

AGENDA FOR FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION:

Perspectives of and actions by Indigenous Peoples and Nations of the Americas

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INTRODUCTION

During the last week of May 2024, in the cloud forests of Yunguilla, Ecuador, an encounter titled “Food systems transformation: perspectives of Peoples and Nations of the Americas” took place. Representatives of 10 Indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas, from Canada to the Peruvian Amazon, met to talk about the transformation of the region’s food systems.¹ With funding from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and coordination by Rimisp – Centro Latinoamericano para el Desarrollo Rural, Asháninka, Aymara, Cayambe, Cree, Inuit, Náhuatl, Q’eqchi’ Maya, Métis, Misak and Wolastoquey representatives spent three days reflecting on the elements that characterize their food systems, their potentialities and the challenges they face, as well as strategies and opportunities for strengthening resilient, sustainable and inclusive systems at the local and regional scale.



The invitation to think about these perspectives and actions for supporting a food systems transformation that includes Indigenous peoples and nations, was based on shared analysis. Food-related Indigenous practices and knowledge are increasingly recognized; they are documented and have been valued globally, but they are not always fully understood. Rarely are they put into practice at the national level, and they may even be unknown in their own territories. Meanwhile, the Indigenous population is increasingly exposed to climate changes that, along with social and political instability in their countries, among other tensions, have led to an increase in the number of people under food insecurity in recent years.

Indigenous food systems are the result of the co-evolution of cultural practices and natural ecosystems. These systems create a chain of practices and goods obtained from nature, ranging from production to commercialization, from a perspective of the interdependence among these practices and goods. These practices are transmitted from generation to generation, and according to testimonials gathered, form part of the core of cultural identity and imply work of conservation and care. Indigenous peoples consider food to be essential for maintaining good health, and that the land,

¹ Details about participants and the agenda of the encounter can be found in Annexes 1 and 2, respectively.

water and air, as well as animals and plants inhabiting our planet, must be respected and protected. In this world view, the food they produce is based traditionally on species adapted to local characteristics, and they use techniques for crop diversification and rotation, water conservation and terracing, and gathering on land and sea, among other practices very close to what is commonly understood as agroecology or regenerative agriculture.

Indigenous peoples navigate the tensions of inhabiting a world that is interconnected at the global scale, along with the vulnerabilities derived from the extreme poverty and social marginalization to which they have been subjected throughout history. In this context, in their life ways, they have played a key role in the care and recovery of the environment as a biodiverse source of livelihood, associated with healthy and complete diets. These coinciding elements reflect the increasingly visible strength of Indigenous stakeholders in movements for food sovereignty and resistance to climate change that are active in various Western countries, and which are not necessarily linked to Indigenous traditions.

During the “Food systems transformation: perspectives of Peoples and Nations of the Americas” encounter, various leaders met to share and construct joint solutions that give greater visibility to the value of Indigenous food practices, knowledge and social and environmental innovations, and to foster their use and adoption in other spaces. All participants in the encounter agree that Indigenous leadership is necessary in food systems governance structures at the local and national levels, not only because this voice has historically been excluded, but also because the knowledge and perspectives these peoples have developed will make an important contribution to national policies affecting everyone.

This document is a synthesis of the reflections and exchange of ideas that occurred at this encounter, and which shape an agenda centered on an understanding of Indigenous food systems as complex systems where various levels and dimensions intertwine.

Food systems are part of the richness of a culture; they are a reservoir of biodiversity and a source of good health, as well as a space of political affirmation and affirmation of rights in an interconnected world. In these elements the potentialities of Indigenous food systems unfold, mainly associated with their sustainability, the capacity for resilience in the face of social and environmental crises, their contribution to understanding health as a process based on good nourishment, and a field of opportunities for local economic development.

Indigenous food systems also face challenges, such as the transmission or recovery of ancestral knowledge and knowledge related to everyday life, or the political and social strengthening of communities so they can establish an agenda for real advocacy, connect with transformations of our times and include technological innovations in their practices. To address these challenges, it is crucial to build alliances. In this area, participants in the encounter highlighted the importance of the academic sector and research, the influence of the state and public policies, and the contribution made by international development agencies and philanthropic organizations.

This document reflects the diverse voice of a group, where bridges were established between cultures and territories that, because of their geographic or linguistic distance, had not had an opportunity for direct and sustained dialogue for the purpose of creating an agenda for the future, with objectives that

can only be measured by future generations. This necessary “far-sightedness” regarding food systems transformation is reflected in the words of Marisol Shariva, one of the participants:

“We are eagles; we care for the chicks. And like an eagle, which goes up into the heavens and surveys the landscape from there, we have our vision. We are like an eagle; we feel the place 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).

1. FOOD SYSTEMS THAT NOURISH CULTURES

Indigenous food systems and their possibilities for transformation are described by peoples and nations of the Americas in four cross-cutting areas that together create a common agenda:

- Culture and biodiversity in interdependence
- Cultural nutrition and health
- Rights and political advocacy
- Challenges and opportunities in a context of globalization

1.1. Culture and biodiversity in interdependence

Indigenous food systems relate diverse dimensions of social life in their territories. Cosmovisions, knowledge, traditional practices and innovations converge in food systems that respond to more than just needs for dietary subsistence.

For the peoples and nations of the Americas, community lifestyles and cosmovisions have in common the creation of relationships of interdependence among various aspects of life.

The value and visibility of that interdependence is manifested in both the collective and communitarian nature of diverse everyday practices and conceptions associated with food, and in the relationship established with other beings in nature that are not human. Understood in this way, the cultural practices implied in food systems facilitate the maintenance of these relationships and, as a consequence, good health and care of ecosystems.

The Andean tradition *pamba mikuy*
(communitarian meal)



The photograph shows a *Pamba Mikuy*, which consists of sharing food in a communal setting. Its meaning is based on the principle of reciprocity, i.e. those who participate in the *Pamba Mikuy* contribute the food they have grown in their *chakras* to gather around a single table and share it with all participants' (Kelly Ulcuango, Pucará de Pesillo Indigenous Community, Kayambi People, Ecuador).

Credit: Kelly Ulcuango,
Pucará de Pesillo Indigenous Community, Kayambi People, Ecuador.

Access to natural resources and the relationship with them defines food systems, to a great extent. There is a common conception in the cosmovisions of the peoples and nations of the Americas that understands other-than-human nature as an active agent; interactions with it are characterized by a relationship of reciprocity, where human persons are just another participant in interactions and exchanges.

The earth, sea, rivers, seeds, lichens, peat or elk are considered fundamental stakeholders with the capacity to act, but above all, they are considered reserves of knowledge and culture, which have been accumulated for thousands of years. In this way, care is understood as extended and inclusive practices toward persons and other beings that make up the ecosystem, as well as reciprocal practices, where humans care for nature and vice versa.

Fern sprouts



Credit: Ken Paul,
Wolastoquey, Canada.

“For us, seeds, more than food, are part of the identity of the culture. **If a seed disappears, we, as communities, will become impoverished** in some way.” (Leider Andrés Tombé Morales, Misak from Colombia)

“As Indigenous persons, we see ourselves as part of the environment; we don’t call ourselves stakeholders, who come to a territory and put a stake in the ground and claim it for themselves. We don’t see ourselves as administrators of the land, because that would mean having the idea that we actually control what happens there. There are elders who teach us to say that **the land and the water are administrators of us.**” (Ken Paul, Wolastoquey from Canada)

“Peat moss is a lichen that takes more than a thousand years to grow. It is a natural cleanser of water systems. This is the food of large animals, such as elk and deer. Therefore, **if we lose our peat moss, we have lost thousands of years of knowledge.**” (Priscilla Settee, Cree from Canada)

Many studies show that Indigenous peoples, with their biocentric focus, are bearers of a knowledge that contributes to the preservation of biodiversity: 80% of the planet’s biodiversity is concentrated in areas that coincide with traditional Indigenous territories, which cover 22% of Earth’s surface (FAO, 2021; Sobrevila, 2008). The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2020) notes that their participation, protection and management of natural resources constitute one of the main contributions of Indigenous peoples to the sustainability of the world.

1.2. Cultural nutrition and health

One distinctive trait of food systems that has been highlighted is the high nutritional value of locally produced traditional foods, in contrast with the negative health effects of the habitual and excessive consumption of ultra-processed foods.

It is a matter of consensus among diverse peoples that health has broader sense than well-being or physical strength, integrating care for the territory as something that also is sustained through traditional food. Therefore, body and territory form part of a complex health system.

Caring for the environment is associated with caring for health on various levels. One significant aspect of Indigenous food systems is that they are based on resources that are local and produced on a small scale, without excluding foods produced long distances away. The food systems are not closed; they integrate relationships with different peoples and foods. In this sense, the local, the foreign and the culturally relevant are not static ideas and must be understood within a dynamic of interdependence, with variable tensions and balances.

Indigenous food systems thus aspire to maintain degrees of belonging with regard to foods and food system practices; In other words, these are diets that have evolved jointly with ecosystems and social relationships over time. This relationship among food, environment and culture is considered a key stakeholder for people's health.

This issue is widespread throughout America, and is illustrated clearly in the words of representatives of peoples in Canada, Guatemala and Peru, whose biological adaptation to their environments, and to the digestion of certain foods, requires a particular diet that is incompatible with the overconsumption of some products associated with certain production models, and even with "balanced diets" according to international nutrition standards.

Skinning a seal with an *ulu*
(knife used by women)



Credit: Lynn Blackwood, Inuit, Canada.

"Because, with the industries that are reaching every corner, there is an increase in diabetes, because of the sugar, because of the refined flours, because now at school they are starting to give us bread instead of corn. We **have a digestive system for corn, not bread**, not flour." (Ernesto Tzi Chub, Q'eqchi' Maya from Guatemala)

"The Inuit who ate food from the wild, such as marine mammals, fish and caribou, did not have scurvy or many diseases that are caused by nutritional deficiencies, but they did not eat vegetables and fruits. In my education as a dietitian, they tell us that vegetables and fruits are a fundamental pillar. And **once European lifestyles arrived, diseases began to occur.**" (Lynn Blackwood, Inuk from Canada)

"We continue to farm and we continue to teach other sisters, so they can also feed their children, so they are well-nourished and have strong little bodies; When they are 11 months old, the children are already walking. At a year and a half, they're already climbing small hills." (Marisol Shariva Pérez, Asháninka from Peru)

In 2009 by the Center for Indigenous Peoples' Nutrition and Environment showed that traditional foods, whether local crops or wild foods, can cover around 100% of energy needs in the diet of adults (FAO, 2021).

1.3. Rights and political advocacy

Recognition of forms of production, consumption and related cultural practices is key for strengthening Indigenous food systems. In a context of coexistence with global-scale development models, with certain industries and states this poses challenges for exercising Indigenous sovereignty² and giving viability to the coexistence of foods from different places, with diverse forms of production.

For example, one threat to Indigenous food systems identified by encounter participants is the extensive, large-scale control of soil and water for the agriculture, aquaculture and livestock industries. Meanwhile, significant opportunities were identified in the regulatory recognition of food systems as such, for protecting and promoting them. This is also seen as a resource that can have an impact not only on improving production conditions and possibilities for the commercialization of local products, but also on activating or promoting communities' interest in conserving and developing their own foods systems.

Backyard garden tomatoes



“Original peoples have the right to maintain, conserve and make decisions about their own production and food systems. Because **politics has a lot of influence on what production system is implemented as a family and as a community.**”
(Kelly Ulcuango, Pukará de Pesillo Indigenous Community, Kayambi People, Ecuador)

Credit: Shannon Udy, Métis, Canada.

According to proposals regarding the need for Indigenous sovereignty over food systems, it is crucial for states throughout the continent to take action based on legal instruments that protect the rights of Indigenous peoples, international and in different regions.

² This refers not to state sovereignty, but to degrees of administrative self-determination and spaces for political decision making about matters that determine the collective future of Indigenous peoples. The idea of the self-determination of peoples inspired the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007).

Indigenous peoples in the Latin American region highlight the need to comply with International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 169 on Indigenous and tribal peoples, a key instrument for organizations and states that propose to address Indigenous rights. The convention establishes aspects related to the right to self-determination, where, in principle, Indigenous peoples' traditional production and consumption systems should be recognized and protected as part of the guarantee of political, territorial, economic and cultural rights, as they ensure the reproduction of their society as such. One example of compliance with this instrument is the role of local governance and Indigenous communal management in the conservation of territories with significant forest ecosystems (FAO and Fund for the Development of the Indigenous People of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2021). Nevertheless, recognition of Indigenous peoples and their rights remains outside of the institutional frameworks and practices of many countries (ILO, 2018).

Meanwhile, Indigenous peoples of Canada have emphasized the need for national legislation to align with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2007), to guarantee their rights to lands, waters, ice and air. In 2021, the federal government approved Law C-15, which sought to affirm the nature of UNDRIP and align Canadian legislation with its content. Within that framework, the government developed and implemented, jointly with Indigenous peoples, the 2023-2028 Action Plan announced in 2023. It is currently being applied and is viewed with cautious optimism by Indigenous peoples, who continue to assert their rights (International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs [IWGIA], 2022; IWGIA, 2024).

1.4. Challenges and opportunities in a context of globalization

One issue shared by peoples throughout America is the introduction of foreign food practices that, like industrialized production and consumption, have blocked the recovery and preservation of Indigenous food systems, as well as their prosperity. One of the challenges identified by indigenous peoples is that food production should respond to local food needs and not to external demands that threaten their food security.

Participants in the encounter identified impacts that industrial agricultural practices have on local agriculture, and which compromise traditional production and biodiversity. Specifically, they noted the high ecological pressure and low availability of land for less-intensive forms of production.

“We see that products from other countries are arriving in our communities. For example, the kiwi. For us, it’s an exotic product, but there it is. The communications media play a key role in food systems, because **they’re the ones who say** what food you have to eat at home, **what food is going to make you happy.**” (Alejandro Marreros, Náhuatl from Mexico)

Extractive and industrial development has had a major impact on Indigenous territories and food systems. According to an analysis of 3,081 environmental conflicts, conducted by Global Witness and other researchers, with the Environmental Justice Atlas platform, Indigenous peoples are affected in 34% of all conflicts. Among the most common impacts are landscape loss (which affects around 56% of peoples), loss of means of subsistence (around 52%) and being stripped of lands (50%). This demonstrates the threat not only to biodiversity and the sustainability of local food systems, but also to rights and traditional lifestyles, increasing health problems and threatening the relationship with their territories (Scheidel et al., 2023).

The widespread availability of ultra-processed foods, meanwhile, is incongruent with the exercise of Indigenous cultural practices, such as gathering or harvesting local foods, and the transmission of traditional recipes, among others. It also leads to an increase in health problems, such as nutritional deficiencies, diabetes, anemia, and others. The correlation between transformations in the diets of Indigenous populations and socioeconomic, cultural and ecological changes is a phenomenon strongly associated with their ties to the global world.

The effects of the nutrition transition are alarming for public health, if we also consider that Indigenous peoples have the highest rates of infant mortality, childhood and adult obesity, and malnutrition. On occasion, this transition has been promoted by national public health systems through dietary recommendations that are sometimes culturally inappropriate or irrelevant (FAO, 2021).

2. POTENTIALITIES OF AND CHALLENGES FOR FOOD SYSTEMS

The Indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas have a shared vision with regard to the potentialities of their food systems, and they jointly identify challenges for realizing these potentialities. These can be summarized in four main areas, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Potentialities of and corresponding challenges for food systems

Potentiality of food systems	Challenges for food systems
Preserve and promote forms of sustainable cultural heritage.	Face weakening of traditional Indigenous knowledge and practices.
Strengthen biodiversity and capacity for response to social and environmental crises.	Face environmental risks and the consequences of climate change.
Promote a holistic approach to health.	Require better positioning of the holistic approach to health and cultural nutrition.
Offer opportunities for local economic development.	Require strengthening of Indigenous governance for the exercise of sovereignty and political rights.

2.1. Preserve forms of sustainable cultural heritage in face of the weakening of traditional Indigenous knowledge and practices

One potentiality that food systems mobilize in a cross-cutting way is the cultural heritage of communities. This refers to their ancestral lifestyles, knowledge and skills, transmitted for generations in the practice of traditional agriculture. Some initiatives and practices where this potential is manifested are the production and commercialization of local handcrafts, which have been promoted by initiatives for the intergenerational rescue of knowledge within communities, and the creation of schools where knowledge and practices of traditional production are shared.

Men and women farmers of different ages holding crops



Credit: Eleodoro Baldiviezo, Aymara, Bolivia.

“The *campesino* schools are where **all these forms of ancestral knowledge are shared** It is a space for sharing ideas among farmers who can only plant root crops, others who grow citrus fruit, others who grow other types of crops. Bringing together this diversity of people implies learning from each family’s life experience.” (Ernesto Tzi Chub, Q’eqchi’ Maya from Guatemala)

The transmisión of this knowledge and these practices is not the same in all Indigenous peoples. In Colombia, in particular, young people have a noteworthy commitment to rural life and the recovery of knowledge, but in other peoples, youth participation in the transmission of cultural heritage and traditional agricultural practices is noted as a need to be addressed.

The knowledge, practices and perspectives offered by Indigenous food systems are a true contribution to debate about the unsustainability of the global food system. The inclusion of this knowledge in public policies can benefit the sustainable management of natural resources, as well as processes of transformation of food systems for all (FAO, 2021). In accordance with this, the FAO has recognized the importance of involving young people in the preservation of this knowledge, working within the framework of initiatives aimed at promoting dialogue and participation (IWGIA, 2024).

There is a series of common challenges for Indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas that stems directly from certain impacts of globalization and the colonization of consumption practices that are increasing rapidly.

Priscilla Settee's uncle holding a sturgeon



Credit: Priscilla Settee, Cree, Canada.

“Young people no longer eat cultural foods. They eat junk **foods that cause diseases** like diabetes. We see it every day, and we see how cultural identity is being lost.” (Marisol Shariva Pérez, Asháninka from Peru)

“I see an increase in the number of people who are eating ultra-processed products. They make it easy for people to acquire these products.” (Brenda Xol, Q’eqchi’ Maya from Guatemala)

“If you go back 75 years, we **never had cereal for breakfast. That was promoted by wheat producers.** Cereal is another expression of monocropping, of practices of Western society.” (Ken Paul, Wolastoquey from Canada).

The modification of patterns of consumption is a problem shared across communities throughout America. In the face of such challenges, some interesting responses have already been put into practice, such as markets of local products, and especially initiatives for promoting the transmission of healthy eating habits and the nutritional advantages of locally produced foods.

Dietary changes in Indigenous communities are related to the reduction of access to traditional foods, but also with harm to the earth, and they have as a consequence the loss of practices and, therefore, of means of subsistence and the transmission of traditional knowledge within Indigenous peoples. And this, in turn, contributes strongly to creating poverty, food insecurity, social disintegration and loss of identity, according to indicators of the FAO (2021) and IWGIA (2024).

2.2. Strengthen biodiversity and the capacity for responding to crises, as well as for facing the consequences of climate change

Much of food systems' potentiality lies in the sustainability of the practices they promote, in both ecological and cultural terms. This is reflected in practices such as taking advantage of all parts of an animal that has been hunted, the harmony of the rhythm of planting with the phases of the moon and the carrying capacity of the soil, or fishing seasons, which follow the reproductive cycles of fish and mollusks. In this way, Indigenous food systems are grounded in a close bond of reciprocity with the ecosystem to which they belong and for which they care, thanks to traditional knowledge related to food.

The biodiversity of the maritime and terrestrial territories inhabited by Indigenous communities can be understood not only as a condition, but also as an effect of Indigenous food systems. Diets adapted to a specific biodiversity, the lack of waste associated with artisanal production, and the constant adjustment of production cycles to ecological circumstances contribute to the sustaining of ecosystems into which humans are integrated by means of food systems.

This social and ecological reciprocity, mobilized by Indigenous food systems, is reflected in a spiritual dimension specific to each culture and each territory, which is especially important for facing situations of climate, health or social crisis, as in the case of the recent pandemic:

Lobster



Credit: Ken Paul, Wolastoquey, Canada.

“I know that during COVID, when the world was shutting down, a large number of native communities told it that they were going back out, to the territories far from cities, **go out there, go hunt, go fish**, take their families out there.” (Ken Paul, Wolastoquey from Canada)

The adaptation and ability of Indigenous food systems to respond to occasional social and environmental crises has been on the agenda for discussion in international agencies. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2023), Indigenous and local knowledge is indispensable for understanding and leveraging the resilience of socio-ecological systems. For centuries, Indigenous peoples have developed strategies for adapting to changing environments. For this reason, Indigenous self-determination and the recognition of their rights are fundamental for promoting development pathways that can offer responses to the effects of climate change. Nevertheless, they remain outside of the Sustainable Development Goals. (IWGIA, 2024).

The environmental risks faced by Indigenous food systems are mainly described in terms of climate change, environmental pollution, deforestation, exhaustion of soil, drought and the loss of animals, fish, plants and harvests. These risks, meanwhile, are experienced most radically among the Indigenous peoples and nations of America, because their subsistence is closely tied to local natural resources, especially in the Latin American region.

Tubers and vegetables that grow on the coast, in the highlands and in the Amazon



Credit: Marisol Shariva Pérez and Atilio Chauca López, Asháninka, Peru.

“One of the challenges I have identified is the drought, which is related to climate change. In the region where we live, this year 100% of the harvest has been lost in some places, and in others at least 60% has been lost.” (Alejandro Marreros, Náhuatl from Mexico)

“In the communities, there is a lot of deforestation and illicit activities. Contamination of the river, of children, of our brothers and sisters who live there. They drink that polluted water, which causes other illnesses, and that’s what we see. They also take packaged food, like canned tuna that has also passed the expiration date, and because they don’t know, because they don’t know how to read and write, they eat it. Sometimes they also self-medicate for health problems.” (Marisol Shariva Pérez, Asháninka from Peru)

The threats from climate change that Indigenous peoples face are diverse and are related to poverty and inequality, the erosion of livelihoods based on natural resources, residing in critical zones, migration and forced displacement, gender inequality, and the lack of recognition, rights and institutional support (ILO, 2018).

2.3. Promote a holistic approach to health that requires better public positioning

This is an issue shared by peoples in Canada, Colombia, Peru and Ecuador, which, from the perspectives of Indigenous peoples of the Americas, holds that health is reflected in individual physical aspects — for example, nutrition — as well as in cultural and spiritual aspects, of both individuals and the community as a whole.

Interdependence, as a central value of Indigenous cosmovisions in the Americas, contributes to the development of conceptions capable of integrating different scales. Thus, their cultures conceive of health from a holistic perspective, which refers to social and ecological balance, where individuals and their singular state of health also reflect the state of the relationships of which they are part.

The discussion was rich in images and examples that highlighted the importance of culturally relevant foods and their medicinal strengths, from the properties of local organic foods for preventing illnesses to traditional medicinal products used to cure and alleviate symptoms of illnesses, such as the *quina* tree in Peru.

“When I talk about food as medicine, it’s not only from a nutritional standpoint, but also from a cultural and spiritual standpoint.” (Lynn Blackwood, Inuit from Canada)

Indigenous peoples’ food systems are multifunctional and fundamentally holistic, where foods are inseparably associated with health, care and energy. This multifunctionality is rooted in the understanding of food systems as entiresities, which cannot be dissociated from the other elements of ecosystems. This potentiality presents Indigenous peoples as indispensable stakeholders for a future of sustainable food in the world (FAO, 2020).

In a context of coexistence with industrial food systems, the positioning of multicultural perspectives on nutrition and health represents a cross-cutting challenge for the Indigenous communities of the continent. The lack of guidelines for nutritional policies that integrate multicultural perspectives, along with easy access to ultra-processed foods, highlight the need to strengthen the protection of food systems under regulatory tools and implement strategies for educating about foods that are nutritional and appropriate to cultures.

On one hand, there is great pressure on ecosystems. On the other, a limited production and consumption of local, or culturally relevant foods. This limitation not only represents a food problem, but is also detrimental to the health of the culture, and is manifested in the individual experience of “cultural hunger”: a conception proposed apropos of the consumption of caribou by Indigenous peoples living in Canadian territories, and which is also present in the other Indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas, who understand food security as inseparable from the sustainability of their cultures. In discussion about this concept, Náhuatl and Q’eqchi’ Maya participants from North and Central America complement the idea with regard to the increase in wheat consumption, to the detriment of corn, the traditional food of that area. Andean peoples said the same when they spoke of a decrease in the consumption of quinoa and certain varieties of potato.

Caribou meat



Credit: Lynn Blackwood, Inuk, Canada.

“Our main source of protein is the caribou, and now it’s endangered, so hunting is prohibited. **I ate caribou last week; I felt nutritionally satisfied, and my cultural hunger was also satisfied.** This cultural hunger is a concept that we have to position, not just nutrients.” (Lynn Blackwood, Inuk from Canada)

Dependence on markets and on food welfare systems, that do not take into account the traditional practices of Indigenous peoples, lead to the consumption of foods with a high sugar, salt and fat content. As a result, Indigenous peoples face an increase in non-communicable diseases, such as obesity, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer and other chronic illnesses. Added to this is the high prevalence of malnutrition, especially among children (FAO, 2021).

2.4. Indigenous governance for the exercise of social rights and viability of opportunities for local economic development

Another significant potentiality attributed to the expansion of Indigenous food systems is diversification of and innovation in income sources. Tourism, advances in infrastructure allowing greater connectivity, new forms of economy and uses of technological advances are opportunities for food systems that also dynamize local communities' social and economic life.

Small farmers offer their products
in the city's farmer's market



Credit: Brenda Xol and Ernesto Tzi Chub,
Q'eqchi' Maya, Guatemala.

“Through food systems conservation, new income sources are also being created, through tourism, for example, and with **the creation of innovative foods**, which are now being incorporated into gourmet cuisine.” (Kelly Ulcuango, Pukará de Pesillo Indigenous Community, Kayambi People, Ecuador)

“The plaza became a traditional space where farmers offer their products, with traditional music from the area. They are sharing their foods and their crops with brothers and sisters of other peoples.” (Ernesto Tzi Chub, Q'eqchi' Maya, Guatemala)

Most Indigenous peoples belong to the demographic group that lives in absolute poverty. Under these conditions, natural resources represent the bulk of their income sources. In practice, considering the need for climate change mitigation, related data demonstrate how Indigenous peoples minimize emissions from deforestation and maintain a relationship with their natural resources that is both sustainable and productive (ILO, 2018).

Leveraging this potentiality of food systems poses challenges for the Indigenous peoples' governance, their political rights at the national level, the relationship they maintain with their states and local institutions, and for the weakening of Indigenous leadership.

Indigenous peoples' governance mechanisms are strongly integrated with their territories and lifestyles. This is evident with regard to older people and their leadership, inter-generational

transmission of Indigenous knowledge, and awareness of their collective rights. These elements are fundamental for the functioning of their governance systems, which are complex and closely tied to their values of solidarity and reciprocity, which are reflected in the practice of communal work (FAO, 2020).

The relationship with the state, in particular, is mentioned as a challenge, because it assumes a two-way relationship. Communities need state support and recognition, like that received by industries that conduct productive activities in the territory. There is a clear demand for minimum conditions for the coexistence of diverse lifestyles within the same state, which takes into consideration cultural diversity. Examples of this are recognition of Indigenous practices and products, or the incorporation of approaches that include elements of Indigenous cosmovisions in health policies.

Meanwhile, Indigenous peoples and nations have posed for themselves the challenge of maintaining the strategic sense of this recognition, and not creating excessive dependence or clientelism in relations with the state and local authorities. They participate in international networks and connect with municipalities, civil society organizations and the private sector. Communities have made progress in this area and constantly seek entities that can implement their decisions, but they are also aware of the limitations of these alliances and support.

“Public policy is focused on the material part: projects, roads, bridges, seeds, technology, but **the entire spiritual part is absent**. Other aspects that are not addressed are collective issues, and many of **the policies have encouraged individualism**.” (Eleodoro Baldiviezo, Aymara from Bolivia)

“I never want to say that governments give something, but I do say that they should support something and promote alliances. But when I work in my community, I try to remind them that **if we want to work for our own sovereignty, we have to examine all aspects that guide our community**. We must have responsible governance in our community.” (Ken Paul, Wolastoquey from Canada)

International evidence is clear when it proposes that state recognition of Indigenous peoples and their rights is fundamental for strengthening their governance practices. Similarly, Indigenous peoples must be taken into account when making decisions about resource management and in development programs, through consultation and consent processes (FAO, 2020).

3. STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTHENING INDIGENOUS FOOD SYSTEMS

The dialogue that took place in the encounter revealed a wide repertoire of strategies, practices and experiences of Indigenous communities for the protection and valuing of their food systems, which assume coordination with stakeholders within and outside of the communities. Of course, this poses various degrees of difficulty. Some internal conditions, specific to the communities' context, affect how viable or complex the implementation of certain strategies is, and some differences can be highlighted.

From the standpoint of some Indigenous peoples of Canada, where there is a certain articulation between Indigenous communities and academic institutions (for example, a tripartite council), it is possible to design strategies that involve the academic world. Nevertheless, there is a gap between academic and indigenous knowledge systems related with an approach of large-scale industrial agriculture conditions from the academic side, which condition the possibilities of a common collaboration.

In Indigenous communities in Latin America, there are fewer specific paths for collaboration with academia, and stakeholders therefore consider strategies for connecting with this sector to be complex, with various degrees of difficulty.

Strategies implemented by Indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas fall into four key areas:

- Education and transmission of knowledge
- Integral health promotion and community care
- Strengthening the community and networking for advocacy
- Technological innovations for access to natural resources.

3.1. Education and transmission of knowledge for cultural recovery and economic empowerment

The recovery and strengthening of food-related cultural practices and ancestral knowledge are at the core of strategies for protecting and adapting Indigenous food systems. Noteworthy among the experiences shared was the development of educational projects, incentives for production and participation in local markets (see Table 2).

Table 2: Viability of education strategies for cultural recovery and economic empowerment

Estimated viability and stakeholders whom it depends on	<i>Strategies in the field of education for cultural recovery and economic empowerment</i>
Viable and stakeholders communities dependent on the outside the	Ancestral young chefs: methodology for sharing culinary knowledge between adults and young people.
	Healthy shops: school initiative for commercialization of healthy food prepared by young students.
	Farmer competitions: annual competitions with cash prizes to motivate families to participate and cultivate a diversity of crops.
Viable and stakeholders communities dependent on the within the	Registry of traditional recipes for future generations: preparation, methods, seasoning, cooking techniques.
	Dialogues with people who have knowledge about how and when to gather medicines from the land.
	Education programs and training or tutoring that facilitate the sharing of knowledge and skills, and development of the labor force.
	Renewed valuing of the Asháninka language and ethnicity in educational institutions (Bilingual Intercultural Education).
	Farmer schools, sharing hands: space for exchanging knowledge among local farmers to foster collaborative work.
	Promotion of networks for learning and interchange.
	Study of food system to characterize its behavior.
	Integral agroecology: union of stakeholders empowered to produce, transform and commercialize using agroecological methods.
	Farm to fork: Promote a “farm to fork” system for own consumption in institutions such as hospitals and prisons.
Enhancement of family gardens, through production of vegetables and herbs.	
Less viable and stakeholders communities dependent on the outside the	Increase programs relevant to the territory to transfer knowledge about dressing game animals (skinning, butchering).
	Advocacy with public health and education institutions to recognize and work with traditional and western plants, training communities in food preparation.
	Promote a holistic approach to health in public policy.
	Develop programs so young people follow the work of fisheries scientists.
	Creation of women’s agroecology networks.
	Rural challenges: development of curriculum relevant to the territory.
Less viable and stakeholders communities dependent on the within the	Document and disseminate knowledge and traditional and ancestral foods and nutrition.
	Recovery of traditional and ancestral foods and nutrition.

In various of these strategies aimed at the recovery of practices and knowledge, participants propose intergenerational work – with youth, to promote and revitalize the use of knowledge and practices, and with older generations, to rescue or collect accumulated information and strengthen intergenerational bonds. Initiatives in this area include short-term strategies, such as intergenerational encounters, and long-term strategies, such as the establishment of farmer schools.

“In the Métis community, there have been various events with the goal of bringing young people and elders together to interact and share knowledge, because **most young people don’t have a connection with older adults, who are the ones who maintain traditional knowledge.** That can also support the development of the work force.” (Shannon Udy, Métis from Canada)

Q’eqchi’ people and variety of herbs, fruits and vegetables



Credit: Brenda Xol and Ernesto Tzi Chub, Q’eqchi’ Maya, Guatemala.

Bannock (quick bread) traditional Métis recipe



Credit: Shannon Udy, Métis, Canada.

Cultural recovery is a process that ranges from talking with those who have the knowledge, to carrying out programs aimed at young people, to promoting professional development at the service of communities and their food systems. In the professionalization of practices, economic development takes an approach based on cultural and territorial relevance.

The most viable strategies tend to be associated with greater dependence on stakeholders within the communities, while the more difficult ones tend to depend on outside stakeholders. This relationship (more viable assuming internal coordination and less viable assuming outside coordination) indicates that Indigenous peoples and nations face challenges when it comes to building their capacity for advocacy and for networking with other organizations, institutions and interested stakeholders outside their own communities.

3.2. Promotion of integral health and community care

The dialogue during the encounter identified a series of strategies that emphasize the role of health, understood from a holistic standpoint (see Table 3).

Table 3: Viability of strategies for integral health promotion and community care

<i>Estimated viability and stakeholders whom it depends on</i>	<i>Strategies for promotion of integral health and community care</i>
Viable and dependent on stakeholders outside the communities	Healthy shops: school initiative for commercialization of health foods prepared by young students.
Viable and dependent on stakeholders within the communities	Dialogues with people who have knowledge about where and when to gather medicines from the land.
	Healthy food boxes: offering food boxes at reduced prices for students and families, including non-local products.
	Community gardens.
	Community kitchens: help new caregivers enhance food preparation skills .
	Medicinal gardens and exchange: organization of gardens and exchange of medicinal products and treatment of illnesses in collaboration with health institutions.
	Collection and registry of products from communities, nutritional foods.
	Community health: health posts with community agents to implement first aid services, because access to these services is limited in some territories.
	Farm to fork: Promote a “farm to fork” system for own consumption in institutions such as hospitals and prisons.
Study of food system to characterize its behavior.	
Less viable and dependent on stakeholders outside the communities	Increase programs relevant to the territory to transfer knowledge about dressing game animals (skinning, butchering).
	Advocacy with public health and education institutions to recognize and work with traditional and western plants, training communities in food preparation.
	Promote a holistic approach to health in public policy.

As with community-level care, health is understood as the effect of shared responsibility. Strategies for promoting a holistic concept of health are consistent with those related to promoting education and the transmission of knowledge for cultural recovery and economic empowerment, and focus on the recovery of medicinal plants, nutritional foods and an approach to health and food as components of collective well-being.

“Children investigated with their parents what ancestral foods were like and later prepared those foods.” (Leider Andrés Tombé Morales, Misak from Colombia)

“At the academic level, at the Amawtay Wasi University we have implemented community challenges, which are teaching-learning systems in which students learn in the community through intergenerational dialogue along with wise elders. This system is unique to our university and breaks with the hegemonic structure of conventional universities. (Kelly Ulcuango, Pukará de Pesillo Indigenous Community, Kayambi People, Ecuador)

“I am an agronomist, and unquestionably my grandmother had much more knowledge about growing Andean tuber and root crops, things I haven’t had the opportunity to see in other places. And they are things that really have to do with the culture; they have to do with spirituality, and above all they have a great deal to do with the way we view life.” (Eleodoro Baldiviezo, Aymara from Bolivia)

Family hearth



Credit: Leider Andrés Tombé Morales, Misak, Colombia.

“We have an exchange of products. On May 24, we had an exchange of cultural plants that we grow in the fields and the medicinal plants whose value we are recovering.” (Marisol Shariva Pérez, Asháninka from Peru)

“Part of our service to the community is to help more and more parents become better food preparers. We have 60 community gardens; this really has led to an explosion of community gardens in First Nations communities.” (Priscilla Settee, Cree from Canada).

3.3. Strengthening and networking for advocacy

Strengthening communities’ organizational dimension is one of the most important strategy areas for Indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas. Along with objectives related to strengthening Indigenous forms of governance, strategies are proposed that assume networking with external stakeholders and institutions, with the goal of influencing local and national public administration and exercising political rights that guarantee the preservation of Indigenous foods systems (see Table 4).

Table 4: Viability of strategies for strengthening and networking for advocacy

<i>Estimated viability and stakeholders whom it depends on</i>	<i>Strategies in strengthening and networking for advocacy</i>
Viable and dependent on stakeholders outside of the communities	Promotion of Territorial Consultative Councils as an advocacy strategy and for networking and support.
	Seek partners and allied organizations, to improve food systems.
	Round-table discussions about issues of common interest, with other communities and related organizations (such as climate change, ancestral foods and climate monitoring).
	Farmer competitions: annual competitions with cash prizes to motivate families to participate and cultivate a diversity of crops.
Viable and dependent on stakeholders within the communities	Promote local leadership to strengthen food systems: working with committed leaders to recover and enhance traditional agricultural practices.
	Promote a food systems approach for research and planning of actions for food security and community food sovereignty.
	Community territories: cultivate products in expanses of community territory for both family consumption and commercialization.
	Promote networks for learning and exchange.
Less viable and dependent on stakeholders outside of the communities	Advocacy with public health and education institutions to recognize and work with traditional and western plants, training communities in food preparation.
	Local municipal government: connect with the local government on social and educational issues.
	Creation of women's agroecology networks.
	Teaching-learning systems in territories with young people and wise elders.

Among the strategies for strengthening communities is the promotion of networks and leadership, as well as the creation of dialogue round tables that can lead to collaborations and commitments. Strategies for networking with stakeholders in public administration and the private sector include working with health and education institutions to expand and preserve knowledge, promoting local leadership, and research and planning of actions in the areas of food sovereignty and security.

Community exchange of products



Credit: Leider Andrés Tombé Morales, Misak, Colombia.

“We look for non-governmental organizations, we look for other native communities with which to associate; sometimes we work with the private sector or universities, **we seek partners who can effectively help us do research** in our community.” (Ken Paul, Wolastoquey from Canada)

“Engage in advocacy with public institutions and **gain recognition for our traditional plans, to work on health issues, along with western plants.** For that, we do training and demonstrations closer to the communities about how to prepare those foods that come from another country.” (Marisol Shariva Pérez, Asháninka from Peru).

3.4. Technological innovations for access to natural resources

A last set of strategies identified involves development of technological advances beneficial for communities, considered in synergy with ecosystems, along with strategies for access to natural resources, particularly seeds and water (see Table 5).

Table 5: Viability of technical innovation strategies

<i>Estimated viability and stakeholders whom it depends on</i>	<i>Strategies in technological innovation</i>
Viable and dependent on stakeholders outside of the communities	Implementation of ecological technologies, such as dry toilets and rainfall-capture systems.
Viable and dependent on stakeholders within the communities	Seed banks: storage, collection and distribution of seeds at public events called Seedy Saturday.
	Seedy Saturday: very popular annual event where open-pollinated seeds and heritage seeds are distributed.
	Community territories: cultivate products in expanses of community territory for both family consumption and commercialization.
Less viable and dependent on stakeholders outside of the communities	Integral agroecology: union of stakeholders empowered to produce, transform and commercialize using agroecological methods.
	Creation of women’ agroecology networks.
Less viable and dependent on stakeholders within the communities	Create conditions for access to information through intercultural climate services.

The development of technologies implies networking with stakeholders, resources and capacities that are difficult to access, especially in communities in countries in the Latin American region, where investment in technologies and innovation is scant. Nevertheless, seen as a highly useful and relevant tool — for example, for climate monitoring, as has been the case in Bolivia, or for cost reduction, in the case of Mexico, with the implementation of dry toilets³ and rainfall-capture systems — technological innovations present a certain degree of viability and have had significant impacts for food systems transformation.

Farming system known as *milpa*



Credit: Marisol Lerdo and Alejandro Marreros, Náhuatl, Mexico.

“We have created conditions for making information more accessible. We are building climate and agroclimate services. We are learning from the Indigenous leaders themselves. **We have questioned access to technology and we have started producing technology.** We are manufacturing meteorological stations, with all the difficulties that implies for our country. This technology is necessary for climate change, but it is very expensive, very complex to operate.” (Eleodoro Baldiviezo, Aymara from Bolivia)

“The implementation of ecotechnology, such as dry toilets, because the water problem has been very difficult, and rainfall-capture systems.” (Marisol Lerdo, Náhuatl from Mexico)

³ Toilets that use organic material (usually straw and soil) instead of water or chemicals to treat waste.

4. OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCING INDIGENOUS FOOD SYSTEMS

Along with identifying potentialities, challenges and strategies, Indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas envision opportunities for deepening and transforming their food systems. A significant portion of the opportunities identified revolve around contributions from philanthropy, the international cooperations and the state, but also academia regarding improving public policies, linking three key areas:

- Opportunities in academia and research for promoting Indigenous cultures and biodiversity
- Opportunities in better public policies and more state resources, for the exercise of political rights; and
- Opportunities in local and international civil society organizations, for strengthening Indigenous advocacy.

4.1. Opportunities in academia and research for promoting Indigenous culture and biodiversity

The recovery and dissemination of ancestral practices that are part of food systems represent a significant opportunity and are shared across Indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas. These opportunities bring together public policies, philanthropic financing and a wide range of methodologies (see Table 6).

Table 6: Opportunities in academia and research for promoting Indigenous culture and biodiversity

Systematize and document local food heritage (for example, local cookbooks).
Develop proposal for activities to create bonds with guardians of knowledge, to rescue local food heritage (intergenerational approach).
Research medicinal uses of local products.
Support research and training, based in and led by Indigenous communities.
Facilitate the development or enhancement of research capacities in Indigenous communities.
Measure nutrition in Indigenous communities with diverse agriculture.
Resume participatory methodologies: participatory action research; “farmer to farmer.”
Create learning communities among stakeholders involved in these issues.
Manage work jointly with own authorities.
Identify who are the people who have the greatest diversity of seeds and traditional food crops and can be considered as 'seed keepers'.

Specifically, and in a significant way, participants see the opportunity to conduct research to deepen the recovery of, revitalize and disseminate local food heritage and ancestral community knowledge, for example, through the intergenerational collection of information about the food and medicinal uses of local resources. However, in all cases, the intellectual property rights of indigenous peoples

must be guaranteed, otherwise there is a tendency towards an extractive model that does not recognize indigenous knowledge systems and threatens to erode them.

In communities in Central and South America, greater emphasis is placed on the need for research to systematize this knowledge, which has not yet been collected.

“It would be important to do a study or research to make **a local cookbook**. We really need this recovery of our local gastronomy, in Spanish and Q'eqchi'”. (Brenda Xol, Q'eqchi' Maya from Guatemala)

“Food heritage seems to be the response to public health problems, to nutrition problems. It could be an effective, low-cost way to address these problems, present and future. We must work more on the recovery of this local food heritage.” (Eleodoro Baldiviezo, Aymara from Bolivia)

Conducting studies and research is seen as an opportunity for consolidating, articulating and promoting ancestral knowledge, in both Indigenous communities and the rest of society, to give this knowledge a broader reach. Specific modalities are proposed for conducting these studies, mainly building research capacities in the communities, among young people, and promoting spaces for collaborative work with allied communities and institutions.

For communities in Canada, the institutionalized paths for development of these opportunities are clearer. For example, there is the tripartite council's ethics policy,⁴ which formalizes the active participation of communities in research design and the subsequent drafting of specific policies. This reflects a relatively recent installed base for the development of research capacities in Indigenous communities, as well as research led by or conducted in collaboration with them.

“I work for a community-based program for diabetes prevention and health promotion for school aged children, and they have a research program focused on mobilizing other Indigenous communities around diabetes prevention. That's a very concrete example that I can offer about how it's possible to build **research capacity in communities, to conduct studies and create knowledge that responds to their own needs, priorities, and values.**” (Shannon Udy, Métis from Canada)

“In Canada, **we have a long history of finding space in academia, specially within social sciences and education**, and we have spent a lot of time discussing what kind of contributions, values and principles we want to install in our Indigenous universities.” (Priscilla Settee, Cree from Canada)

In communities in Central and South America, the opportunity to conduct research is proposed in specific terms of inquiry or depth, and in the need to build capacities for research, participatory methodologies and formation of learning communities, which include both young people and elders, who are the guardians of ancestral knowledge.

“One academic strategy is the implementation of community challenges, through which students revive the knowledge of their own or other communities. With regard to food systems, the Agroecology and Food Sovereignty Programme promotes the transmission, promotion and recognition of indigenous

⁴ The tripartite council consists of three agencies: Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR); Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

knowledge as a science in higher education through intergenerational dialogue”. (Kelly Ulcuango, Pukará de Pesillo Indigenous Community, Kayambi People, Ecuador).

“Discussing with the communities has enabled us to really know their needs and what they want to transform. If we join forces in things that aren’t really necessary, that transformation would be impossible. With this methodology, **we have really managed to focus on what the community wants to transform.**” (Leider Andrés Tombe Morales, Misak from Colombia)

4.2. Opportunities in better public policies and more state resources for the exercise of political rights

Opportunities for promoting modification of public policies, based on communities’ priorities, specifically with regard to making viable the production, consumption and commercialization of locally produced foods, are particularly important to Indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas (see Table 7).

Table 7: Opportunities in better public policies and more state resources for the exercise of political rights

Identify communities’ needs, gaps and possible collaborations, to identify opportunities.
Review regulations or other regulatory agency documents, to allow transportation of locally produced foods across provincial, federal and international borders.
Advocate for the implementation of policies developed through community-led research.
Push public policy toward a holistic approach to food security.
Promote access to stable state resources (for example, associated with taxes on extractive industries) for the benefit of communities.
Enhance advocacy on local political-administrative governance, promoting mechanisms such as incentives and rewards from municipalities for initiatives related to food systems.

Key stakeholders identified in relation to these opportunities are institutional agents at the local level, such as municipalities and district government agencies, as they issue certifications and patents, and plan the use of land and natural resources. Additional stakeholders identified include federal and national authorities and international agencies (for example, food safety inspection agencies and the FAO), as they can give recognition to local products and, with that, facilitate the issuing of permits for the handling, transport and commercialization of local products.

“Any meat that a local hunter has hunted, such as a caribou or elk, must be inspected before obtaining approval for transportation across provincial borders, so **there must be some recognition of Indigenous knowledge for hunting and dressing game safely. We’ve been doing it for a thousand years**, and I believe it is very important that we find a way for the federal government or whatever country we’re in to provide that recognition.” (Lynn Blackwood, Inuit from Canada)

“We need for agencies like the FAO to recognize what we native communities grow, as **ancestral and natural products, without chemicals**. We want them to recognize us and certify us.” (Marisol Shariva Pérez, Asháninka from Peru)

“We are seeking approval of local participatory ecological land-use planning, an environmental policy

tool whose objective is to regulate the use of natural resources.” (Marisol Lerdo, Náhuatl from Mexico)

Among the perspectives discussed, there is a distinction in how communities perceive the effectiveness of these policies. Indigenous communities in Central and South America emphasize the opportunity for creation and/or approval of regulations, in a context of scant existence of regulatory conditions that facilitate the development of Indigenous food systems.

For Indigenous communities in Canada, meanwhile, the opportunities identified are related to improving the implementation of these policies and regulations — that is, enforcing them — and in taking a more integral approach to food security, beyond focusing solely on income.

“In Canada, approaches to food security tend to focus on people’s income and economic access to food, and we know that food security and sovereignty are much more than that. It would be a contribution to go a little further and take a more holistic approach.” (Shannon Udy, Métis from Canada)

“Policies generally are developed through these studies for which we have obtained financing. But policies are only policies; **if they are not put into practice, they are useless.**” (Priscilla Settee, Cree from Canada)

“Many of our communities chase funding. They say, “Oh, they’ve announced a new program,” without necessarily having community planning. But **the hard work of planning must be done**, and once you have that vision for the community, then you can start to decide where you want to obtain financing.” (Ken Paul, Wolastoquey from Canada)

The state appears here as a key stakeholder related to opportunities for food systems and possible strategies. In communities in Canada, as well as in Central and South America, opportunities for obtaining financing from state programs or initiatives is a recurring theme. In communities in Colombia, Ecuador and Guatemala, there is specific mention of the role of municipalities in strategies and incentives for promoting initiatives in communities, such as farmer schools, or obtaining resources from ministries (specifically agriculture) and royalties levied by the state on extractive industries.

“The Amawtay Wasi University, as a public higher education institution, is dependent on the national public procurement system, which has delayed the award of contracts for goods and services for the implementation of projects funded by national and international cooperation, such as the IDRC-funded food systems strengthening project”. (Kelly Ulcuango, Indigenous Community of Pukará de Pesillo, Kayambi People, Ecuador, "The Pukará de Pesillo, Kayambi People, Ecuador)

“We need to construct and promote a municipal public policy for obtaining prizes for farmer competitions. The prizes are needed to motivate the families to participate. To transmit this type of information and messaging, we think it would be interesting for it to be institutionalized, and for the local municipality to take responsibility.” (Ernesto Tzi Chub, Q'eqchi' Maya from Guatemala)

“We want to resume fish farming (*paiche*, *paco* and other local fish from the area), as part of the APCI project that promotes raising fish in pools. This project requires centralized financing and support from the state.” (Marisol Shariva Pérez, Asháninka from Peru)

Although the state is considered a key stakeholder, limitations are seen regarding its relationship with communities. There is a need to adapt the form and content of government food aid programmes to indigenous peoples' food systems. In those of Central and South America, the difficulties are associated with the lack of available resources and the difficulty of accessing them (for example, long waits and the need to intervene and monitor the implementation of public policies for obtaining them), as indicated in the comments above; in communities in Canada, meanwhile, the limitations are related to the competitive model of the programs, as in the case of competitions among communities to obtain resources.

“One of the things native communities in Canada don’t want to do is collaborate with one another. There are laws in Canada that treat each community separately and discourage them from working together. Funding is distributed in such a way that each community competes with the rest.” (Ken Paul, Wolastoquey from Canada)

4.3. Opportunities in local and international civil society organizations for strengthening Indigenous advocacy.

Communities describe themselves as being inserted in a network of interactions, at a scale ranging from local to global. In the latter, they identify a series of opportunities related to connections with civil society organizations: the private sector, NGOs, the academic world and international philanthropic organizations (see Table 8).

Table 8: Opportunities in local and national civil society organizations for strengthening Indigenous advocacy.

Access to international funds with specific financing for the support of Indigenous communities.
Better possibilities for connecting communities with academia, in positions of leadership and strategic partnership.
Develop proposals for international funding, in packages that include short-, medium- and long-term initiatives.
Promote the construction of a strategic vision in the communities, identifying gaps and opportunities, to guide the search for support with greater agency.
Prioritize funding mechanisms that promote collaborative partnerships between communities and organizations and diverse scales.
Decrease barriers to access to and implementation of support from international organizations for more isolated communities.

In contrast to government resources, these are seen as opportunities for more agile access to resources, especially for conducting research and supporting innovative projects. Meanwhile, the opportunity to overcome national barriers, promoting collaboration among communities — independently of the political and electoral cycles of each country — is seen as necessary for strengthening the Indigenous presence in local and international debates and policies.

“If we want to bring more innovation to these territories, I would open up the discussion to see if we could access some philanthropic funding, because it’s clearly for research. At least in Bolivia, there’s less and less support for research. It’s **very scarce, very competitive.**” (Eleodoro Baldiviezo, Aymara from Bolivia).

“In my country, it’s difficult to access resources quickly for long-term and medium-term projects; there’s no budget. We have to knock on other doors, like NGOs, with a package of projects.” (Atilio Chauca López, Asháninka from Peru)

Communities in Canada, especially, have information about specific opportunities from philanthropic organizations for financing Indigenous initiatives, while communities in Central and South America mention experiences with NGOs in many initiatives.

“One of the main strategies we have seen is undoubtedly international funding. Amawtay Wasi University is implementing the project 'Strengthening food systems of indigenous peoples and nationalities of Ecuador, resilient to climate change'. We are one year into the project and it is hoped that we will be able to revive the knowledge of the Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities communities involved in the project to improve their food systems and ways of life”. (Kelly Ulcuango, Pukará de Pesillo Indigenous Community, Kayambi People, Ecuador)

“I want to mention one foundation in Colombia. The nice thing about this organization is that the committee that makes the decisions is made up of the leaders of the community. **They make an effort to ensure that those spaces really are participatory** and that the decisions come from the grassroots. Another foundation, which is very interesting and dynamic, was created and is led by young women. They work in different parts of Colombia to form leaders and support processes that transform those spaces.” (Leider Andrés Tombe Morales, Misak from Colombia)

Some difficulties are also identified with regard to relationships with civil society organizations.

For peoples and nations in Central and South America, limitations include the NGOs’ lack of continuity of support for initiatives over time, as well as language barriers in the calls for proposals and application processes.

In the case of communities in Canada, the resources offered by civil society institutions are significant for communities and sometimes cause tensions within the communities, as access to these resources assumes some degree of complicity with industries or private-sector stakeholders who are seen as a threat to the communities’ self-determination.

Given the various limitations identified in relationships with civil society organizations, Indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas emphasize the need to prioritize work in alliances with diverse stakeholders and in ways that enhance the communities’ agency and leadership.

CONCLUSIONS

The perspectives and actions discussed during the encounter in Yunguilla, Ecuador, among representatives of 10 Indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas, demonstrate the great diversity of cultures, lifestyles, territories, and social and political contexts. This diversity is not an obstacle, but is able to bring together interests and create shared horizons where a common agenda for the transformation of food systems of Indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas can be delineated.

This agenda includes definitions, potentialities, challenges, strategies, opportunities and concrete actions for development of these food systems. Based on the issues raised in the dialogue, they can be summarized in four main areas for transformation and empowerment:

- i. Highlight interdependence as a fundamental trait of food systems;
- ii. Promote a holistic concept of health and cultural nutrition;
- iii. Emphasize the importance of young people and Indigenous knowledge for the future of food systems;
- iv. Gain recognition and influence the public agenda at the local and international levels.

Highlight interdependence as a fundamental trait of Indigenous food systems

Diverse images and metaphors mentioned by the Indigenous peoples and nations in the dialogue highlight the close dependence between the health of ecosystems, the culture and societies.

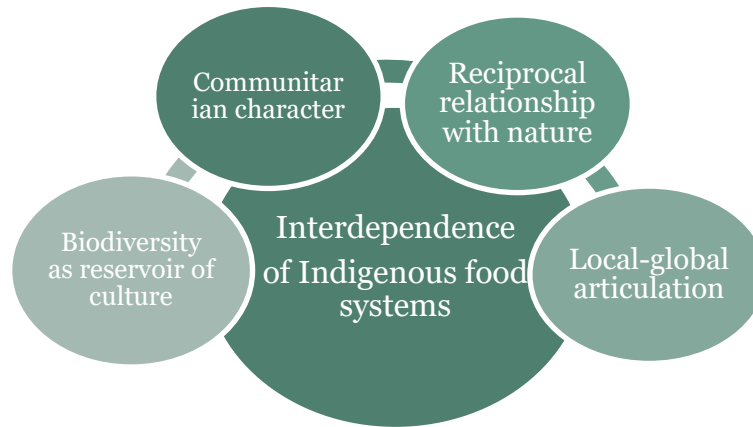
“A lichen, which feeds the forests and animals, purifies our Waters, giving life to the blueberries, which give life to our elk and to us.”
(Priscilla Settee, Cree from Canada)

“Two months ago, there was a month-long drought. **People started to fight over water**, and I say, if there are longer droughts, what will happen to us? In the future, I hope to see much vegetation, much of that biodiversity that we’re losing today.”
(Atilio Chauca, Asháninka from Peru)

It is possible to summarize at least four defining aspects of Indigenous food systems that reflect this interdependence (see Figure 1):

- i. Their communitarian character;
- ii. The relationship of reciprocity with nature;
- iii. Biodiversity understood as a cultural reservoir; and
- iv. Their articulation at the local and global levels.

Figure 1: Interdependence in Indigenous food systems.



In Indigenous food systems, the relationships of collaboration y mutualism between people and communities are very visible and fundamental for social life. Production practices such as *milpa*, or consumption practices such as *pamba mikuy*, are examples in which individuals benefit from work and food that are understood as depending on cooperation. Various practices implied in Indigenous food systems, which reinforce and activate this communitarian dimension, also have a strong ritual dimension and activate a circuit of symbolic relationships of interdependence.

Indigenous food systems, meanwhile, mobilize a relationship of interdependence with nature. In this relationship, nature is understood as an active agent that participates in reciprocity with human action in the expansion of Indigenous food systems. The result is a thriving relationship based on knowledge, collaboration with and gratitude toward nature, which partly explains the high adaptability of food systems to certain ecological niches. The contributions of Indigenous food systems to the preservation of biodiversity are widely documented and are considered fundamental for sustaining communities and societies, especially in contexts of high economic, social and climate pressure.

“I also see the diversity. This is the case in the region of Zautla, Ixtacamaxtitlán, Puebla, in Mexico, and this crop diversity, which signifies diversity of species and also diversity in varieties. With regard to raising animals, also raising small animals, also diversity in species, in breeds. And we also have gathering, hunting, because we don’t really have fishing, but we obtain some food from gathering wild plants. In our region, *quelites* [wild greens] are also very important; in some cases they are considered weeds, but for us they are an important source of food. (Alejandro Marreros, Náhuatl from Mexico)

Indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas place great value on the preservation of biodiversity, not only because of its role in the sustainability of the society’s food systems, but also because biodiversity represents a true cultural reservoir, which interweaves lifestyles and knowledge. Elk, seeds, blueberries, lichens, fish, the sea and rivers, all are true guardians of means of collaboration, uses, rites, and definitely relationships and knowledge cultivated for hundreds or thousands of years.

Finally, one defining aspect of Indigenous food systems is their interdependence with development models that articulate the scale of local practices with the equilibria of global ecosystems. Indigenous food systems are not closed; they interconnect with other food systems, other ecosystems and other forms of production and consumption.

It is common at an Indigenous table to find fish grown in river pools, corn from a neighboring community, imported sugar and Chilean kiwi; locally produced herbs may be for medicinal use in the community or for commercialization in the international market for gourmet products. This coexistence offers opportunities and challenges for Indigenous food systems and constitutes yet another dimension of the interdependence of food systems.

The main challenges are related to protecting spaces for small-scale production in the face of monocropping and other large-scale industries. There is also a need to promote a holistic view of health and nutrition that contributes to the diversification of food practices, including ancestral practices, and helps avoid the overconsumption of processed foods.

Opportunities for this local-global interdependence appear under diverse dimensions. One is in the diversification of spaces for commercialization, and in the possibilities for integrating technological innovation into food systems, especially in the development of sustainable production strategies. Meanwhile, the creation of networks and spaces for Indigenous advocacy that can reach beyond local borders are significant opportunities that are opened up in this local-global networking of food systems.

This opportunity is extremely important for Indigenous peoples and nations, as it enables them to join efforts, experiences and common horizons with other Indigenous peoples, as well as with public and private organizations from the business, political or academic world, to channel resources and promote Indigenous perspectives on the public agenda.

Promote a holistic concept of health and cultural nutrition.

The cultural importance of food is a significant attribute of Indigenous food systems, and highlights both the nutritional and medicinal value of ancestral diets.

Various studies and reports by international agencies indicate the nutritional contribution of Indigenous communities' traditional foods to the diet of adults. Nevertheless, this evidence has not yet had a significant impact on the valuing and protection of these food systems. Given this, Indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas speak of the need for recognition of cultural and food diversity in health policies. Actions have been proposed for raising awareness, as well as for the documentation and dissemination of Indigenous knowledge about the nutritional and medicinal use of foods (see Table 9).

Table 9: Actions for promoting a holistic concept of health and cultural nutrition.

Short-term actions	Medium-term actions	Long-term actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recover and disseminate community knowledge regarding production practices and medicinal uses of locally produced foods. • Promote re-education in food habits, prioritizing ancestral forms of consumption and preventing the overconsumption of ultra-processed foods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence local health policies, to promote consumption of healthy and culturally appropriate food. For example, promoting diets based on locally produced products, or adapted to the ancestral diets of Indigenous peoples and nations. • Promote, at the local and international level, the concept of cultural nutrition, to broaden the focus of food security, which is currently limited to the economic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop awareness-raising strategies to position in society the health and sustainability benefits of diets adapted to cultural diversity.

Hunger affects 43.2 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean, and Indigenous peoples are especially affected (FSIN, 2024). From the standpoint of Indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas, however, this phenomenon reflects a problem that goes beyond nutritional or economic issues and is described as cultural hunger.

In a context of high pressure on ecosystems, the production and consumption of some foods, which are among the elements that define a people’s identity, are limited. This limitation results in dietary deficiencies, but also weakens the culture’s health. In contrast, eating culturally appropriate foods satisfies not only biological hunger, but also cultural hunger.

Youth and Indigenous knowledge are the foundation of future food security

Both aspects, youth and ancestral Indigenous knowledge, are seen as closely related and guide many of the current strategies and future actions for strengthening food systems in the short, medium and long term (see Table 10).

Table 10: Actions for positioning youth and Indigenous knowledge

Short-term actions	Medium-term actions	Long-term actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase young people's participation in leadership spaces within communities. ● Increase young people's access to education with a multicultural focus; for example, scholarships and Indigenous internships for post-secondary studies. ● Recover and disseminate community knowledge regarding production practices and ancestral uses of locally produced foods. ● Revalue modes of small-scale rural production, including fish farming. ● Create networks for sharing knowledge, experiences and information about climate and territories for enhancing food systems. ● Create databases that make it possible to map ecosystems of stakeholders who participate in or can support Indigenous food systems (for example, local businesses that produce healthy foods, philanthropic organizations and government programs). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase youth participation in decision making within communities and at the territorial level. ● Increase young people's access to education, with a focus on developing literacy in English and local languages (specifically translation, to access international circuits to disseminate knowledge and seek financing). ● Identify and communicate innovative and successful experiences for strengthening food systems. ● Develop research agendas and methodologies for intergenerational action-research on food systems and Indigenous peoples. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Build young people's capacities to enhance their participation in spaces of power within communities and with local public administration. ● Build capacities so the communities themselves can evaluate the impact of different strategies for strengthening food systems.

Transmitting to young people both knowledge and the value of ancestral production, with initiatives involving intergenerational work, is a priority focus of actions for Indigenous food systems sustainability and transformation. Increasing young people's participation in the economy, in local spaces of power and in practices of ancestral knowledge are among the means highlighted by Indigenous peoples and nations for giving young people protagonism, which is considered key for the future of food systems.

Examples of actions in which young people are encouraged to adopt a leadership role are initiatives for transmission of ancestral knowledge, creation of networks of experiences between communities, initiatives for sharing information about the production cycle or the characteristics of different territories, and scientific studies that can respond to the communities' interests.

The development of skills for researching, monitoring and communicating knowledge of food systems constitutes a circuit of promising actions for Indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas. These

actions are seen as opportunities to increase control over and understanding of stakeholders that influence food systems, as well as for enhancing the strategic nature of collaborations that can be established with other communities and stakeholders.

The study of food systems from an Indigenous perspective represents an opportunity to position approaches, methodologies and collaborations already under way in the region. Particularly noteworthy are opportunities to conduct action research and networked research, and to build capacities for organization and collaboration among the communities, offering fields of study of interest to the world of academia and science.

Gaining recognition and influencing the local and international public agenda

The exercising of political rights is a constant challenge for Indigenous communities. One critical aspect in this area is the need for recognition of food systems in national policies and local regulations. This recognition helps create conditions for food systems continuity and transformation, for example by regulating ecosystem protection, as well as the transport, commercialization and use of foods produced by Indigenous peoples and nations.

As a cross-cutting issue, Indigenous peoples in the Americas seek to have their voice heard and for their knowledge to serve as the basis for public policy decisions (see Table 11).

Table 11: Actions for recognition and Indigenous advocacy on the local and international agenda

Short-term actions	Medium-term actions	Long-term actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Promote education within and outside of communities, to decrease the consumption and impact of ultra-processed foods. · Disseminate food-related experiences and knowledge in local and international communications media. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Influence health policies to promote consumption of locally produced healthy food. · Create and participate in public and academic spaces, to discuss food systems at the local, national and international levels. · Contribute to the implementation of public awareness-raising campaigns within and outside of communities, about the origin and impacts of foods. · Strengthen local and alternative communications media, to highlight the contribution that Indigenous peoples can make to building more resilient, sustainable and inclusive food systems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Participate and advocate in international forums, to position Indigenous food systems on public agendas. · Advocate in public spaces to promote the cultural and political dimensions of food. · Enhance and strengthen networks and alliances at the global level, with communities and allied organizations, to strengthen Indigenous food systems.

Possibilities are identified for contributing to the enhancement of public policies that impact the construction of more resilient, sustainable and inclusive food systems, for example, in designing nutrition policies that reflect the cultural importance of diets, and in promoting a holistic approach to health and sustainable food practices.

Along the same line, actions are proposed for the development or approval of plans for protecting ecosystems and biodiversity, such as reforestation and land-use regulation in municipalities and districts, through participatory processes. Better use of natural resources at the global level is among the actions that must be promoted to strengthen Indigenous food systems.

Diversification of funding sources and establishment of collaborative networks are highly important for putting into practice the different contributions that Indigenous peoples can make to the task of making food systems more just in the short, medium and long term.

There is full awareness of opportunities for advocacy that lead to the establishment of strategic relationships with stakeholders in the public and private sectors, civil society and academia. These relationships are seen as networks of collaboration among diverse stakeholders, both local and international, who play a key role in strengthening food systems.

Enhancing participation in international circuits of knowledge and political debate makes it possible to adapt food systems in the long term; this is related to the management of strategic resources for sustaining communities. For example, Indigenous peoples and nations mention making significant contributions in areas such as soil management, water purification, recovery of plant and animal species, and maintenance of biodiversity –issues that require better positioning in international, national and local debate.

Indigenous peoples and nations of the Americas understand the public agenda in relation to global trends and debate. Therefore, opportunities for networking with other communities and civil society allies, both local and international, are especially important.

In this aspect, it is relevant to mention the struggle for and the impact of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the importance of Free, Prior and Informed Consent, as well as the work done in the United Nations Climate Change talks, which includes mitigation, compensation and financing to deal with the problems caused by developed countries. Indigenous knowledge systems, including food systems, will only survive if developed countries are held accountable for environmental degradation and take responsibility for the conditions of indigenous communities.

There is an increasing number of collaborative experiences at various scales, and particular value is placed on flexibility and promptness in the delivery of support and resources offered by the philanthropic sector, especially for research and innovation.

Some significant opportunities for building capacity for advocacy regarding the public agenda, in the short term, are in relationships with communications media that can give greater visibility to food systems and their contributions to society. This is considered crucial for calling attention to the contributions these agricultural and food systems make to environmental resilience.

The ability to develop strategic relationships, with the goal of forming part of a collaborative network at diverse scales, which combines local and international efforts of civil society and the public and private sectors, is a priority focus of this agenda.

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ANNEXES

Annex 1: Participants

	Participant	Position and institution	People	Country	Gender
1	Lynn Blackwood	Food Security Program Manager Nunatsiavut Government Happy Valley- Goose Bay, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada	Inuit	Canada	F
2	Priscilla Settee, PhD.	Professor Emerita, Department of Indigenous Studies University of Saskatchewan	Cree	Canada	F
3	Shannon Udy	M.Sc., Registered Dietitian, Centre for Indigenous Peoples' Nutrition and Environment, McGill University	Métis	Canada	F
4	Ken Paul	Expert on Fisheries and Marine governance, member of the Wolastoqey Nation at Neqotkuk	Wolastoqey First Nation	Canada	M
5	Marisol Shariva Pérez	Vice president of the Association of Asháninka Communities of the Pichis Valley (<i>Asociación de Comunidades Asháninkas del Valle del Pichis</i> , ANAP)	Asháninka	Peru	F
6	Atilio Chauca López	Chief of the Florida community of the Asháninka People	Asháninka	Peru	M
7	Eleodoro Baldiviezo	Researcher and planning and management coordinator, PROSUCO	Aymara	Bolivia	M
8	Alejandro Marreros	Professor/advisor on rural development and coordinator of the community work program at the Center for Studies of Rural Development – Promotion and Social Development (<i>Centro de Estudios de Desarrollo Rural - Promoción y Desarrollo Social</i> , CESDER - PRODES)	Náhuatl	México	M
9	Marisol Lerdo	Coordinator of the production for food sovereignty and security project of the Center for Studies of Rural Development – Promotion and Social Development (<i>Centro de Estudios de Desarrollo Rural - Promoción y Desarrollo Social</i> , CESDER - PRODES)	Náhuatl	México	F
10	Ernesto Tzi Chub	Director, SANK	Q'eqchi' Maya	Guatemala	M
11	Brenda Xol	Field coordinator, SANK	Q'eqchi' Maya	Guatemala	F
12	Leider Andrés Tombé Morales	Researcher, National University of Colombia	Misak	Colombia	M
13	Kelly Ulcuango	Professor, Director of the Agroecology and Food Sovereignty program, Amawtay Wasi University	Kayambi	Ecuador	F

Annex 2: Program

Day 1 - Thursday 30-05-2024

Time	Activity	Content
14:00 hrs. (30 min.)	Opening ceremony	Opening ceremony
14:30 hrs. (15 min.)	Welcome from the community	Representative of the Community of Yunguilla recounts the history of the community: German Collaguazo
14:45 hrs. (15 min.)	Song by Asháninka People	Singer: Marisol Shariva
15:00 hrs. (15 min.)	Introduction and words of welcome	Remarks by representatives of the Canadian Embassy in Ecuador
15:15 hrs. (15 min.)	Introduction and words of welcome	Remarks by IDRC representatives
15:30 hrs. (45 min.)	Introduction of participants	Participants introduce themselves
16:15 hrs. (15 min.)	Break	
16:30 hrs. (60 min.)	Presentation of organizations and their perspectives on food systems. The goal is to identify similarities and differences in the way in which food systems are defined.	How is a food system understood? Who participates? What particular characteristics does your food system have? Can characteristics related to spiritual, cultural, political, social or economic dimensions be identified?
17:30 hrs. (60 min.)	Walk	Walk along the El Riachuelo trail
19:00 hrs.	Dinner	

Day 2 - Friday 31-05-2024

Time	Actividad	Contenido
8:45 hrs. (95 min.)	Identification of potentialities of and challenges facing food systems	What are the potentialities, challenges, conditions and obstacles related to participants' food systems (production, consumption, sovereignty, food security, among other issues)?
10:20 hrs. (20 min.)	Presentation	Presentation about the meaning of Indigenous knowledge and legislative context of Indigenous peoples in Canada: Ken Paul
10:40 hrs. (20 min.)	Presentation	Presentation about legislative context of Indigenous communities' rights in Latin America: Kelly Ulcuango
11:00 hrs. (15 min.)	Break	
11:15 hrs. (105 min.)	Dialogue	Identification of potentialities of and challenges facing food systems (continuation of dialogue)
13:00 hrs. (75 min.)	Lunch	
14:15 hrs. (120 min.)	Identification of communities' strategies, practices and experiences regarding the protection or valuing of food systems.	Group discussion about actions being developed and implemented to value and recover practices, change laws, maintain vigorous systems, etc. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What strategies have worked? What experiences did not work? Why? • What specific challenges are found in these processes with regard to access to and consumption of culturally and nutritionally appropriate foods?

Time	Actividad	Contenido
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With what stakeholders is it important to connect these processes? What issue of governance, agenda, policies does this raise?
16:15 hrs. (15 min.)	Break	
16:30 hrs. (60 min.)	Dialogue: How can these efforts be supported through policies, action research and philanthropy?	Sharing of ideas about policies and financing that support Indigenous communities Sharing of ideas about Indigenous peoples' methodologies for research with co-construction, how to work with allies, how to support community action from the grassroots
17:30 hrs. (60 min.)	Walk	Visit to enterprises (jam and cheese manufacturing, handcraft workshop), gardens and home for elders
19:00 hrs.	Dinner	

Day 3 - Saturday 01-06-2024

Hora	Activity	Content
8:45 hrs. (135 min.)	Construction of an agenda for sustainable transformation of food systems with Indigenous peoples of America	Synthesis of discussions and reflection about the importance of constructing a common agenda. Based on the discussion, what can be done differently? Who are the allied stakeholders? Who is missing? Identification of key points for an Indigenous work agenda at the local, national and regional scale, for resilient and inclusive food systems transformation.
11:00 hrs. (15 min.)	Break	
11:15 hrs. (105 min.)	Dialogue	Continuation of dialogue
13:00 hrs. (75 min.)	Lunch	
14:15 hrs. (120 min.)	Communication activity	Communication activity by La Minga por la Pachamama
16:15 hrs.	Break	
16:30 hrs. (60 min.)	Communication activity	Communication activity by La Minga por la Pachamama
18:00 hrs.	Cultural night, bonfire & farewell dinner (Pampa Mesa)	



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