



Science Days for the UN Food Systems Summit 2021 Side-event.

The White/Wiphala Paper on Indigenous Peoples' food systems: Indigenous Peoples' contributions to food system's thinking and sustainability

Highlights

The side event of the UNFSS Science Days 2021 presenting the White/Wiphala Paper on Indigenous Peoples' food systems was held on Tuesday 6th of July and organized by the Global-hub on Indigenous Peoples' food systems & the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

BACKGROUND

Food systems at the global level and in many countries and regions are failing to end hunger, provide adequate nutritious foods for healthy diets, or assure safety of foods. How we produce and consume food is having profound implications for the health of people, animals, plants, and the planet itself. A change in world views in support of a range of actions is needed to re-orient food systems dynamics. The recently published White/Wiphala Paper on Indigenous Peoples' food systems provides an evidence-based contribution to global sustainable food systems debates, demonstrating that lessons can be learnt from Indigenous Peoples' approach to food. This side event was convened to facilitate an open dialogue on the important publications like the White/Wiphala paper ahead of the UN Food Systems Summit, its key findings, and key gaps in research and policy relating to Indigenous Peoples' food systems. The event was attended by approximately 60 people from research institutions, NGOs, Indigenous Peoples, policy actors and Government representatives.

HIGH LEVEL REMARKS & PRESENTATIONS

Geoffrey Roth, Member of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (United States of America) & Interim Executive Director, Native Americans in Philanthropy reminded participants that the UN Food Systems Summit has thus far paid insufficient attention to Indigenous Peoples and there remains immense lack of clarity over how Indigenous Peoples will be involved. He emphasised that Indigenous representatives must be invited to join pre-Summit and Summit processes, including all solution clusters, Action Tracks, and the Scientific Group. Indigenous Peoples knowledge and culture must be given equal respect and integrated in food policy and practice if the goals of the Summit and the UN Sustainable Development Goals are to be met.

Daniel Wai-Poi, Deputy Head of Mission in the New Zealand Embassy in Rome shared details of the recent game-changing proposal from New Zealand, which seeks to recognise and support the important role that Indigenous Peoples play in food production. The proposition is that by sharing power with Indigenous Peoples and providing for their participation in decision making will facilitate nature-positive food production. It includes: the fusion of "modern" and Indigenous technologies; the establishment of new organic labelling systems for Indigenous produce; support for Indigenous agri-businesses; targets and actions to minimise food waste; and new planning rules around freshwater use that have been co-developed by Indigenous Peoples and Government officials and which recognises the importance of water quality for human and ecological health. Whilst acknowledging the relevance and importance of food policies like the one presented by New Zealand, he reminded participants that these are solutions generated and applied locally, and no one system will apply globally.

Joseph Karanja, Associate Project Officer on Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems at UNESCO, shared recent data from his research on the health and wellbeing (including personal life satisfaction) of Indigenous pastoralists, their socio-economic contributions and interest in alternative livelihoods. Through this research, he demonstrated how Indigenous Peoples could contribute to food systems thinking and sustainability. He emphasised that Indigenous Peoples are critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG2 on hunger, with direct relevance to SDG2.4 on resilient and sustainable food systems and SDG2.5 on seed genetic diversity. He stressed the importance of high-quality papers like the White/Wiphala paper and underscored that if we are to fully understand Indigenous Peoples' food systems and their contributions, we must respect their knowledge. Indigenous Peoples' knowledge and culture must be integrated into food policy and practice.

Yon Fernández-de-Larrinoa, Chief of the Indigenous Peoples Unit at FAO, and Professor Bhaskar Vira from the University of Cambridge presented the scope and key policy recommendations from the White/Whipala Paper on Indigenous Peoples' food systems. The White/Whipala Paper on Indigenous Peoples' food systems was coordinated by the Global Hub on Indigenous Peoples' Food systems and provides: (1) characterization of Indigenous Peoples' food systems; (2) evidence on how Indigenous Peoples' food systems can contribute to debates on sustainable food systems (including the preservation of biodiversity, providing diverse and nutritious diets, and enhance resilience); (3) identification of drivers that place pressure on Indigenous Peoples' food systems; (4) outline of policy recommendations aligned with the five Action Tracks of the UN Food Systems Summit in September. Key policy recommendations from the White/Wiphala include the generation of a sub-fund for Indigenous Peoples as part of the Summit's proposed "Zero Hunger fund", and the expansion of social protection systems that explicitly recognise and respect the rights of Indigenous People. The presenters also stressed the urgent need for interculturality in formal and informal education systems, to support the development of intercultural food policies, and to directly confront the issue of land and tenure rights that often result in further marginalisation of Indigenous Peoples.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE DISCUSSION

During the panel discussion, Carol Zavaleta-Cortijo, medical surgeon and researcher at the Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia, shared insights and examples from her own research in Peru, reflecting on the low-waste nature of Indigenous Peoples' food systems, how Indigenous cosmogonies help to inform more sustainable food practices, the medicinal properties of food, and the importance of solidarity and food sharing in times of food crises.

Phrang Roy, coordinator of The Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty (TIP), elaborated on how food generation and production is carried out in balance with nature, citing the example of how shifting cultivation enables the preservation of rich biodiversity in the lands of the Khasi People in India. The speaker emphasised that these food systems are productive, sustainable, adaptive – all values that current food systems can learn from.

We heard reflections on the fact that market integration is increasingly becoming reality, but that markets themselves are not inherently exploitative - the terms of exchange. Therefore, there is need to incorporate principles of equity, respect, and recognition in all forms of exchange with Indigenous Peoples. Speakers cited labelling, certification, and self-help schemes as ways that terms of exchange may be made more equitable and meaningful for Indigenous Peoples.

The speakers further reflected on the importance of strong, responsible governance in preventing unregulated access to natural resources (e.g., by private corporations). Further, they elaborated on the need to ensure that processes of Free, Prior and Informed Consent, and Environmental Impact Assessments, are carried out appropriately.

Finally, a question on the importance of water highlighted that this was a key gap in current policy dialogues and practice, despite it being a critical part of Indigenous Peoples food systems – and central to sustainable food systems transformations. Speakers reflected that Indigenous Peoples' rich knowledge about water characteristics, quality, and use, also needs to be valued and incorporated into decisions on food production for local use and the markets.

The panel concluded that publications such as the White/Whipala paper, and of the work of knowledge platforms like the Global Hub on Indigenous Peoples' food systems – both of which seek to co-create knowledge - are important in illuminating evidence on the threats and opportunities for Indigenous Peoples worldwide ahead of the UN Food Systems Summit in September. The UN Food Systems Summit must loudly acknowledge that Indigenous Peoples Food Systems are "game changing solutions", as proposed and evidenced throughout within the White/Wiphala paper. The UN Food Systems Summit has thus far paid insufficient attention to Indigenous Peoples and there needs to be greater representations of Indigenous persons, their food systems and knowledge within Summit processes.