



## Policy Brief.

# Indigenous Youth: Innovation and Traditional Knowledge for Food Security

There are 476 million Indigenous Peoples around the world, constituting 6.2 percent of the global population and, according to different sources, representing more than 19 percent of the extreme poor (ILO, 2019). Approximately 214 million of them are Indigenous youth (Calculated from IWGIA, 2020; ILO, 2019). In addition to the challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples in general, Indigenous youth experience challenges such as intergenerational effects of dominant cultures, migration to urban areas, malnutrition, lack of intercultural education, lack of legal protection and lacking space in decision-making, all leading to a dramatic increase in self-inflicted harm and suicide. Although Indigenous youth face immense barriers, they are guardians of valuable knowledge, agents of change in the youth mobilization agenda on the climate crisis, and holders of unique ability to combine innovations, modern technology and traditional practices. Indigenous youth are key in achieving food security for all, ensuring the continuity of Indigenous Peoples' food systems and biodiversity protection.

### Key messages

#### **Indigenous youth have important contributions to make to the world.**

- Indigenous youth hold a **profound understanding of their cosmogony, beliefs, cultural heritage, livelihoods, territories and resources**. Food, land and natural resources are fundamental to **Indigenous Peoples' identity** and their food systems are therefore essential for Indigenous youth. Many Indigenous youth find their Indigenous **traditional foods healthier, tastier, more sustainable and thus preferred over processed and imported products**.
- Meanwhile, they hold a **unique ability to combine modern technology with traditional practices**, giving them a key role in the fight against climate change and the path towards food security. They are prone to embrace new habits as they feel the need to engage further in the cash economy to enjoy better prospects for the future.

#### **Education is essential and highly regarded by Indigenous youth. At the same time, different religious organizations and governmental programmes without intercultural components have had an impact on Indigenous Peoples and their communities, affecting their health, food systems, beliefs and culture.**

- Education programmes have **often resulted in assimilation programmes** that have undermined Indigenous traditions, spirituality, languages and food practices.
- Many Indigenous youth face immense challenges resulting from the **intergenerational effects of dominant cultures**. Normalization of **external regulations induce generational divides** and make it challenging for Indigenous youth to fully grasp their Indigenous cultural heritage and food system practices.

#### **Indigenous youth face high levels of malnutrition and lack of health services.**



- The **relationship between Indigenous youth and their traditional foods and customs are weakening**, among other causes because of school feeding programmes introduced by external actors with less healthy foods, who lack understanding for the importance of interculturality for Indigenous youth.
- **The lack of health services for Indigenous Peoples has become elevated during the COVID-19 pandemic**, putting responsibility on Indigenous youth to obtain medicines, treatments and health information for their communities.

#### **Globalization and prevalence of cash-income economies continue to weaken Indigenous Peoples' food systems and Indigenous culture.**

- Factors such as loss of land, climate change, lack of access to higher education and increasing dependence on cash economy push more **Indigenous youth to migrate to urban areas, disrupting the continuation of traditional food systems, as well as the transmission of Indigenous languages and traditional knowledge**. At the same time, **defending natural territories and traditional food systems** is becoming increasingly dangerous for Indigenous youth, as the killing of environmental Indigenous activists continues to increase.
- There have been recent reports about the **increase of self-inflicted harm and suicide among Indigenous Youth** due to criminalization of Indigenous Peoples, territorial displacement, the lack of hope or a project of life, and the challenge in reaching a balance between their place within Indigenous communities and mainstream society. This issue was presented by the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus to UNDESA in 2015 at the United Nations in New York.

#### **Indigenous youth need stronger political recognition and legal protection.**

- The future of the traditional Indigenous food systems largely depends on the cessation of systemic discrimination and marginalization of Indigenous Peoples. **Lack of legal protection of Indigenous Peoples' rights and lack of institutional access** constitute major issues hindering Indigenous youth's preservation and management of Indigenous food systems in the years to come. In addition, Indigenous elders must **give Indigenous youth the space to participate in local decision-making**, to allow for Indigenous youth to work for the preservation of traditional food systems amidst the influence of predominant market-oriented, commercialized food systems.
- Adhering to the principle of **Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)** is fundamental for any action, activity or programme affecting Indigenous Peoples' and youth's livelihoods and territories. In emergency situations, such as food shortages arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, **Indigenous youth must be included as key actors in the crisis response** as their command of social media and languages makes them essential in such situations.
- Indigenous youth must be given **more space in international policy making arenas**, in particular the process and structures connected to the **2021 UN Food Systems Summit**, to have their voices heard and allow for their key contributions towards the achievement of Agenda2030. It is crucial that **more funding is channelled towards initiatives by Indigenous youth** to enhance food sovereignty and food security.

#### **Main policy issues**

Indigenous Peoples' food systems are considered as some of the most sustainable on the planet, touching "the full spectrum of life in ways that modern food systems do not" (Kuhnlein, Erasmus and Spigelski, 2009, p. 5). They are resilient and adaptive, rooted in ancestral heritage, recurrently exercised

through the transmission of traditional knowledge and their cosmogony and belief systems (FAO and Bioversity International, Forthcoming). Such transmission further depends on the maintenance of traditional Indigenous Peoples' languages. Many Indigenous Peoples base their production and gathering of food on seasonal cycles and the dynamics of their natural surroundings, providing them with key knowledge and insights on biodiversity preservation and sensitivity for climatic changes (Kuhnlein, Erasmus and Spigelski, 2009; FAO, 2020c). In times of intensifying climate change, globalization and uncertainty, Indigenous youth stand at the precipice of change that will determine if and how their Indigenous ways of life and cultures are carried into the future. However, being able to effectively navigate through different cultural systems, they hold key insights on resilience and innovation drawn from different systems which, in combination, can contribute immensely to the global agenda on food security, climate change adaptations, biodiversity preservation and Zero Hunger. In order to hear and implement these effective and necessary contributions, we must give Indigenous youth space in national and international policy arenas and address the following obstacles for continuation of traditional Indigenous food systems:

### **Intergenerational effects of colonization and assimilation policies**

Article 31.1. of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) states that *"Indigenous Peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts."* (UNDESA, 2007, p. 22). Intergenerational transmission of Indigenous traditional knowledge, often oral, is essential for the preservation and sustainability of Indigenous communities' culture, traditions and practices. Several Indigenous Peoples consider the ability to pass on traditional Indigenous knowledge to younger generations an essential component of their own food security (Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska, 2020).

Regrettably, many Indigenous youth face immense challenges resulting from intergenerational effects of colonization and assimilation policies, hindering intergenerational transmission of Indigenous traditional knowledge. Historically, Indigenous Peoples' communities have seen their beliefs and customs denied, due to assimilation and education programmes that undermine Indigenous traditions, spirituality, languages and food practices (FAO and Bioversity International, Forthcoming).

Further, governments have imposed regulations and restrictions which ban or partly limit Indigenous Peoples' ability to carry out their traditional practices (Angel, Lopez-Carmen and Stamatopoulou, 2019). These regulations and restrictions are, in turn, perceived as normal by Indigenous youth in some Indigenous Peoples' territories as they have become embedded in their surroundings and life, greatly altering the preservation of traditions and food culture. Normalizing these restrictions can induce generational divides and make it challenging for youth to fully grasp and learn their Indigenous cultural heritage (Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska, 2020). This type of distancing can lead to external actors having greater influence on Indigenous Peoples' food systems, decreasing their diversity, nutritional values and resilience. When external actors hinder Indigenous Peoples in carrying out activities, this severely affects their livelihoods which fundamentally affect their human rights.

### **Lacking respect for the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent**

It is of great importance that external projects, development interventions and new regulations recognize, adhere to and implement the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), recognized in UNDRIP. FPIC is a key mechanism that is embedded in Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination, which includes the right to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development, according to Article 3 of UNDRIP. This specific right of Indigenous Peoples allows them to give or withhold consent to a project or policy that may affect them or their territories (FAO, 2016). Once they have given their consent, they can withdraw it at any stage. Furthermore, FPIC enables them to negotiate the conditions under which the project will be designed, implemented, monitored and evaluated (FAO, 2016). Allowing Indigenous youth to carry forward their culture and traditional food systems onto new generations will depend on external actors' adherence to FPIC when intervening in Indigenous territories.

### **Malnutrition and health issues amongst Indigenous youth**

UNDESA (2020) has underscored that malnutrition is one of the major challenges facing Indigenous youth today. One of the causes can be connected to the steadily weakened relationship between Indigenous youth and their traditional Indigenous Food and Knowledge Systems, beliefs and customs. There are many contributing factors to this phenomenon, among them are school feeding programmes introduced by external actors and governmental schemes. Such programmes are often introduced with well-intended objectives to support the well-being of Indigenous Peoples and their communities. However, as they often fail to consider the cultural customs, traditions and Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems, such programmes have often resulted in acculturation that in several cases have worsened the diets of young Indigenous Peoples (Kuhnlein, Erasmus and Spigelski, 2009; FAO and Bioversity International, Forthcoming). In some cases, this further implies that Indigenous youth might discard traditional, nutritious food in favour of processed foods, compromising their health.

There are multiple examples of projects and initiatives working to counteract malnutrition in Indigenous communities, carried out entirely by, or in collaboration with, Indigenous Peoples. In Sanephong, a Karen community in Thailand, an academic research team worked together with the community to increase production of traditional Indigenous foods within households, raise motivation and provide nutrition education for schoolchildren, empower women, and strengthen capacities for community leadership (Sirisai, Chotiboriboon, Tantivatanasathien, Sangkhawimol and Smittasiri, 2013). This collaborative process focused particularly on the empowerment of youth as key actors to enhance nutrition in their communities, with successful results. Another project, with the Inga Indigenous group in Colombia, worked to promote Indigenous Peoples' traditional foods and medicine as an approach for securing the communities' nutrition (Caicedo and Chaparro, 2013). The project established farming projects and medicinal gardens hosted workshops on nutrition, and organized festivals to celebrate the community's food culture, seed exchanges and the collection of traditional recipes. The project's success relied on the involvement of traditional healers, who inspired the community's consensus on the project's advantages, as well as communication through radio channels and brochures in the local Indigenous language (Caicedo and Chaparro, 2013).

In general, Indigenous youth across the world face a lack of access to health services, and the health status among Indigenous Peoples' communities diverges significantly from that of non-Indigenous population groups (FAO, forthcoming). In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, these circumstances have

placed Indigenous peoples' communities among the high-risk groups. During these challenging conditions, Indigenous youth have been central in facilitating access to medicines, treatment and health information. Among other initiatives, the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus facilitated for translation of documents containing key information on COVID-19 into Indigenous languages (Global Indigenous Youth Caucus, 2020). In Myanmar, young Indigenous peoples worked to distribute food and health supplies to their community members, as well as using social media to increase connectivity and the flow of key information regarding the pandemic. Indigenous traditional recipes were also used to boost the community members' immune systems for improved health (FAO, 2020d).

### **Lacking interculturality in education as threat to continuing Indigenous Peoples' food systems**

The food habits of Indigenous youth are shaped not only by the meals served in schools, but also by the educational content. Regrettably, respect for the importance of teaching traditional Indigenous languages is often lacking, and schools are, in general, set up without consideration to Indigenous Peoples' beliefs and customs. The UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA, 2020) points at the lack of culturally appropriate education in Indigenous languages as one of the central issues affecting Indigenous youth today. Among other consequences, this leads to Indigenous youth having to learn traditional food practices in their communities. However, when spending substantial amounts of time in schools being taught other practices, Indigenous children and youth are left with less time and opportunities to learn land-based practices for food sourcing and preparation, and other forms of key traditional knowledge. Sometimes the different food practices acquired at school and in their communities can be contradictory and pose a challenge for Indigenous youth to integrate them.

Education programmes shape food habits, peoples' nutrition – and also Indigenous youth's understanding of their own identities. Culturally appropriate education focusing on identity-building and ensuring access for Indigenous youth can help Indigenous young people connect better with their roots and culture, which in turn will ensure the continuation of traditional sustainable food system practices. In the Philippines, community leaders and NGOs have long worked to enhance literacy for Indigenous Peoples' communities<sup>1</sup>, with consideration to culture and customs. In 1997, the government of the Philippines assumed such efforts, passing a law in recognition of Indigenous Peoples' rights and needs, the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA) (Cornelio and de Castro, 2016). Several initiatives to offer intercultural education to Indigenous children have been initiated since. However, criminalization and displacement of Indigenous Peoples have reduced the attention on the development of intercultural education programmes (Cornelio and de Castro, 2016; ECOSOC, 2003). There are also challenges with the level of formal recognition, as there are new national standards for education (Cornelio and de Castro, 2016).

A shared opinion amongst the majority of Indigenous youth and elders in several Indigenous Peoples' territories is that their Indigenous traditional food systems, meals, livelihoods and ways of life are healthier, tastier and preferred to the new imported habits (FAO and Bioversity International, Forthcoming). The strive to balance modern education with preservation of traditional knowledge and

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of initiatives are the Alternative Learning Center for Agricultural and Livelihood Development (ALCADEV) and the Asian Council for People's Culture (ACPC) setting up *Sagu-ilaw*, a school meant to train adult para-teachers who can also teach children in their community (Cornelio and de Castro, 2016).

the continuation of traditional food systems is a challenge Indigenous youth will continue to face in the years to come.

### **Globalization decreasing youth's interests in traditional agricultural practices and knowledge**

Indigenous Peoples have historically lived in natural and rural areas and in close contact with the ecosystems and environment, relying on their territories, ancestral lands and natural resources to secure their livelihoods thanks to close observation of nature's cycles. Currently, many Indigenous youth are confronted with the hard choice between maintaining their roots in the Indigenous community – or pursuing education and employment in cities far from home. Lack of access to higher education close to Indigenous Peoples' territories pushes many Indigenous youths to move to urban areas. Additionally, migration of Indigenous Peoples, especially Indigenous youth, to urban centres has also increased due to the loss of their lands, climate change, conflict and increasing need for income generation (FAO and Bioversity International, Forthcoming). Globally there is a lack of accurate, current data on urban Indigenous populations. In Latin America, for example, in 2010 it was estimated that 35 percent of the Indigenous Peoples resided in urban areas, and the numbers were expected to pass 50 percent by 2020 (UNHABITAT and OHCHR, 2010).

There are mixed reports on the perspectives of Indigenous youth on urban migration. On the one hand, reports underscore the adversities faced by Indigenous youth in urban areas. UNDESA (2020) highlight how being far from home exposes Indigenous youth to risks of both physical and emotional violence, as well as unemployment. On the other hand, Tupuola (2007, as cited in UNPFII, 2007) expresses that Indigenous youth *“have mastered help-seeking skills in order to access educational resources, training facilities and health services not as easily available to earlier generations.”* (p. 8). Many also aspire to take part in urban culture, something that is also encouraged through attendance in schools that are lacking cultural sensitivity for traditional customs (FAO and Bioversity International, Forthcoming).

For traditional food systems, youth migration has severe consequences as fewer Indigenous Peoples still reside in the territories and can take on the responsibility to carry the traditions forward. Baldinelli (2017) demonstrates how Indigenous youth growing up in urban areas are unlikely to learn agrobiodiversity conservation and traditional farming practices from their parents. Migration to urban areas has severe consequences for the social cohesion of many Indigenous Peoples' communities (Baldinelli, 2017). Moreover, the increasing connectivity between rural and urban areas have made Indigenous Peoples' communities increasingly reliant on the cash economy, leading them increasingly choosing to cultivate cash crops rather than traditional food varieties and food production for their own subsistence (Li, 2014; FAO and Bioversity, 2020). This trend towards less agrobiodiversity within many traditional food systems creates challenging circumstances for the coming generations in preserving and promoting the resilience and sustainability of Indigenous food systems. Engagement in the cash economy is another factor pushing Indigenous youth to move to urban areas for employment opportunities to support their families. Consequently, traditional knowledge, Indigenous languages and Indigenous food systems are eroding at an alarming rate.

Despite the increasing migration of Indigenous youth, and the decreasing interest in traditional practices, many Indigenous youth do still take great interest in the traditions, culture and food production systems (Kuhnlein, Erasmus and Spigelski, 2009; FAO and Bioversity, 2020). This interest is visible through several initiatives where Indigenous youth wish to market and spread their traditional

foods, such as in the village of Nongtraw in India, where a group of 16 Khasi youth have formed a cooperative society for marketing the traditional grain millet. They sell both raw (grains removed from stem) and processed (ground into a powder) millet, the latter being packed nicely for sale at the market (FAO and Bioversity International, Forthcoming). In Baniata in Solomon Islands, Indigenous youth are engaged in the community's efforts towards achieving organic certification for *ngali* nut. A dedicated processing facility is currently being constructed in the village, which will ensure that the product is Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) certified for food safety. After the organic and HACCP certifications are complete, the community will likely be able to expand to other international markets and increase sales (FAO and Bioversity International, Forthcoming).

Multiple initiatives are also taken by Indigenous Peoples' communities to engage youth in traditional practices, such as the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission in Alaska, USA, that over several years hired and trained Indigenous youth to collect information on fish (Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska, 2020). Also in urban areas, we see examples of initiatives to restore and strengthen Indigenous identity and community-building through traditional foods, such as the Chi-Nations Youth Council in Chicago, who in response to discrimination of Indigenous youth developed Native gardens across the city, to serve as healing safe spaces for Native people, a place to grow their traditional foods, and to function as a public teaching and learning hub (Tamez, 2019).

### **Loss of natural resources and land rights inflicting threats on Indigenous youth's well-being and lives**

Multiple factors currently threaten the well-being of Indigenous youth. They are linked to the intensification of Indigenous Peoples' loss of rights to their lands and territories, natural resources, traditional ways of life and traditional uses of natural resources. In 2015, the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus raised the issue of Indigenous youth self-inflicted harm and suicide to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA, 2020). In their statement, the primary two reasons cited for self-inflicted harm and suicide for Indigenous youth were the difficulty of "striking a balance between their place within their indigenous community and mainstream society", as well as "the additional challenges they face due to their distinct identity", such as loss of their traditional habitats and territories (UNPFII, 2015).

In addition, we see an increase of killings and violence against Indigenous leaders and activists defending their natural resources and lands. During the last four years, the numbers of fatal attacks on environmental activists have increased, over a third of them targeting Indigenous Peoples (Global Witness, 2020). In 2019, murders of 212 land and environmental activists were recorded, with notably high numbers in Colombia, Honduras and the Philippines (Global Witness, 2020). Based on these numbers, Global Witness (2020, p. 10) consider Indigenous Peoples' communities to be "some of the most at-risk communities across the globe". The direct threats and loss of their traditional habits are strongly affecting the mental and physical well-being of Indigenous youth, as well as their prospects to defend their traditional food systems and practices.

Despite the many challenges, Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous youth are not vulnerable populations *per se*. For thousands of years they have managed their territories and natural resources in ingenious and dynamic ways that have allowed them to inhabit the same territories and preserve the natural resources making them available for future generations. Yet, it is the systematic and systemic lack of recognition of their rights, in particular self-identification rights and collective tenure rights, that places

Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous youth in situations of vulnerability, poverty, conflict and food insecurity. During an Open Talk on Indigenous Youth and Food Security at the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Rome, on 6 February 2020, Co-chair of the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus Jessica Vega stated that "Food, land and natural resources are the base of Indigenous Peoples' identity and improving food security is therefore an essential struggle for Indigenous youth."

### **Institutional challenges: lack of political participation, health services and education**

Many of the challenges faced by Indigenous youth are connected to the lack of proper institutional arrangements in Indigenous Peoples' territories, relating to political participation, health services and education. Local governmental institutions are, if at all advised by Indigenous Peoples, – often consulting with the elders or the adults in the community. This leaves little space for the voices of Indigenous youth (AIPP, 2020). Concerning Indigenous traditional institutions within Indigenous Peoples' communities, they are in many territories harmed by militarization, development invasions, assimilation or being imposed by state authorities. This causes great disturbances in the lives of Indigenous Peoples, including for Indigenous youth (AIPP, 2020). The lack of opportunities for political participation severely challenges the future of Indigenous food systems, as many Indigenous youth feel neglected by government decisions ignoring the experiences and concerns of Indigenous Peoples. This leaves them with negative connotations towards pursuing traditional customs and ways of living (Angel, Lopez-Carmen and Stamatopoulou, 2019).

Still, good practices of inclusion of Indigenous youth in politics do exist. The Scandinavian countries with Sámi populations all have Sámi parliaments with youth councils as part of their political structures (The Sámi Parliament in Finland, 2020; The Sámi Parliament in Norway, 2020; The Sámi Parliament of Sweden, 2020). Further, on the international arena, the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus (GIYC), officially recognized by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) as a working caucus in 2008 (Global Indigenous Youth Caucus, n.d.), is an important actor for Indigenous youth to voice their concerns and stands in the annual sessions of the Permanent Forum. In recent years they have increasingly been reached out to by major international institutions and UN agencies. On a recommendation from UNPFII, FAO and GIYC are planning for a FAO Forum on Indigenous Youth for Food Security in 2021, in relation to the upcoming UN Food Systems Summit.

There are structural and legal barriers to Indigenous youth's full, equal and effective participation in political, economic, social and cultural life. Thus, above-mentioned good practices must be adopted in more places for effective inclusion of Indigenous youth in policy making, and governments must ensure the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) to avoid harm imposed on traditional Indigenous institutions.

### **Lack of effective legal protection**

The rights of Indigenous youth are recognized in several international legal instruments. The UNDRIP articles 21 and 22 request distinct consideration of the rights of Indigenous children and youth. Specifically, the UNDRIP recognizes the rights of Indigenous youth to live in freedom, peace and security (article 7.2), the right to all levels of education without discrimination (article 14.2) and the right to be protected from economic exploitation or hazardous work (article 17.2) and the right to be protected



against violence and discrimination (article 22.2) (UNDESA, 2007). Article 21 urges that “states shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of Indigenous (...) youth and children” (UNDESA, 2007, p. 17). Additionally, the 1989 Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) contains explicit references to Indigenous children, ensuring their access to diverse media in their languages (article 17.d), to education that is non-discriminatory (article 29.d) and the right to own culture, religion and language (Article 30) (OHCHR, 1989).

However, as presented information demonstrates, Indigenous youth often experience violations of their rights. Firstly, the greatest obstacle for the realization of their rights is that multiple Indigenous Peoples are not recognized by their country as distinct Peoples within their territories. Further violation of their rights occurs through education programmes that undermine Indigenous traditions, Indigenous traditional languages and food practices; as well as external regulations and restrictions banning traditional practices, loss of traditional habitats and even threats against their lives. According to UNDESA (2020), incarceration and lack of legal protection are among the main challenges facing Indigenous youth today, threatening their livelihoods and security, and obstructing Indigenous youth’s strive for food sovereignty and food security.

## Key contributions from Indigenous youth

### **Climate change adaptation**

It is widely agreed that the impacts and ramifications of climate change are increasingly threatening Indigenous Peoples’ food systems and intensifying the occurrence of damaging natural catastrophes (ILO, 2019). The interconnectedness of Indigenous Peoples’ food systems, cycles and the surrounding natural resources are central to their resilience. Yet, with escalating climatic extremes, this interconnectedness makes Indigenous Peoples’ food systems particularly vulnerable to climatic changes (FAO and Bioversity International, Forthcoming). Many Indigenous Peoples’ eating habits follow seasonal cycles. This is another factor that increases their food system’s vulnerabilities to the impacts of climate change on seasonal migrations, hunting, fishing, growing and harvesting practices. Yet, Indigenous Peoples are among the key players to tackle climate change, due to their traditional knowledge, resilience and high adaptive capacities. The 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change specifically stresses the role played by Indigenous Peoples and local communities with their traditional knowledge for effective climate action (UNFCCC, 2015). Being the receivers and carriers of traditional knowledge, Indigenous youth hold key positions enabling them to contribute to the global endeavour to combat climate change. Indigenous youth’s abilities to combine modern technology with traditional practices gives them a unique role in global efforts, and in developing innovative solutions to strengthen Indigenous food systems in their own territories (Angel, Lopez-Carmen and Stamatopoulou, 2019).

### **Innovation**

In preserving and adapting food systems, Indigenous youth are key players in achieving sustainable and resilient transformations. As carriers of traditional knowledge and the future generations of Indigenous Peoples’ communities, Indigenous youth have important opportunities to carry forward their food customs and traditions – both in promoting their food customs to the general public and to keep adapting to the changing climatic conditions and contemporary circumstances. In 2007, as part a session



in the UNPFII on urban Indigenous Peoples and migration, an Indigenous author used the term “edgewalkers” to describe Indigenous youth in the Pacific. “[Edgewalkers] are part of a generation of Pacific Peoples who have mastered skills that have enabled them to adopt situational identities that allow them to weave between traditional Indigenous contexts and the technological and information worlds” (UNPFII, 2007, p. 2).

We see several demonstrations of Indigenous youth’s impressive navigation of such contexts: through local initiatives, social enterprises and engagement in policy spaces. Many youth use new technological platforms to spread traditional knowledge and to communicate the importance of Indigenous Peoples’ food systems through social media such as TikTok and Instagram. Further, Indigenous youth in Quechua and Yáneshas communities in Peru are sharing traditional knowledge through documentaries, other forms of audiovisual production and music (Government of Canada, 2018). In the United States, the Indigenous-led organization Indigikitchen uses digital media to create a cooking show, utilizing only native foods. It aims to support Indigenous Peoples in finding and preparing food in their own communities, in order to strengthen cultural ties, and in turn communicating the value of Indigenous Peoples’ food systems for healthier ecosystems and people (Indigikitchen, 2021). Also in the United States, the United National Indian Tribal Youth (UNITY) hosts the Earth Ambassador program, for Indigenous youth to teach other youth in their communities the importance for the environment and value of the traditional foods offered by their culture, using digital platforms and webinars to communicate their messages (UNITY, 2020). Other initiatives by Indigenous youth to enhance food sovereignty and improve the resilience of food systems also include the Life Plan of the Association of Indigenous Communities in the Amazon district, containing an ethno-education programme of a local Yachaicury School in Colombia. At the Yachaicury School, Indigenous youth are implementing a traditional food recovery programme to improve nutrition and health (Kuhnlein, Erasmus and Spigelski, 2009).

In addition, Indigenous youth have introduced new, useful technologies to their territories for territorial management, management of forest fires, weather predictions and other situations (Jessica Vega, Open Talk at FAO headquarters, 6 February 2020). In the village of Uaxactún in Petén, Guatemala, several Indigenous youth are working in a coalition to keep 500 000 hectares of forest in the Mayan Biosphere Reserve safe from fire, by utilizing drones and other modern technology to protect and observe the area (Janfaza, 2020). Among the Cabécar Indigenous people in Costa Rica, Indigenous youth are part of the Love for Life project, who are installing solar panels to provide electricity and enhance the community members’ quality of life, and access to more services and infrastructure (Janfaza, 2020).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen Indigenous youth as significant actors in their communities. Not only have they provided information on health and facilitated access to treatment and medicines as elaborated above, but they have built bridges between the elders’ knowledge and technology, establishing new channels for communication, as well as initiating new projects to secure culturally appropriate food supply (FAO, 2020b). Among other initiatives, the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus facilitated a major fundraising campaign for culturally appropriate food supplies (Global Indigenous Youth Caucus, 2020). In Chile, Indigenous youth led intergenerational dialogues in Mapuche territories (FILAC, 2020). In Chicago, United States, the Chi-Nations Youth Council supported construction of home gardens for Indigenous Peoples to increase culturally appropriate food production. They also fundraised to ensure supply of healthy, traditional foods for emergency food relief

as the rations provided to emergency shelters were unhealthy and culturally inappropriate (FAO, Forthcoming).

### **The role of Indigenous youth in international policy making and the UN Food Systems Summit 2021**

With their key experience in balancing traditional practices and modern systems, knowledge of resilience and sustainability, and because of the many challenges they are facing, it is of the utmost importance that Indigenous youth are sufficiently included, and given a space at the table in local, national and international decision-making processes. The Global Indigenous Youth Caucus is one of the central actors working to develop statements and positions voicing the concerns of Indigenous youth in various international bodies, mechanisms, and processes (Global Indigenous Youth Caucus, n.d.). They have managed to drastically increase the visibility of Indigenous youth and raise their voices internationally through collaborations with the FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and other UN agencies, as well as keeping close collaboration with the UNPFII. However, UN agencies, Member Nations and other stakeholders must step up efforts to open more spaces for dialogue and collaboration with Indigenous youth and Indigenous Peoples, in line with the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent especially on matters concerning Indigenous Peoples themselves.

Being one of the major upcoming happenings for the global community with regard to food security, the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021 is an important platform, where the perspectives of Indigenous youth must be fully integrated, both into the process and in the implementation of the actions arising from the Summit outcomes. Already present in the Summit Structure representing Indigenous youth, in the Champions network we find Vice-Chair of the Champions network, Food Systems Champion Jessica Vega Ortega from the Mixteco People in Mexico, also currently serving as Co-Chair of the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus. Also present is Food Systems Champion Mai Thin Yu Mon, from the Chin people of Myanmar. Ms. Yu Mon is the Program Director for the Indigenous Peoples Development Program of Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) and represents youth on the Executive Council of the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP). Within the Summit structure, she also holds a seat as Vice-Chair of the action track on *Advancing equitable livelihoods and value distribution*, one of the Summit's five action tracks. Lastly, Denisa Livingston serves as a young Indigenous Food Systems Champion from North America. She also holds the position of International Indigenous Councilor of the Global North in Slow Food International. Their involvement in the Summit structure is of high importance to open the doors for Indigenous Peoples' perspectives in the Summit. However, we must continue to look for opportunities and windows to strengthen the involvement of Indigenous youth in developing the Summit, and beyond.

### **Policy recommendations and actions**

Based on the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Rome Statement on the Contribution of Indigenous Youth towards a World without Hunger (Global Indigenous Youth Caucus, 2017), the following policy recommendations and actions should be considered by governments and stakeholders to ensure the recognition of Indigenous youth's contributions towards food security, as well as the need to protect their rights in order to ensure the survival of traditional food systems and livelihoods.

**To ensure intercultural and appropriate education for Indigenous youth, also in order to preserve traditional food practices:**

- For governments to **fully fund mother-tongue-based multilingual primary, secondary and tertiary education in Indigenous Peoples’ communities**, led by Indigenous Peoples, and surrounding areas with schools attended by Indigenous children. Such education initiatives must include mobile education initiatives for nomadic and semi-nomadic communities. Further, they should strive for Indigenous youth’s access to culturally appropriate universities by creating Indigenous universities.<sup>2</sup>
- **For governments to set up national committees composed of experts from the Ministry of Education and Indigenous leaders who can discuss and design intercultural education plans in Indigenous Peoples’ territories.** These intercultural education plans should blend new education along with traditional knowledge, ensuring that the Indigenous Peoples’ languages are preserved and along with them the food systems and livelihoods. Ideally, interculturality should inform all education plans and curricula in the 90 countries in the world where Indigenous Peoples live.<sup>3</sup>
- **Through this national committee on intercultural education, analyse the time and frequency of the classes and the schooling.** These should not collide with the traditional calendar for livelihood activities that follows nature’s seasonality and cycles. Rather, it is important to reach a schedule of lectures that does not clash with the transmission of traditional knowledge that takes place in association with many livelihood-related activities. Classes and lectures can be taught with the support of parents in the Indigenous Peoples’ language as well as in the language spoken by the professors.<sup>3</sup>
- For governments to **pay special attention to the right of Indigenous girls** to primary and secondary education and ensure equitable education for all genders in Indigenous Peoples’ communities.
- For Ministries of Education and the Governmental Agencies responsible for the school feeding programmes **to set up a mixed committee with the Indigenous elders, women and representatives to jointly decide the foods that will be served during the school menus.** The recipes and foods should come from the community by involving the parents in the school meal programmes, ideally purchasing their local production of Indigenous foods<sup>3</sup>.
- For governments to **enhance nutrition education for schoolchildren** in accordance with Indigenous Peoples’ food systems.
- For governments and UN agencies, together with universities and Indigenous organizations, **within the overall context of the Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022–2032) managed by UNESCO , undertake a mapping of the Indigenous languages spoken**, identifying centres that can document and support these languages to avoid their disappearance.<sup>3</sup>
- **For UNPFII to take up the issue of school feeding and analyse the impact** it is having on Indigenous youth’s health, food taste and habits and culture.<sup>3</sup>
- **For FAO and research institutions to undertake a study on the impact of school feeding programmes on the nutritional status of Indigenous youth.**<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The recommendation builds on recommendation 35 from the Eighteenth Annual Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII).

<sup>3</sup> Recommendations retrieved from FAO & Bioversity International (Forthcoming).



**To enable Indigenous youth to themselves protect traditional Indigenous Peoples' knowledge and traditional food systems:**

- For governments and other development actors to strictly **comply with the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)** in the design and implementation of all projects, policies and regulations affecting Indigenous Peoples and their territories. Indigenous youth's ability to carry forward their culture and traditional food systems onto new generations will depend on external actors' adherence to- and implementation of FPIC.
- **For Indigenous Peoples' organizations to conduct activities for documentation of traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples** with the involvement and participation of Indigenous youth. In this regard, GIYC suggests establishing and developing local protocols that guide access to Indigenous traditional knowledge.<sup>4</sup>
- For Indigenous Peoples' organizations, UN agencies and governments to **conduct activities to further support and facilitate for intergenerational transfer of knowledge.**
- **For governments, NGOs and UN agencies to provide support and resources for the implementation of programmes that will capacitate new and current leaders within traditional institutions and organizations;** and support networking, learning exchange programmes, and activities for Indigenous youth at local, national and international level.
- For governments, NGOs and Indigenous Peoples' communities **to promote Indigenous youth as key actors in their communities to enhance nutrition.** Indigenous youth have in several communities initiated farming projects, medicinal gardens, as well as hosted festivals to celebrate the community's food culture, and communicated nutritional information through radio channels, other media channels and brochures in the local Indigenous language.
- For Governments and Indigenous Peoples' organisations to **invest in youth initiatives related to economic empowerment based on Indigenous Peoples' food systems,** providing training for the development of sustainable entrepreneurship. These projects can increase the awareness and the cultural identity of young people, contributing to the transfer of traditional agricultural knowledge.<sup>4</sup>
- For governments and Indigenous Peoples' organizations to **provide culturally appropriate educational materials and activities to increase the knowledge of Indigenous youth related to national and international law in the field of management, co-management and use of natural resources, and other relevant traditional food practices.** Such materials and activities should emphasize youth in order to recognize the intergenerational nature of many Indigenous Peoples' livelihoods and rights.<sup>5</sup>
- **For Governments and United Nations Agencies to take measures to ensure that Indigenous Peoples have control over the transfer and use of their traditional knowledge.** Through this recognition, Indigenous Peoples secure their rights to development, health, and culture, ending poverty as recognized in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and ensuring their role as guardians of Mother Earth within the framework of the 2030 Agenda.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Recommendations retrieved from the Global Indigenous Youth Caucus (2017).

<sup>5</sup> Recommendations retrieved from Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska (2020).



- **For UN agencies to gather and publish best practices of culturally appropriate employment opportunities for Indigenous youth** from the seven socio-cultural regions.<sup>4</sup>

**To ensure legal recognition and protection of Indigenous Peoples and youth:**

- **For all relevant stakeholders to ensure the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)** and other international commitments relating to Indigenous Peoples such as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) Outcome Document, and the adaptation of ILO 169.
- **For governments to increase their focus and efforts on livelihood generation and security issues** of Indigenous Peoples and highlight the issues affecting Indigenous youth in the regional and global forums.
- **For governments to recognize Indigenous Peoples as distinct Peoples with their collective rights over their lands**, and their right to self-determination.
- **For governments to remove bans on traditional practices** which obstruct Indigenous Peoples in performing their livelihoods, customs, languages and traditions.

**To ensure institutional access for and participation of Indigenous youth in policy making arenas relevant for food security:**

- **For UN agencies, Member Nations and other relevant stakeholders to step up efforts to open more spaces for dialogue and collaboration with Indigenous youth and Indigenous Peoples**, in line with the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent especially on matters concerning Indigenous Peoples themselves.
- Within these spaces and platforms **ensure participation of Indigenous young women and girls**, in addition to strengthening their capacities, through more initiatives such as Leadership Schools for Indigenous Women, co-organized by FAO and the International Forum for Indigenous Women (FIMI).<sup>6</sup>
- For UN agencies and Member Nations to **create specific platforms for discussions between Member Nations, UN agencies and Indigenous youth** on policies regarding food security, agriculture, fisheries, forestry, plant genetic resources and other topics related to livelihoods and food security.
- For Member Nations, UN agencies and Indigenous Peoples' organizations **to invest in initiatives aiming at training Indigenous youth** in leadership, technical skills, consultation processes of Free, Prior and Informed Consent as well as the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests and on Small Scale Artisanal Fisheries and sustainable entrepreneurship. Such projects increase awareness of and can contribute to strengthening the cultural identity of young Indigenous people, contributing to the transfer of traditional agricultural knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Read more about Leadership Schools for Indigenous Women in “Indigenous Women, daughters of Mother Earth” at <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb0719en>.



- For NGOs to give **training and support to Indigenous youth in how to familiarize with the functioning of the United Nations system**, and advocate within it for food security and food sovereignty within the United Nations system, as well as in other international and national policy processes.
- For UN agencies and governments to **create scholarships programmes to provide Indigenous youth opportunities to learn further about their food systems**, and to gain scientific and technical skills in relation to food security, as well as the sustainability and the resilience of Indigenous food systems.
- **For UN agencies to make efforts to recruit Indigenous youth as interns and professionals**, ensuring gender equality; representation from all seven socio-cultural regions; self-identification as an Indigenous person; and involvement of Indigenous youth representatives in the design of the internship programmes.
- **For UN agencies and governments to provide Indigenous youth with the opportunity of participating effectively in the implementation and monitoring of SDG 2 Zero Hunger** and the 2030 Agenda. Participation must be guaranteed at each of the local, national, regional and international levels.<sup>4</sup>
- For Member Nations and United Nations Agencies to **establish an implementation and monitoring methodology** that ensures the participation of Indigenous youth in the implementation of SDG 2 Zero Hunger.

**To sufficiently recognize and support the key contributions of Indigenous youth for food security:**

- **For international organizations and governments to increase the funding channelled to Indigenous Peoples' organizations**, enabling them to better respond to climatic changes and natural catastrophes in Indigenous Peoples' communities in accordance with needs and local traditions.
- **For Indigenous Peoples' organizations to strengthen networks for exchange between Indigenous Peoples' communities** with regards to use of technology and techniques for climate change adaptation.
- **For governments and Indigenous Peoples' communities to include Indigenous youth in emergency response teams**, i.e. food shortages as consequence of COVID-19, as their command of social media and languages makes them essential in such situations.
- For governments and United Nations Agencies to ensure that the specific needs of Indigenous youth are considered in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the national level, through the **creation of specific indicators for Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous youth, involving data collection through the participation of Indigenous youth**. Such specific indicators should also be developed for SDG 2 and matters of food security and food sovereignty. The indicators and data should be used to measure the impact of the 2030 Agenda.
- For governments and UN agencies to **develop disaggregated data on Indigenous youth and food security, through participatory data collection methods**, to demonstrate the needs, aspirations, challenges and concerns of Indigenous youth.

**To ensure the integration of the voices of Indigenous youth in the process towards the UN Food Systems Summit 2021:**

- **For UN agencies, Member Nations and the Summit Secretariat to ensure the involvement of Indigenous youth in all five action tracks** of the UN Food Systems Summit 2021.  
If allowing for physical attendance, **for governments and UN agencies to ensure the presence of Indigenous youth through financial support and opening for interventions** from Indigenous youth within the Summit.
- For UN agencies, Member Nations and the Summit Secretariat to **continue to look for opportunities and windows to strengthen the involvement of Indigenous youth** in developing the Summit, and the process beyond.

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