Indigenous Food Culture

Territory, Tradition and Transformation of Food Systems in the Americas

Edited by Rodrigo Yáñez Rojas

IDRC · CRDI Canada

RIMISP

“We are eagles; we care for the chicks. And just like an eagle that ascends to the skies and from there observes the landscapes, we have our own vision. We are like an eagle; we sense where we come from and where we have taken flight. from Pucallpa to Lima, from Lima to Ecuador, and now we are in Yunguilla, like an eagle, seeing everything from where we are gathered. That is our vision.”

Marisol Shariva Pérez,
Asháninka from Peru.

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Prologue

Weaving Wisdom Across the Americas: Indigenous Food Systems, Knowledge, and Flavors

By María Paula Espejo[1] and Sandra Gagnon[2]

Why tell an interwoven story about the Indigenous peoples of Latin America and Canada?

When knowledge is shared and respected across geographies, worldviews, and generations, it becomes a powerful force for transformation. This book is a testament to that belief: a collection of stories, reflections, and recipes meant to be enjoyed with family and community. It brings together voices, memories, visions, and flavors from Indigenous communities at both ends of the continent, two regions often perceived as distant, yet deeply connected by ancestral wisdom and a shared aspiration for a just, balanced, and respectful coexistence.

The commitment of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) to the transformation of food systems is grounded in equity, sustainability, and inclusion. Along this path, the voices of Indigenous peoples are not only important, but essential. For generations, Indigenous communities have nourished themselves and their territories through systems rooted in harmony with nature, collective well-being, and a profound understanding of the relational fabric that connects people, land, and knowledge. Their food systems have coevolved with local ecologies and cultures, continuously adapting to external disturbances, and have proven to be extraordinarily resilient. They offer vital lessons for addressing today's global challenges, from climate change and biodiversity loss to inequality and food insecurity.

From the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit of Canada to the Indigenous communities of the Andes and the Amazon, these food systems and worldviews endure. They are living repositories of wisdom preserved across generations. Today, Indigenous peoples are leading efforts to reclaim sovereignty over their diets, economies, and life plans. They are living stewards of knowledge about biodiversity, agroecology, and climate resilience, transmitted from generation to generation. Their knowledge is not a relic of the past; it is vibrant, evolving wisdom that is essential for building our present and shaping a better, more sustainable future for all of us.

Why reflect on Indigenous food systems?

The world stands at a crossroads. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, amid intensifying climate disruptions and geopolitical instability, our food systems have revealed both their fragility and their centrality to human and planetary health. Despite this, dominant approaches to food production and distribution remain extractive, unequal, and disconnected from the cultural and ecological contexts in which food is cultivated and consumed. These systems often neglect the working and living conditions of small-scale producers, reinforcing cycles of inequality and vulnerability.

Exploring Indigenous food systems—especially from a comparative perspective—invites us to recognize the commonalities among different geographies and to affirm the equal value of diverse knowledge systems. It urges us to question our assumptions about hunger, malnutrition, and inequality, and to reconsider how we address these pressing issues at a time when climate-related crises are intensifying.

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Indigenous food systems chart a different path—relational rather than transactional. A path in which food is medicine, knowledge is shared, and care for the land is inseparable from care for the community. Recognizing the value of these systems means acknowledging the rights of Indigenous peoples to lead the shaping of policies and practices that affect their lives. These systems offer not only alternative models of food production and governance, but also profound cultural wealth, flavors, and meanings. Recipes are stories, and meals are cultural heritage; they are alive to be learned from and shared. In Latin America, Indigenous organizations are leading powerful movements for food sovereignty and agroecology. They are reclaiming ancestral crops, protecting seed diversity, recovering traditional culinary practices, and restoring degraded landscapes. Their work is grounded equally in cultural identity and regeneration. And in northern Canada, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities are promoting food sovereignty through policy and research initiatives that center Indigenous knowledge and strive to protect both cultural identity and nutritional well-being.

These are not isolated efforts, but rather interconnected struggles and aspirations. This book honors those connections, showing how similar the challenges are, how current the demands remain, and how powerful it is to listen and learn across contexts and lived experiences throughout the continent.

Why a book like this? Why now?

This book arises from a unique and timely initiative: an exchange of knowledge between Indigenous leaders and knowledge holders from Latin America and Canada, supported by the IDRC. The objective was simple yet profound: to create a space for stories, perceptions, and dreams to flow across territories. It emerged from a convergence of motivations: the growing recognition of Indigenous rights and contributions in Canada, especially following the painful truths that have come to light regarding the residential school system; the increasing leadership of Indigenous organizations in Latin America in climate action and the transformation of food systems; and the IDRC's strategic commitment to inclusive and resilient food systems.

Through dialogue and shared experience, the participants in the creation of this book explored the deep connections between climate, culture, knowledge, and food systems. They identified common challenges—the marginalization and erosion of traditional practices, limited access to land and markets, and the repercussions of environmental and economic crises—while also highlighting shared opportunities, such as intergenerational learning, rural-urban partnerships, the revitalization of ancestral knowledge, and the power of community-based innovation.

This book is more than a compilation of experiences and recipes. It is an offering. A step toward amplifying Indigenous voices and visions. A call to policymakers, researchers, and practitioners to listen, learn, and act in solidarity. It urges us to value knowledge in a horizontal and non-hierarchical manner. We therefore invite readers to join this conversation around the table, where everyone has a seat and every flavor tells a story.

We present here the result of the collective effort and creative collaboration of our partners with yours, which has been designed to help us diversify our crops and diets and deepen the bonds that unite us with all peoples. It is an invitation to celebrate our differences as sources of strength for building more inclusive, healthy, and resilient food systems.

For the IDRC, this book reflects a broader vision: to deepen the interregional and intercultural exchange of knowledge, explore how efforts in Latin America resonate with communities in Canada, and lay the groundwork for future initiatives that center Indigenous leadership and wisdom in transforming food systems.

Ultimately, this book invites us to reflect on the value of listening, with humility and hope, to different languages, landscapes, and lived experiences. To address the great challenges of our time, we must go beyond technical solutions and embrace ethical, cultural, and ecological paradigms that restore balance between people and the planet, between the individual and the collective, between the past and the future.

The stories within these pages remind us that such paradigms already exist. They are alive in the food systems of Indigenous peoples—resilient, deeply rooted, and full of possibilities. And in the spirit of traditional generosity, they are shared with the world through stories, practices, and flavors.

Introduction

Indigenous Food systems: a Gathering of Voices and Foods

By Rodrigo Yáñez,[3] Camila Migueletto[4] and Diego Milos[5]

This book is the final expression of an exchange of experiences and knowledge among members of the Asháninka, Aymara, Kayambi, Cree, Inuit, Náhuatl, Maya Q'eqchi', Métis, Misak, and Wolastoqey peoples and nations, spanning the American continent from northern Canada to the Amazon. They gathered for the first time in May 2024 in the cloud forests of Yunguilla, Ecuador, at the meeting titled "Transformation of Food Systems: Perspectives from Peoples and Nations of the Americas."[6] It began as a conversation about the transformation of Indigenous food systems in the region, which continued to be enriched over time through individual or group interviews, the exchange of ideas via social networks, conversations about traditional dishes with various community members, and other forms of collective reflection.

With funding from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and coordination by Rimisp – Latin American Center for Rural Development, this book seeks to highlight the elements that characterize contemporary Indigenous food systems, their potentialities and the challenges they face, what they mean for each people, the spaces of adaptation and rediscovery that are emerging, the historical changes in the production and gathering of their foods, and the flavors that shape a great diversity of cultures.

These issues are framed within a line of work linked to the transformations of food systems, strongly marked by processes of industrialization and the impacts of climate change. In this context, Indigenous peoples inhabiting rural territories are highly vulnerable, as evidenced by rates of poverty, exclusion, and food insecurity. However, in a context where global food systems are threatened in terms of productivity and sustainability, Indigenous food practices and knowledge are increasingly recognized, documented, and valued on a global scale, although they are not always fully understood.

Indigenous knowledge proposes another relationship with nature, one that directly questions the standardized practices promoted by numerous agricultural extension centers across the American continent as a legacy of the Green Revolution.

Through various formats—interviews, speeches, recipes, and analyses of perspectives on the past, present, and future—this book gives voice to Indigenous peoples so that they may convey their perspective to the reader. What distinguishes their food systems from an industrialized or fully open one? In what ways do they make selective and moderate use of new technologies in their productive processes? And how can these diverse practices, which might commonly be viewed as "backward," shed light today on how to adapt food systems to the major transformations they are undergoing because of the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and pollution?

Indigenous food systems are still here. The book demonstrates in various ways their vitality, their central role in articulating Indigenous cultures, and that, despite centuries of transformations, there has been no assimilation, nor overcoming, nor definitive replacement by other productive, marketing, and consumption practices. Perhaps—and this is suggested throughout the different texts—what Indigenous food systems contribute to the world is their diversity, achieved in coexistence with other food systems, sometimes with difficulties, not without tensions, but whose persistence over time is a clear sign of strength.

Perhaps, what Indigenous food systems contribute to the world is their diversity, achieved in coexistence with other food systems.

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4 Research assistant at Rimisp.

5 Social anthropologist.

6 Following the meeting, the document Agenda for the Transformation of Food Systems: Perspectives and Actions of Indigenous Peoples and Nations of the Americas (Marreros et al., 2024) was published.

Rimisp, in its nearly 40-year history, has defended the territorial approach as its interpretive framework for supporting rural localities. One of the central pillars of this approach is that territorial actors themselves should lead processes of social, economic, and institutional transformation to achieve better living standards. From this perspective, the book takes as its starting point the voice and reality of the actors, which prevails throughout all the chapters. We set out to write a book collectively, where the testimonies would narrate the history of food systems, without prioritizing a legal, political, agricultural, or culturalist perspective. Taking a stand from one of these viewpoints would have entailed interpreting the recorded material differently, perhaps standardizing processes that are rich in their diversity. Thus, and drawing on a beautiful approach by Vinciane Despret,[7] the aim of showcasing so much life was precisely to multiply worlds, and thereby reveal the various ways in which food is being thought about and experienced on our American continent.

The Indigenous situation in Canada is not the same as in Latin America. There are significant material and institutional differences between the peoples of the North and those of the South. Dialogue and negotiation with the Canadian state have been established at the federal level, through direct treaties between the peoples and the provinces. In contrast, among Indigenous peoples of Latin American countries, Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) is the main legal safeguard for promoting the rights of peoples to maintain their ways of life and their institutions.

Multiple similarities can be observed among the various peoples and nations of the continent, and they are reflected in the chapters of the book. Dispossession, historical exclusion, and an unresolved debt with the States are also manifested in productive and food-related practices. A concept that appears in various forms is that of food sovereignty, which encapsulates the right of a society to define its own policies and strategies for food production and consumption. One of the questions posed by the protagonists of this book is: traditional Indigenous foodways still exist, but are they still sovereign?

7 Despret, V. (2022). Living like a bird. Ways of doing and thinking about territories. Cactus.

Thus, sowing, cultivating, harvesting, gathering, hunting, cooking, and sharing a meal, throughout the pages, are forged as a space of resistance, of cultural affirmation in a fast-paced and open world, where Indigenous communities are losing certain anchor points, but are also finding and recovering others. Producing what is eaten, eating in the way of the ancestors, is a way of being and belonging, and it is this that can offer a perspective for the future.

The book is structured as follows:

Chapter 1
Traditions and Food Sovereignty: Agricultural Practices of Resistance among Indigenous Peoples

Addresses the concept of food sovereignty and how certain protective measures, such as Indigenous laws, have aided the preservation of Indigenous peoples' lifeways. The authors argue that this type of tool can contribute to the transformation of food systems that is required to confront the challenges posed by the demographic explosion of recent decades, as well as the transformations in the environment, which affect rural agricultural sectors, but also urban groups of food consumers.

Chapter 2
Elements for Understanding the Transformation of Indigenous Food Systems

Is a synthesis of a series of interviews conducted with the protagonists of this book. From the north to the south of the Americas, we discuss what the traditional foods and preparations are and what they consist of, the culinary objects and utensils used by each people, the causes they perceive as most significant in the transformation of their food systems, how these transformations connect with current Indigenous diets, the impacts of climate change, and the strategies they are implementing to ensure the sustainability of Indigenous foodways. Finally, we address why they consider it important to continue discussing Indigenous food systems.

Chapter 3
Sowing, Diversifying, and Reflecting Collectively to Adapt to Climate Change

Presents the discourse of Alejandro Marreros, a representative of the Nahuatl people, who addresses a community regarding the impoverishment and loss of ancestral knowledge and customs in many communities of Puebla, Mexico. Marreros emphasizes the importance of conversation and collective reflection to confront symbolic violence and to reclaim a way of life based on food self-sufficiency. Life projects are the strategy for this, and entail a collective reflection on what it means to cultivate and harvest when the climate has changed so drastically. The only way to resist and adapt is through dialogue, developing a shared collective intelligence.

Chapter 4

Ken Paul, a Wolastoqey representative: *"If we do not maintain our natural food systems, we will not have a habitat in which to live".*

Drawing on various experiences, Ken Paul delves into the cultural and nutritional significance of traditional foods for his community, such as potatoes, moose meat, fiddlehead ferns, salmon, and lobster. Through the relationship with these resources and seasonal cycles, he high-lights the importance of the well-being of both the communities and the territory, which is constantly threatened by industrial agriculture, dam construction, pollution, and the legacy of colonization. The interview also addresses global sustainability challenges and the role of Indigenous knowledge systems, whose long-term perspective, rooted in ancestral pasts, possesses a potential that can contribute to the sustainability of food systems on a global scale.

Chapter 5

Agenda for the Transformation of Food Systems: Perspectives and Actions of Indigenous Peoples and Nations of the Americas

Synthesizes the dialogues and reflections of the Indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas who participated in the Yunguilla, Ecuador, meeting in 2024, developing a joint agenda on Indigenous food systems. The text highlights the value of ancestral knowledge and practices present in Indigenous foodways in the face of the challenges they encounter. The agenda is structured around four cross-cutting themes: interdependence between culture and biodiversity; health and cultural nutrition; rights and political advocacy; and challenges and opportunities in a globalized context. It concludes with a proposal for strategies and opportunities for strengthening Indigenous food systems, prioritizing collaboration among diverse actors and Indigenous leadership to preserve their biocultural diversity.

Chapter 6

Recipes

Includes a set of Recipes of culinary dishes representative of Indigenous peoples. These traditional Indigenous dishes constitute a brief repertoire selected by various peoples who participated in the creation of the book and showcase the richness and flavors of Indigenous cuisine. The recipes detail ingredients, preparation, and modes of consumption, many of which may seem unusual to those living in cities or in other regions. The diversity of their components and the importance of their social dimension are highlighted. These are forms of knowledge transmitted through practice, enjoyed in community and during celebrations. Each dish is a testament to the cultural heritage of some Latin American Indigenous peoples.

Finally, on behalf of Rimisp, we would like to thank the protagonists of this book for sharing their stories with us and future readers. Each chapter presents only an excerpt from multiple conversations that touched on many intimate topics. Our thanks to Alejandro Marreros, Andrés Tombé, Aurora Panoso, Atilio Chauca López, Brenda Xol, Eleodoro Baldiviezo, Ernesto Tzi Chub, Kelly Ulcuango, Ken Paul, Lynn Blackwood, María Quispe, Marisol Lerdo, Mario Siquic, Marisol Shariva Pérez, Modesta Acarapi, Nicolás Marreros, Priscilla Settee, and Shannon Udy.

CHAPTER ONE

Traditions and Food Sovereignty: Agricultural Resistance Practices of Indigenous Peoples

By Kelly Ulcuango[8] and Andrés Tombé[9]

8 Representative of the Kayambi people. Professor and director of the Agroecology and Food Sovereignty Program, Amawtay Wasi University, Ecuador.

9 Representative of the Misak people. Researcher, National University of Colombia.

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to define their own policies and strategies for the production, distribution, and consumption of food, with the aim of ensuring that it is healthy and culturally appropriate, as well as sustainably produced. Indigenous peoples have played a fundamental role in the promotion and defense of food sovereignty, implementing ancestral agricultural practices and strategies of resistance in the face of contemporary challenges. These communities have developed productive systems based on crop diversification, seed conservation, and sustainable land management. Nevertheless, factors such as climate change, the expansion of agribusiness, and the lack of adequate public policies have put these practices and their food security at risk.

Indigenous peoples face challenges related to the right to food that is their own, decent, and sustainable. Although legal frameworks differ from country to country, struggles for food sovereignty, territorial defense, and seed conservation are shared across many Indigenous territories on the continent. Communities such as the Misak, Nasa, Wayuu, Embera, Kayambi, Asháninka, Náhuatl, Maya Q'eqchi', among others, have developed proposals for agro-food resistance based on ancestral practices, the recovery of native seeds, and community organization in the face of the impacts of armed conflict, extractivism, and state neglect.

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Food sovereignty:

the Indigenous strategy

Ecuador's 2008 Constitution incorporates the concept of "Buen Vivir" or Sumak Kawsay, a vision of life in harmony with nature and the community, deeply rooted in the Indigenous worldview. This constitutional framework recognizes food sovereignty as a fundamental right, allowing communities to define their food and agricultural policies without external interference. Food sovereignty is protected under Article 281 of the Constitution, which establishes measures to promote agroecology, protect biodiversity, and guarantee access to land and productive resources.

Indigenous organizations, such as the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) and the Latin American Coordination of Rural Organizations (CLOC-Vía Campesina), have been key actors in promoting policies that strengthen food sovereignty. These organizations advocate for the protection of native seeds, the promotion of agroecological practices, and resistance to industrial agricultural models that threaten biodiversity and traditional practices. They also have participated actively in the formulation of laws such as the Organic Law of Agrobiodiversity, Seeds, and Promotion of Sustainable Agriculture, which seeks to protect traditional knowledge and guarantee farmers' autonomy in the face of trans-national corporations.

As in Ecuador, Indigenous peoples in Colombia have developed proposals for resistance in response to the loss of their traditional food systems. Although the 1991 Political Constitution recognizes the pluriethnic and multicultural character of the country and grants autonomy to Indigenous territories, public policies regarding food sovereignty remain fragmented and, in many cases, disconnected from territorial realities. One of the greatest challenges has been the replacement of ancestral food systems with assistance-based food distribution models, which has led to a loss of traditional knowledge, a decrease in agrobiodiversity, and economic dependency.

In this context, some state institutions have begun to incorporate more territorial and inclusive approaches. The Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF), for example, has implemented the Local Purchasing Strategy, an initiative aimed at strengthening the country's food security and sovereignty. This strategy aims to support the development and entrepreneurship of local families and communities; comply with Law 2046 of 2020, which promotes the public procurement of food produced by small and medium-sized producers; and advance the objectives of the National Development Plan 2022–2026. Although it still faces challenges in implementation, this strategy represents an opportunity to link institutional supply with the production of healthy, sustainable, and culturally relevant food, thereby strengthening peasant and Indigenous economies.

Colombia recently adopted the Public Policy on Agroecology (Resolution 0085 of 2024), a legal milestone that recognizes agroecology as a means for transforming food systems. This policy integrates ancestral and scientific knowledge, fosters agrobiodiversity, promotes sustainable production, and strengthens community processes such as agroecological schools, participatory guarantee systems, and food sovereignty. Its nationwide implementation aims to support peasant, Indigenous, and Afro-descendant communities in the agroecological transition, promoting buen vivir, fair trade, and respect for life and territories.

Agricultural resistance practices of Indigenous peoples

Indigenous communities in Latin America have developed and maintained ancestral agricultural practices that not only ensure food production, but also preserve biodiversity and strengthen cultural identity. These practices represent forms of resistance in the face of agricultural homogenization and the loss of traditional knowledge. In the Andean region, among the most relevant strategies are the chakra system, the conservation of native seeds, and, in the Amazonian region, agroforestry systems.

Spirituality also plays a fundamental role in Indigenous peoples' relationship with the land, as agricultural rituals, offerings, and ceremonies are an essential part of food production, promoting a holistic view of nature. Ceremonies of gratitude to the Pachamama (Mother Earth) are held before each planting and harvest; lunar cycles and the teachings of wise men and women are considered when determining the appropriate moments for sowing and harvesting, thus maintaining a balance between nature and agricultural production.

THE ANDEAN CHAKRA

The Andean chakra is an integrated agricultural system implemented by the Kichwa peoples of the Ecuadorian highlands. This system is characterized by crop diversification, land rotation, and the use of agroecological techniques that maintain soil fertility and resilience against pests and diseases. The chakra is not only a production unit, but also a space for the transmission of knowledge and cultural practices, where new generations are taught how to cultivate the land.

Among the Indigenous peoples of Colombia, who share roots and cultural ties with the Andean and Mesoamerican peoples, ancestral gardens also occupy a central place in community life. For example, for the Misak people, the yatul (chakra) is much more than a garden or production plot. It is a holistic space where diverse foods are cultivated, native seeds are conserved, ancestral knowledge is transmitted, and the spiritual relationship with Mother Earth is strengthened. The yatul is governed by principles of complementarity, reciprocity, and balance, functioning as a true unit of life where sustainable agricultural practices converge with the Misak worldview. Its management, both collective and familial, is a form of cultural resistance against hegemonic agricultural models and a cornerstone in the construction of food sovereignty rooted in territories.

RESCUE AND CONSERVATION OF NATIVE SEEDS

The conservation of native seeds is an essential strategy of resistance. Indigenous communities have established seed banks and exchange networks to preserve local varieties adapted to specific conditions. For example, in the province of Cotopaxi, in Ecuador, several communities have recovered ancestral potato varieties, not only contributing to agricultural diversity, but also strengthening local food security and resilience in the face of climate change.

In Colombia, this process has been driven by the Free Seeds Network of Colombia, a broad and decentralized space that brings together peasant, Indigenous, and Afro-Colombian communities, as well as social, academic, and cultural organizations, around the defense of creole and native seeds. This network promotes the recovery, conservation, and free circulation of seeds in response to policies that favor privatization, the use of GMOs, and corporate control. Through regional nodes and action areas, it strengthens food autonomy, agroecology, and sovereignty in territories such as the department of Cauca in Colombia. Communities such as the Misak, Nasa, and Ampiuile peoples have succeeded in conserving more than 70 varieties of native potatoes, adapted to their páramo and high Andean ecosystems, integrating ancestral knowledge, intercultural education, and climate resilience strategies.

Indigenous communities have established seed banks and exchange networks to preserve local varieties adapted to specific conditions.

AGROFORESTRY PRACTICES IN THE AMAZON

In the Amazonian region, Indigenous communities such as the Kichwa of Pastaza implement agroforestry systems that combine food crops with native forest species. These practices promote environmental sustainability, economic autonomy, and biodiversity conservation. In addition, they strengthen the role of women in the local economy and in the transmission of traditional knowledge.

Responses of resistance

Despite the progress made, Indigenous peoples face significant challenges, such as pressure from agribusiness, climate change, and public policies that do not always favor family farming, let alone the recognition of Indigenous knowledge systems. In response, they have developed resistance strategies based on their worldview and community organization, including the defense of territory, intercultural education, and political advocacy regarding the formulation of agrarian laws.

In Ecuador, CONAIE has led massive mobilizations against extractive projects that threaten ancestral territories and biodiversity, and demands recognition of territorial rights and respect for free, prior, and informed consent. On several occasions, it has filed lawsuits before the Constitutional Court to halt mining and oil concessions on Indigenous lands.

In the field of intercultural education, CONAIE and the Confederation of Peoples of the Kichwa Nationality of Ecuador (ECUARUNARI) have promoted the creation of community schools with pedagogical models based on ancestral knowledge, strengthening the transmission of knowledge regarding food sovereignty and agroecology. The Intercultural University of Indigenous Nationalities and Peoples Amawtay Wasi, which includes subjects related to sustainable agriculture and food autonomy in its curriculum, is an example of this initiative.

Regarding political advocacy, CONAIE has actively participated in the drafting of regulations such as the Organic Law on Agrobiodiversity, Seeds, and Promotion of Sustainable Agriculture, which promotes the protection of native seeds and access to credit and resources for small-scale farmers. It also has promoted initiatives to ban transgenic crops and has advocated for the creation of community markets that favor direct marketing between producers and consumers, reducing dependence on agribusiness.

In Colombia, as in Ecuador, Indigenous peoples fight for the recognition of their knowledge and the right to decide how and with what they nourish themselves. People in various territories and organizations, such as the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC), the Organization of Indigenous Peoples of the Colombian Amazon (OPIAC), the Tayrona Indigenous Confederation (CIT), the Indigenous Authorities of Colombia and Gobierno Mayor (AICO), the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC), and the Movement of Indigenous Authorities of the Southwest (AISO), are also developing processes that engage with these forms of resistance and create new alternatives rooted in the diversity of seeds, languages, and cultural practices.

In Colombia, as in Ecuador, Indigenous peoples fight for the recognition of their knowledge and the right to decide how and with what they nourish themselves.

CHAPTER TWO

Elements for Understanding the Transformation of Indigenous Food Systems

By Rodrigo Yáñez, Karla Bayres[10] and Camila Migueletto

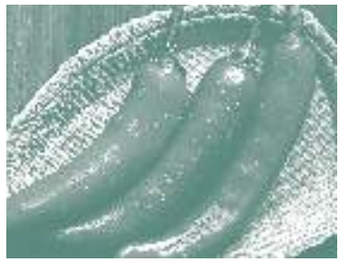
A synthesis of conversations held with representatives of various Indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas, from the Inuit people in Canada to the Asháninka people in the Peruvian Amazon is presented in this chapter. Using various methods, such as workshops and group and individual interviews, this material was collected between May 2024 and June 2025. The conversations aimed to identify and characterize Indigenous food systems, the foods and traditional elements that distinguish them, and the causes people consider most important in the transformation of their food systems. We also inquired into how these transformations connect with contemporary Indigenous diets, the impacts of climate change, and the strategies they are implementing to sustain Indigenous foodways. These are some of the reasons why they consider it important to continue discussing Indigenous food systems.

10 Research assistant at Rimisp.

Traditional preparations:

the flavor of cultures

The continuity of traditional Indigenous dishes over time is related to the transmission of knowledge through ancient recipes that are taught from generation to generation. This transfer of knowledge occurs mainly in family and community spaces, where knowledge of ingredients and preparation is linked to grandparents and members of a genealogical tree that stretches across time. This is evident, for example, when discussing the traditional Métis bread (bannock):



"It is one of the first traditional foods I learned about. It is a recipe I make with my grandmother all the time, and each family prepares it in their own way. I think it is something that definitely everyone should try."

Shannon Udy,

métis, Canada

Other examples of ancestral recipes considered representative because of their long history, also connected to the territories where Indigenous peoples have established their lives, are the fish chipa with cassava asada[11] for the Asháninka people, and the uchujaku[12] (chili pepper gruel) and tzawar mishki[13] (agave syrup with barley rice) for the Kichwa Kayambi people.

Although younger generations preserve these traditions and know the ingredients, seasonings, timing, fermentations, and cooking methods, changing contexts and connections with the rest of the world, among other factors, mean that the loss of some food knowledge is a risk. All interviewees, who represent various peoples and nations of the American region, comment that from the cultivation and gathering of species to the preparation of dishes, these practices are strongly threatened by the changes experienced in recent decades.

For this reason, Indigenous peoples are paying special attention to traditional food systems and are striving to ensure their continuity over time. This work is consciously promoted and carried out in different ways with the aim of contributing to the revitalization of traditional diets and the improvement of Indigenous nutrition.

"I worked on the dish known as pit barbecue or buried barbecue.[14] This is a dish that, according to what was discussed with a community member, used to be prepared by his grandfather. His father continued to prepare this barbecue, and this is how the man learned. Now his children are also getting involved and know how to prepare it."

Nicolás Marreros,

náhuatl, Mexico

Traditional Indigenous culinary preparations include local ingredients and foods whose cultivation and processing have also been passed down through generations. Their procurement may involve learned collective tasks, and they are part of a heritage whose origins date back centuries, with the domestication of certain species. The traditional food system of the Wolastoqey Nation, for example, is based on hunting, fishing, and gathering, closely linked to family knowledge, as seen in the spring collection of fiddlehead ferns. Likewise, the local chunto (turkey) used in recipes of the Q'eqchi' Maya people was domesticated by previous generations. The same is true for maize among the Misak people, which is considered the creator of Indigenous peoples and a source of connection with their historical roots, or the potato in the case of Andean peoples.

11 See recipe on page 110.

12 See recipe on page 114.

13 See recipe on page 118.

14 See recipe on page 134.

FOOD BASES OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE AMERICAS

As a result of cultural and territorial processes, as well as biological needs, the ingredients and foods that underpin traditional Indigenous dishes generally differ among the Indigenous peoples and nations of Canada and Latin America. In Central and South America, domesticated plant crops that originated thousands of years ago predominate, while in Canada, wild animal protein from the respective territories takes precedence.

Nevertheless, diversity is the prevailing feature. For example, Asháninka communities in the Amazon have diverse food sources, which are connected to practices related to hunting, fishing, and gathering in forests and rivers, or to traditional agriculture in chacras (small farms). These are food systems that display a complexity associated with the most traditional methods, which can also be observed in heterogeneous food systems such as those of the Métis Nation, where diversity is strongly attributable to contact with other peoples and effects associated with the impacts of colonialism.

The traditional foods of the peoples inhabiting Canada are related to the consumption of substantial animal protein, derived from hunting large animals such as moose, caribou, and deer, as well as other animals like waterfowl and rodents. In coastal or northern Canadian communities, traditional dishes include marine mammals, fish, crustaceans, and mollusks—important resources provided by the territory. This reflects a way of life and a particular relationship with the natural environment, resulting from adaptation to the natural world and to the climatic conditions of each territory:

“Regarding foods or dishes, in this region we have always had a connection with large animals, such as moose, deer, antelope, and also waterfowl like geese and ducks, and muskrats.”

Priscilla Settee,

cree, Canada

And while animal protein is emphasized as central, roots, berries, and other local plants are also mentioned as prominent foods. In Wolastoqey communities, fiddlehead ferns are gathered and then preserved to be available during the winter, while in Inuit communities, caribou is prepared in various ways:

"In my village, Inuit people eat many marine mammals, belugas and whales, many fish, and also caribou. Caribou can be eaten frozen, raw (tuktu quaq), cooked, or fried.”

Lynn Blackwood,

inuit , Canada

In contrast, the traditional foods of peoples in Latin America are linked to the region's fundamental and historical crops, where maize and potato, species domesticated thousands of years ago, occupy an important place. These crops represent the foundation for the survival of many Indigenous communities. Recipes that use these crops include kentu tsulak (sango)[15] from the Misak people, ajojtawajwan (chilacayote atole)[16] from the Nahua people, maize tortillas[17] from the Q'eqchi' Maya people, and uchujaku[18] from the Kichwa Kayambi people.

Besides these crops, there are others, such as cassava, squash, quinoa, chili, and legumes such as fava beans and peas. Although crops are prominent, the meat of traditional domestic animals, such as turkey and guinea pig, as well as introduced animals such as chicken, cattle, and goat, is also included in traditional recipes, along with fish.

"For us, cuisine has always been rooted in two important crops: maize and potatoes. These two are the most important staples."

Andrés Tombé,
misak, Colombia

15 See recipe on page 124.

16 See recipe on page 130.

17 See recipe on page 128.

18 See recipe on page 114.

IDENTITY IN INDIGENOUS INGREDIENTS

Traditional dishes are part of the identity of Indigenous peoples. It is possible to find some recipes that vary according to specific communities or geographic areas, and they are prepared with native ingredients that are among the specific resources offered by each territory. In this way, in a single dish, nature, culture, and territory are connected, where identity is born, constructed, and maintained across generations based on what the land provides. This is conveyed in the idea of being a child of a particular food, such as maize:

"To be children of maize is to connect with those historical roots that peoples have had, those connections that are created among peoples, because maize has been shared in many ways, through bartering and other practices. Thus, in maize, a natural product, there is a union that has been forged."

Andrés Tombé,
misak, Colombia

Foods are pillars of culture, and therefore, even when access becomes scarce and their consumption less frequent, they remain present because they are deeply rooted in the collective memory. This is the case of salmon for the Wolastoqey Nation, which is very strongly associated with their identity:

"Another very important source of food for us is fish. Traditionally, we have been associated with Atlantic salmon, but there are some rivers and communities where wild Atlantic salmon have literally not been seen in a generation. Nevertheless, we still talk about salmon at almost every one of our gatherings. It is like a kind of genetic memory that we have."

Ken Paul,
wolastoqey First Nation, Canada

Lynn Blackwood, a representative of the Inuit people and head of the Food Security Program of the Nunatsiavut Government in Canada, speaks of this cultural process differently, conceptualizing it as cultural hunger. She introduces this term to represent a problem in Indigenous diets that is related not only to nutritional issues or access to food, but also to the cultural transformations of the diets of numerous communities. This type of hunger arises when foods that are part of a people's identity are no longer consumed. In her words:

"Our main source of protein is caribou, and now it is endangered, so there is a ban on its hunting. I ate caribou last week and I felt nutritionally satisfied, but my cultural hunger was also satisfied. This cultural hunger is a concept that we need to highlight, beyond just talking about nutrients."

Lynn Blackwood,
inuit , Canada

The concept of cultural hunger resonates with Nahuatl and Q'eqchi' Maya representatives from North and Central America, who have seen an increase in wheat consumption to the detriment of maize, the traditional food of that region. This is reiterated by Andean peoples when referring to the decreased consumption of quinoa and certain varieties of potato. When traditional foods are no longer consumed, years of biological experimentation and social agreements vanish, as do methods of cultivating and processing foods and the transmission of recipes. It is not only about diets; these transformations are also the expression of societies subject to exploitation and forced dietary change.

Ingredients, like recipes, are highly valued because they represent identities and roots linked to local and territorial cultural development, which demonstrates their spiritual and ritual importance beyond their contributions to physical health. Likewise, the value of the local is constantly associated with the environmental and nutritional contributions of food that is naturally diverse and produced autonomously, in contrast to non-traditional or industrialized food.

"The original dishes are the most authentic, those that have been consumed for hundreds of years in my community, because they have a value that is not only nutritional, but also spiritual. They also possess a richness of biodiversity, as they come from crops that are native to us."

Kelly Ulcuango,
kichwa kayambi, Ecuador

CELEBRATIONS AND COMMEMORATIONS

Many traditional dishes are prepared especially for events and festivities that are important to communities. These dishes hold special significance and are associated with moments of gathering and community. This is how the Nahua people in Mexico refer to mole and the Misak people in Colombia speak of sango:

"And you say: ah, you're going to have a party, invite me for mole! Because it's the meaning of the celebration."

Marisol Lerdo,
náhuatl, Mexico

"Sango[19] is a special dish. It is eaten at dinner, when we are together at the end of the day, after work, after studying. It is eaten around the hearth, when everyone is present."

Andrés Tombé,
misak, Colombia

As access to some traditional foods becomes difficult, or even impossible, these dishes are usually reserved for special occasions, which become an opportunity to access ancient foods and ways of preparing them, and to celebrate communal bonds:

"Whenever we have some type of gathering in the community, whether it is a wedding, a celebration for a new birth, or the passing of someone, the community leaders—usually the women in these types of activities—bring everyone together as a family. We usually have a shared meal where each person brings a traditional dish. This is how we view food security and why it is truly important to us."

Ken Paul,
wolastoqey First Nation, Canada

In Guatemala, kaq ik[20] (turkey stew with chili) is usually prepared when there are important events: planting, marriage, inaugurations, or the start of a project. It is prepared for events such as the planting of maize, another food, which is made into tortillas and can accompany the kaq ik. It should be noted that this association between a dish and certain events is more common in rural indigenous communities:

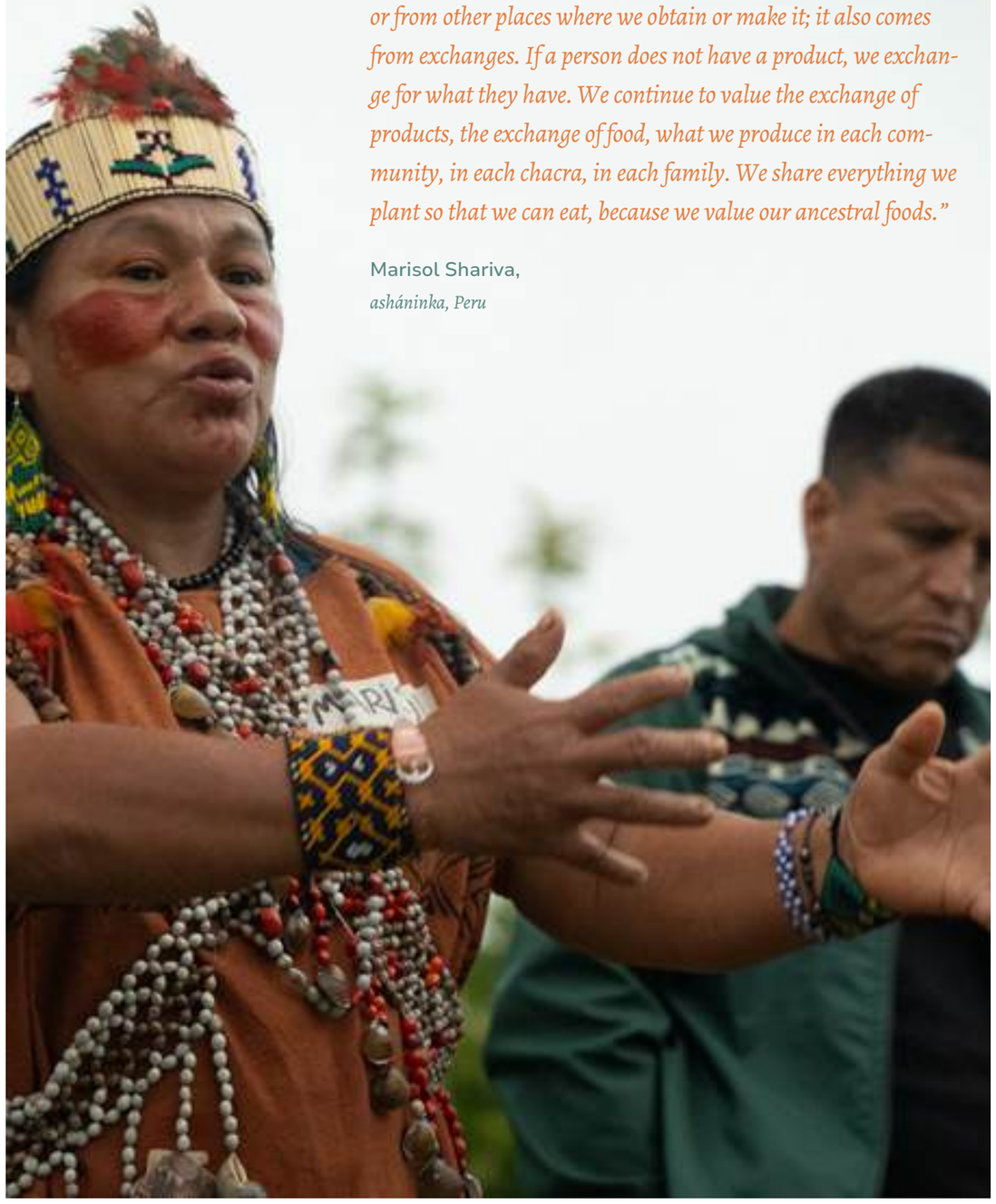
"Kaq ik is a ceremonial dish. It is also eaten when maize is planted, because the planting of maize is very important and has traditionally been a ritual space among the Q'eqchi' people."

Brenda Xol,
maya q'eqchi', Guatemala

These dishes are also exchanged for other products and are offered as symbols of gratitude and reciprocity. For communities or families where some traditional foods are scarce, exchanges are made to broaden availability and access.

19 See recipe on page 124.

20 See recipe on page 126.



"Our food comes from our forest, from hunting, from the chacra, or from other places where we obtain or make it; it also comes from exchanges. If a person does not have a product, we exchange for what they have. We continue to value the exchange of products, the exchange of food, what we produce in each community, in each chacra, in each family. We share everything we plant so that we can eat, because we value our ancestral foods."

Marisol Shariva,
asháninka, Peru

For Indigenous peoples and nations, traditional foods and dishes are much more than food: they are bearers of histories, cultures, and connections with the land and nature. Eating these dishes in company is a celebration of life, family, cultivation, roots, and heritage. In addition, there are ingredients, local products, preparation methods, utensils, and objects that make it possible to create a shared space and a familiar taste, where the connection between individuals and the community is a permanent and substantial aspect of identification with a people. Traditional dishes are subject to various transformations that Indigenous food systems are undergoing, and their persistence is a testament to the importance they continue to hold for the peoples and nations of the Americas.

There are ingredients, local products, preparation methods, utensils, and objects that make it possible to create a shared space and a familiar taste.

Culinary objects:

utensils that preserve flavors

The resources provided by nature are deeply incorporated into traditional Indigenous kitchens, and also through objects and utensils used to prepare food. The materials of which these tools are made reflect a connection with nature and local resources, and reveal a way of doing things that not only involves a functional or practical dimension, but also carries cultural meanings related to territories. Objects, materiality, are part of the environment, the memory, and the history of the communities.

In the history of Indigenous peoples and nations of Latin America, materials such as clay, stone, wood, metal, leaves, and fruits play a role. Clay is used to manufacture cups, pots, and casseroles, containers necessary for the preparation of a wide variety of dishes and broths. This type of container does not alter the energy of the food. Clay pots and pans, such as the comal in Guatemala, are also used. The use of stone is seen in tools such as the batán, an ancestral grinder of grains and maize. Wood is used both in the manufacture of spoons and to feed the fire.

"Cooking with firewood is very different from cooking with gas. Even among types of firewood, cooking with bejucos (vines) found in the hills is different from cooking with eucalyptus or pine firewood. The food tastes better when you cook with bejucos."

Kelly Ulcuango,
kichwa kayambi, Ecuador

In the history of Indigenous peoples and nations of Latin America, materials such as clay, stone, wood, metal, leaves, and fruits play a role.

Metal, increasingly widespread and present in various modern objects, reflects certain elements of change. While it is part of traditional tools, such as the scraper that the Nahua people in Mexico use with maguey to produce pulque (a fermented beverage), it also replaces clay in the manufacture of pots, allowing for faster cooking. Large aluminum pots, called peroles, make it possible to cook for crowds, as in the broths prepared at weddings, as do comales that allow tortillas to be made to welcome all the guests.

Among the Asháninka people in Peru, banana leaves are used as wrappers or natural plates for serving food, and gourds are transformed into containers, called panoko or pate, which are used to consume beverages such as masato. In Q'eqchi' Maya communities in Guatemala, jícaro fruits (Crescentia cujete) are used to make guacales, another type of beverage container.

Among the Indigenous nations of Canada, certain utensils and tools are made from wood, plant fiber, and metal. Ash wood basketry is a traditional activity of the Wolastoqey nation. These baskets, crafted in various shapes, are used for gathering food, fishing, and transporting goods. They are lightweight and durable baskets that attest to a craft still practiced for both artistic and utilitarian purposes. For Inuit communities, the ulu, or woman's knife, stands out. With a crescent-shaped blade, the ulu is a sharp tool with multiple uses, such as skinning and butchering large land animals and marine mammals.

THE ENERGY OF FOOD

The value of objects is recognized because it influences the flavor of dishes. Traditional materiality is related to not altering the energy of food, preserving a wealth of aromas and sensations as close as possible to their natural state. There is also a connection to history, to the past, to the generations that preceded the current ones, with whom the recipes originated.

"In food preparation, clay pots are important; they give dishes a distinct flavor. And cooking with firewood—well, that is another touch that enhances the food. Sometimes even the little wooden spoons used to mix the ingredients matter."

Marisol Lerdo,
náhuatl, Mexico

In general, dishes always turn out better with traditional objects and tools. Corn tortillas are a good example. As they are prepared today, on metal griddles, it is often perceived that they no longer have the same flavor as before, as they burn easily. Something similar happens with fava beans; aluminum adheres to them if they are roasted in pans made of that material. Community members therefore say that traditional utensils are inseparable from the authentic flavor of Indigenous peoples' cuisine.

"Here we try to preserve utensils such as clay pots and wooden paddles. With these, the food has a different taste, as when using clay cups. The vessels used to serve drinks are also preserved, such as the guacal."

Brenda Xol,
maya q'eqchi', Guatemala

TRADITIONAL METHODS AND KNOWLEDGE

The objects mentioned, such as the batán, comal, tiesto, tulpa, and clay pots, are intrinsically linked to traditional culinary methods and techniques. The material and design imply a particular way of doing things, of cooking and preparing food by hand, which is often associated with a lifestyle distinct from the modern one. The use of these utensils helps ensure that various methods, which have been perfected over the years, are not lost and remain alive, considering also that many traditional Indigenous recipes cannot be prepared without these objects.

When discussing traditional methods, both the way food is prepared and the way utensils, objects, and tools are crafted and manufactured are considered. A clear example of how these elements preserve traditions is basket making among the Wolastoqey Nation, a set of skills honored at the community level and still collectively practiced. Basketry begins with the work of striking ash logs with mallets, delivering precise and steady blows until the fiber can be separated into strips. These fibers are then made into threads, which are subsequently interwoven to create baskets used for gathering berries and fruits, fishing, and carrying food, or transformed into crafts that may circulate as works of art.

"There is still a very strong tradition of basketry in my community. Part of our production is for art. Another part is for gifts, but another part is truly for work, for practical uses. The baskets are important because of their association with food."

Ken Paul,
wolastoqey First Nation, Canada

These cultural objects are part of environments and moments that facilitate the transmission of knowledge related to traditional foodways. An example of this is the tulpa, a hearth supported by stones, used by the Kichwa Kayambi people in Ecuador. Although it is usually women who cook at the tulpa, the arrangement of the space allows the entire family to participate in the preparation. This allows for the sharing of knowledge of culinary practices, but also provides a place and time for conversing and sharing oral histories unique to each people and each Indigenous community.

CONNECTION WITH EVENTS AND FESTIVITIES

Given their pronounced identity and cultural dimension, culinary objects and utensils are also part of events, festivities, rituals, celebrations, or special moments that reinforce the sense of belonging and social cohesion within communities. Their relevance lies in the ability of these objects to preserve energetic harmony, both of the foods themselves, as a vital force, and between communities and other living beings or spiritual entities. The role of these items in such events therefore is connected with respect for and connection with traditions.

"In very special moments, such as a wedding, when someone passes away, or when an important celebration is to be held, the dishes are prepared in clay pots. Because the elders say that in clay pots, nutritional quality is not lost and Pachamama or the elder beings are not harmed."

Andrés Tombé,
misak, Colombia

These objects clearly demonstrate more than practical and functional aspects related to food. They are interwoven with and nourish identities. They represent an ongoing connection with the past and are a way of keeping Indigenous communities' food systems and traditions alive.

Causes of the transformations of Indigenous food systems

The first major transformation in traditional food systems occurred with the European colonization of the Americas. The dispossession of territories and ways of life was an expression of the drastic transformation to which Indigenous peoples were subjected in all aspects of their lives. This process and its institutions established impediments to and restrictions on access to land, productive assets, food, and traditional practices and knowledge, through mechanisms of prohibition and policies of cultural assimilation: *"Other challenges for our food systems lie in access to knowledge about them. It is a major barrier, because many Métis people have been disconnected from their culture over time."* (Shannon Udy, Métis, Canada)

While in Canada hunting, fishing, and gathering were prohibited during the administration of the Indigenous land reserve system, even though they were supported under treaties between Indigenous ancestors and the British, in Latin America systems such as the huasipungo in Ecuador were reinforced. This system allowed Indigenous laborers on haciendas, under extremely poor working and living conditions, to use a portion of the land as compensation for their labor, as was the case with the Indigenous runa:

"The runa had to work from sunrise to sunset in very, very precarious situations to be able to obtain a plate of food. Huasipungo is a piece of land that was given to Indigenous people to work, but with many restrictions. Their diet did not include meat—no protein at all. And their basic food was a little of what was left over from the harvest, nothing more. Everything else was for the landowner, for the church priests, and for the hacienda families. All that food was for them. The runa ate very poorly, only grains."

Kelly Ulcuango,
kichwa kayambi, Ecuador

Both Indigenous territory management regimes, in Canada and Ecuador, formal or not, involved the allocation of a small portion of land with little or no autonomy, which affected Indigenous peoples' access to food, food security, and access to natural resources, as well as their productive development, living conditions and health. Moreover, colonization not only deprived people of traditional food systems, but it also introduced new forms of food, products, and species, such as wheat and new domesticated animals for livestock. Many of these introduced foods, depending on their production and management, can now also be considered part of traditional diets, although there is some controversy about them, as is the case with wheat and certain fruits that are not among the foods historically produced in Indigenous territories, but which arrive now through national and international trade networks.

INDUSTRIALIZATION

Industrialization, closely linked to the expansion of a global-scale economic model, and processes of globalization have profoundly transformed Indigenous food systems in all their dimensions: environmental, cultural, economic, and social. These transformations have favored large-scale production models that prioritize the pursuit of profitability, thus shifting away from the concept of food as a basic human right to see it as a commodity.

"Our food system is under pressure due to Western development, we produce to feed the south, the rivers are dammed. This affects everything, it causes chaos in the gardens, with the large animals, with the waterfowl, and with the local economies. My family, which is made up of hunters, experiences these pressures. Our identity therefore suffers, as does our economy. The industrial food system is exerting a great deal of pressure and influence on our communities. That system is responsible for the rice, wheat, and corn crops and for the agrochemicals that large-scale production requires, and which are stripping us of power and of the space to make our own decisions."

Priscilla Settee,
cree, Canada

This form of development, oriented toward yield and profit, expands not only through the commercialization of industrialized products, such as rice; processed foods, such as wheat pasta; and canned goods, but also through advertising and the media, which promote consumption patterns adapted to modernity:

"Other factors influencing the change in consumption are linked to the place from which people access their food, breaking a relationship with the past, as in the case of caribou consumption. Today, people need to go to stores and purchase food there. I also believe that advertising has had a great impact on the increase in the consumption of ultra-processed foods, which are generally not the healthiest."

Lynn Blackwood,
inuit, Canada

MIGRATION

Rural-to-urban migration is also an important factor and has produced disruptions in ancestral food practices. Families and young people who migrate, and who adapt to and adopt new lifestyles and the pace of urban life, influence the integration of quick and easy-to-prepare foods into their new customs: *"We see that families who have migrated, if it's the whole family—the husband, the wife, the children—they bring other eating habits, with ham, eggs, canned beans."* (Marisol Lerdo, náhuatl, Mexico).

These adaptations respond both to lack of time and to economic limitations and restricted access to resources, such as land for the production of traditional foods. one example is the raising of the chunto, or turkey, in Guatemala, which is not feasible in cities because of space limitations and the care required for the bird's health. Nor is it consumed as frequently, because of competition with other products. In comparisons between urban and rural life, the latter is seen as an environment capable of providing greater continuity with ancestral knowledge and food practices:

"I believe that culture has been undergoing modifications over time, because if we look at the areas closest to the urban zone, it begins to change. People start to replace chunto with beef or frozen chicken. But those who are further inside the communities still preserve their culture, raising and preparing chunto."

Brenda Xol,
maya q'eqchi', Guatemala

SOCIOECONOMIC AND LABOR TRANSFORMATIONS

The change in socioeconomic conditions has influenced types of diets, because of both a relative increase in purchasing power and a transformation in labor conditions, as agricultural and non-agricultural work multiplies in both rural and urban areas.

Increased income has provided access to a diverse range of products. This does not necessarily mean the products are of higher quality, but the greater cash flow enables people to purchase products that were cultivated before. People also have access to products that were previously unknown, and families begin to consume more meat and incorporate it into their dishes. At the same time, migration to large cities—often linked to a decline in quality of life and increased job insecurity—pushes individuals to consume cheap, quickly prepared foods that satisfy hunger but are not very nutritious, are harmful to health, and strain people's relationship with their traditional food practices.

"If we talk about the economic level, in the communities it has improved greatly, and that has led to a change in the diet that families used to have, which was very much based on vegetables, on tubers, or solely focused on those. Now they are integrating more protein into their diets."

Andrés Tombé,
misak, Colombia

This phenomenon is also related to migration, as heads of households seek other job and economic opportunities outside of the communities because rural production often is not sufficient. Representatives of different peoples note that these dynamics are distancing people from their customs.

"Often, because the father has to work in the city, he no longer has that moment to sit in the tulpa (kitchen with a traditional wood-fired cooking area) to converse, to transmit the grandparents' life experiences related to food preparation. If something is not done, the time will come when all of this may remain only for a museum."

Kelly Ulcuango,
kichwa kayambi, Ecuador

STATE AGENCY

Government actions and decisions have contributed to changes in Indigenous diets, because of public policies or legislation. Programs aimed at food security have led to the distribution of industrialized and processed products, which people say lack cultural relevance and are intended only to address nutritional and economic needs:

"(Regarding the transformation of Indigenous food practices), the first culprit has been the State, with its food security policy, because they taught our communities to eat differently. I think since the 1990s, when they brought rice and many canned goods, that led us to change our diets significantly."

Andrés Tombé,
misak, Colombia

State policy, as expressed in agrarian reform processes and land ownership regulations, and through the denial or recognition of treaties and Indigenous rights, has triggered changes such as the loss or incorporation of certain foods. The case is not closed however; there are ongoing processes, discussions about adapting policies, or the creation of regulations with a territorial approach and Indigenous relevance that may open new possibilities for imagining the future.

"Policy also plays a role in changes to food systems. I believe it is important to have the conversation about the joint management of animals, and that could lead to discussion of territorial claims and rights concerning animals, such as, for example, hunting for subsistence versus hunting for profit. These are things we need to talk about."

Lynn Blackwood,
inuit, Canada

Food transformations and Indigenous diets:

new environments, habits, and preferences

The commercialization of food through stores and supermarkets brings with it relatively new, non-traditional food options and consumption patterns associated with the practical immediacy demanded by modern lifestyles: *"People are picking up the habit of doing things quickly and eating quickly, so I think that has also brought about some changes here."* (Marisol Lerdo, náhuatl, Mexico).

A new, non-traditional diet is being introduced into Indigenous peoples' practices because of its broad availability and low cost. The ease of access to and consumption of these products drives changes and adaptations in people's habits and communities' practices, particularly near cities, but also in remote Indigenous communities. This has made it increasingly difficult to maintain traditional diets:

"A large part of our traditional foods usually comes from roots, berries, or plants, as well as from fish and hunted animals. And it is difficult to maintain that traditional diet, because many people in our community go to regular grocery stores."

Ken Paul,
wolastoqey First Nation, Canada

This is particularly seen in the habits and preferences of young people, who often do not enjoy traditional preparations or simply do not know them, because they grow up near urbanized environments, are connected with other practices, or migrate to urban areas at an early age.

"New food fashions are adopted and ours are lost. So of course, all of this has changed our dietary habits. The dishes I share in traditional recipes are dishes enjoyed by adults and older adults. Children and youth, very little. In fact, many hardly even know they exist."

Kelly Ulcuango,
kichwa kayambi, Ecuador

The introduction of new products and ways of eating is closely related to the loss of practices such as agriculture, animal husbandry and hunting, gathering, and fishing. This also implies a change in ways of life, which makes it increasingly difficult to maintain and transmit traditional habits and diets. As migration and multiple jobs accelerate life, quick and easy food options become more prominent:

"Eating has changed a lot; now everyone wants rice and noodles. People look for what is easiest. Before, we ate broad bean mote, corn, toasted grains, papalisas, oca lawas, fresh corn, wheat."

Modesta Acarapi,
quechua, Bolivia

"Before, festivities were about making your own farm. You would prepare everything, your turkeys, your chickens, or your goats, so you could hold the celebration. Now there is greater access to commercial options, buying chicken and preparing it quickly."

Marisol Lerdo,
náhuatl, Mexico

In comparison with traditional foods, it is easier, faster, and less expensive to consume industrialized, processed, or convenience foods sold in stores. Prepared dishes, meats, and even fresh vegetables that are not part of the traditional diet of the territories are also becoming popular:

"There are some who like to mix local foods with rice or with carrots or potatoes, but for us, as Q'eqchi' people, that is no longer so original, because these foods, like carrots, are new to the area."

Brenda Xol,
maya q'eqchi', Guatemala

The main value that emerges from the description of these foods is the ease of preparing or consuming them. An accelerating world requires speed, responsiveness, and the facilitation of domestic tasks that require extra effort. Many families adapt by reducing the time allocat-ed to cooking, transforming a ritual space into a practical one:

"With the arrival of products such as rice, noodles, and oil, most people have changed their diet. These products are easier to prepare; in the past, we had to grind corn and wheat on a grinding stone, but now we opt for what is most practical, such as cooking rice or noodles quickly."

Aurora Panoso,
quechua, Bolivia

The consumption of ultra-processed products is associated with negative health impacts among Indigenous peoples, with particular concern about the effects on youth and children: *"That type of food takes away our power and is harmful. It takes away our health and our culture. We have an epidemic of diabetes and also suicides among young people who can no longer continue with their ancestral traditions."* (Priscilla Settee, Cree, Canada)

These widely available food products often contain additives and offer low nutritional value, resulting in homogeneous diets, malnutrition, and chronic diseases such as diabetes. People emphasize that although these foods are appetizing and highly accepted in all communities, it is unsustainable to rely on them for nutrition in the long term.

Indigenous peoples observe and draw conclusions. Many of the health effects produced by modern diets were not observed when Indigenous peoples consumed traditional foods. There was a biological adaptation to the processing of foods cultivated or gathered in their territories: diverse, vernacular foods, that people know how to process, and which are processed by the communities themselves. This gave people confidence and security regarding the food they consumed:

"In the most remote communities of the Asháninka people, illness is not seen often, because they eat a natural, ancestral diet that comes from our forest, that we plant as part of our culture, that our grandparents ate. There is much wealth in our chacra, in our forest, in our territory."

Marisol Shariva,
asháninka, Peru

21 This opinion is shared by all interviewees and is supported by scientific data. A meta-analysis published in 2024 in BMJ (formerly the British Medical Journal), which is among the world's top five scientific journals in general medicine, reports that greater exposure to ultra-processed foods is associated with an increased risk of adverse health outcomes, particularly cardiometabolic disorders, common mental disorders, and mortality. Based on these results, it is recommended that public health measures be developed to identify and reduce dietary exposure to ultra-processed foods and thus improve human health. Lane MM, Gamage E, Du S, Ashtree DN, McGuinness AJ, Gauci S, Baker P, Lawrence M, Rebholz CM, Srour B, Touvier M, Jacka FN, O'Neil A, Segasby T, Marx W. (2024): "Ultra-processed food exposure and adverse health outcomes: umbrella review of epidemiological meta-analyses," BMJ 2024 Feb 28:384:e077310. doi: 10.1136/bmj-2023-077310.

The incorporation of certain meats and types of protein into the diets of some Latin American Indigenous peoples is relatively recent. Although there are territories where native species ¡ domesticated centuries ago, such as the chunto, or turkey, and the guinea pig, have traditionally been consumed, they now tend to be replaced by other animals, such as chicken and cattle, which are produced on a larger scale, a practice that spread with colonization and the rise of industrial livestock farming. It should be noted that although the goat and sheep are introduced species, they are considered part of a traditional diet because they are often raised by Indigenous families.

In general, from the time of colonization until fairly recently, eating meat was considered a luxury. The poverty and marginalization of Indigenous peoples, linked to systems that expelled them from their territories or regulations that condemned them to domination (such as the huasipungo in Ecuador and reservation systems), deprived them of more nutritious foods. Over the years, social struggle, agrarian reform, and better socioeconomic conditions led to increased meat consumption, even in recipes that originally did not include meat as an ingredient:

"In the past, or previously, let us say, ancestral dishes contained almost no protein component because it was a luxury that very few could access. This has changed, and nowadays, for example, meat or chicken is added to sango, but it was not something that was very common."

Andrés Tombé,
misak, Colombia

"The runa were forbidden from eating meat. That was considered a very presumptuous desire on the part of the runa—wanting to eat meat; it was prohibited. In fact, the diet itself was very, very rationed, and also racialized. When does this diet begin to improve? It is recent, with the agrarian revolution here in Ecuador, which took place in the 1970s. It was then that people began to eat meat, with the creation of agrarian cooperatives."

Kelly Ulcuango,
kichwa kayambi, Ecuador

In most communities, various traditional foods and culinary practices persist, despite the challenges posed by recent changes. In certain territories, preserving the virtues of this continuity is a priority, associated with a way of life that has allowed people to live in harmony and good health for centuries.

Many peoples and nations are engaged in cultural revitalization processes that enable them to reflect on transformations and invite young people to learn to reconnect with their ancestral heritage and continue traditional practices. Some of these are linked to agriculture, others to the preparation of traditional dishes.

"There has been a push in recent years toward food sovereignty and food security, which is why there are several different initiatives within the Métis Nation in British Columbia. For example, a home gardens project that was designed to promote food security, in which many young people have participated."

Shannon Udy,
métis, Canada

Some communities have also reconnected with certain foods to which they had lost access over time because of government actions that perpetuated land dispossession and disregarded ancestral treaties related to hunting, fishing, and gathering. This is the case of lobster fishing for the Wolastoqey Nation, as this food has been integrated into their peoples's consumption practices again and has become a pillar of their diet.

Processes related to the reconnecting of identity with Indigenous food systems are not free from contradictions and challenges that stem from the impacts of colonization. There is a constant struggle against local, national, and international regulations that disregard Indigenous peoples' self-determination. Yet their practices persist, they resist, and Indigenous food systems maintain their vitality.

Impacts of climate change and sustainable strategies in Indigenous food systems

A significant portion of the foods that sustain Indigenous diets come from territories affected by rising temperatures and extreme climate-related events, such as thaws, hailstorms, rain and drought, fires, and floods. These alterations result in an overall imbalance of ecosystems, manifested in the loss of natural resources and key biodiversity, the proliferation of other species, and changes in production, as well as in hunting, fishing, and gathering: *"Sometimes there is an excess of rain and other times droughts, which makes pests more likely to appear. Before, hail did not fall in this area, but now there are intense hailstorms that destroy the crops."* (Aurora Panoso, Quechua, Bolivia)

Rising temperatures and melting ice are phenomena that particularly affect Indigenous nations of the North, through the thinning and loss of ice masses. This makes hunting more difficult, as native species migrate to colder areas:

"Climate change is having an impact in the North. The ice is no longer as thick as it used to be. With their hunting routes, hunters can no longer rely on the ice or the weather, because they are not predictable. So, places where people used to hunt have become unsafe, or they may not even be accessible because ice is not forming."

Lynn Blackwood,
inuit, Canada

These ecosystem alterations make access to diverse food sources more difficult and prevent the prediction and interpretation of natural indicators, which also leads to an increase in food prices. At times, this results in forced adaptation and unsustainable responses. Nevertheless, there are also isolated territories that demonstrate a differentiated impact, showing a greater ability to maintain traditional diets and greater resilience to environmental changes, as is the case of the Asháninka people in the Amazon rainforest.

"We feel climate change through our Pichis River. Before, we knew when the river would rise, but now it may rain at any moment, or it may also get too hot. Near the town of Puerto Bermúdez, which is the capital of our district, fish have already decreased. In contrast, remote communities still maintain their resources and it is possible to find fish and animals to eat."

Marisol Shariva,
asháninka, Peru

The impacts of climate change are not only environmental, but also cultural. Indigenous peoples' worldview guides part their dietary and productive practices toward synergy with the natural cycles of their territories. The disruptions caused by climate change therefore affect the timing of agricultural calendars, which in turn affects ritual ceremonies or festive events, impacting both the cultural sphere and traditional forms of production:

"In the past, rituals were performed to counteract lightning. The yatiris would mix the waters from the rivers of high and low areas so it would rain, and everyone in the community—men, women, boys, and girls—would challar to Pachamama with offerings, asking for rain. They would also set off firecrackers to ward off hailstorms. Today, it is no longer possible to confront natural phenomena."

Modesta Acarapi,
quechua, Bolivia

STRATEGIES FROM INDIGENOUS FOOD SYSTEMS

Indigenous peoples offer varied responses to climate change and diverse positions regarding how, and from what perspective, they should be implemented. Some are immediate responses driven by economic and productive needs, which do not always take into account well-being or environmental sustainability, such as the use of agrochemicals or the expansion of the agricultural frontier into forested areas. This expansion may also be vertical, as when land is gained from the páramos in the Andean region.

Other strategies include the cultivation of adapted and resistant seed varieties: *"Today we are searching for varieties that can adapt. We also are aware that many of these varieties will not be able to adapt and will not yield the same results, but we must continue farming."* (Andrés Tombé, Misak, Colombia)

The value of traditional knowledge and Indigenous leadership

Moving beyond adaptation as an immediate response entails a broad-based struggle and a reaffirmation of Indigenous knowledge systems, valuing them and granting them validity as "sciences," that is, as complex and integrated systems and not simply a collection of practices. These knowledge systems have particular value because of the environmental stewardship inherent in Indigenous ways of life, which have recently received greater attention from institutions because of their history of resistance since colonization. Because it is part of integrated systems, Indigenous knowledge cannot be fragmented and decontextualized to fill in specific gaps of Western systems; otherwise, those integrated systems would lose their value and functions.

"Promoting, revitalizing, working with young people and children so they have this knowledge and value our science, we begin to confront climate change so we do not merely have to adapt, but rather face it, fight against it."

Kelly Ulcuango,
kichwa kayambi, Ecuador

Valuing traditional Indigenous knowledge and practices as a strategy for addressing climate change involves enabling Indigenous peoples and nations, who are fighting for their sovereignty, to lead their own food production initiatives according to the ideas that articulate their vision of food security. This leadership entails the validation of a unique worldview: prioritizing environmental sustainability over economic benefits and incorporating ongoing as-sessments to guide future actions.

"If our Native nations, our Indigenous nations, were increasingly empowered to lead ideas about food production and food security, we would find that it is not just about food, but also about the habits and practices by which we do things."

Ken Paul,
wolastoqey First Nation, Canada

Sustainable and self-sufficient local production

Sustainable production and consumption center on diversity, both in the food products that are cultivated and in the sources of access: *"We obtain food from our rivers, forests, and the chacras that we strive to conserve."* (Marisol Shariva, Asháninka, Peru)

This production is considered sustainable because it is generally free from, or significantly reduces, the use of external inputs and agrochemicals, prioritizing the use of organic matter and waste that enhance soil health. It also involves techniques such as crop rotation and practices such as using all parts of the food that is produced. *"Here, living fences made of plants are being restored and are widely used. Living fences allow the ecosystem, mainly birds or insects that inhabit the surroundings, to occupy all these spaces here."* (Andrés Tombé, Misak, Colombia)

Sustainability is often closely associated with traditional knowledge and practices, which are also connected with economic sustainability, production for the family's consumption, or self-sufficiency. *"Sustainable food production means not depending on the market."* (Aurora Panoso, Quechua, Bolivia)

Production is considered sustainable especially when it includes food crops that represent the pillars of diets, such as maize, the dietary staple of peoples like the Q'eqchi' Maya. This not only reduces food dependency, but also lowers costs and builds resilience in the face of crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The cost of living is constantly rising. So, a family from the communities that grows what they consume, well, they already have everything; it does not cost them much. We saw this a lot during the pandemic. People in the communities fared better, much better, than those in urban areas, right? Because [those in urban areas] had no way to sustain themselves as a family, in the home. They had to go find elsewhere to find many products."

Brenda Xol,
maya q'eqchi', Guatemala

Education and participation

Another way to address the impacts of climate change is to raise awareness and circulate knowledge and practices related to traditional agriculture, sustainable production for the family's own consumption and good health, as well as a gender perspective related to domestic work. This reflects the inclusion of equally important social dimensions in response to the challenges of climate change. This involves methodologies for both education and outreach. A good example is the work done by the Aproba Sank Indigenous group in Guatemala, who have developed a methodology that links schools and farming competitions among communities, mobilizing more than 11,000 Indigenous farmers in the department of Alta Verapaz for over 20 years.

"In the competitions we organize, the objective is to attract people's attention so they can compete in the area of planting. But in the farmer schools, we go deeper; there is more awareness-raising, especially about current planting practices, about how not to lose what has been traditional. For example, in backyard animal husbandry—how to diversify backyard animal husbandry again?"

Brenda Xol,
maya q'eqchi', Guatemala

Community strengthening

Ultimately, a key challenge will be to align communities' efforts with those of institutions, especially government institutions. It is considered counterproductive that while communities assert their sovereignty by advancing sustainable production, States implement public policies detrimental to the environment, such as a lack of regulations in mining and monoculture, while simultaneously promoting the mass importation of industrialized and ultra-processed products. There is also criticism of government actions that promote and expand the consumption of non-traditional foods and practices through school programs, which limits the work being done to value Indigenous food systems.

It is therefore necessary to continue strengthening community organization, as climate change affects all peoples, and addressing it requires collective effort and negotiation in the political and legislative spheres. This is a necessary step for peoples and nations in the process of reaffirming their sovereignty to assume leadership:

"The strengthening of community organization is very important, because, where is the páramo? It is within the communities, and in the communities there is no individualization; rather, it is everything, it is a community organization. Therefore, it is the community that must decide to reaffirm our knowledge system, to protect it, to care for those páramos, the water, the soil, children's nutrition. To do this, policies must be created that recognize collective rights and food sovereignty. That struggle begins in the communities."

Kelly Ulcuango,
kichwa kayambi, Ecuador

The relationship between sustainable local production and health

Good health, both physical and spiritual, is frequently associated with sustainable local production and its capacity to provide culturally appropriate nutrition and energy: *"Local food is healthy because of the combination of ingredients and flavors it has."* (Aurora Panoso, Quechua, Bolivia).

"I say our food is still healthy because, in the end, it is prepared at home. Even though sometimes the ingredients are processed or purchased— for example, the chili pepper—families grind it and prepare everything at home."

Marisol Lerdo,
náhuatl, Mexico

What makes Indigenous diets healthy is often described using adjectives like organic, diverse, fresh, local, natural, unprocessed, and without additives or agrochemicals when referring to production and consumption. Direct access to and preparation of food products allow people to know their origin and condition, which is associated with the low prevalence of diseases in some communities that consume few industrialized or processed foods. The consumption of traditional dishes is associated with well-being and with cultural and spiritual health, where flavors are linked to meanings, and both the practices related to preparation and the gatherings where the food is consumed establish a connection with the ancestral past.

"Our food gives us good energy; it is a protein for all pregnant women, for children. That is why sometimes in the most remote Asháninka communities, disease is not seen much, because they maintain a natural, ancestral diet that comes from our forest, which we cultivate culturally, just as our grandparents ate many riches from our fields, from our forest, from our territory."

Marisol Shariva,
asháninka, Peru

What does it mean and why does it matter to speak of Indigenous food systems?

Food reflects a set of practices that make life possible, giving it a multidimensional nature where various aspects converge. Besides being the foundation that provides nutrition and sustenance to living beings, it encompasses cultural and relational elements that make it an activity of gathering and exchange, whether with family or the community. In this way, one's own cultural identity is nourished.

"For Indigenous peoples and nations, speaking of food always also means speaking of the symbolic and spiritual realms that are expressed and come into conflict within a collective and universal activity: 'To speak of food is to speak of life, to speak of cultural identity, to speak of reciprocity, of spirituality, of integral health."

Kelly Ulcuango,
kichwa kayambi, Ecuador

It is often said that one is what one eats; for this reason, food can bring people together even in contexts of change and conflict. It is considered an area that can reflect both collective difficulties and possibilities for transformation, thus contributing to internal social cohesion of peoples and among Indigenous nations:

"We have found that food unites peoples. I believe there is a bridge in food-related matters; everyone faces the same difficulties: loss of diversity, food is very monotonous, among other things, but everyone has a point of convergence, as food brings them together."

Andrés Tombé,
misak, Colombia

Food is thus considered the sustenance of life that provides energy, health, and well-being. This well-being is not only physical; it is not just about nutrition, but is also cultural and spiritual, and it is closely associated with the production system behind the food. For this reason, the need to guarantee healthy food, especially for younger generations, requires thinking about sustainable production:

"What we eat is what sustains our lives. That is, our lives depend on our food; we can live, we have energy. And yes, the importance of the organic, the natural, always arises when we talk about food, because that sustains our health."

Brenda Xol,
maya q'eqchi', Guatemala

PRESERVING TRADITIONS AS CULTURAL RESISTANCE

Sustaining in the present everything that surrounds traditional Indigenous food entails, and will entail, rescuing and strengthening these cultures, yet their continuity is pressured by the constant transformations experienced by the world on various scales. Speaking about food, or about feeding, is a way of resisting the threat faced by certain traditions and a way of reclaiming what is one's own. To speak of foods and dishes implies revisiting the ways and rhythms of cooking, reflecting on native species, tools, objects, utensils, and original flavors. In other words, it is to construct a shared consciousness from a daily act. This recovery has cultural value while also allowing for the preservation of sensory richness and the profound meaning of food as experience.

"This matter of recovering recipes is important, and how you do it is important as well, because of the flavor. For example, some have tried to make it, the mole, with pots that they call steamers, but the flavor always changes. So, I think it really is important to continue to recover our traditions and our ways of doing things."

Marisol Lerdo,
náhuatl, Mexico

It is not only a matter of recovering and preserving recipes; it is also necessary to ensure the transmission of this knowledge and these practices so that they are incorporated by younger generations. This intergenerational process must be cultivated both in homes and in collective and public spaces, such as schools and health centers. It is a task that raises concerns, as many children and youth are unaware of or show no interest in these food traditions. Given this context, continuing to speak about them is also a struggle that contributes to their continuity.

"In our families, preparing and teaching our children to prepare meals is very important. One must know how to prepare them; we should know how to consume all foods, we should wash our hands, we should teach our children at home, in educational institutions, and also in health centers. For this, it is necessary to train children, to teach and demonstrate the preparation of our foods that come from our forest, from our home, from the chacra, and other spaces from which we obtain food."

Marisol Shariva,
asháninka, Peru

The work of resistance to preserve ancestral foodways is communal and social, but it also has a strong individual component. Incorporating and maintaining traditional food practices, in the face of a standardized global diet, entails a constant effort to swim against the current, which is not without internal conflicts. Nevertheless, the possibility of effecting change through one's own decisions endows peoples with agency in much broader processes:

"It is also a struggle even against oneself, to decide to remain and to become rerooted in my communal and spiritual principles, and to be in harmony with Pachamamita. It is a decision, and that decision comes at a cost. It is easier to adapt and adjust to the new, to new foods, to gourmet innovations. That is very, very easy; it is quite simple to lose communal identity. Therefore, much is said about struggle and resistance also in food."

Kelly Ulcuango,
kichwa kayambi, Ecuador

GUIDANCE FOR A TRANSFORMATION OF FOOD SYSTEMS

To speak of Indigenous food is, in part, an affirmation of sovereignty, since it is about deciding what and how to eat, where to obtain food, and about answering the question: Under what relationships does food connect communities, territories, and identities? This food-related self-determination involves preserving inherited practices, but also playing an active role in food systems. To fulfill this role, one must know the origin of foods, participate in their procurement and preparation, and reconnect with the natural and communal processes that make them possible. Finally, it is a matter of positioning oneself as an equal with other food systems, which coexist because they are preserved and endure.

Indigenous knowledge systems associated with food represent a response that is inherently subject to environmental sustainability. The present and future of Indigenous foods are linked to the preservation of ecosystems, and require a political commitment to engage, take responsibility for, and continuously care for the long-term relationship between human beings and nature. From this perspective, to speak of food is also to speak of sustainable systems and of the role that Indigenous peoples and nations can play in this process. One important idea in this regard is food literacy, understood as the knowledge and awareness of what is consumed:

"If we do not think about the origins of our food, we will probably stop thinking about protecting the natural and wild places where we can grow natural foods. You cannot live on McDonald's alone; it simply would not work. So, if we could increase this kind of food literacy around the world, I think many more people would think twice about whether their activities are damaging a natural habitat or improving it."

Ken Paul,
wolastoqey First Nation, Canada

Given the particular place that Indigenous peoples and nations occupy in history, their perspectives, worldviews, and knowledge are indispensable for advancing towards equitable, resilient, sustainable, and healthy food systems. It is essential to strengthen Indigenous agency and leadership in these processes of transformation, as well as the opportunities for dialogue aimed at this:

"The Indigenous perspective is absolutely essential. Everywhere in the world, Indigenous peoples were the first to develop foods. We have a great deal of knowledge about biodiversity, and that is why our participation is essential. International solidarity should create more opportunities to promote traditional practices of Indigenous peoples, because Indigenous peoples are at the center of global food sovereignty."

Priscilla Settee,
cree, Canada

Just as leadership is important, it is essential to understand that Indigenous knowledge is situated within a broader context of life and systems; this is why the exchange and flow of knowledge and wisdom are beneficial. Preserving traditions does not mean isolating oneself from the rest of the world. Western and Indigenous knowledge can nourish each other and work together to achieve transformative objectives:

"There is a concept called two-eyed viewing, where Indigenous perspectives are interwoven with Western science and research to better manage animals, to learn harvesting and hunting skills that have persisted for millennia. I believe Indigenous peoples have a wealth of knowledge about foods, which they have consumed for millennia, and even though their knowledge is not built upon conventional science, it is of great importance and value."

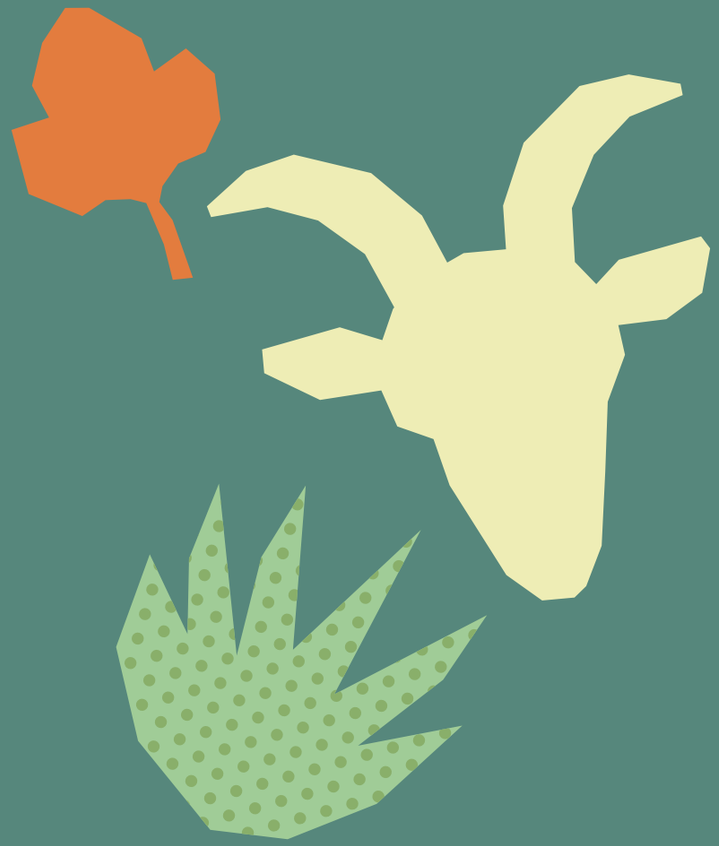
Lynn Blackwood,
inuit , Canada

A concrete example of how Indigenous perspectives contribute to the transformation of food systems can be found in the resilience of small-scale agriculture and subsistence production. This has become evident during periods of social and economic crisis, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic, when people who grew their own food were better able to cope with food shortages: *"It's good to talk about food and food production, as it gives us the ability to withstand food crises that occur suddenly."* (Marisol Lerdo, náhuatl, Mexico).

Continuing to speak about Indigenous food is to speak of life, well-being, identity, and the future. Its importance transcends the nutritional and practical to become rooted in the cultural, spiritual, and political, as an act of resistance and sovereignty. Preserving and valuing this knowledge not only strengthens the cohesion and continuity of Indigenous peoples and nations, but also offers comprehensive responses to global challenges related to food.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, people who grew their own food were better able to cope with food shortages.

CHAPTER THREE



Sowing, Diversifying, and Reflecting Collectively to Adapt to Climate Change[22]

By Alejandro Marreros Lobato[23]

22 Edited by Rodrigo Yáñez Rojas, principal researcher at Rimisp – Latin American Center for Rural Development.

23 Professor/advisor in rural development and coordinator of the community work program at the Center for Rural Development Studies - Promotion and Social Development (CESDER - PRODES).

Speech delivered before the Community of Tentzoncuahuigtic

Puebla, Mexico

Networks for Transformation of Agrofood Systems Project, coordinated by Rimisp in the Indigenous territories of Sierra Norte de Puebla (Mexico), Alta Verapaz (Guatemala), and Torotoro (Bolivia).

Maya mythology recounts the creation of the world. They say that in the beginning, the world was in stillness; there was nothing, because the gods went their own ways, without communicating. Until they decided to speak, to exchange ideas, thoughts. And then the idea of creating the world emerged; it was at that moment that they made the decision and said, "Let us create the world, let us create the sea, let us create the plants, let us create maize." Thus, the gods brought about creation. And so, we, too, need to converse continuously, because conversation gives rise to creation: to create something from what we discuss.

If each person is solving their problems at home, well, that is fine; it is their way. But when we come together and talk, we realize that we all suffer from the same affliction. There is a saying that speaks to this: If I am unwell, but the person over there is also unwell, is everything fine? Do you know the saying? The saying goes, and I will say it with great respect: "Misery loves company." This means that I am content, I remain tranquil as long as the other person is in the same situation as I am. But if we start talking about why things are this way, one asks: Do the things that happen here also happen elsewhere? How do they happen? And if they happen the same way elsewhere, then what is happening? We need to go deeper, to understand, and that requires these spaces for conversation; it requires joint reflection.

I say this because I want to talk about a particular situation. There is a process of impoverishment. It is not that we are poor, because we are not poor. We are in a process in which we are losing things, and this does not happen because God wills it. It is important to say this: we are not in this situation, as is sometimes said, because God made us poor. God would not truly wish there to be poor people. This process comes from others who are deriving benefit from this impoverishment. They are taking everything from us. They are taking everything from us, and this is something we need to become aware of; it must be discussed. The power groups in this country and globally want to take everything from us.

I will explain it with an example, with an illustration. If everything is gradually taken away from us and we are left with nothing, we have nothing, we need someone to give us something. If we are completely naked, stripped, with nothing, we will have to ask for someone to please give us something so that we can cover ourselves. It is this system that is taking everything from us, little by little, and we do not realize it. How many eggs are sold in the stores? This is an example. Who benefits from us not having chickens? Who benefits from us not planting and having our own beans, when it is possible to cultivate on all these lands and we can also have our own poultry, to have eggs.

Everything is being taken from us. In schools, we were forced to learn Spanish and we are forgetting our language. One day we were told that eating sausage, eating ham, eating cereals, drinking milk, was the best diet. A few years later, the number one cause of death in our country is diabetes. But we were told on television, tirelessly, constantly, that "if you eat sausage, eat ham, if you eat cereals, drink cola, you are modern, you are cool, you are fashionable. And if not, you are backward, you are wrong." This is a form of violence, a violence we often do not perceive.

What is violence? Violence is not physical; it does not hurt physically, it hurts morally. It is not something where someone hits you and you say, "Oh, that hurts!" No. The violence I am talking about is moral, because if someone tells you, if they make you feel that if you do not eat cereal with milk, you are not fashionable, you are backward, how does that feel? That hurts, doesn't it? No one wants to feel that way.

I want to share my experience with you; I want to tell you how I lived it. When ham and sausage started to appear, I was a child. This was about 30 years ago. At that time, if you went to a family's home and they had eggs with ham for breakfast, it was a super cool breakfast. Or to have breakfast with cereal, milk, and banana — that was something else. The people who had that on their table were modern, they were civilized. And the one who had their tortillas, their quelites (edible greens) with salsa and beans, was backward and not fashionable.

One day we were told that eating sausage, eating ham, eating cereals, drinking milk, was the best diet.

So, it is a violence that does not hurt physically. It is a violence that hurts and weakens us morally, and that is why we stopped drinking pulque, we stopped eating quelites, we stopped eating palmos (a flower consumed in certain seasons of the year). There was a time when people, eating sausage, eating ham and head cheese, drinking Coca-Cola and milk, and all of that, well, they felt they were fashionable. Years later, when the number one cause of death in our country is diabetes, is obesity — these are diseases that entered through the mouth.

I have said it before, but I will not get tired of repeating it: not even as a joke would I take a sip of Coca-Cola, because it is my way of saying that I reject and despise it, because it outrages me. The Coca-Cola people are getting rich at our expense. And we are slowly poisoning ourselves. And the worst thing is that this poisoning makes us dependent. For example, once diabetes is diagnosed, that person becomes dependent on pharmacies. And who owns the pharmacies? Almost always, or sometimes, they are the same people.

So, this is part of what we want to reflect on with you. We are inviting you, proposing a conversation, to see how we can reclaim ancestral foods, the foods our grandparents, our parents used to eat, which had their particular characteristics, but were healthy. Today, we still have the possibility of accessing these foods. Those quiotes (maguey stalks) over there, those that have sprouted and are flowering, are dozens of kilos of food. Possibly even tons. If anything, it will end up as firewood or organic matter, but today it is food. Those are dozens of kilos, hundreds if we add up all the communities and villages, that will be turned into organic matter, when we could have used them differently.

Isn't that right, Doña Meche? I remember the first time I saw you, when I met you, you had some palmitos de quiote with egg and quelites on your table. Oh, amazing! How delicious! These are our foods, and we must make the most of them in season, when they are available.

There is someone who benefits from our loss. There is someone who benefits when we lose our knowledge, our stories, our customs, the ways our parents and grandparents taught us. There is someone who benefits from that, from our loss of memory, because in this system there are some who are wealthy and want to monopolize everything, to take everything possible away from the rest and keep it all for themselves. You can see it on television, though there it is reported differently. Death is a business. There are people who get rich by killing. That is their job. And there are many, as we know in Mexico. So, we live in a system of death, and we need to think about how to confront it. We confront that system of death with a system of life. And that system of life is built from the communities, from here.

Specifically, we, together with you, have the challenge in the next two or three years to ensure that there is as much food as possible throughout the year. Growing maize, beans, and broad beans; these are seasonal crops. And if things go well, we harvest once a year, and if not, we harvest nothing. That is why we propose that you grow vegetables. Which vegetables? The ones you want. Two, three, or four, but they must be used—vegetables that will be eaten.

Why do we want to focus on vegetables? Because they have a short cycle. Corn, how long does it take to be ready? When do you plant it and when do you harvest it? It is planted in March and harvested in November, approximately. March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, and November. Let's say at least eight months for the harvest to be ready. Among vegetables, there are plants whose cycle is as long as three months, and the radish, which is miraculous and ready for harvest in just 28 days. So, we have this great opportunity to plant vegetables continuously, and harvest continuously, which gives us the possibility of having food continuously.

Many people already have their own gardens and irrigation systems at home. So we want to invite those who are interested to join this project, where we aim to collaborate so that we can cultivate, diversify, and harvest. And experiment to see how we can do it better. We want to contribute with netting, shade cloths, and seeds. So far, we have seven varieties of seeds that we can offer: cilantro, radish, lettuce, spinach, carrot, onion, and chard. This is the great challenge: to cultivate, diversify, and harvest. Another point we want to reiterate is that, even amid these situations of water scarcity, it is possible to grow vegetables, as many of you demonstrate every day. You have had your own gardens for some time, which means it is possible. And if we were to visit your homes, it would be rare to find a house without at least one plant. Most have many ornamental plants; at the entrance of the houses there are always pots, and you water them, and there they are — they do not dry out. This means there is at least a little water available to plant and harvest some vegetables.

Growing maize, beans, and broad beans; these are seasonal crops. And if things go well, we harvest once a year, and if not, we harvest nothing.

We would also like to propose that you record how much you harvest. If you harvested a bunch of radishes, if you harvested a bunch of chard, write it down, because we want to keep a record so you can see how much food we are capable of producing in a year. How much you are capable of producing. We must strive to depend as little as possible on food that comes from outside.

Colleagues, another important thing we want to do is monitor how the climate behaves. We want two people to help us monitor the climate on a daily basis. This does not require lengthy reports. There is a template where you simply note whether it was cloudy, rainy, sunny, etc., and that is also recorded. These notes will be compiled so we can observe how the climate behaves throughout the year, and we want to continue this for several years to see how we see the climate evolving. We need at least one or two people from this section to do it, and at least one or two people from the upper section, because, as you said earlier, once you cross from that little hill to here, it is a different climate. Crossing the hill over there, that is another climate. It is not the same, it is not identical, which is why we want to keep records using templates that we will share.

This is the project to which we invite you. We seek to collectively build knowledge about how the maize cycle is adapting to this climate change, while we experiment with our crops. We will record information at least about maize, and if we have the energy, we will do so with other crops as well. We will cross-reference these notes with information about planting and harvesting, to observe how adjustments are being made to the cycle in the face of climate change ¬— that is, the variation in rainfall, the increase in temperatures, the arrival of frosts. In some cases, for example, this could help the maize sprout more quickly, right? It could; who knows? That is why we want to systematize and cross-reference this information, reflecting with the communities. For example, asking, “Don Luis, when did you plant? Don Constantino, when did you plant? Don Víctor, when did you plant?” We want to see how things are working out for them. The one who planted first, how did it go? And the one who started second, how did it go? And so on, observing how the plantings behave and cross-referencing that information with producers from other communities, to see how they are doing it and to create knowledge about how we are adjusting the maize crop cycle in response to climate variability.

We believe that adaptation to these climatic changes is better achieved collectively, through dialogue and sharing, rather than each person acting individually. As the saying goes, it is better all together than for each to fend for themselves. If we do it reflectively, through conversation, I believe we can adapt much more advantageously than if each person tries to adapt alone. We must face this challenge of climate change collectively.

CHAPTER FOUR

Ken Paul, Wolastoqey Representative:
"If we do not maintain our natural food systems, we will not have a habitat in which to live"

By **Rodrigo Yáñez** [24]

24 The interview was conducted on Wednesday, July 2, 2025.

Interview with Ken Paul

representative of the Wolastoqey Nation of Neqotkuk, Canada.

An expert in fisheries and marine governance, he works to improve ocean governance based on the worldview of the peoples and nations of northern America, to balance relationships that currently harm Indigenous cultures and the environment.

What dishes, foods, or beverages does your community consider traditional, and why?

I live in a place where non-traditional agriculture has developed over many years. What my ancestors did was clear vast swathes of forest to create spaces where rows of land could be used to cultivate different crops. Among these, potatoes are one of the most important crops; many recipes can be prepared with them.

This area has many river valleys, and the river, of course, flows into the ocean. So various animals gather around the rivers according to the seasons, and thanks to this we have access to food. For example, in the fall, members of our family hunt. My nephew hunted a large moose last fall and shared the meat with the family. And that meat is a good source of food, much better than farmed beef. We know this because it is wild game. That animal is not being fed an artificial diet. Moreover, it is a delicious food for us. There are other animals to hunt here in winter, such as deer, but none compares to the moose.

In the spring, we have something here that we love, what I call fern shoots (fiddleheads). Some people also call them ostrich ferns and, I believe, strictly speaking, they are mosses. They are small green vegetables that sprout in a little spiral, which is also part of our cultural identity. They grow on the riverbanks, underneath, in the old grasses that become flattened. When the ice begins to melt, the rivers appear, and about two or three weeks later, these small fern shoots begin to grow. That's when families become active, and a whole social aspect emerges, going out to gather them; it is the end of winter, and many things are happening. And they must be harvested in time, because they grow quickly, and if they are not cut, they turn into ferns and are no longer suitable as food because they become too hard to chew.

What do they taste like? Is there anything similar to them?

When people ask me what they taste like, I say they can be compared to asparagus.

These wild foods that we go out to gather are our connection to the land, a chance to go out as a family. At the same time, they are very tasty and nutritious. They are a good green vegetable that is only available in spring. My mother and sisters can them. They prepare the shoots and put them in glass jars, so we have some during the winter. Of course, when they are freshly picked, they have much more flavor.

The fern sprouts are a sign that summer is coming soon and that another type of animal is coming to our territory. Traditionally, our people have been associated with the Atlantic salmon, which lays its eggs in our rivers. When they are fertilized and begin to hatch, growing into small fry and other early stages of a salmon's life, they wait about two or three years and then migrate down the river and out to the ocean, and then head north. No one really knows how or where the salmon go, or what happens on their journey once they leave our rivers. But they go north and, then, after a couple of years, they migrate back to our river systems and then to the ponds and lay eggs. And when they return, we traditionally catch them and are able to eat them.

Many of our traditional foods come from roots, berries, plants, fish, and hunted animals. However, it is difficult to maintain that traditional diet, so many people in our community go to regular grocery stores. This happens in many cultures, doesn't it? But every time we have some kind of gathering, if there is a wedding or a celebration for a new birth or someone's passing, the community leaders, who are usually women, gather all the families and we have a potluck, and everyone brings a pot with some of these foods.

Is there any other special day for your community that is celebrated around food?

Yes, the community gathers and holds community feasts at least once a month. At the end of summer there is a Canadian provincial holiday. We have games, such as softball tournaments and other activities. We take advantage of those occasions for our artisans to set up. Many people from the communities who are facing economic difficulties manage to earn something there and share in community traditions. We encourage people to bring their families; it is a way to bring people together.

At least once a month, there are elders' meetings in our community, and they are always given food and tea. The elders, of course, enjoy traditional food, so something like corn soup or cabbage rolls is always served, which are foods that are eaten and greatly enjoyed by the oldest members of our community.

And then we have the larger gatherings, such as high school graduations. These are family events where 50 or 60 people gather, including relatives and friends, and it is necessary to feed them. Usually, at these larger gatherings, people prepare traditional foods. Some people store frozen products in order to provide for so many guests, or in case the celebration takes place during seasons when there is limited access to many foods. Or sometimes people go and speak with other nearby communities, because we have a close relationship with many Indigenous communities. For example, if they have moose meat, sometimes we pay them with a bit of salmon.

These exchanges of food are quite common. The other day, I was visiting another community and a man approached me and said, *"Ken, I know your father, a few years ago he did some work for me. Wait here, I'll be right back." And he went to his house and came back with a large Atlantic salmon. "Give this to your father because he helped my daughter and me."* And I was delighted. I was tempted to go home with the salmon myself, but no, I gave it to my father.

Could you tell us about the changes that have been observed over time regarding these food practices, their production, their exchange, and consumption?

They are different and of a different nature. For example, I mentioned the importance of rivers, and how spring is marked by the emergence of fern shoots, initiating a series of activities. There are hydroelectric dams in our river systems that have altered their behavior and affect the beings that inhabit them. In the case of fish, engineers have created passageways called fish ladders, which are small paths or channels that allow fish to pass through so they do not become trapped. However, these techniques have not been very successful, nor have they yielded good results; much work remains to be done for continued improvement in this area.

This is not the only cause, but we know that the salmon population is disappearing. Although in some rivers and communities, wild Atlantic salmon have not been seen in the wild for literally a generation, we still discuss salmon in almost all our meetings. It is like a kind of genetic memory for us. So we are making a great effort to mitigate some of these problems in our territory. And this is part of our larger struggle as a nation to stay ahead of science and work with hatcheries to try to bring back salmon in healthy numbers.

Another threat is agriculture. Modern agriculture uses pesticides and fertilizers, and when the rains come, these products run off into our river systems. So there are some areas where we do not recommend that people collect fern shoots, because we don't know if the river contains toxins. We also question the condition of the fish that remain in our river systems, such as brown trout. We are always asking ourselves, where do we catch these fish? Because there are some areas we know are fairly clean, but we also know that others are not. We know there are all kinds of harmful chemicals that we don't trust, even though they are approved and certified, and we cannot drink the water in these areas. In some places, people are even advised not to swim there.

Bannock, a traditional Métis food. It is traditionally made with flour, water, and lard, sometimes with egg as well.

One element that marks our history and that also changed the food systems is our location on reservations. There was a forced displacement of all our communities onto small tracts of land. This was a policy that existed in Canada for more than a hundred years. And when this occurred, traditional migratory routes were cut off. Thus, the way we traditionally lived—along the rivers, in the valleys, moving between seasons to hunt, fish, and gather food in rather small groups—was significantly changed. In small groups it was easier to have shelter, heating, and to supply ourselves. When the ice broke, we would go and begin fishing. Then, in the summer, we would move toward the coast. We traveled throughout the territory, making our way along the river systems in our canoes and canoe families.

We generally have our largest gatherings on the coast. And it is in these coastal areas where we have traditionally depended on seafood, such as lobster, clams, and mussels. The summer diet consisted of seafood. And then in the fall, when things began to cool down again, that is when we would start to migrate to the river systems. This is how our culture and our food security functioned; it was linked to movement across our lands.

With the reservation system and colonization, all of this was disrupted, and many of the practices we had were lost. For example, today we have returned to lobster fishing, but with modern methods. We have members of our community who actively fish with traps on lobster boats. This generates some economic benefit for the community and allows for the distribution of food a couple of times a year, because on those boats they dedicate about two or three weeks' worth of catch to the community. So we all gather there, and when we are all together and once again eating our traditional foods, it is a very happy day. But today lobsters are caught differently.

And in your conversations with the communities, have you identified other factors?

Yes, well, the influence of the global economy and the commodification of food, which is not seen as a human right, but as a necessity to concentrate wealth in a few hands. I heard somewhere, years ago, that the morning breakfast of cereal, which is common in North America, was fabricated as a need so that wheat-based cereals could be sold to support the wheat industry, which was not a native industry in North America. And now we have three meals a day.

I also believe it makes more financial sense to have a greenhouse with artificial lights to grow tomatoes than to have a natural tomato garden. Producing year-round is more profitable monetarily, but we do not measure the quality of the food and tend to relegate nutritional value to a secondary position. All of this accelerated, I believe, primarily after the Second World War, when food began to be an issue for industries. This is what happens with elements processed on a large scale; everything possible must be done to sell them.

I know that many studies have been conducted on the type of diet we follow. But despite all of that, it is cheaper to buy something that has been processed than to buy a fresh product at a market or something organic. We have a nutritionist here in my community, and I went to talk to her about my personal diet, because I wanted to know how I could eat better. She told me that in many poor households, like the one I grew up in, because there was not much money, we tended to serve a lot of potatoes, a lot of rice, and a lot of pasta, such as spaghetti. I told her yes, that was how it had been. All those foods are tasty. I remember growing up with all of that, and it is cheaper to feed a large family with a lot of children. When there are many mouths to feed, decisions are economic, but all these foods are carbohydrate and starch-based; they satisfy and stretch meals, but maintaining a diet based solely on them is not healthy.

Therefore, a question we ask ourselves is how, as a society, we ensure that poorer households can access a diversity of foods, so that they are not nourished solely on the basis of two or three things. But it is very difficult to achieve this, because of how our modern food system is structured. It is easier to buy processed foods; moreover, they are subsidized by the State.

Does climate change have any place in your conversations in the communities?

Yes, it is an issue. I work on national policy, in groups for my native nation, analyzing laws. I work with many lawyers. And what I see, and where I can contribute, is that it is necessary to empower native nations, Indigenous nations, in this area. I work on oceans and climate change, and what Indigenous peoples have to say about coexistence with the oceans and biodiversity is of great interest; we possess knowledge that can contribute to addressing these climate challenges.

What is happening is a consequence of the actions of others, not the actions of our nations. But there is an understanding that our native nations know or do something that has allowed us to sustain ecosystems despite all the problems we have had during centuries of colonization.

In my opinion, and this is what I try to explain to people, this traditional knowledge is not really information that you can take and use to fill the gaps left by your own scientific information. There is an entire methodology. It is a different knowledge system, which is maintained by the value system that the native nation has within its culture, within its spirituality, within the way they work with one another. So, if you take the information out of that system and try to introduce it into another, it may not work, because it is out of context.

People who want to visit our elders, if they go on their own, are often disappointed because they do not understand why the elder is telling them stories or talking about other things, because they do not really comprehend the context of what is being shared. And I believe that if our native nations, our Indigenous nations, were increasingly empowered to lead ideas about food production and food security, we would realize that it is not only about food, but also about the habitats and the practices with which we truly do things.

We do not like to throw away anything that comes from nature. We try to use all parts. So when they started introducing composting programs here in Canada, for me that is just common sense, something we have always done. We know that everything is a cycle, and that one must take what can be taken, which makes fishing difficult because, on the open sea, it is an extractive industry. But how can we improve the habitat of fish and lobsters, for example? There is habitat restoration that we could do in our river systems for some of the salmon, removing logs, making sure there is good shade in some of the rivers so it is not too hot for them, among other things.

Climate change comes up in these discussions. How do you organize yourselves? How do you envision your life in the territory?

What we try to do is encourage and support any Native nation that is asserting its own sovereignty. From what I have seen, the difference between working with a non-Native community, a non-Indigenous community, and an Indigenous community is that Indigenous peoples always talk about long-term environmental impacts. So in North America, among many Native Americans and First Nations, we talk about the seven generations. We think about how our activity today will affect seven generations into the future. This helps greatly, and has always helped, to be much more responsible. Even, if we put ourselves in a modern context, we go beyond what is required for an environmental impact assessment. So when we are determining whether or not to carry out a project, we exceed the minimum environmental standards. I see this; it happens constantly.

Another thing our Native nations always talk about is what the benefits of the projects will be for the members of our community. You do not always see that when working in business or politics. They talk about the benefit for shareholders, right? But in our case, even though we have businesses, even though we are involved in that monetary system because we have to pay for our homes, food, clothing, and travel, we will do it while thinking about the impact a project may have on nature. I have seen many Native nations in Canada that do not fully benefit from the total economic impact of a project because it has a negative environmental impact. In these discussions, climate change arises, in how we organize ourselves, in how we envision our life in the territory.

A few days ago, I was speaking about the ocean sector at a meeting, and we were discussing the fishing industry. And I said what I had to say out loud. Who speaks on behalf of the fish? I know we want to help protect our fishermen if we undertake certain kinds of scientific interventions. But if there are no fish in the water, then it does not matter if we are taking care of our fishermen. We must have fish.

And fish are also part of our ecosystem, of our body; fish are like the messengers or the platelets that flow through the blood, through the veins and arteries. We need healthy fish in our river systems because they help nourish the soils when they die. They help feed other animals in those areas, such as bears, for example, or otters, or any kind of rodent. Studies have been conducted on the east coast of Canada, in areas where there were healthy salmon corridors, and it has been observed that they had healthy trees because the bear eats the fish and leaves the bones on the ground, and those bones become fertilizer. So if a tree is cut down, it is possible to tell by looking at the growth rings whether there were healthy salmon corridors in different years, based on this kind of activity.

That is just one example of this complex web, which we do not fully understand. There are a lot of ducks, geese, eagles, and hawks around here. All those birds depend on the fish. Each has its own ecosystem. And these birds, of course, feed other predators, such as coyotes and other types of carnivores, like foxes.

So if we do not maintain our natural food systems, on which we depend, then all of this will disappear, and we will not have a habitat in which to live. That is what is important. And this dispute is so crucial that I feel the value system of Indigenous peoples is something we have to be a little more open to sharing.

And hopefully, people will begin to adapt to that because I do not believe the economic system that provides our processed foods is sustainable. It is not sustainable in terms of produc-tion value and it is not sustainable for us in terms of individual health. I know it makes a lot of economic sense, but if you look at the long-term factors, what happens if you do not have people to sell your products to? Then your economic model is going to collapse.

CHAPTER FIVE

Agenda for the Transformation of Food Systems: Perspectives and Actions of Indigenous Peoples and Nations of the Americas

By Alejandro Marreros, Atilio Chauca López, Brenda Xol, Eleodoro Baldiviezo, Ernesto Tzi Chub, Kelly Ulcuango, Ken Paul, Andrés Tombé, Lynn Blackwood, Marisol Lerdo, Marisol Shariva Pérez, Priscilla Settee y Shannon Udy

Indigenous food practices and knowledge are increasingly recognized, documented, and valued globally, yet they are not always fully understood, are rarely implemented at national level, and may even be unknown within their own territories. Moreover, Indigenous populations are increasingly exposed to climate change, which, together with the sociopolitical instability of their countries, among other pressures, has led to a rise in the number of people experiencing food insecurity in recent years.

This document is a synthesis of the reflections and exchanges that took place at the meeting held in Yunguilla, Ecuador, in May 2024, titled "Transformation of Food Systems: Perspectives of Peoples and Nations of the Americas."

This event brought together representatives from ten Indigenous peoples and nations, from territories ranging from Canada to the Peruvian Amazon. During this gathering, a variety of topics were discussed to foster an understanding of Indigenous food systems in the region and develop a common agenda.[25]

FOOD SYSTEMS THAT NURTURE CULTURES

Indigenous food systems and their possibilities for transformation are described by peoples and nations of the Americas around four cross-cutting themes: culture and biodiversity in interdependence, health and cultural nutrition, rights and political advocacy, and challenges and opportunities in a context of globalization.

25 The complete document can be reviewed at the following link: https://rimisp.org/agenda-for-food-system-transformation-perspectives-of-and-actions-by-indigenous-peoples-and-nations-of-the-americas/

01 Culture and biodiversity in interdependence:

Food systems are strongly linked to worldviews that conceive of nature as an active agent with which relationships of reciprocity are maintained. Cultural practices (planting, hunting, gathering) sustain biological diversity and promote eco-system regeneration, relating food to the care of land and sea.

02 Health and cultural nutrition:

Health is associated with both the physical and spiritual dimensions and is manifested in the food itself, which has preventive and curative functions. Caring for the environment is associated with health care at different levels. A significant aspect of Indigenous food systems is their reliance on locally sourced and artisanally produced resources, without excluding foods produced at great distances. Food systems are not closed; they integrate foods from different peoples. The transition toward diets based on ultra-processed products has resulted in problems such as diabetes, obesity, and nutritional deficiencies, raising concerns about the "loss" of ancestral foods and their benefits for health.

03 Rights and political advocacy:

Among the peoples of Latin America, International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples are key to safeguarding Indigenous sovereignty over productive systems, access to natural resources, and territorial governance. The exercise of food sovereignty implies the possibility for peoples to make decisions about and manage their own modes of production in coexistence with other forms of large-scale production. For their part, Canadian Indigenous peoples have emphasized the need for national legislation to be consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2007), in order to guarantee their rights to lands, waters, ice, and air. In 2021, the federal government passed Bill C-15, which sought to affirm the nature of UNDRIP and align Canadian legislation with its content. Within this framework, the government developed and jointly implemented, together with Indigenous peoples, the 2023-2028 Action Plan announced in 2023. It is currently being implemented and is viewed with cautious optimism by Indigenous peoples, who continue to assert their rights.

04 Challenges in a context of globalization:

A common issue shared by peoples throughout the Americas is the introduction of foreign dietary practices which, like industrialized consumption and production, have hindered the recovery, preservation, and prosperity of Indigenous food systems. One challenge identified by Indigenous peoples is that food production should primarily respond to local food needs and not to external demands that threaten their food security. The growth of industrialized agriculture and livestock farming entails ecological pressure that limits the availability of fertile land and affects biodiversity. The intense presence of processed foods leads to the adoption of new consumption patterns that are removed from ancestral culinary knowledge and poor in nutritional value.

POTENTIALITIES AND CHALLENGES OF FOOD SYSTEMS

The Indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas share a common vision regarding the potentialities of their food systems and jointly identify challenges to realizing these potentialities.

01 They preserve sustainable cultural heritages, but face the weakening of traditional knowledge:

Ancestral agriculture is itself a repository of knowledge that promotes the reproduction of culture and generates crafts, gastronomy, and rituals; meanwhile, the erosion of food practices is attributable to external factors (industrialization or changing consumption habits) and to the decline in new generations interested in continuing these traditions.

02 They strengthen biodiversity and resilience to crises, but are affected by ecological degradation and climate change:

Indigenous peoples have developed adaptation strategies, thanks to the connection of their food-related activities with climate variability and the sustainable management of biodiversity. Today, however, phenomena such as deforestation, water pollution, and species loss have led to a crisis that threatens the balance of their environments and livelihoods.

03 They promote a holistic approach to health, but greater public recognition of this integrative perspective is needed:

The concept of cultural nutrition articulates the importance of foods that are biologically and spiritually appropriate for each people, in contrast to the mass consumption of processed products. Nevertheless, public health and education systems do not usually consider traditional practices and remedies. The lack of guidelines for nutritional policies that integrate multicultural perspectives, together with the easy access to ultra-processed foods, highlights the need to strengthen the protection of food systems with regulatory tools and to implement strategies to educate about nutrition that is both nourishing and culturally appropriate.

04 They offer opportunities for local economic development, but it is necessary to strengthen Indigenous governance and the exercise of rights:

Another significant potential attributed to the deployment of Indigenous food systems is the diversification and innovation of income sources. Tourism, cultural industries, and the commercialization of native products are avenues for expanding income and projecting culture into a global market. The challenge lies in maintaining Indigenous autonomy and sovereignty, and not falling into modalities that displace community decision-making or provoke an unbalanced dependence on state or private entities.

STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN INDIGENOUS FOOD SYSTEMS

The dialogue that took place at the Yunguilla meeting made it possible to gather a broad repertoire of strategies, practices, and experiences from Indigenous communities for the protection and appreciation of their food systems, which require coordination with actors both within and outside of the communities.

01 Education and knowledge transmission for cultural recovery and economic strengthening:

Cultural practices and ancestral knowledge regarding food are at the center of strategies to protect and adapt Indigenous food systems. Among the experiences shared, the development of educational projects, production incentives, and participation in local markets are highlighted. Some examples include peasant schools in Guatemala, cultural recovery initiatives, traditional dish competitions, recipe manuals, and spaces for intergenerational dialogue with knowledge holders, as well as the use of participatory methodologies that include the contributions of grandmothers and grandfathers. There are numerous examples of action-research in the areas of agroecology, gastronomy, and traditional medicine.

02 Promotion of holistic health and community care:

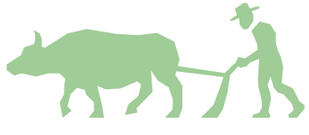
Strategies aimed at promoting a holistic concept of health focus on the recovery of medicinal plants, nutritious diets, and an approach to health and food that understands them as components of collective well-being. For example, community and medicinal gardens, which serve to exchange seeds, foods, and healing plants, simultaneously foster social cohesion and adequate nutrition. Emphasis is also placed on the need for institutions to recognize the importance of cultural nutrition and the potential of traditional medicine.

03 Strengthening and articulation for institutional advocacy:

Strategies include a focus on strengthening communities and promoting networks and leadership, as well as creating dialogue tables that can give rise to collaborations and commitments. One particularly important strategy for articulation with public and private-sector actors is working with health and education institutions to expand and preserve knowledge, promote local leadership, conduct research, and plan actions regarding food security and sovereignty.

04 Technological innovations for access to natural resources:

The development of technologies involves the articulation of actors, resources, and capacities that are often difficult to access in many communities in Latin American countries. Nevertheless, technological innovations have demonstrated viability and have had significant impacts on the transformation of food systems. Examples include climate monitoring, as in Bolivia, and the implementation of dry toilets and rainwater harvesting to reduce costs, as in Mexico.



OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIGENOUS FOOD SYSTEMS

Along with identifying potentialities, challenges, and strategies, the Indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas envision opportunities for deepening and transforming their food systems.

01 Opportunities in academia and research to promote their own culture and biodiversity:

Research offers the opportunity to advance the deepening, recovery, revitalization, and dissemination of local food heritage and related ancestral community knowledge. Examples include studies of culinary traditions, inventories of medicinal plants, and analyses of traditional diets. In these studies, community leadership must always be maintained, with youth and local elders participating in the collection and analysis of information about food and medicinal uses.

02 Opportunities in improving public policies and increasing state resources for the exercise of political rights:

Opportunities for promoting modifications of public policies, based on community priorities, aimed at making viable the production, consumption, and commercialization of locally produced foods, are of particular relevance for the Indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas. Local institutional agencies, such as municipalities and district offices, are key actors, as they issue certifications and patents, and plan land use and natural resource management. Federal and national authorities and international agencies (for example, food safety inspection agencies and the FAO) are also important, as they can grant recognition to local products and facilitate authorization for the handling, transport, and commercialization of local products.

03 Opportunities in local and international civil society organizations, to enhance Indigenous influence in the public policy sphere:

Opportunities also exist in connection with civil society groups, including the private sector, NGOs, academia, and international philanthropic organizations. Examples include developing proposals for international funding in packages that include short, medium, and long-term initiatives; prioritizing mechanisms that promote alliances between communities and organizations at various scales; and accessing international funds with specific financing to support Indigenous communities, among others.

CONCLUSIONS: AN AGENDA FOR TRANSFORMATION

The Agenda for the Transformation of Food Systems underscores that Indigenous peoples and nations are key actors in achieving just and sustainable food environments. Their food systems simultaneously nourish culture, biodiversity, and the holistic health of the community, yet they are under increasing threat because of globalization, the loss of territorial rights, and the pressures of climate change.

Indigenous food systems are the result of the coevolution of cultural practices, spiritual values, and natural ecosystems. This concept highlights the interdependence among community relationships, the reciprocal relationship with nature, biodiversity as a cultural reservoir, and its articulation at both local and global levels.

Collaborative and mutualistic relationships among individuals and communities are highly visible and fundamental to social life. Productive practices such as the milpa, or consumption practices such as pamba mikuy, are examples in which the individual benefit from labor and food is understood as dependent on cooperation. Several practices involved in Indigenous food systems, which reinforce and activate this communal dimension, have a strong ritual component and activate a circuit of symbolic interdependent relationships.

Indigenous food systems mobilize a relationship of interdependence with nature. In this relationship, nature is understood as an active agent, participating in reciprocity with human action in the development of Indigenous food systems. Thus, a relationship prevails that is based on knowledge, collaboration, and gratitude toward nature, which partly explains the high adaptability of food systems to specific ecological niches.

The Indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas attribute great value to the preservation of biodiversity, not only for its role in the sustainability of food systems and society, but also because biodiversity represents a true cultural reservoir, which connects ways of life and knowledge.

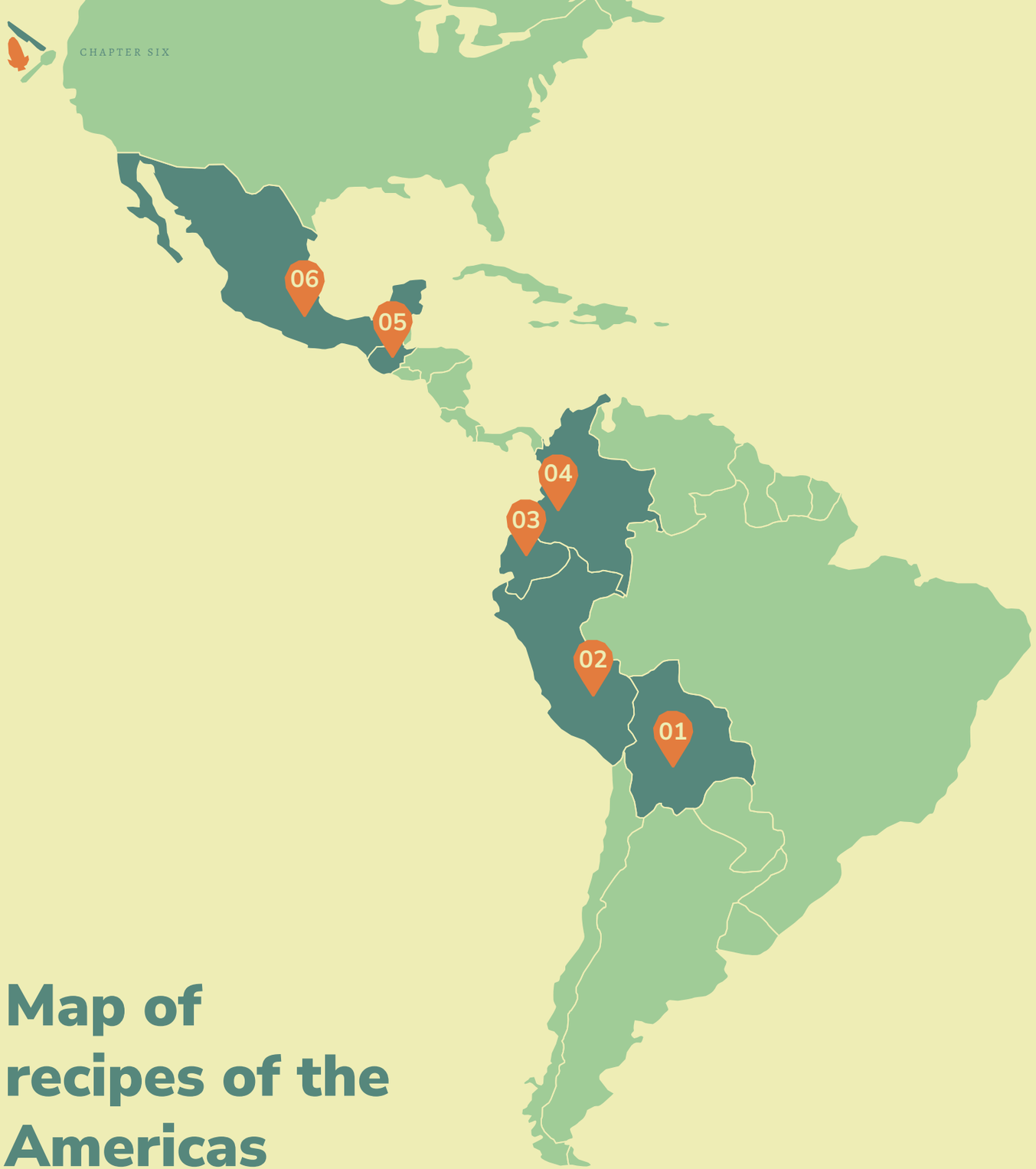
A defining aspect of Indigenous food systems is their interdependence with development models that link the scale of localized practices with the balances of planetary ecosystems. Indigenous food systems are not closed: they are interconnected with other food systems, other ecosystems, and other forms of production and consumption.

Finally, youth and ancestral Indigenous knowledge are closely related and guide many current strategies and future actions for strengthening food systems in the short, medium, and long term. The agenda highlights the benefits of forging alliances with various stakeholders on the essential condition that every process be led and decided by the Indigenous communities and peoples themselves. In this way, the aspiration is for a future in which food systems re-affirm the life of the territories and the dignity of their peoples, safeguarding the cultural and natural diversity that distinguishes the Americas.

CHAPTER SIX

Recipes of the Americas

This chapter is an invitation to a culinary journey that explores the diversity and richness of some of the indigenous peoples of the Americas. From the Andean mountains of Bolivia with the Quechua people to the Amazon rainforest of Peru with the Asháninka people, traveling through the communities of the Ecuadorian highlands of Kichwa Kayambi and passing through the plains and forests of Colombia with the Ampiuile and Misak peoples. We will travel to Central and North America to learn about recipes from the Q'eqchi' people and the traditions of the communities of Tenampulco, Zautla, and Xopanaco in Mexico. Each recipe is much more than a simple list of ingredients; it is a testament to the ancestral knowledge that has sustained these peoples through generations, transforming cooking into an act of cultural preservation and a link to the land.



Map of recipes of the Americas

01 **Jarwi Lawa / Toasted wheat soup**
Quechua people, Torotoro, Bolivia

Steamed meats
Quechua people, Rancho Pampa community, Torotoro, Bolivia

02 **Akiparentsi shima itsipataro tyomirentzi / Fish chipa with roasted cassava**
Asháninka people, Peru

03 **Uchujaku / Chili porridge**
Kichwa Kayambi people, Ecuador

Tzawar mishki with barley rice / Sweet agave syrup with barley rice
Kichwa Kayambi people, Ecuador

04 **Tree tomato chili**
Ampiuile people, Colombia

Kentu tsulak / Sango
Misak people, Colombia

05 **Kaq Ik / Chunto broth**
Q'eqchi' people, Guatemala

Xorb'il wa / Corn tortillas
Q'eqchi' people, Guatemala

06 **Ajojtawajwan / Chilacayote atole**
Tenampulco and Zautla, Puebla, Mexico

Goat barbacoa in an earth oven
Xopanaco Community, Zautla, Puebla, Mexico

Jarwi Lawa

Toasted wheat soup

Ingredients:

Potatoes
Peas
Onion
Carrot
Garlic
Red chili pod
Meat with bone (may be beef, lamb, or chicken). Two types of meat are recommended.
Fresh whole wheat flour
Egg
Pork lard
Parsley
Cumin
Salt

Quechua people, Torotoro, Bolivia

Significant ingredient

Freshly ground wheat milled on a stone batán

PREPARATION

01 Grind the garlic, cumin, and red chili pepper on a stone batán. This mixture will be used to season the wheat flour.

02 Grind the wheat on a stone batán to obtain flour. This is crucial for the flavor.

03 Mix the wheat flour with the egg, then toast it in a pan with the lard and the previously prepared mixture of garlic, cumin, and red chili pepper.

04 Chop the onion into small cubes, peel the carrot into long slices, shell the peas, and peel the potatoes.

05 Boil the meats, peas, onion, and carrot in water, then add the peeled potatoes.

06 When the potatoes are halfcooked, add the toasted wheat flour (this is why it is called jarwi). Continue cooking all ingredients for approximately one hour.

07 The soup is then served in a deep ceramic bowl to enhance its flavor.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

The cooking time is one hour, and it is important to ensure that the wheat flour is fresh or freshly milled; otherwise, women say, the flavor changes. Chopped parsley can be added, and the soup can be served with a side dish of cooked mote.

Recipe from: Modesta Acarapi
Recorded by: Rosario Valenzuela

Steamed meats

Ingredients:

Chicken
Beef
Potatoes
Onion
Carrot
Tomato
Lemon
Garlic
Bell pepper
Lime juice
Salt

Quechua people, Rancho Pampa community, Torotoro, Bolivia

Significant ingredient
Lime

PREPARATION

01 Wash all the vegetables and meats thoroughly. Cut the vegetables into large pieces and crush the garlic.

02 Mix the crushed garlic with lemon juice and salt, then marinate the beef and chicken in this mixture. Let it rest for a few minutes.

03 In another pot, cook the potatoes with their skins on. Meanwhile, heat a large pot and first place the marinated chicken, then a layer of vegetables, place the beef on top, and end with another layer of vegetables.

04 Cover the pot to retain the heat and allow the ingredients to cook slowly for approximately one hour.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

The total cooking time is approximately 1.5 hours. The level of difficulty is low, as the entire process involves steaming; it is important however to ensure that the water does not evaporate, which is why it should be cooked over low heat. The dish can be served with corn mote.

Recipe from: Aurora Panoso
Recorded by: Rosario Valenzuela

Akiparentsi shima itsipataro tyomirentzi

Fish chipa with roasted cassava

Ingredients:

Fish (one fish per serving is recommended)

Sacha culantro (cilantro) leaves

Guisador or turmeric leaves, for wrapping

Bijao leaves, for wrapping

Banana fiber or other type of fiber, for tying

Salt to taste

Asháninka people, Peru

Significant ingredient

Boquichico and carachama fish, and cassava

PREPARATION

01

First, the fish is eviscerated. The entrails are set aside to be prepared, as well.

02 Once the fish is thoroughly washed, in the case of boquichico, the scales are removed and then it is retaleado, meaning cuts are made along the sides to ensure better cooking, and the bones are cut so children can eat the fish easily.

The carachama is not retaleado, because its scales are as hard as armor, so itis cooked whole.

03 Once the fish is cut, it is seasoned with salt and chopped sacha culantro leaves, which helps impart a characteristic flavor.

04 Next, it is wrapped with bijao and guisador leaves, then tied with fiber or string. When it is enchipado (wrapped), it is placed over the fire for 20 to 30 minutes, depending on the heat and the size of the fish.

05 When it no longer releases water, it is ready to serve.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

This dish should be accompanied with cassava, our daily food. The fish chipa is eaten using the leaf as a plate, because in the past we did not have the eating utensils that exist today.

It is possible to replace the boquichico and carachama fish with farmed fish, such as paco, but the flavor is no longer the same; it is not as natural, because it is raised in ponds and eats other foods.

This dish is not difficult to prepare and takes approximately one hour, depending on the time it takes to light the fire and the number of chipas being prepared.

FISH AND CASSAVA

These fish have always been the basis of our diet, since the time of our ancestors.

Fish and cassava are the foundation of our diet. There are two types of fish: the boquichico or chupadora, which is the most abundant fish and sustains the fishery in our Pichis River basin, and the carachama, a fish whose various species are found in our streams and rivers. But this resource has been decreasing, both in quantity and size, because of harmful fishing practices. The use of explosives and nets that do not respect minimum catch sizes affects the diversity of all fish.

We also have cassava, a food that we consume daily in our communities, and which comes from our chacras. Cassava, consumed in its different forms, is indispensable at our table, whether roasted, boiled, fried, or prepared as the fermented cassava beverage, which we call piarentzi (also known as masato).

Here we present cassava roasted over the fire without the peel (tyomirentzi), but it can also be roasted with the peel (tawacorentsi). Tyomirentzi is a way of preparing cassava so the food lasts longer, even more than a week. This way of consuming it is ideal when we go fishing or hunting for several days, or when we spend the entire day working in the chacra. It is a very traditional way of consuming cassava. In the past, our ancestors courted this way: the woman would prepare roasted cassava for the man and have him taste it. It was a sign of affection. It was part of our customs.

Recipe from and recorded by: Carmen Yolanda Castellanos Santos, Jocabet Cárdenas Sánchez, Clariza Ormacho Mariano, Marisol Shariva Pérez

Uchujaku

Chili porridge

Ingredients:

2 tablespoons of oil

1 white onion, finely chopped

6 pieces of lamb meat

3 liters of water

1 cup of uchujaku flour

1 cup of cooked hominy

1 teaspoon of salt (or to taste)

1 sprig of chopped cilantro or culantro (optional)

Kichwa Kayambi people, Ecuador

Significant ingredient

Seven-grain flour

PREPARATION

01 In a large pot, heat the oil and sauté the onion until golden and fragrant.

02 Add the 3 liters of water and wait until it boils.

03 Add the pieces of lamb to the boiling water and cook for 30 minutes.

04 In a separate container, dissolve the uchujaku flour in a cup of cold water, stirring well to avoid lumps.

05 Slowly pour the mixture into the boiling pot, stirring constantly to prevent lumps from forming. Cook over low heat for an additional 15-20 minutes, until the porridge thickens. Add salt to taste.

This flour is an ancient combination rooted in Andean agricultural wisdom and symbolizes agricultural diversity and respect for the knowledge of the Andean Kichwa peoples.

06 Incorporate the cooked hominy. Mix well for a few minutes.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

Uchujaku is served hot in a deep plate or bowl and accompanied by a portion of toasted corn. It can also be served with half a hard-boiled egg cut into pieces, and just before serving, you may add chopped cilantro or coriander for flavor.

The lamb can be replaced with a piece of roasted guinea pig, which can be served on top of the porridge at mealtime. The preparation time is one hour.

SEVEN-GRAIN FLOUR

Uchujaku is a gruel whose main ingredient is seven-grain flour: corn, wheat, barley, fava beans, peas, lentils, and beans, with a pinch of cumin and achiote (Bixa orellana) seed, although the mixture may vary depending on the community or family tradition.

All these grains are toasted and then ground to produce a flour with a deep, slightly roasted flavor and a texture that, when cooked, becomes a thick, comforting, and highly nutritious gruel. This preparation is traditional in the Ecuadorian Andes, primarily among the Kayambi people. Its name derives from the Kichwa "uchu," meaning chili or spicy, and "jaku," which relates to the act of cooking a thick gruel.

Nutritionally, uchujaku flour is rich in plant-based proteins, fiber, complex carbohydrates, iron, and B vitamins, making it a balanced and sustained source of energy. In times when processed foods dominate the diet, uchujaku represents a healthy, local, and sustainable alternative.

Its preparation requires time, knowledge of seeds, and techniques passed down through generations. It is a food born from collective labor and consumed in community, and it remains present in festivities, rituals, and communal celebrations, such as Inti Raymi, the festival of the sun, celebrated on June 21.

Recipe from and recorded by:
Mama Teresa Margarita Ulcuango Colcha

Tzawar mishki with barley rice

Sweet agave syrup with barley rice

Ingredients:

1 cup of barley rice

1 liter of tzawar mishki

Kichwa Kayambi people, Ecuador

Significant ingredient

Tzawar mishki

PREPARATION

01 Boil the tzawar mishki in a large pot for 15 to 20 minutes.

02 Once the tzawar mishki is boiling, add the barley rice. As it boils, use a spoon or skimmer to remove the foam and the bran (residue or impurities) that rise to the surface.

03 Cook over medium-low heat, stirring occasionally, for about 40 minutes, until the barley is fully cooked and the liquid has acquired a slightly thick texture.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

This dish is served hot or warm, in deep bowls, and is ideal as an energizing breakfast or traditional snack. It can be accompanied by serrano wheat bread, corn tortilla, or artisanal fresh cheese. The tzawar mishki should not be substituted, as it is the ingredient that gives the dish its identity.

If barley rice is not available, it can be replaced by quinoa, in the same quantity (1 cup), washed several times before adding it, as it is also a traditional Andean grain of great nutritional value. Its preparation takes 60 minutes.

AGAVE SYRUP

Tzawar mishki is a natural nectar extracted from the Andean agave (Agave americana), a resilient and emblematic plant of the highland landscapes of Ecuador.

This sweet sap is obtained by making an incision in the center of the mature plant to slowly collect the thick, sugary liquid that emerges over several days.

Since ancestral times, Indigenous peoples of the northern Sierra, such as the Karanki, Otavalo, and Kayambi, have valued tzawar mishki not only as food, but also as traditional medicine, a ritual beverage, and a symbol of connection with the land. It is considered to have energizing, digestive, and purifying properties, and is also used as a natural alternative to sugar.

In Indigenous gastronomy, tzawar mishki is cooked with barley, maize, or quinoa, giving rise to sweet and energy-rich dishes. One of the most traditional is prepared with barley rice, a grain widely used in the Sierra for its hardiness and nutritional value.

The agave plant is also used to make ropes, textiles, roofs, and fences, so the comprehensive use of agave reflects a holistic and respectful vision of the environment.

Recipe from and recorded by:
Mama Teresa Margarita
Ulcuango Colcha

Tree tomato chili

Ingredients:

110 grams of chili pepper

1 onion

3 scallions or spring onions

5 tamarillos (tree tomatoes)

4 lemons

3 sprigs of cilantro

½ cup of soybean oil

Ampiuile people, Colombia

Significant ingredient

Tree tomato and hot chili pepper

PREPARATION

01 The fruits and vegetables are washed, including the 5 tamarillos, 4 lemons, 3 scallions or spring onions, and 3 sprigs of cilantro.

02 The 3 stalks of spring onion and 3 sprigs of cilantro are chopped, and the onion is cut into thin strips (julienne).

03 The juice of two lemons is then squeezed through a strainer to remove the lemon seeds, and the lemon juice and salt are poured into a cup along with the onion. It is left to rest for 10 minutes so that the sharpness of the onion diminishes slightly.

04 The juice of the 2 lemons is poured into the mixture of scallions, onion, and cilantro.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

This tree tomato chili is served in a soup bowl to be shared and enjoyed with dishes such as empanadas, stuffed potatoes, Swiss chard croquettes, among other foods offered at the Own School Food Shop at the Ambaló Technical Educational Institution, in the municipality of Silvia, Cauca. It is easy to prepare and takes 20 minutes.

Recipe from and recorded by[26]*:*

Karol Valentina Ibarra Rengifo y Santiago Andrés Ibarra Sánchez.

TREE TOMATO AND HOT PEPPER

The tree tomato hot pepper sauce has its origins in the Andean region of South America, where the tree tomato is native. The combination of tree tomato with hot pepper and other ingredients has been used for centuries in the region's traditional cuisine. This spicy sauce is valued for its unique flavor and its ability to enhance the taste of various dishes. Over time, it has become an iconic element of Colombian and Ecuadorian gastronomy, and its popularity has led to it being enjoyed in other parts of the world.

The history of tree tomato hot pepper sauce reflects the culinary richness and the tradition of utilizing local ingredients to create extraordinary flavors. Without a doubt, it is a condiment that has left a significant mark on the gastronomic culture of the Andean region.

26 Developed as part of the Territory, Food, and Life Project.

Kentu tsulak

Sango

Misak people, Colombia

Ingredients:

6 liters of water

Toasted friano corn – 1 pound (450 grams)

1 pound of lamb or mutton

Fava beans - 1 pound

Peas - 1 pound

Ulluco (smooth potato) - 1 pound

White potatoes - 1 pound

Yellow potatoes - 1 pound

Cilantro - 100 grams

Thyme - 100 grams

Oregano - 100 grams

Scallions, 2 stalks, chopped fine

Garlic cloves, 5, chopped fine

Turmeric, a pinch

Pepper, a pinch

Significant ingredient

Corn

PREPARATION

01 Shell the dried corn and toast it in a pan for about 20 minutes. Allow it to cool, then grind it using a manual mill.

02 In a pot, bring 6 liters of water to a boil and add the meat, allowing it to cook for 30 minutes. Then add the finely chopped scallions and garlic, followed by the thyme and oregano.

03 Wash the white potatoes, yellow potatoes, and ullucos; chop them into medium-sized pieces and add them to the pot. Add the ground corn and stir constantly

04 Shell and wash the peas and broad beans, then add them to the pot. Add the pepper and turmeric. Allow the ingredients to cook and blend together until all the foods are cooked and the preparation thickens sufficiently.

Serve hot, accompanied with fresh cilantro and avocado.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

Preparation takes 2 hours. The maize variety may vary depending on the territory, as may the vegetables. For generations, maize has been a sacred plant and our principal food. It is not only basic sustenance, but also holds profound spiritual significance and is a key ingredient in medicine, for cleansing, and for harmony. Thus, it stands as a symbol of life and a bond with the land.

As an ancient food, it has given rise to diverse traditional recipes that reflect its nutritional value, such as mote, soup, arepas, and chicha, which are used at different moments in Misak life. These dishes transcend the daily diet and embody culinary traditions passed down through generations.

Maize also represents the resilience of Indigenous communities in the face of challenges such as the arrival of transgenic seeds. Thanks to collective efforts, both its varieties and our cultural identity have been preserved.

Recipe from[27]*:* Mamas Sabedoras de la cocina ancestral Misak

Recorded by: Yuli Andrea Yalanda, Dora Inés Calambas, Benilda Tumiña

27 Developed as part of the Territory, Food, and Life Project.

Kaq Ik

Chunto broth

Q'eqchi' people, Guatemala

Ingredients:

One chunto or large turkey

Garlic, 4 ounces

Tree tomatoes, 2

Achiote (Bixa orellana), 2 tablespoons in paste

Tomatoes, 2 pounds (900 grams)

Onion, 1/2 pound

Salt, 5 tablespoons

Red chili, 2 tablespoons

Aromatic herbs: 1 bunch of cilantro, half a bunch of fresh oregano leaves, half a bunch of mint, 2 bunches of samat (habanero cilantro), 2 bunches of scallions

For preparation the following are needed: Fire, firewood, large pot, ladle, water

Significant ingredient

Cilantro and red chili

PREPARATION

01 The large turkey is killed by cutting its neck.

02 First, the turkey is cooked with a little salt and sufficient water in a large pot. It is important to ensure that the water covers the meat, as it will boil and some will evaporate. This will be cooked immediately with the ingredients listed below.

03 Previously, the tree tomato, garlic, onion, tomato, and chili were roasted on a traditional comal (cooking griddle) and then blended with a little water. Now, add these ingredients to the broth.

04 Separately, chop the aromatic herbs, such as samat, mint, and oregano, and add everything together with a handful of salt. Add the achiote, which has been kneaded in a bowl with a little water.

05 After 1 hour, check the meat. If it is tender, the final ingredients, such as cilantro and oregano, can be added, and if it is well cooked, it can be removed from the heat and served in an artisanal clay cup.

Recipe from: Aproba Sank de la comunidad maya q'eqchi'

Recorded by: Brenda Xol

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

Everything should be eaten hot, to enjoy the flavor, and the meat should be served in large pieces with tamalitos made from dough, or tortillas, to taste, accompanied by cacao as a traditional beverage. Onion can be replaced by scallion, and if tree tomato is not available, tomato can be used, but chili should not be omitted. Preparation of the ingredients takes half an hour and cooking approximately an hour and a half, depending on whether the chunto is young or mature.

Chunto broth is a dish that is culturally recognized by the Q'eqchi' people and has been declared cultural and intangible heritage of the nation since 2007, according to Ministerial Agreement 801-2007 of Guatemala.

Xorb'il wa

Corn tortillas

Ingredients:

Maize, 5 pounds (2.25 kilograms)

Lime, a handful

Water, a medium-sized pot

1 bundle of firewood for the fire

Utensils: pot, spatula, grinding stone, griddle.

Q'eqchi' people, Guatemala

Significant ingredient

Maize

PREPARATION

01

Water is placed in a large pot and set over the fire. The maize is added, followed by the lime.

02 When it begins to boil, it is stirred with a paddle until the maize feels soft or tender and becomes nixtamal. It is then removed from the heat.

03 It is allowed to cool for at least half an hour and may rest for up to 12 hours. The nixtamal is strained and washed. It is then ground to make dough (using a grinding stone or motorized mill).

04 Tortillas can then be prepared using a grinding stone. A comal is placed over the fire, a little lime with water is added; it is left for about three seconds, then immediately dried to prepare the comal. The tortillas are then placed on it to cook.

05 The tortillas are turned over as they cook, or when they puff up. They are removed to be eaten hot with the accompanying meal.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

The corn tortilla is an important accompaniment in traditional Q'eqchi' cuisine, as "without the tortilla, the meal is not enjoyed in the same way." It is not possible to replace a traditional ingredient with another that is more readily available. Preparation time is 30 to 40 minutes using a wood fire.

Recipe from and recorded by:

Brenda Xol

Ajojtawajwan

Chilacayote atole

Ingredients:

1 kilogram of nixtamal (corn precooked in water with lime)

1 chilacayote squash

2 piloncillos (concentrated cane sugar)

½ kilogram of corn dough (ground nixtamal)

Tenampulco and Zautla, Puebla, Mexico

Significant ingredient

Chilacayote squash

PREPARATION

01 Begin by placing a pot that will hold approximately 10 liters, and add five liters of water to start heating.

02 The nixtamal is washed until all the husk is removed and it is completely white. It is then added to the boiling water and left to cook for two hours.

03 Wash the chilacayote squash and cut it in half. Using an amaxkal (a scraper for maguey), scrape the squash to remove all the pulp and seeds, and place this mixture in a bucket or tray.

04 After two hours, the pulp and seeds of the chilacayote squash are added and left to boil for one more hour.

The chilacayote squash is one of the region's seasonal harvest products. It is not produced in large quantities, and its best-known preparation is crystallized chilacayote.

05 Once this time has elapsed, two piloncillos are added and the mixture is left to boil until they dissolve. While the piloncillos are dissolving, the nixtamal is ground on the metate until half a kilogram of dough is obtained.

06 It is then dissolved in a little water and added to the pot. Everything is stirred with a spoon to mix well, and it is left to boil for about 10 minutes, stirring continuously during this time to prevent the dough from sticking.

07 Finally, the pot is removed from the heat, allowed to cool slightly, and served as desired. Many of us enjoy serving it in, and eating it from, jícaras (gourds) made from the squash.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

This preparation is an atole (a beverage) traditional to Indigenous peoples and is considered medicinal, as it possesses properties that help lower blood glucose levels. Besides being a refreshing drink, it is also quite filling.

Chilacayote atole is prepared starting in the month of November, when the chilacayote squash is ripe; after ripening, it can be stored for approximately six to eight months in a shaded place. Preparation takes approximately 3.5 hours: two hours for cooking the nixtamal, one hour for cooking the pulp and seeds of the chilacayote, 20 minutes for melting the piloncillo, and 15 minutes for cooking the corn dough. Difficulty is moderate, as the mixture can stick and burn if not stirred thoroughly when adding the corn dough.

Recipe from: Juana Márquez Ortega
Recorded by: Cesder-Prodes

Goat barbacoa in an earth oven

Xopanaco Community, Zautla, Puebla, Mexico

Ingredients:

1 goat (approximately 14 to 19 kilograms), cleaned and cut into pieces

12 liters of water

1¼ kilograms of ground chileancho

5-10 chipotle chilis or smoked chili (optional, for a spicy touch)

100 grams of ground cumin

50 grams of ground cinnamon

50 grams of ground cloves

100 grams of garlic powder

100 grams of salt

20 grams of oregano

20 grams of thyme

20 grams of bay leaf

20 grams of spearmint

12 liters of clean water

250 grams of dough (to seal the lid of the pot)

Significant ingredient

Goat

PREPARATION

01

Before sacrificing the animal, all the ingredients must be prepared to make the chili, with which the meat will be marinated before placing it in the oven.

02 Once the animal has been sacrificed, the carcass is cleaned, hung, and covered with a cloth or mesh to protect it, and it is left to rest for 8 to 12 hours to dry the meat, so it will absorb the marinade mixture.

This dish is popular in the Zautla region and is served at family gatherings, weddings, baptisms, confirmations, birthdays, and memorial anniversaries.

03 After the resting period, the meat is sliced into pieces of the size desired for serving to the guests.

04

In 12 liters of water, the powdered chileancho, chipotle if desired, and a powder made from all the condiments (cumin, cinnamon, cloves, garlic) are added, along with the 100 grams of salt, and the mixture is stirred until it is homogeneous.

05 Before placing the chili and meat in the pot, a film of lard must be applied to the inside of the pot to prevent the meat from sticking. The meat is then placed in the pot, and the pot is filled with the mixture, leaving an air space between the liquid and the pot lid. The herbs—oregano, thyme, and mint—are tied together in bundles, and placed in the pot along with the bay leaf. The pot is then covered and left to rest for at least 12 hours before being placed in the oven.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

This dish should be served hot and accompanied with rice, beans, and handmade corn tortillas.

Preparation is highly complex, because it must reach the exact point of doneness; if heat is insufficient, the food could be undercooked; in the worst case, it could be burned because of excessive heat.

Preparation of goat barbacoa can take several hours, as it involves slaughtering the animal, cleaning the meat, toasting and grinding the chili and seasonings to marinate the meat, and then cooking it slowly over low heat. Total time required for preparing the dish is five to six hours, not including the resting periods or the cooking time, as these are considered waiting periods.

06 To heat the oven, 50 kilograms of oak firewood are arranged and lit. When the fire is hot enough, volcanic stones are placed over the fire to heat them. The oven heating process ends once the firewood has been consumed and smoke no longer emerges. The stones will be redhot among the embers, an indicator that the oven is ready for the pot to be placed inside.

07 Once the pot is arranged in the oven, the lid (cajete) is filled with water and the oven is covered by placing the previously moistened wooden boards over it and covering it with cardboard or a metal sheet. A layer of earth is then placed on top to prevent heat loss. Cooking time is measured beginning at that moment: three and a half hours for a young goat and four hours for a mature animal.

08 When the time has elapsed, the earth is carefully removed and the oven is uncovered. The pot is removed and carried to the place where the food will be served.

THE GOAT

Goat meat is a traditional food in many communities of the region. Its use in celebrations and festivities reflects its cultural and symbolic value. On these occasions, dishes prepared with goat meat are often a means of bringing families together and strengthening community ties.

Each region may have its own way of preparing it. In the Zautla region, it is cooked in a traditional underground oven. This cooking method enhances the flavors of the meat and the seasonings with which it is prepared.

Raising goats provides an additional source of income for small farming families in this region. Goats require fewer resources than other livestock for their upkeep. They can feed on a variety of plants and adapt to different climatic conditions, making them ideal for inclusion in the backyard areas of Family Production Units.

Recipe from: Hilario Pérez Cruz
Recorded by: Cesder-Prodes

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“To plan our actions today, we must think seven generations ahead. I am not going to solve the climate problems, but I know that my actions will serve as support for those who come after me, and the actions of our peoples will strengthen those who will make up the society of the future.”

Ken Paul,
Wolastoqey from Canada.

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