



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands



World Vegetable Center

Equity and equality in SafeVeg

Why equity and equality?

Globally, malnutrition in all its forms is the leading cause of poor health (GNR 2021) and food insecurity is rising (SOFI 2022). Poor quality diets are one of the leading causes of death and disability globally (GBD Diet Collaborators 2017): three billion people cannot afford to eat a healthy diet (SOFI 2022); and 63% of adolescents do not consume vegetables daily (FS Dashboard 2015). Importantly, not all populations are affected by these issues in the same ways: outcomes are unequal. Over time, food systems have made more and healthier foods available to some people – but others face increased difficulties in feeding themselves adequately, safely, and nutritiously (Global Panel 2016).

Food security and nutrition (FSN) outcomes are unequal across regional and national boundaries

(GNR 2021, SOFI 2022): Africa has the largest hunger prevalence at 20.2% of the population, compared to less than 2.5% in North America & Europe, for instance.

Inequalities do not end at national boundaries but are also evident among different populations within countries (GNR

2020): Child stunting is far higher in rural communities globally (35.6% of children) than urban (25.6%) for instance, and achievement of minimum dietary diversity is higher when caregivers have secondary or higher education (22.4%) than primary or lower (14.8%).

Across the food system itself, we see inequalities along the lines of gender and other social groupings (for instance Indigenous peoples) in ownership and control of land and other productive assets; gendered pay and time use differentials; and different opportunities for participation across the value chain by small versus large farmholders (Land Quality Initiative Report).

The unequal distribution in these outcomes and food system opportunities is not random but is underpinned by inequitable processes at the societal level that shape food and social systems,

and ultimately shape outcomes differently for different people in different contexts (Nisbett Harris 2022). Inequalities are built on histories of the marginalization of certain countries, regions and populations – intergenerational inequities



from which it is difficult to break free – shaping opportunities in food systems, economies and societies (GNR 2020). In turn, food insecurity and malnutrition continue to contribute to precarious lives, disrupted livelihoods, and poor health (SOFI 2022). Thus, understanding how inequities in societies contribute to inequalities in food systems and ultimately in livelihood, food and nutrition outcomes is vital if these are to be addressed: **Food security, food system, and nutrition goals will not be met without addressing inequality and inequity.**



How do we define inequity and inequality?

These are defined in the forthcoming **UN-CFS HLPE report** on inequality and inequity in the food system (2023):

“Inequalities can be understood broadly as differences between socially relevant groups, ie. differences in FSN outcomes or food system-related aspects (eg. land access) between individuals or groups. Inequality is understood here as an uneven distribution in an outcome, opportunity or resource. Which groups are socially relevant in terms of inequalities will vary by context, depending on which groups are most marginalized according to socio-political norms (this could be on a global scale, looking at marginalized countries, or a local scale, looking at marginalised communities).

In many contexts marginalized groups include the poor, women, and the disabled; in different contexts there may be other socially-relevant differences based on

ethnicity, race, caste, religion, age, sexuality, or other issues of social position.

Inequities, on the other hand, are the reasons for why this uneven distribution exists and accrues systematically to certain social groups, and therefore the unfair, unjust and avoidable differences in socio political, historical, cultural, social, and other driving factors that causes inequalities in FSN. For instance, the reasons why some countries are economically disadvantaged in the global order (eg. Colonialism), or the reasons why women have fewer opportunities to participate in some aspects of food systems (eg. Patriarchy), or the reasons why it is certain ethnic or indigenous groups that experience poorer FSN outcomes (eg. Racism), all of which have their basis in power relations and the marginalisation of certain groups.”

Why equity and equality in SafeVeg?

The following information is obtained from the **Food Systems Dashboard**:

In West Africa, as elsewhere, inequalities are clear: In Benin, 10% of adults are obese while 32% of children are stunted; in Burkina Faso, 6% of adults are obese while 20% of children are stunted; and in Mali, 9% of adults are obese while 22% of children are stunted. In Mali, 74% of the population are unable to afford a healthy diet, while in Burkina Faso it is 80% and in Benin 83%. The proportion of the population unable to come up with emergency funds in a crisis, a measure of resilience, stands at 15% in Burkina Faso, 19% in Benin, and 30% in Mali.



These inequalities are built on systemic inequities that shape access to social, economic and political opportunities:

Benin, Mali and Burkina Faso all register a Gender Inequality Index of 0.6, reflecting relatively high gender-based disadvantage in the dimensions of reproductive health, empowerment, and the labour market. In Benin, 42% of the population over age 15 are literate, in Burkina Faso 39%, and in Mali 31%, meaning that a majority of the population in each country is unable to

participate fully in economic or political activity. All three countries score 'medium' on the Voice and Accountability Index, impacting reporting of food system working conditions or voice in food system and social policies. And all three countries score 'medium' on the GINI Index, measuring inequality in income distribution. **Therefore, systemic inequities in terms of gender, education, political accountability and poverty are clear in the countries within which SafeVeg works.**



While the food system inequalities are clear, and the underlying inequities are evident, there has been very little work linking these issues of inequality and inequity together empirically, or looking at them in these West African contexts, or looking at them in the context of vegetables specifically. SafeVeg will start to fill these gaps:

- Explicitly considering what the key inequities are (in terms of the kinds of populations who are marginalized in different contexts) in designing research and interventions;
- Explicitly linking the underlying inequities to the unequal outcomes in empirical research; and
- Explicitly considering equity considerations in any policy or programmatic advocacy or advice.