solution. 39% overlooked women entirely. These data gaps have translated into real gaps in policy response. Global solutions are not keeping pace with the magnitude of the problem because they continue to overlook the importance of gender equality. This requires all of us to invest money, time and training in women leaders, listen to their voices, and honor their right to be at all tables where decisions are made. The culminating effect of all these barriers is a systemic gap between what women can contribute to food systems and what they are able to do today. This gap was only widened during Covid-19—both in the workforce and at home. And with a lack of data, solutions often overlook the severity of the problem and overlook women and girls. This means that sometimes the proposed solutions are furthering inequality. In order to ensure that these policy recommendations truly tackle inequalities and do not further them, gender inequality must be at the center of these policy recommendations.

**Intersectionality**

As addressed in the HLPE report, the policy recommendations must address the multiple disadvantages in food and nutrition security (FNS) defined by social groupings and their intersectionality, in both developing and developed countries. As the report mentioned, the recommendations must address how multiple forms of inequalities can intersect to create further inequities for marginalized groups. This creates a food system where the most marginalized people in society are also the most left behind in our food systems. For example, discrimination based on social class can affect access to education, employment, and healthcare, creating long-lasting disparities. In food systems, this can manifest as differential access to nutritious food and opportunities in the agricultural sector. With limited access to quality education, this further compounds and perpetuates inequality by restricting opportunities for

personal and economic growth. In food systems, education plays a crucial role in shaping agricultural practices, food processing, and overall participation in the food industry. The term intersectionality must be used to emphasize this interconnectedness rather than just as an empty term that leads us to avoid addressing the root causes of these structural inequalities. The HLPE report also mentions that there is insufficient data to characterize intersectionality, however **sufficient data does exist on this**. The gap is that it has not been properly analyzed or communicated to those who are most affected by FSN insecurity and to decision-makers.

**Human Rights Framework**

The policy recommendations must support a transformative and human rights-centered approach based on agreed UN and CFS language. This approach must tackle the root causes of inequalities and work towards transforming power imbalances and structures that further reinforce inequalities. The policy recommendations must be based on a strong human rights framework and include the rights to food, water, land, housing, social protection, health, education, decent work and workers rights. While the HLPE report does address human rights (pg 12-13), it does not center a human rights based approach and the policy recommendations must do more. A human rights framework is an essential component of these policy recommendations.

**Humanitarian**

The convergence of conflict and violence in addition to other forms of inequalities only create further vulnerabilities in already marginalized communities. Conflict significantly affects and reduces peoples' agency. The policy recommendations must include a focus on those not only affected by chronic hunger but also those experiencing extreme and acute food insecurity in fragile settings, a number which is increasing significantly globally. The policy recommendations should include this nexus of humanitarian and FSN structural inequalities. Policy recommendations and solutions should recognize that humanitarian agencies have [long-standing commitments](link) to be accountable to affected populations and to transfer decision-making power and resources to local actors, who are best placed to lead in emergencies. Realizing these commitments means working with women-led collectives and organizations to provide the resources, space and solidarity they identify as being important in order to take an active role in humanitarian decision-making and action.

**Access to Resources**

The policy recommendations must touch specifically on inequalities in regard to resource access. Access goes beyond just availability to ownership and control, as well as the ability to make the most from the resources available, particularly for women and Indigenous Peoples. Specifically on land tenure, gender inequities in policy and practice, power imbalances as a driver for inheritance, land grabbing, and unequal distribution of land all must be addressed.

**Micronutrients and Micronutrient Deficiencies**

The importance of micronutrients seems undervalued in the report, especially given the disparities of "hidden hunger" across and within countries, and in marginalized populations. Seeing the impact that climate change is having on food nutrient availability and composition, including from biodiversity and livestock loss, additional focus should be placed on addressing micronutrient deficiencies (and micronutrient consumption) when discussing food systems and nutrition. For that reason, it is alarming that food fortification, biofortification, and supplementation is scarcely mentioned in the report. Edits can be made to the sections on the food supply chain, private sector/consumer behavior, and enabling environment (social protection, health service delivery).

**Accountability**

The report, and conceptual framework, don't effectively capture accountability. There are a few areas where it is captured at the sector/activity level, and a few mentions of social accountability, but that is not adequate. Accountability in the document leans heavily on social audits, and transparency and consent for corporate activities, rather than being required at the highest levels across all domains. And relies mostly on individual, community or social movements to demand accountability – rather than ensuring they are **_purposely built into_** the policy, food production, value chain, service delivery and enabling environment the report aims to tackle. Instead, the "ROADMAP TO EQUITY-SENSITIVE POLICYMAKING" diagram (page 112) makes a weak attempt to capture accountability, which seems to be left to some future state. This should be further stressed the policy recommendations.

**Locally led**

The HLPE report does not mention 'locally led' or 'community driven'. There are several principles identified for governance strategies where this could be developed, but they are not. For example, the most relevant statement in this regard reads : _"Strengthen inclusive spaces for dialogue, participation and coordinated action at global, national and local levels that centre on building equity_." However, this principle does not translate into actions that empower women, communities and other local actors to drive the processes that they are nevertheless expected to participate in. Attributing ownership of processes to communities would say something like 'community-driven action will ensure that relevant issues are explored.' The policy recommendations must include this missing element of locally led.

**Social protection**

As addressed in the HLPE report, social protection is a key human right. However the focus on social protection in the context of the HLPE report is centered on what outside actors might do, without any mention or recognition that communities have social protection systems that could be reinforced, or at least given some space from a 'do no harm' perspective. Social protection involves analyzing the context, collecting data, identifying and engaging the most affected groups from a crisis, and creating tools or ways to enhance access to healthy and adequate food systems. The policy recommendation should look at social protection through this additional lens. Social protection mechanisms must be well-targeted

and equitable, and not only protect people, but enable their own economic improvement and graduation from poverty to self-sufficiency.

[END]

**CARE's original contribution to the drafting of the V0 of the Reducing Inequalities for Food Security and Nutrition Report:**

**Response and recommendations from CARE 30 April 2022**

**Inequity in Food Systems**

The issue of equity has recently become a focus among the international development community, culminating in targeted efforts to establish fair and just access to opportunities, resources, and distribution of benefits under the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. This effort is consistent with the long-standing recognition that development is a human right, one which is individually owed to every human person and one in which all peoples are collectively entitled to participate, contribute to, and enjoy. First set forth in the Declaration on the Right to Development, adopted in 1986 (54 State Parties) and since reiterated in international human rights instruments (*e.g.* UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas), the right to development includes "equity" as an essential element. It is also inextricably linked to all other human rights in food systems, including the right to health, freedom from slavery and forced labour and the right to adequate food.

Despite efforts to adapt food systems and development goals to address the needs of those most marginalized first, certain groups are continuously being left out and left
behind. Women, small-scale farmers, peasants, fisher folk, Indigenous Peoples, and racial and ethnic minorities continue to face disproportionately high rates of hunger and malnutrition and associated health complications. Food insecurity and malnutrition are not randomized conditions, but rather are the results of social and economic *systemic inequalities* from local to global levels. Unequal relationships and power dynamics in markets, in households, and in policy processes, determine who has access to resources and who does not, shaping who is hungry and malnourished and who is not. This unequal access to food is rooted in inequalities of income, inequalities of political and economic power, and gender and social inequalities – leading to inequitable distribution of outcomes. And these inequities in our food system exist across both vertical and horizontal lines with vertical inequalities based on measured outcomes at household level (such as income) and horizontal inequalities affecting certain groups of people who are marginalized due to social exclusion. Often individuals and groups face an intersection of multiple disadvantages which can result in some of the most extreme forms of marginalization. For example, a person's gender, ethnic identity, and spatial location can all intersect in a manner that excludes them from a country's economy, political system, and food system.

Transforming food systems therefore requires addressing these underlying inequalities and restoring fair, or equitable, access to and ownership of resources, including water, land, and seeds, as well as access to information, technology, and justice. Adopting a human rights- based approach to this transformation will help to reveal the inequalities, discriminatory practices, and unjust power relations that are often undermining sustainable development efforts. Mainstreaming human rights will further reinforce that all food system actors are entitled to decent work, livelihoods, and safe and adequate food.

Many forms of inequity exist in food systems, however gender-based discrimination is one of the biggest sources of inequity. Women frequently face intersectional challenges – they face time poverty, low (or no) pay, denial of

access to resources – and all the while shouldering reproductive and care responsibilities. Women and women farmers are key actors in every aspect of food systems. They have extensive skills and capacities and their roles are critical to global food production, natural resource management , household and community resilience, and to the way families eat. They have been key architects of community solutions to the pandemic. However they are undervalued, unpaid or underpaid, and constrained by systemic limitations on their access to natural and productive resources and labor market opportunities. Women are exposed to higher risks of famine, gender-based violence, and other forms of exploitations and abuse, in peacetime and in conflict, and they often eat last when food is scarce. CARE studies have shown that women are eating less frequently and less nutrition food than men, especially in areas of heightened conflict. In Afghanistan, men reported eating fewer meals three days a week, while women are eating fewer meals four days a week.

Evidence shows that land tenure and other natural resource rights are strongly associated with higher levels of investment and productivity in agriculture – and therefore with higher incomes and greater economic well-being. Land rights for women are correlated with better outcomes for both them and their families, giving women greater bargaining power at household and community levels, improving child nutrition, and lowering levels of gender-based violence. Yet, while rural women produce up to 80 percent of food consumed in households in developing countries, they make up fewer than 15 percent of all smallholder landowners. Women struggle to not only secure land titles but also to obtain credit and insurance, purchase seeds and equipment, and access agricultural training. Women are often excluded from decision making spaces, comprise a large percentage of seasonal, part-time, and low-wage work, and are primarily employed in the informal sector. On a household level, women's food security and nutritional needs are neglected in countries and regions where discriminatory cultural and social norms exist. The culminating effect of all these barriers is a systemic gap between what women can contribute to food systems and what they are able to do today. This gap is only widening due to the pandemic, which is rolling back 50 years of progress in gender equality —both in the workforce and at home. Gaps in women's leadership and in supporting women's unpaid care burdens mean that the pandemic and the proposed solutions are furthering inequality.

Gender inequity harms not only women and girls but entire households. Countries where women lack land ownership rights have an average of 60% more malnourished children. When women are empowered, entire communities are lifted out of poverty. Research shows that if women had equal access to rights such as land and labor rights, their yield would increase 20-30% and an additional 150 million people annually could be fed.
  Tackling gender inequities will help dismantle the barriers women face —boosting productivity, promoting good nutrition, and leading to better outcomes not only for women, but for everyone in the food system.

Inequity across gendered lines plays out at the international level, too—global solutions consistently ignore women, their rights, and the critical role women play in food systems. Furthermore, reports and policies on hunger itself leave women behind. Of 84 global policies and plans designed to address hunger released between September 2020 and December 2021, only 4% refer to women as leaders who should be part of the solution or provide funding to support them. 39% overlook women entirely. CARE's review confirms that, despite women's and girls' significant roles in food systems, global responses to hunger crises are still either ignoring them or treating them as victims who have no role in addressing the problems they face. Women aren't just left out of creating solutions to end hunger; the organizations tasked with supporting them actually make them invisible. This makes it nearly impossible to determine the full scope of the problem. Of all available global datasets and dashboards on hunger or gender equality – only one—from UN Women—provided sex-disaggregated data, and that is only for 2019.

To make food systems more equitable, all actors—including governments, as well as development and humanitarian organizations—should prioritize responding to the needs and impact areas that women themselves have prioritized as critical: livelihoods, food security, mental health support, and health services. Immediate and medium-term livelihood recovery and food assistance is critical at all levels. There also must be increased efforts to create partnerships and work with women leaders and local Women's Rights Organizations to ensure inclusive and gender-responsive policies and decision-making at all levels. All actors should also work with women's groups,

listen to women, and ensure they are targeted in recovery programs and funding. It is critical to create accountability mechanisms that guarantee women's voices in any COVID-19, conflict, or food security related response. Global solutions are not keeping pace with the magnitude of the problem because they continue to overlook the importance of gender equality. Global policies must work towards equality if we ever hope to end hunger, not just this year, but into the future. That requires investing money, time, and training in women leaders; listening to their voices; and honoring their right to be at all tables where decisions are made.

For equitable and just food system transformation we must adopt transdisciplinary, inclusive, and rights-based approaches. This implies that we should ensure integrated, participatory, rights-based approaches to governance and policymaking at all levels to address the structural inequities and power imbalances in food systems. This includes building processes and policy platforms on democratic principles, transparency, accountability, and inclusive participation to ensure that policies are both evidence- and rights-based.

Successful Programs and Policy Initiatives

Successful initiatives to reduce the inequality gaps are ones that strengthen the capacities, skills, and confidence of women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples in food systems so they can collectivity challenge social norms; increase ownership and control of resources and assets, increase access to markets and services; and strengthen their voice to promote equitable power relations in households and communities.

Successful response strategies:

- Have a cross-sectoral response and clear indicators and targets that promote women and marginalized groups rights to food, decent work, reliable markets, and healthy environments.

- To combat gender inequity strategies must include tools and models to engage men and boys in all relevant protocols and interventions in food systems to enhance male responsibility in sharing production and reproduction burdens and to advance the elimination of all forms of gender-based violence.

- Provide *non-conditional* financial and capacity-building support to women's organizations, social movements, networks, and women's collective action, including legal and negotiation training skills. This could be done through farmer/pastoralist/fisher schools and other social learning models.

There must be a demand for policies that place gender justice at the center for transformative change and increase investments into understanding, implementing, and strengthening equitable livelihoods in food systems.

- Affirmative action at organizational, policy, and legislative levels to promote women's leadership, is critical to ensure equal participation and representation, and to allow women's voices to be heard at local, national, and international levels within food systems discourse and decision-making processes.

- Policies that support women's access and ownership over productive resources, and guarantee access to public goods and services (such as biodiversity, water and sanitation, and public health) to advance food security and nutrition are successful at enhancing food systems' role in the reduction of inequalities.

- An adoption of a multi-stakeholder approach is also critical by ensuring health, education, climate and environment, social development, local government, and other relevant ministry budgets are planning for, and in coherence with, gender and indigenous people's equality investments and plans in food systems.
- Ensuring national and global accountability mechanisms and processes for all duty bearers in food systems are functioning and transparent.

Most recent references to be considered in this report.

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