



## Prologue

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

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### 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.

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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.



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.**