



Indigenous Food Systems, Biocultural Heritage and the Sustainable Development Goals:

Challenges, interdisciplinary research gaps and empowering methodologies

Virtual Workshop organised by IIED and Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

9th October & 13-15 October 2020

Global food systems represent one of the biggest sustainable development challenges of our time. They contribute about one third of the world's greenhouse gas emissions and are a major driver of biodiversity loss and environmental degradation. Food insecurity has been steadily rising in recent years - more than 820 million people are hungry and 2 billion people are food insecure, underscoring the immense challenge of achieving Zero Hunger by 2030 (FAO, 2019).

Indigenous peoples are disproportionately represented among food-insecure and hungry populations, with women and girls suffering the greatest burden (Lemke and Delormier 2017). The prevalent loss of control over their territories and resources has left Indigenous peoples impoverished in many countries, and resource-extracting development models further exacerbate food insecurity and hunger among these groups (FAO, 2019).

For many of the world's 370-500 million Indigenous peoples, who make up about 15% of the extreme poor, the globalised export-driven food system represents an existential threat. Agribusiness development may create employment, but can negatively affect the physical and mental health of Indigenous people as diverse traditional foods and cultural identity are lost (Kuhnlein et al, eds, 2013). Indigenous worldviews hold the key to alternative development paradigms which are vital for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Across the world, Indigenous peoples' food systems are biodiversity-rich, nutritious, climate resilient and low carbon, and play a critical role in the food security of some of the world's poorest people. Many neglected and underutilised species that Indigenous people cultivate are nutrient-dense, functional foods which provide rich sources of micronutrients (FAO, 2019). The COVID-19 crisis is not only a serious health threat for Indigenous groups, it is also an economic crisis and a food crisis, which highlights the critical importance of Indigenous food systems and food sovereignty for resilience to shocks.

Despite their importance, Indigenous food systems have received little support and recognition. They are often undermined by policies that seek to modernise and commercialise agri-food systems, and by top down development on Indigenous territories (e.g. mining, dams, deforestation). At the same time, many protected areas continue to impose restrictions on

traditional harvesting practices, despite growing evidence of their sustainability (Kuhnlein et al, eds, 2013).

Indigenous food systems sustain unique ancestral knowledge, agrobiodiversity and cultural values that hold the key to sustainable agriculture, climate change adaptation and mitigation in diverse local socio-ecological contexts. This includes knowledge about sustainable food practices, from harvesting and production, to preservation, storage and cuisine; and core cultural values of environmental stewardship transmitted through subsistence practices (Natcher 2009; Fischer et al 2012). Indigenous women and elders play a key role in sustaining Indigenous foodways and seed systems.

The transition to modern food systems has led to growing health problems amongst Indigenous peoples in many OECD countries, particularly overweight, obesity and Type II diabetes. This 'nutrition transition' is starting to emerge in global South countries where there is acculturalisation and poverty (e.g. Argentinian Andes, Amazon, East Africa) (Kuhnlein et al, eds, 2013). The FAO Expert Seminar on Indigenous Food Systems (2019) highlighted the critical role of Indigenous peoples in achieving Zero Hunger and called for new partnerships and networks to address Indigenous food system challenges.

This virtual workshop will bring together a diverse range of actors, including UK academics from humanities and agri-food disciplines; agriculture and sustainability researchers; Indigenous experts; and UN agencies. It has three main objectives:

1. **Enhancing understanding of Indigenous Food Systems (IFS)**, by taking stock of knowledge on the role of IFS in agricultural resilience, nutrition and sustainability, key trends and challenges, and responses needed.
2. **Co-creating new interdisciplinary and empowering research agendas**, by exploring interdisciplinary research gaps, Indigenous peoples' research priorities, and interdisciplinary and decolonising research methods.
3. **Networking and partnership building**, by bringing together different disciplines and actors.

The workshop will consist of **four Webinars**:

- 9th October – Opening keynotes and Potato Park (Peru)
- 13th October – Indigenous food systems in China, India and Kenya
- 14th October – Co-creating Research Agendas
- 15th October – Exploring Research Methods

The results will be used to advocate the importance of Indigenous food systems for climate resilience, biodiversity conservation and the SDGs, including in global biodiversity and climate change policy processes. Participants will include IIED participatory action-research partners and Indigenous research partners in Kenya, India and China, who are promoting the establishment of biocultural heritage territories, inspired by the successful Potato Park model in Peru.

The workshop forms part of a project on "Indigenous food systems, biocultural heritage and agricultural resilience", funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (GCRF).