



2.6. Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems

1. What is the idea?

Indigenous Peoples Food Systems have been resilient and sustainable for centuries; they have been designed, managed, and functioning within a cultural context that involves a complex arrangement of social, technological, ecological, economic (trade & marketing), governance, land tenure, horizontal decision making, and reflecting their ways of processing information as well as constructing, and passing on knowledge to new generations. This biocultural complexity explains the role of Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems in preserving and enhancing biodiversity, mitigating climate change, controlling soil erosion, and sustaining global ecological processes that benefit the planet. Nevertheless, the resilience and the knowledge that supports Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems are being lost rapidly. Immediate policy interventions are thus needed to prevent their total loss.

Indigenous Peoples Food Systems are still in the position of offering a great potential for the design and management of sustainable food systems, suitable for ad hoc conditions. In this regard, two important elements must be considered: 1) Financial support for intercultural research and capacity building through education and training on site, along with infrastructure; 2) Effective recognition of the leadership, governance, ways of knowing, to manage their territories, lands, resources and to significantly participate in the decision making for element 1.

2. Why is it needed?

The combination of external and internal drivers compounded with global challenges such as climate change, migration, soil erosion, loss of biodiversity, etc., all of them threatening food systems worldwide, have created conditions of unsustainable food systems to both conventional and Indigenous. Therefore, there is an urgent need to create innovative designs and management of food systems ad hoc for different environmental and cultural contexts; the emerging sustainable systems must consider cultural factors, not only a dominant paradigm.

Conventional practices have been introduced into traditional systems, increasing negative effects on the environment, people, and erosion of knowledge and social fabric. In recent years this scenario explains the reduction of Carbon sequestration, loss of effective governance, increase in migration and human diseases, in Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems. Creating viable alternatives is thus urgent, not only for the official 476 million Indigenous Peoples' but also for all humanity.

Although conventional and traditional food systems rest on and are driven by different cultural values, Indigenous Peoples' Knowledge Systems together with science, in an intercultural process, can provide the needed conceptual and methodological means to transition from non-sustainable to sustainable food systems.

3. Why will it work?

It will work because there will be acknowledgment and understanding of the cultural driving values in the design and management of sustainable food systems, including ecological, technological, social, economic, etc., factors. Because there will be carried under an intercultural approach, not only multicultural. Because the design and management of an ad hoc food system, will result from a process of co-creating knowledge,

combining Indigenous/local with science. It will work because the work will be performed by multi/inter disciplinary teams. It will work because no before a global strategy had been implemented in a systematic and large scale, in terms of number of farmers benefited and enough to have a significant impact on environmental and cultural degradation. It will work because makes sense and is a game changer. It will work because to continue the present trend, food systems will collapse along with the environment, biodiversity, societies, cultures, and economies.

4. How will it work?

Assuming that there is an international trust fund to finance research, training, and extension to create sustainable food systems, under a governance system that gives primacy to Indigenous Peoples and their values in the decision-making process, the idea is first to conduct pilot experiences in at least one site or institution per continent where a conspicuous conventional and traditional food system are selected. A team of multi/inter disciplinary scientists would work with local knowledgeable Indigenous Peoples'. Together would develop a research program based on a diagnosis of the systems, in alliance with a local university or civic organizations for incorporating students, faculty, communities and using their facilities. After a period of three to five years, with continuous reports, a second phase would be prepared aiming at training farmers and future researchers and to escalate the impact of the findings. A third phase will be to institutionalize a network of international centres for research and training on site, either inserted in a local university or independent.

5. What efforts are already underway and how does this solution cluster complement/add value?

There are several examples in different regions. For instance, under the Mātauranga Māori (Māori traditional knowledge and science), the Māori People has developed a successful International Agribusiness Program with the world's first Indigenous organic certification. The Yucatec Maya people has developed successful business based on cultural principles, this is a process documented by the Universidad Intercultural Maya de Quintana Roo under the name of intercultural business to scale up agroecology. Mexico has a system of intercultural universities with programs dedicated to food systems in indigenous territories; because of the interaction between scientists and local knowledgeable people, many indigenous communities have not only recuperated and revalue their knowledge but also developed innovations. Agroecology in California helped significantly the strawberry small farm system, where many indigenous immigrants work, to convert from conventional to organic in times when the pesticide methyl bromide was forbidden back in the 1980's.

Those examples of success are only a small proof of the great potential that the ideas presented in this cluster can become. Innovation is much needed in both conventional and traditional agriculture; the innovation needed to design and manage sustainable food systems should also be the result of innovative thinking. This is the potential of financing the co-creation of knowledge with an intercultural approach. Interculturality is the result of a process in which different ways of processing information and constructing knowledge, where cosmogony of a culture plays a critical role (e.g. scientific and Indigenous ways) can coexist under a safe environment, allowing conditions for new, innovative, knowledge to emerge; this new co-created knowledge is intercultural, benefiting not only one culture, but humanity.