



## High-Level Expert Seminar on Indigenous Food Systems

Building on traditional knowledge  
to achieve Zero Hunger

7-9 November 2018,  
FAO Headquarters, Rome  
Red Room A121





## SUMMARY EXPERTS SEMINAR REPORT

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7-9 November 2018, FAO headquarters, Red Room

#### Introduction

Over the last few years, there has been increasing attention towards indigenous food systems and their holistic approach to food generation and resource management. At the international level, there have been extensive discussions to define sustainable food systems in relation to the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

In addition, the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025) calls on the enhancement of sustainable food systems and on the importance of diversifying diets with nutritious foods, while broadening the existing food base and preserving biodiversity. Many of the existing indigenous food systems have been doing this for hundreds of years and can contribute to the current debate on sustainable food systems and resilience.

In 2015, indigenous representatives officially requested FAO create an indigenous food systems group. This commitment was reaffirmed in April 2015 during the XIV Session the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII).

Since then, closer attention was paid, at FAO corporate level, to indigenous food systems, which cut across FAO's different areas of work, being particularly relevant to the Sustainable Food Systems Framework, the UN Decade on Family Farming (2019-2028), Agroecology and the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS), among others.

In December 2017, FAO and Bioversity International entered into an agreement to contribute to the overall food systems and climate change adaptation debate through analytical and field activities on indigenous food systems. Thanks to this agreement, and through a task force that included, FAO and Bioversity, the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), the Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty, the French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development (IRD) and local indigenous organizations, different food systems across the world were profiled.

To present the first results of these studies and to identify strategies to safeguard the preservation and transmission of ancestral knowledge to future generations in relation to indigenous food systems and climate-adapted crops, FAO in collaboration with different partners organized the **first High-level Expert Seminar on Indigenous Food Systems**, held at FAO headquarters from 7 to 9 November 2018.



## Partners

The Expert Seminar is the result of the will and effort of different actors. In order to develop a High-Level Seminar, with experts from different sectors and socio-cultural regions, FAO joined forces with the **Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean (FILAC)**, the **United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)**, the **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)** and the **Indigenous Peoples' Centre for Documentation, Information and Documentation (DOCIP)**.

In addition, a **Technical Committee** composed of representatives from different FAO Units supported the evaluation and selection of speakers and panels for the Expert Seminar.

In the technical work for the profiling of indigenous food systems, FAO promoted a task force, which included several collaborators in the field: **Bioversity International**, the **Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR)**, the **Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty**, the **French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development (IRD)** and **local indigenous organizations**.

It is important to highlight that the Expert Seminar took place at the gates of the International Year of Indigenous Languages (2019) promoted by UNESCO and the 18<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII). The International Year's main theme is 2019 is "Traditional knowledge: Generation, transmission and protection".

## Participants

The first Expert Seminar on Indigenous Food System represented a dialogue space to share traditional and scientific knowledge. The Seminar reunited delegates from over **23 countries** and **200 participants, of which 70 were speakers**, from more than **40 countries**, including representatives of indigenous communities and organizations, academia, countries, UN agencies, international community and civil society.

It is important to highlight that more than **22 indigenous communities** and **20 universities and research centers** participated to the Seminar.



## Key areas (needs)

Based on the presentations, discussions and group work by the seven sociocultural regions, the Expert Seminar identified 9 focus key areas in which, through participatory approaches, experts should work together to enhance and preserve indigenous food systems across the world.

### 1. Increase the recognition and appreciation of indigenous food systems.

- Acknowledge indigenous peoples' territories (ICCA<sup>1</sup>) as fundamental elements for the recognition of indigenous food systems.
- Organize discussions where the effects of climate change can be shared and communicated to indigenous peoples.
- Establish mechanisms of collaboration and research that will enable the blending and combination of traditional resilience mechanisms utilized by indigenous peoples and scientific research.
- Promote evidence-based advocacy dialogues among indigenous peoples and governments at different levels, academic and research centers and international organizations.
- Promote dedicated research, documentation (including audiovisual) and awareness raising on indigenous food systems, especially in terms of use of energy, nutrition values, biodiversity and conservation of resources, and resilience and climate change.

### 2. Advocate for sensitive and informed public policies to strengthen indigenous food systems, local foods and indigenous culture.

- Guarantee indigenous peoples' right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent, and take into consideration Intellectual Property Rights and food sovereignty.
- Advocate so that policy and decision makers recognize and support indigenous food systems both publicly and through normative and legal provisions.
- Promote among decision-makers, the political will, information and awareness of indigenous food systems to generate policies that meet the cultural relevance of the people and do not contravene traditional knowledge, local food cultures and diets.
- Promote policy harmonization at national level to avoid contradictions and protect indigenous peoples' rights to their lands, resources and foods.
- Continue to support and promote discussions and research on shifting cultivation and establish a flexible system for participatory forest management.

<sup>1</sup> Recognition of Community Conserved Areas and Territories (ICCAs)



3. **Map institutions, laws and norms, at country level which harms indigenous food systems.**
  - Identify national and international legal norms that negatively affect indigenous food systems.
  - Advocate to government institutions responsible for food standards and for food safeguards and preventing over commercialization of indigenous products.
  
4. **Develop intercultural education methods strengthening indigenous values, foods and traditional knowledge and include them in national education programmes and curricula.**
  - Advocate for countries and governments to adopt and develop intercultural education into their national education curricula, taking into consideration indigenous languages and food culture, and strengthen indigenous community learning centers.
  - Strengthen processes that support the autonomous and intercultural education of indigenous peoples, which are nurtured by the research of institutions regarding their own food systems.
  - Establish specific curricula for education and alphabetization programs, organize information days on site on indigenous food systems and set up school gardens.
  
5. **Assist with the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge on indigenous food systems in the indigenous communities.**
  - Strengthen youth and elders' dialogues and work with local youth and children while creating opportunities to promote their own learning models, and arranging traditional festivals and events.
  - Reflect on a holistic/multidisciplinary approach to raise awareness on indigenous food systems' values including legends, recipes and storytelling related to indigenous foods and their production, cultural values and worldviews.
  - Empower and strengthen communities' youth as the main agents for advocacy and awareness raising on indigenous food systems.
  - Through specific school programmes based on interculturality, build capacity of youth on their understanding on indigenous food systems, improve their understanding of the nutritional and resilience benefits.



**6. Support commercialization of indigenous foods respecting interculturality, traditional knowledge and indigenous territorial management practices.**

- Build the capacity of indigenous peoples to add value to their products through certification of their products, organization of fairs, and improvements and innovations in transformation processes.
- Utilize the whole production chain (production, packing, labeling, certification, etc.) to commercialize indigenous foods through registered Indigenous Peoples' customary institutions and federations at local and national levels.
- Facilitate mechanisms for self-sufficiency, food security, food sovereignty and nutrition that strengthen the implementation of fair trade and value chains.
- Organize markets for indigenous foods and contribute to break the isolation of communities that leads to social insecurity.

**7. Reduce the threats from food industries and agro-biotech companies to replace and affect indigenous foods and seeds with highly processed foods, seeds and chemical inputs.**

- Capacity building on indigenous peoples on free, prior and informed consent
- Reviving local seeds and achieving seed sovereignty through participatory and evolutionary plant breeding.
- Raise awareness on indigenous peoples' customary institutions to ensure adequate governance of their indigenous food systems in order for their knowledge to positively influence policies and reduce the food industry's threats to indigenous food systems.
- Promote spaces for dialogue and policy discussion to promote and conserve indigenous peoples' native-seeds, biocultural diversity, and diets.
- Assist in ensuring the participation of indigenous peoples in the Ad hoc Technical Expert Group on Farmers' Rights established by the International Treaty of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGR).

**8. Strengthen connectivity and exchanges on indigenous food systems through and indigenous network on food systems**

- Establish a participatory network on indigenous food systems that involves indigenous peoples on the ground, and promote regional and community networks focus on traditional knowledge.



- Strengthen the exchange of knowledge and experiences among different countries and indigenous peoples on aspects related to food security, nutritional sovereignty and safeguarding of the biocultural diversity of indigenous peoples.
9. **Build partnerships and networks across UN agencies, Universities and indigenous communities to share knowledge and collaborate in support of global platforms and processes.**
- Create collaboration agreements and partnerships between specialized UN agencies (FAO, UNESCO); organization centers (CIFOR, Biodiversity International, IRD); Universities (Massey, Chapingo) and indigenous communities to generate and expand knowledge about indigenous food systems, guaranteeing at all times respect and ownership.
  - Create a platform to participate in processes that offer opportunities for discussions and coordination of policies (for example the Decade of Action on Nutrition; Committee on World Food Security, the Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition; the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the 2019 UN Year of Indigenous Language).
  - Promote regional specific platforms for knowledge exchange among international agencies, universities and indigenous organizations.

## Way forward

Finally, taking into consideration the 9 key areas identified, the Expert Seminar agreed on the need to continue collaborative efforts and work on indigenous food systems and nutrition.

In this regard, the Expert Seminar concluded that:

- a) FAO, UNESCO, Bioversity International, CIFOR, a group of interested universities, in collaboration with UNPFII and with the participation of indigenous peoples are ready to continue working on indigenous food systems, giving importance to identifying indigenous peoples regional focal points from the seven sociocultural regions to accompany the process;
- b) The indigenous focal points from these sociocultural regions together with Bioversity International; CIFOR; IRD; Universities; FAO agreed to continue this collaboration through a **Hub on Indigenous Food Systems** open to other potential interested partners;
- c) The hub will be an important contributor about indigenous food systems issues to relevant forums and international ongoing processes (CFS; UN Decade of Action on Nutrition; UNFCCC; CBD; IUNS; UN Decade of Family Farming; The Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture; The Treaty; INFOODS, the 2019 UN Year of Indigenous Language).



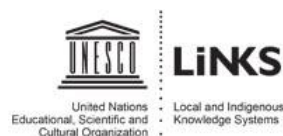
- d) The Hub will support the incorporation of indigenous food systems considerations in global, regional and national debates on food systems.
- e) The Hub will provide technical inputs to the ongoing process set by the World Committee on Food Security (CFS) on Voluntary Guidelines on Food systems and Nutrition.
- f) The Hub will to refine and consolidate proposals, contributions and outputs from the seminar's technical discussions towards a shared work plan with different defined actions to collaborate on indigenous food systems.
- g) There is need after this Expert Seminar to exchange information and mobilize resources for the continuation of the documentation, knowledge generation and research on indigenous food systems.

## Outcomes

The High Level Expert Seminar on Indigenous Food System concluded with five main outcomes:

1. A series of technical inputs to the final publication of the 12 profiles of indigenous food systems, some of which were presented during the Expert Seminar.
2. The summaries of the main discussions of the experts during the three days of Seminar.
3. First mapping of the needs, ongoing actions and possible contributions in the seven sociocultural regions on indigenous food systems.
4. The agreement to create a Hub on Indigenous Food Systems.
5. The proposal to have a Global Action Network on Indigenous Food Systems and Traditional Knowledge within the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition.

**With the collaboration of:**







## Annexes

**Annex 1**  
Concept note



Concept Note  
HLESIFS.pdf

**Annex 2**  
Agenda



Agenda HLESIFS  
2018.pdf

**Annex 3**  
Speakers bio



Biographies  
Panelists HLESIFS 20

**Annex 4**  
Participants Lists



List of participants  
HLESIFS 2018.xlsx

**Annex 5**  
Member Countries list



Participants list  
(Member Countries).