

## **Speaking Notes**

### **Mirna Cunningham Kain, UN Permanent Forum Member FAO International Conference on Forests for Food Security and Nutrition 13 May 2013**

1. For millions of indigenous peoples living in forest environments, the forest forms a dominant part of our physical, material, economic and spiritual lives. Forests have been owned and managed by indigenous peoples for thousands of years. Over many generations indigenous peoples have been able to fulfill their material and spiritual needs through skilful management of their environment and as a result have been the main contributors to the conservation and preservation of forests. Indigenous peoples living in forests possess clearly defined rights to land and natural resources, including communal ownership of their ancestral lands. They manage the natural resources on their territories, exercise their customary laws, and represent themselves through their own institutions.<sup>1</sup>

2. The forest, as well as providing a wealth of material outputs of subsistence or commercial value, is also the basis for livelihood systems based on hunting and gathering, or rotational agriculture systems that depend on the ability of bush fallow to revive the productivity of the land. In the forest we find our gods and spirits that protects our lives, communities and resources. The forest thus constitutes an integral part of the habitat and the social, cultural and spiritual structure of indigenous peoples living within it.

3. Forests and forest trees are the sources of a variety of foods that supplement and complement what is obtained from agriculture, fruits, leaves and other products, fuels with which to cook food, and a wide range of medicines and other products that contribute to health, hygiene, cultural, social and spiritual activities.

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<sup>1</sup> UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, *Report on the ninth session 19-30 April 2010* (E/2010/43) New York, 2010, para153.

4. The majority of rural households in our countries, and a large proportion of urban households also depend on plant and animal products of forests to meet some part of our nutritional, cooking and/or health needs.

5. Forest foods add variety to diets and provide essential vitamins, minerals, protein and calories. The quantities consumed may not be great in comparison to the main food staples, but they often form an essential part of peoples' diets.

6. Forest foods are also used to help meet dietary shortfalls during particular seasons in the year. Many agricultural communities suffer from seasonal food shortages, which commonly occur at the time of year when stored food supplies have dwindled and harvesting new crops is only just beginning. Forest and farm tree products are also valued during the peak agricultural labour period, when less time is available for cooking.

7. Forests are especially important as a source of foods during emergency periods such as floods, famines, droughts and wars. Often these food resources differ from resources exploited in other periods. In famine periods, roots, tubers, rhizomes and nuts are most sought after. They are characteristically energy rich, but often require lengthy processing.

8. Supplies of wood fuels influence nutrition through their impact on the availability of cooked food. If there is less fuel (or time) for cooking, consumption of uncooked and reheated food may increase. This may cause a serious rise in disease incidence as some uncooked foods may not be properly digested, and cooking is necessary to remove parasites. A decrease in the number of meals provided may have a particularly damaging effect on child nutrition.

9. Medicinal usage of forest products tends to overlap with that of forest foods; particular items added to foods serve to act as a health tonic. There are also strong links between medicinal use and cultural values. For example, where illnesses are thought to be due to spiritual causes or plants have acquired symbolic importance as treatments.

10. In some situations subsistence use of forest products appears to be dwindling, as people rely to a greater extent on food purchasing, as famine relief programmes become more effective, or as improved supplies of food crops have diminished the need to depend on forest foods. In some Pacific countries, for instance, the introduction of the sweet potato, which can be planted at any time and produce an edible crop within three months can be left un-harvested for up to two years, has made lessened the reliance on the traditional emergency foods of wild taro, arrowroot, wild yams and sago.

11. Other changes that reduce the role that forest food plays in household nutrition may reflect penetration of rural markets by new food products, changing tastes or decreased availability. However, the latter may reflect changes in the availability or allocation of a household supply of labour rather than physical shortage of the product.

12. As the pressures on women's time increase they may no longer have as much time for gathering forest foods. As we live in an increasingly busy world, here are often times when purchasing food appears more attractive, than gathering foods – although gathering foods still takes places, especially on weekends or holidays.

13. A decline in use of forest food can also reflect reduced knowledge about its use. As children spend more time in school than in the fields and the bush, the opportunity to learn about plants and its associated qualities is reduced.

14. While the management of forests has traditionally been considered the domain of indigenous men, it should be recognized that indigenous women also have a role in maintaining and managing forests. Indigenous women's particular role in forests is not primarily related to income-generating activities, but rather to protecting forest products that are essential for the well-being of the community.

15. Indigenous women protect the forest against deforestation and the introduction of non-indigenous tree species, pass on cosmogonic knowledge, which is a key factor for forest conservation, and take advantage of the forest's resources in a rational manner, to build their houses, access food and provide the community with medicines and clothing. As income generators, indigenous women are involved in the extraction of

non-wood products (handicrafts, furniture, etc.) and ecotourism projects. Indigenous women play a crucial role in promoting forest protection and as drivers of sustainable measures to adapt to changes.

16. Since the First World Conference in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012, Indigenous Peoples have continued to underscore the inextricable link between Sustainable Development, the rights of Indigenous Peoples and the traditional knowledge, cultural understandings and practices that are the basis for the full exercise and enjoyment of our Food Security. All of these elements are included in Indigenous Peoples' definition of Food Sovereignty developed at the *1st Indigenous Peoples' Global Consultation on Food Sovereignty and the Right to Food* and affirmed in a number of Indigenous Peoples' International Declarations:

*Food Sovereignty is the right of Peoples to define their own policies and strategies for sustainable production, distribution, and consumption of food, with respect for their own cultures and their own systems of managing natural resources and rural areas, and is considered to be a precondition for Food Security.*<sup>2</sup>

17. Food Sovereignty, as affirmed in the Declaration of Atitlan, is referenced as a component of the international legal framework used by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in its Policy on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples.<sup>3</sup> It has been affirmed as a fundamental principle in a number of international Indigenous Peoples' declarations. Indigenous Peoples have also recommended that "Food Sovereignty" replace the term "Food Security".<sup>4</sup>

18. In many parts of the world, indigenous peoples are faced with the continuing encroachment and/or expropriation of their lands, degradation of their forests, and the erosion of their cultures, values, and traditional lifestyles. Hence, it is not surprising that many indigenous peoples and their communities are making concerted efforts to

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<sup>2</sup> The "Declaration of Atitlan", 1<sup>st</sup> Indigenous Peoples' Global Consultation on Food Sovereignty and the Right to Food, Sololá, Guatemala, April 17 - 19, 2002

<sup>3</sup> UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Policy on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, November 26, 2010, International Legal Framework Concerning Indigenous Peoples, Declarations: "The Declaration [of Atitlan] emphasizes the importance of indigenous peoples' rights to lands, natural resources and self determination to their overall food security and food sovereignty".

<sup>4</sup> "We recommended that the term Food Sovereignty rather than Food Security be adopted at Rio+20, using the definition which was developed and agreed to by Indigenous Peoples in the Declaration of Atitlan from the first Indigenous Peoples' Global Consultation on the Right to Food and Food Sovereignty, Guatemala, 2002", Recommendation # 8, "Indigenous Peoples in Route to the Rio +20 Conference" Global Preparatory Meeting of Indigenous Peoples on Rio +20 and Kari-Oca 2 Conclusions and Recommendations, August 22 - 24, 2011, Manaus, Amazonia, Brazil

preserve their traditional knowledge and their links to the land for future generations. Further, issues connected to actual or potential expropriation of traditional knowledge by scientists and commercial interests, such as the patenting of medicinal plants that have been used by indigenous peoples for centuries, have both raised public consciousness about the importance and relevance of traditional knowledge, and sparked contentious debates over intellectual property rights. The protection and preservation of traditional forest knowledge is an uphill battle for most indigenous peoples and their communities particularly in the face of rising exploitation pressures on their forest resources.

19. Forests need to be defined broadly, taking into account the philosophical and cultural principles reflected in indigenous peoples' values and teachings. This includes recognition of trusteeship responsibilities once exercised by the ancestors and now carried out by present generations. Forests are often seen within the context of their potential commodity values. The definitions of forests within States and UN processes often do not include indigenous peoples and their visions and aspirations. This has created conflicts between indigenous peoples, corporations and states. Further, there are misconceptions that indigenous peoples are not good managers and cannot manage their own forests and this is an area that needs to be challenged.

20. There are other issues that impact on indigenous peoples living in forests. In many parts of the world, indigenous peoples are faced with the continuing encroachment on and expropriation of their lands, degradation of their forests and the erosion of their cultures, values and traditional lifestyles. Hence, it is not surprising that many indigenous peoples and their communities are making concerted efforts to preserve their traditional knowledge and their links to the land for future generations. In addition, issues connected to actual or potential expropriation of traditional knowledge by scientists and commercial interests, such as the patenting of medicinal plants that have been used by indigenous peoples for centuries, have both raised public awareness of the importance and relevance of traditional knowledge, and sparked contentious debates over intellectual property rights. The protection and preservation of traditional forest knowledge is an uphill battle for most indigenous peoples and their communities, in particular in the face of rising exploitation pressures on their forest resources.

21. The burgeoning development of large-scale plantation economies is a story of erosion and appropriation of indigenous peoples' territories and the alteration to their indigenous land tenure systems. The cycle of plantation development begins when the government grants forest areas as concession areas; the next stage is the clearing or destruction of forests, followed by the establishment of the plantations themselves. As these plantations are meant to produce crops for the market, they are logged after a short period, and planting begins all over again. In these processes indigenous peoples are either evicted from the forests areas or their access to the forests is curtailed. Few people, if any are absorbed as seasonal workers. For indigenous peoples, these results in food insecurity, poor food nutrition to children and their forest resources and way of life is destroyed.

22. The *Cultural Indicators for Food Security, Food Sovereignty and Sustainable Development* were finalized at the **2nd Global Consultation on Right to Food, Food Security and Food Sovereignty for Indigenous Peoples** (September 7 – 9, 2006, Bilwi, Nicaragua), focusing on the inextricable link between the traditional Indigenous food systems and the cultural practices upon which they are based. They provide a framework and practical tool for Indigenous Peoples to assess and measure the positive and negative effects of programs, methods and technologies coming from outside their communities, environmental impacts such as mining and climate change, the resiliency of traditional practices and methods and their transmission to new generations. They also reflect, demonstrate and underscore the inextricable links between human rights, in particular self-determination and free prior and informed consent, access to traditional lands and natural resources and the vitality of cultural and biological diversity.

23. 11 thematic areas have been identified with three to nine specific indicators listed under each. An innovative three-part model for indicators under each of the theme areas measured impacts and changes over time through Structural, Process and Results Indicators and has been widely duplicated in the development of indicators throughout the UN System. The 11 thematic areas reflecting impacts, concerns and priorities relevant, are as follows:

- a) Access to, security for and integrity of lands, territories and natural resources for traditional food production, harvesting and/or gathering
- b) Abundance, scarcity and/or threats to traditional seeds, plant foods and medicines, and food animals, as well as cultural practices associated with their protection and survival
- c) Consumption and preparation of traditional plant and animal foods and medicines, including in ceremonial/cultural use as well as daily household use
- d) Continued practice and use of ceremonies, dances, prayers, songs and stories and other cultural traditions related to the use of traditional foods and subsistence practices
- e) Preservation and continued use of language and traditional names for foods and processes (planting, hunting, gathering, harvesting, fishing, food preparation etc.)
- f) Integrity of and access to sacred sites for ceremonial purposes related to use of traditional foods
- g) Migration and movement away from traditional lands as a result of rural-to-urban migration, conflict, forced relocation, land appropriation, climate change, and economic necessity; return patterns and relationships to continued use of traditional foods.
- h) Effective consultations for planning, implementation and evaluation applying the principles of Free, Prior Informed Consent and full participation by community members when development programs are implemented by states, outside agencies or other entities and the extent to which cultural concerns are considered and addressed.
- i) Existence and viability of mechanisms and institutions created by and accessible to Indigenous Peoples for transmission of food related traditional knowledge and practices to future generations
- j) Capacity within Indigenous communities and Peoples for adaptability, resilience, resistance and/or restoration of traditional food use and production in response to changing economic, political and/ or environmental conditions
- k) Ability of Indigenous Peoples to utilize and implement recognized rights, legal norms and standards as well as self-government

structures to promote and defend their Food Sovereignty on the local/tribal/community, national and international levels

24. There have been notable signs of progress. The “**Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security**” were adopted on March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012 in a process initiated by UN FAO and the UN Committee on Food Security (which in 2011 established two seats for Indigenous representatives). The Guidelines recognize the rights of Indigenous Peoples in a number of provisions including in section 9 which is dedicated specifically to Indigenous Peoples.

For example, paragraph 9.3 reads: *“States should ensure that all actions are consistent with their existing obligations under national and international law, and with due regard to voluntary commitments under applicable regional and international instruments. In the case of indigenous peoples, States should meet their relevant obligations and voluntary commitments to protect, promote and implement human rights, including as appropriate from the International Labour Organization Convention (No 169) concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.”*<sup>5</sup>

25. Indigenous Peoples have concluded<sup>6</sup> that:
- a) That our Right to Food is an Inherent Right affirmed in our Treaties and other human rights instruments, and that Food Sovereignty is an essential aspect of our Sovereignty as peoples.
  - b) Our traditional foods are essential to our physical, cultural and spiritual health, identity and survival.
  - c) The Creator placed us on our traditional lands and provided clean food and water for our health and survival and that we have an inherent right and responsibility to care for and protect the land, plants, animals and water, and our sacred Mother Earth as a whole, from destruction and contamination.

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<sup>5</sup> UN Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security,

<sup>6</sup> In September 2011, the Treaty 1-11 Chiefs met in Calgary Canada, Treaty No. 6 Territory, and adopted a resolution on the Treaty and Inherent Right to Food. “On behalf of the Chiefs, Headmen and citizens of the First Nations of Treaties 1-11”

- d) Any attempt to restrict or curtail our rights to hunt, fish, grow or gather our traditional foods and to use the water on our lands by federal, provincial or municipal government laws, regulations or ordinances are fundamental violation of our human rights, including our Right to Food.
- e) Recognize the negative impacts of imposed development such as mining, damming, drilling, Tar Sands extraction and clear cutting, as well as climate change and environmental contamination on our traditional foods and water sources.
- f) Recognize that we continue to have the traditional knowledge and wisdom about how to use and protect our traditional foods, and that our elders, spiritual leaders and other traditional practitioners carry this knowledge as passed down from our ancestors.
- g) Recognize the urgent need to make sure that our children, young people and future generations learn about our Rights, including our Right to Food and how to use and care for our traditional subsistence foods, waters and medicines. This is fundamental for our continued survival.
- h) Recognize the importance of re-establishing the traditional trade relationships that always existed between our Nations as part of our Indigenous development, Nation-to-Nation relations, and food sovereignty; we recognize the importance of reestablishing these Indigenous trade relations that include the exchange of traditional foods and knowledge as a response to the urgent situations now facing many of our Nations as their traditional foods become more scarce (such as urbanized areas).
- i) Call upon all of our Peoples to assert and put into practice these rights and responsibilities, to exercise their Inherent and Treaty Right to Food and Food Sovereignty on their traditional lands, to protect these resources from contamination and destruction, and to accept this responsibility for the survival of our peoples, especially our children, grandchildren and future generations.