

Indigenous Peoples'  
food systems & well-being  
interventions & policies for healthy communities



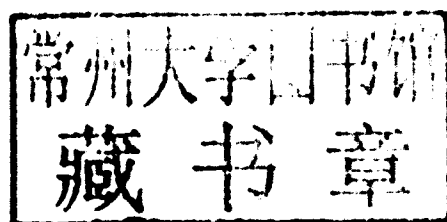
Edited by 🍷 HARRIET V. KUHNLEIN 🍷 BILL ERASMUS 🍷 DINA SPIGELSKI 🍷 BARBARA BURLINGAME



# Indigenous Peoples' food systems & well-being

interventions & policies for healthy communities

Edited by 🌿 HARRIET V. KUHNLEIN 🌿 BILL ERASMUS 🌿 DINA SPIGELSKI 🌿 BARBARA BURLINGAME



Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations  
Centre for Indigenous Peoples' Nutrition and Environment

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Indigenous Peoples have historically faced the denial of their rights, been victims of ancestral knowledge theft and experienced the destruction of their livelihoods. Nevertheless, they still possess rich and diverse cultural knowledge, language, values, traditions, customs, symbolism, spirituality, forms of organization, standards of living, world views and conceptions of development. These components form the basis of their cultural heritage, and allow them to interact with and have a positive influence on the economic, social and political dynamics of any region or country.

Traditional knowledge has been stored in the collective memory of Indigenous Peoples for centuries, and is seen through the day-to-day activities of men and women. This knowledge is expressed through stories, songs, folklore, proverbs, dances, myths, cultural values, beliefs, rituals, community laws, local language, agricultural practices, tools, materials, plant species and animal breeds. In essence, the natural environment is what makes the knowledge of each people unique and different from that of any other.

Indigenous Peoples' greatest and most laborious achievement so far is the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in the belief that Indigenous Peoples' control over the events that affect their lands, territories and resources will maintain and strengthen their institutions, cultures and traditions and promote the development of individuals according to their aspirations and demands.

However, there is still need for targeted strategies and policies that facilitate and foster Indigenous Peoples' use, processing and management of their natural

resources for food security and health through self-determination and autonomy. These policies should be effective at the local, state, national, international and regional levels if they are to be successful; they should stress the importance of using cultural knowledge to develop health promotion activities and improve overall health (mental, emotional, spiritual, physical) and well-being.


I find it important to mention some of the cultural indicators for food security, food sovereignty and sustainable development according to Indigenous Peoples, in order to understand the importance of linkages between traditional knowledge and traditional foods:

1. access to, security for, and integrity of lands, territories, natural resources, sacred sites and ceremonial areas used for traditional food production;
2. abundance, scarcity and/or threats regarding traditional seeds, plant foods and medicines, food animals, and the cultural practices associated with their protection and survival;
3. use and transmission of methods, knowledge, language, ceremonies, dances, prayers, oral histories, stories and songs related to traditional foods and subsistence practices, and the continued use of traditional foods in daily diets;
4. Indigenous Peoples' capacity for adaptability, resilience and/or restoration regarding traditional food use and production in response to changing conditions;
5. Indigenous Peoples' ability to exercise and implement their rights to promote their food sovereignty.

Indigenous Peoples' right to food is inseparable from their rights to land, territories, resources, culture and self-determination. An integral human rights-based approach will open constructive dialogue on what policies, regulations and activities are needed to ensure food security for all, regardless of adaptation. Encouraging meaningful participation by all parties may be the key to building trust and resolving ongoing resource conflicts. Needless to say, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues will address this issue in upcoming sessions.

In brief, the importance of this book arises from its detailed documentation, using a participatory methodology for ten years in different agro-ecological contexts; it provides evidence on the nutrient composition of traditional diets, which supports the Indigenous Peoples' approach.

We hope the book motivates different actors to continue supporting traditional knowledge, to deal jointly with the crisis we face. Ultimately, we hope this book provides the first step in a detailed analysis of Indigenous Peoples' activities and influence in today's world.

 ***Myrna Cunningham***  
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*Nicaragua, 2013*

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I live in the community of Ndilo and am a member of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation. Our territory is adjacent to Yellowknife, the capital of the Northwest Territories, Canada. As National Chief of the Dene Nation and Regional Chief of the Northwest Territories for the Assembly of First Nations my association with the Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems for Health Program has been a privilege and a responsibility, to ensure that the indigenous voice brings the credibility and relevance of this work to Indigenous Peoples everywhere. Having served for many years as Chair of the Governing Board of the Centre for Indigenous Peoples' Nutrition and Environment (CINE) at McGill University I know well the quality of the participatory processes and scientific work of CINE.

The Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems for Health Program is built on networks of partnerships at several levels. Each of the case studies we work with involves a network of partners, and the overall programme is built on these networks, which have met together at least once a year over the last ten years to share experiences and strategies on how to promote and use traditional food systems to enhance health. Each of the chapters in this book reflects understanding and commitment from collaboration among community and academic partners. Together we have worked to define processes and activities and how they are evaluated to improve food systems and health in the communities.


Working with Indigenous Peoples from 12 global regions has given important insights. Similarities in the circumstances faced by Indigenous Peoples are

striking and have no boundaries. Indigenous Peoples have been colonized and are dealing with the forces of assimilation. Their land and resources have been assaulted and access to their own food has been threatened. Vastly different ecosystems and cultures of Indigenous Peoples have followed similar paths through time and development, witnessing similar changes in access to land and food. These include changes in and losses of animals and plants in the ecosystems where Indigenous Peoples live, and changes in health, which are manifested by both undernutrition and overnutrition (obesity) and the accompanying chronic diseases. There has been loss of cultural knowledge with the passing of elders in the circle of life and the imposed imperative to move from expressing the benefits of sharing and assisting others to embracing competition and the wage economy. Throughout this "modernization", Indigenous Peoples have been marginalized, vulnerable, living in extreme poverty and losing their sense of identity and self-determination.

The good news is that the programme described in this book has brought people together to work to improve these patterns. Indigenous Peoples are now expressing their human rights to self-determination and health, and are less isolated and demoralized. Instead, they are becoming increasingly aware that their original diets and local foods are very healthy. Indigenous Peoples have a great deal to share among themselves, and with all humankind. The wisdom inherent to their cultures and ways of knowing and doing demonstrate the all-encompassing connectedness of the land and food to their physical and mental health and spirituality.

Recognizing, understanding and dealing with the benefits and threats to Indigenous Peoples' ecosystems, and the biodiversity provided in their food helps them to know "who they are" and to "feel good about themselves", a confidence that is important to everyone. The way forward is to take things in hand, and work together at the community level with our partners in academia, government and non-governmental organizations, with valuable support from the United Nations.

In this book you will find an inspiring array of methods, processes and activities that can mobilize leaders and their communities. The book will assist them in understanding their ecosystems and, whenever and however possible, using their local food to experience the benefits it gives to cultural expression, food security and health. The book is a natural sequel and partner to the preceding book in this series, *Indigenous Peoples' food systems: the many dimensions of culture, diversity and environment for nutrition and health* (FAO & CINE, 2009).

 **Bill Erasmus**  
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2013*

Writing this section is very difficult for us. There are so many people and agencies to acknowledge that the task is indeed daunting. Each chapter in this book has its own section recognizing contributors in their various roles. So here we note important contributions to the overall effort and to this volume.

Our work is grounded in understanding Indigenous Peoples' food systems for their scientific and social qualities, beginning with the very basics of scientific identification, nutrient composition and cultural value of the many foods contained in the rural ecosystems where Indigenous Peoples live. We have been fortunate to have the engagement of many interdisciplinary scholars within our team who have worked with us to focus on specific unique communities of indigenous people. This breadth in disciplines makes the research and its conclusions meaningful for recognizing and promoting Indigenous Peoples' food systems from many perspectives. Our results lead us to challenge the international community at all levels to give these food systems and the people who depend on them the respect and credibility they deserve for providing nutrition and good health. Therefore, we gratefully thank all of our partners for bringing this effort to fruition, and we also sincerely appreciate those who have responded to our work.

We thank McGill University and staff of the Centre for Indigenous Peoples' Nutrition and Environment (CINE) who have given immeasurably of their resources and time to undertake the work of the programme, including by providing the necessary management and office facilities. Several chapters have been developed

with those who are or have been part of McGill/CINE as professors, affiliated members, graduate students and staff, or who are in leadership roles through the Governing Board of CINE. Kp-studios.com of Anacortes, Washington, United States of America provided most of the excellent photographs from the case study areas.

We thank the members of the International Union of Nutritional Sciences (IUNS) Task Force on Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems and Nutrition, recently renamed the Task Force on Traditional, Indigenous, and Cultural Food and Nutrition, who helped with the conceptual planning of the programme that has been implemented over the last ten years. Several lead authors of chapters in this volume were members of the task force and contributors to the meetings and satellite meetings of the International Congresses of Nutrition, sponsored by IUNS in Vienna, Durban and Bangkok in 2001, 2005 and 2009, respectively. IUNS and its executives have given exceptional support to the concepts of the task force and this programme, which evolved within it.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has been a pillar of support for our work. In providing leadership for the publication process of our series of three books dedicated to the programme, FAO has given editorial and typesetting services as well as outstanding advice on aesthetic qualities in crafting the publication. FAO has provided Internet versions of the books and distributed hard copies free of charge through the United Nations publications distribution system, including FAO's regional offices, and university libraries. In addition,



FAO provided initial funding to kick-start several of the case studies described here. Case study leaders have presented their data and results in several venues sponsored by FAO. Without doubt, the world's attention to issues surrounding Indigenous Peoples' food systems, and our work in this realm have been fostered and promoted by FAO.

The Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center on the shores of beautiful Lake Como in Italy provided grants to bring our team members together on three occasions, for meetings to stimulate our thinking about ways to make progress during the programme. This was essential for our within-programme communications and provided stimulation that was most welcome. We all extend a warm "thank you" to The Rockefeller Foundation for these opportunities in 2004, 2007 and 2008, and to the staff at the Bellagio Center for their unforgettably beautiful setting, hospitality, facilities and efficient service.

Primary funding for the research grants based from CINE was given by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research through the Institute of Aboriginal Peoples' Health, the Institute of Population and Public Health and the Institute of Nutrition, Metabolism and Diabetes. Funding for research and conference grants was given by the Canadian International Development Agency and the International Development Research Centre. Each of the case study intervention and evaluation efforts in this book gained additional funding from other agencies in the country concerned; these agencies are acknowledged in each chapter. We thank the Ernst Göhner Stiftung for assistance in the final months of preparing the publication, and for funds to prepare the videographic documentation of case studies at [www.indigenousnutrition.org](http://www.indigenousnutrition.org).

It is the people in the communities participating in the research described here to whom we are greatly indebted. Their wisdom, encouragement and enthusiasm emboldened the academic partners and led all of us to make the chapters reflect their thinking, their perspectives and their work. Thousands of Indigenous Peoples of all ages in seven countries are represented in this book. They built the knowledge base represented in all of the publications from the

programme. Hundreds of community associates, many of whom were volunteers, contributed and continue to contribute to the ongoing activities in each of the case studies.


The collective intention of chapter authors is to dedicate this book to children in communities of Indigenous Peoples, who will continue to face challenges to protecting their traditional knowledge and use of their local foods for physical, social and environmental health. We know that our books will give them power and strength.

 **Harriet V. Kuhnlein**


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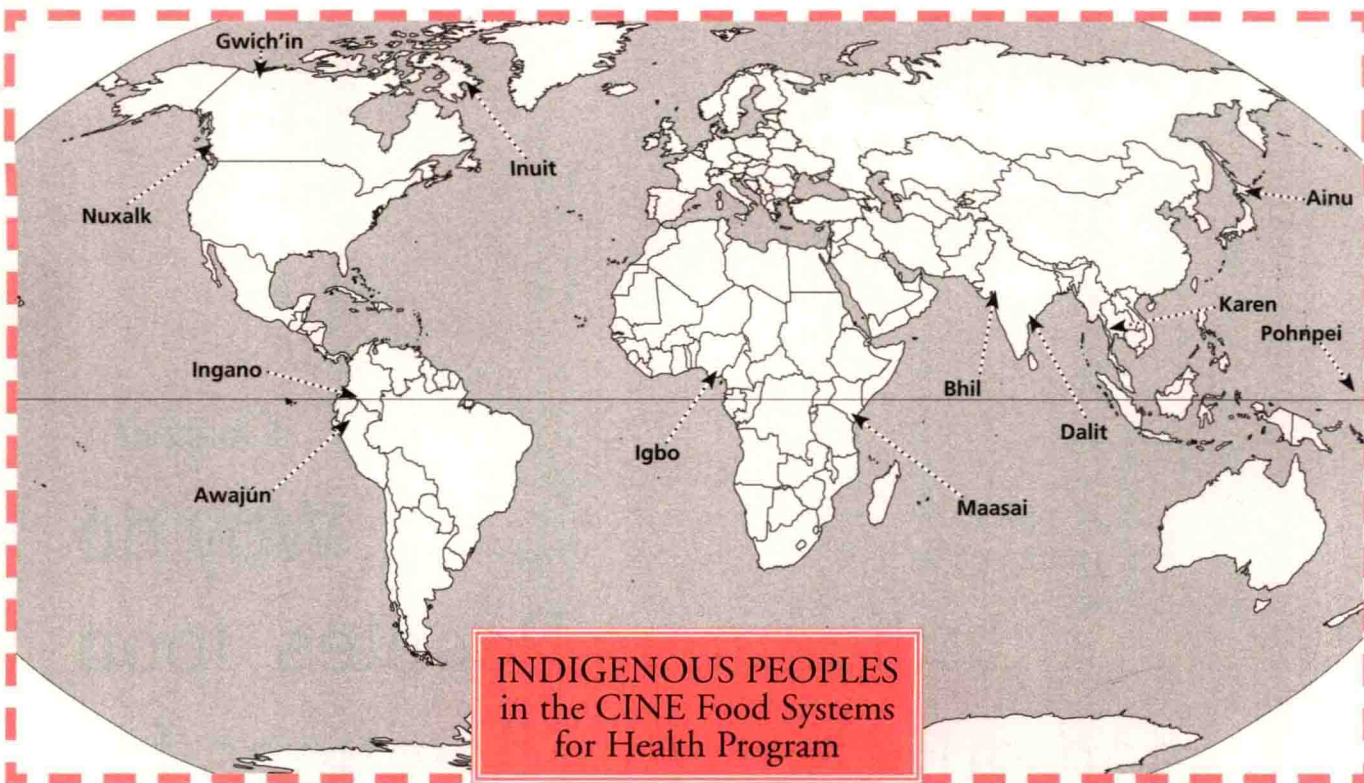


## Chapter 1

# Why do Indigenous Peoples' food and nutrition interventions for health promotion and policy need special consideration?

 HARRIET V. KUHNLEIN<sup>1</sup>  BARBARA BURLINGAME<sup>2</sup>





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