

B.C. Food Systems Network
Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty

Final Activity Report

**Prepared for: Provincial Health Services Authority – Community Food Action Initiative,
Interior Health – Community Food Action Initiative &
the B.C. Food Systems Network – Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty**

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4 Sisters Housing Coop, Downtown Eastside Vancouver
Chehalis Indian Band
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Fraser Health Authority
Kelowna Friendship Society
Kelmuc Sharing Place
Lytton First Nations
Morisetown Indian Band
Northern Health Authority
North Thompson Valley Food Coalition
Paquachin Indian Band
Qwemtsin Health Society
Selkirk College, 10th Street Campus
Skidegate Health Centre
Soda Creek (Xatsull) Indian Band
T'souke Indian Band
Upper Island Women of Native Ancestry
Vancouver Coastal Health Authority
Vancouver Island Health Authority
Vancouver Native Health Society

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Introduction

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to engage Aboriginal communities in discussions that would enable individuals and groups involved with food related action to explore and identify ways that the B.C. Food Systems Network (BCFSN) - Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty (WGIFS) can support their work on increasing food security. Through planning and collaborating with the Director of Provincial Primary Health Care and Population Health Strategic Planning, the consultant worked with the WGIFS to build the capacity of the working group to do its work and focus on coordinating dialogue and education activities to increase awareness of Indigenous food security issues and their potential solutions.

B.C. Food Systems Network – Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty - Who are we?

In March, 2006 the Board of Director's for the BCFSN reached unanimous consensus to designate the WGIFS to work on increasing awareness and advocating around issues related to the topic of Indigenous food sovereignty. In January of 2007, an anonymous donation was given to assist in spearheading the working group.

The working group hosts two email listserves and quarterly meetings; (3) via teleconference calls and (1) face to face meeting. The primary email listserve is intended to increase working group capacity in their efforts to network and share information with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous advocates, and the secondary listserve provides a means for regular business communications between WGIFS members.

The working group strives to ensure Indigenous voices are carried from a strong and balanced representation, and currently consists of 21 participants from key communities in each of the major regions around the province. The working group is inclusive of non-Indigenous advocates from settler communities and organizations, and promotes cross cultural participation that is representative and balanced based on geography, community and Aboriginal cultures.

According to region:

Southern interior
Northern interior
North Coast
Vancouver Coastal
Southern Vancouver Island
North and Central Vancouver Island
Fraser

According to Community of Organization:

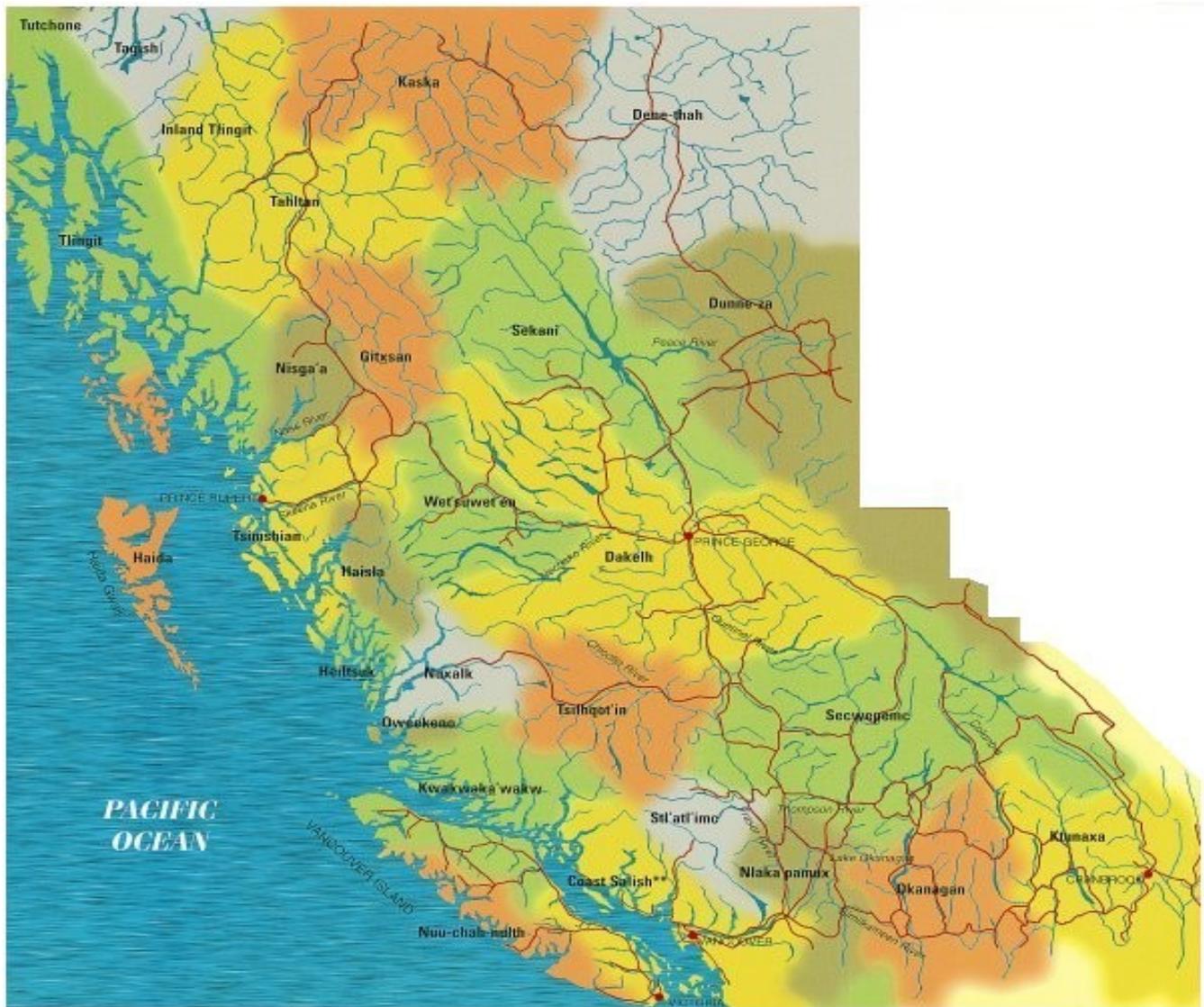
Traditional harvesters (including hunters, fishers and gatherers)
Farmers/gardeners
Aboriginal - urban and rural
Aboriginal - on reserve and off reserve
Metis
Researchers/Academics
Civil Society Organization's (CSO's)
Non Government Organization's (NGO's)
Political advocates

What is an Indigenous food system?

West from the Falls of Kettle River to the Salt Chucks of T'souke Harbour, and east from the Sacred Headwaters of Tahltan Territory to the Taiga Plains of the Peace River region, the vast myriad of rivers, watersheds, landforms, vegetation and climatic zones west of the Rocky Mountains have worked together for thousands of years to shape and form Indigenous land and food systems. Consisting of a multitude of natural communities, Indigenous food systems include all of the: land, soil, water, air and culturally important plant, fungi and animal species that have sustained Indigenous peoples over thousands of years of participating in the natural world. All parts of Indigenous food systems are inseparable and ideally function in healthy interdependent relationships to transfer energy through Indigenous ecosystems and economies. In addition, Indigenous food systems also support both directly and indirectly, the transfer of energy through the present day agriculture based economy that has been developed and industrialized by settlers through the process of colonization.

In a place where biological diversity lends itself well to tremendous localized abundance of traditional foods, Indigenous peoples throughout what is now known as the province of B.C., have developed distinct cultures (27 in total) based on traditional harvesting strategies and practices including: hunting, fishing, gathering and cultivating culturally important plants, animals and fungi in their respective traditional territories. In contrast to the highly mechanistic, linear food production, distribution, and consumption model applied in the industrialized food system, Indigenous food systems are best described in ecological rather than neoclassical economic terms. In this context, an Indigenous food is one that has been primarily harvested, cultivated, taken care of, prepared, preserved, shared, or traded within the boundaries of their respective territories based on values of interdependency, respect, reciprocity, and ecological sustainability. As the most intimate way in which Indigenous peoples interact with their environment, Indigenous food systems are in turn maintained through the active participation in traditional land and food systems.

Figure 1.0 Map - First Nations Peoples of British Columbia



Map borrowed from the Ministry of Education – Aboriginal Education website address:
<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/map.htm>

Activities - What happened and who participated?

1. 1st Annual WGIFS Face to Face Meeting – September 12 & 13, 2007

Purpose: The purpose of the 1st Annual WGIFS Face to Face Meeting was to bring the WGIFS together to meet and get to know one another and provide input into the development of the workplan that included activities, timelines and budget for the planning, coordination and delivery of community outreach meetings in each of the five health regions as they are defined by the Provincial Health Services Authority.

Participants: The face to face meeting brought together 13 working group members as well as 7 observers from the local Neskonlith and Adams Lake communities. Each participant brought with them their unique perspectives as they are shaped by the issues, concerns and situations in each of their respective regions. Varying numbers of working group members from four out of five health regions were present at the meeting as it is shown below in Table 1.0. Regretfully, WGIFS members working within the Fraser region were unable to participate due to other commitments.

Table 1.0 Participation in Face to Face Meeting by Region

Interior Health - (4)

Northern Health - (3)

Vancouver Coastal - (2)

Vancouver Island – South (2), North and Central (2)

Total: 13 participants

Outcomes: The face to face meeting provided the working group with an opportunity, prior to the day long workshop being hosted by the WGIFS at the 8th Annual BCFSN Sorrento Gathering, to discuss current issues, concerns, situations and strategies that link communities and regions around the province. The meeting also provided the working group with the opportunity to provide input into the proposed workplan and budget that included conducting outreach meetings in each of the five health regions.

2. 8th Annual BCFSN Sorrento Gathering

Day Long Workshop: - Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty - Building Cross Cultural Coalitions.

Purpose: The purpose of the day long workshop hosted by the WGIFS at the 8th Annual BCFSN Sorrento Gathering was to provide information and facilitate discussions that would serve to: 1) increase awareness within the B.C. Food Systems Network of the unique issues, concerns, situations and strategies as it relates to Indigenous peoples and their ability to respond to their own needs for healthy, culturally adapted Indigenous foods, and 2) explore ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals, groups and organizations involved with food related action can work across cultures to advocate and support Indigenous peoples in their efforts of achieving Indigenous food sovereignty.

Participants: The day long workshop brought together 31 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants from around the province including members of the BCFSN, members of the WGIFS, and conference participants.

Outcomes:

Session #1 : What is Indigenous food sovereignty and food security? (Informational)

This presentation provided participants with an opportunity to come to a deeper understanding of the current state of the discussions in international forums as they relate to food sovereignty, food security, and the human right to food. A critical analysis of the worldviews, concepts and models that inform both Indigenous and non-Indigenous agriculture led into an overview that outlined key principles of Indigenous food sovereignty as they have been described from a hunting, fishing and gathering perspective at the 1st Annual Interior of B.C. Indigenous Food Sovereignty Conference.

Session #2: Building IFS coalitions - Working cross culturally between the WGIFS, the BCFSN board and membership. (Roundtable discussion)

This roundtable discussion provided participants with an opportunity to identify culturally sensitive principles, guidelines and best practices that would enable the WGIFS to work more effectively on building cross cultural coalitions. Participants began by discussing challenges to working cross culturally and overcoming the cycle of oppression and the negative impacts of industrialization and colonization on Indigenous cultures in B.C. (i.e. loss of connection to land, family history and identity, racism and apartheid). Participants brainstormed a list of cultural values and the ways in which the values can lead to desired action and behaviours that are sensitive to Indigenous peoples worldviews, concepts and communication patterns. With an emphasis on respect, sharing, honesty and empathy, participants explored values of interdependency, visibility, self-awareness and trusting how you feel about the related situations, concerns and issues.

Session #3: Indigenous Food Sovereignty - Whose responsibility is it? (Roundtable discussion)

Following the principles of food sovereignty outlined in session #1, this roundtable discussion began with a discussion that explored the various roles, responsibilities and relationships that can serve to support Indigenous peoples in their efforts of achieving food sovereignty. Participants explored the ways in which traditional harvesters (hunters, fishers, and gatherers), tribal governments, non-governmental organizations (NGO's), corporations, and non-Indigenous advocates and government institutions, can counteract the technobureaucratic approach dominating the industrialized food system through a more balanced ecological and policy approach to food sovereignty. The discussion resulted in a shared understanding that “everyone is to blame, and everyone is responsible” in the process of protecting, conserving and restoring Indigenous food economies.

It was reinforced that while individuals, parents, and families have a responsibility to model and continue passing on Indigenous food related knowledge to present and future generations, it is the responsibility of non-Indigenous advocates to lobby and influence policy changes that will recognize, respect and include Indigenous land, food, and cultural values in research and development proposals. In this context, it was reinforced that it is the responsibility of Indigenous peoples themselves to find ways in which they can create healthier relationships with non-Indigenous visitors without compromising Indigenous cultural, values, ecosystems and dignity. Furthermore, the discussion outlined the responsibilities of governments and corporations to demonstrate social and environmental responsibility by involving Indigenous peoples' in decision making matters affecting their ability to respond to their own needs for safe, healthy, culturally adapted Indigenous foods.

Session #4: Political lobbying and advocacy (Panel presentation and discussion).

An overview of the history and impacts of colonization, combined with presentations that identified some specific situations and concerns held by both Secwepemc and Nuxalk peoples led participants into a discussion that identified some practical ways in which advocates from settler communities and organizations can work to restore populations of culturally important species, and influence policy reform in forestry, fisheries, rangeland, environment, mining, and agriculture.

3. Outreach Meetings – October 2007 – March 2008

Purpose: The primary purpose of the outreach meetings were to provide the WGIFS with an opportunity to build relationships, expand the network and help communities understand and inform the work of WGIFS. The outreach meetings served to provide participants with an opportunity to express concerns and share insights on some of the most critical concerns, situations, and challenges impacting their ability to respond to their needs for healthy, culturally adapted foods in their respective communities and traditional territories. Based on a presentation on the concept of Indigenous food sovereignty and an analysis of the underlying issues, participants identified strategies that will improve Indigenous food culture, safety, accessibility, affordability and nutrition.

Participants: Outreach meetings brought together a number of Aboriginal community members, traditional harvesters (including hunters, fishers, gatherers), farmers/gardeners, community workers, government and non-government organizations, and groups involved with food related action. Participants consisted of varying ratios of Aboriginal, Metis, and non-Aboriginal participants. The ratios also varied for the number of Aboriginal participants residing on or off reserve, or in rural or urban communities.

Key communities were chosen as focal points based on geography, demographics, level of activity in food security work, and/or interest and willingness to participate. In this context, hosting agencies worked with the consultant to plan, coordinate, promote and host the meetings. Figure 2.0 provides a profile of the number of participants and hosting agencies at each of the various meetings that happened. Note: Extra funding from Interior Health made possible 5 additional meetings in the interior region which are marked with an asterisk and bold face typed in the table below.

Table 2.0 Outreach meetings by community, region and hosting agency

Community	Region	Hosting agency	# of participants
Chehalis	Fraser	Fraser Health – Chehalis Indian Band	10
*Clearwater	North Thompson	North Thompson Valley Food Coalition – Kelmuc Sharing Place	7
Comox	North and Central Van Island	Upper Island Women of Native Ancestry – Comox Indian Band	15
Cranbrook	Kootenays	College of the Rockies Nursing Program	25
Kamloops	Interior	Qwemtsin Health Society	20
*Kelowna (1)	Interior	Ki Low Na Friendship Society	16
Kelowna (2)	Interior	UBCO – Indigenous Studies Program	40
*Lytton	Interior	Lytton First Nations, Siska Traditions	30
Moricetown	Northern	Moricetown Indian Band – Health Department	6
*Nelson	Interior	Snixit Nation – Selkirk College	20
Paquachin	South Van Island	VIHA/ Paquachin Indian Band – Feasting for Change Project	27
Skidegate	North Coast	Skidegate Health Centre	44
T'souke	South Van Island	VIHA/ T'souke Indian Band – Feasting for Change Project	28
Vancouver (1)	Van Coastal – Downtown Eastside	Vancouver Native Health Society – 4 Sisters Housing Coop	28
Vancouver (2)	Van Coastal – Downtown Eastside	Vancouver Native Health Society – Native Education Centre	27
*Williams Lake	Interior	X'atsull (Soda Creek) Indian Band	24

Outcomes – What we learned?

Based on a presentation on the concept of Indigenous food sovereignty and an overview of recent meetings, conferences and discussions that have taken place around the topic of Indigenous food sovereignty, outreach meeting participants identified some of the most critical concerns, situations, and challenges impacting their ability to respond to their needs for healthy culturally adapted Indigenous foods. In this context, participants identified practical strategies, solutions and ways to appreciate and build upon indigenous food related action already taking place within the communities.

Due to the scale and complexity of the concerns over environmental degradation, socio-economic marginalization, and cultural erosion, a detailed discussion of the underlying issues far outweighs the scope of this report. Instead, this report will 1) provide an analysis of some of the most widely expressed issues, concerns, situations, and challenges, 2) highlight some of the strengths and indigenous food related activities already taking place in key communities around the province, and 3) identify practical strategies for building the capacity of the WGIFS to do its work on focusing dialogue and education activities that will increase awareness of Indigenous food security issues, concerns, situations and challenges and their potential solutions.

Presentation

What is Indigenous Food Sovereignty?

Food sovereignty is the newest and most innovative approach to addressing the complex issues impacting the ability of individuals, families and communities to respond to their own needs for healthy culturally adapted Indigenous foods. It has grown out of a social network of Non Government Organizations (NGO's), Civil Society Organization's (CSO's), social movements and many conferences, meetings and discussions that have taken place both within our region and around the world. The concept was developed by a global farmer's movement Via Campesina and was launched to the general public at the World Food Summit in 1996¹. While there is no universal definition of food sovereignty the most common one referred to in the international community is as follows.

“Food Sovereignty is the Right of peoples, communities, and countries to define their own agricultural, labour, fishing, food and land policies, which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and their societies.”

¹ Information taken from the *Food Sovereignty: towards democracy in localized food systems paper* (Windfur and Jonsen, 2005). For more informaton visit the Nyeleni Forum for Food Sovereignty website address: <http://www.nyeleni2007.org/spip.php?article88>

The food sovereignty approach thereby provides a framework to explore, analyze and describe key principles of protecting, conserving and restoring Indigenous food systems as it relates to the the unique cultures and circumstances in the province of B.C. Based on discussions that took place at the 1st Annual Interior of B.C. Indigenous Food Sovereignty Conference (IFSC 2006), some key principles of Indigenous food sovereignty have been identified below.

- **Sacredness** – Food is a gift from the Creator; we have a sacred responsibility to nurture healthy, interdependent relationships with the land, plants and animals that provide us with our food.
- **Self-determination**-The ability to respond to our own needs for safe, healthy, culturally adapted Indigenous foods - the ability to make decisions over the amount and quality of food we hunt, fish, gather, grow and eat. Freedom from dependence on grocery stores or corporately controlled food production and distribution in market economies.
- **Participatory** - An action that is ultimately based on the day to day practice of maintaining our traditional food harvesting strategies and practices for the benefit of present and future generations. A cultural strategy that must be practiced at all of the individual, family and community levels.
- **Policy** - A strategy for influencing provincial, national and international policies that are negatively impacting traditional land and food systems.

Overview of Indigenous food sovereignty discussions: local, regional, provincial and international levels.

Local (Formal and informal)

Intergenerational transmission of Indigenous food related knowledge within the families, schools, communities, and informal social networks.

Indigenous food related teachings embedded in language and culture.

Food security programs and projects that involve traditional food harvesting (hunting, fishing and gathering) and organic gardening.

Regional

1st Annual Interior of B.C. Indigenous Food Sovereignty Conference (IFSC 2006) – For more information view the final report on the BCFSN website address: www.fooddemocracy.org (½ the way down the Resources and Links page under the "Documents" heading, and subheading "New - Indigenous food sovereignty")

Traditional Food Forum in Merrit in March of 2006

Community Food Action Initiative - Interior Health Regional Network

Provincial

B.C. Food Systems Network – Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty

National

Member of Food Secure Canada

Participation in the 1st Annual Newfoundland and Labrador Food Security Network

Assembly in October 2007

maintain traditional harvesting strategies and practices outside of the tribal social structures that traditionally made the workload easier. Parents are striving to hold on to youth in rural communities where traditional harvesting strategies and practices are practiced and passed on through the generations. While traditional harvesters who are unemployed in the mainstream economy may have more time to spend hunting, fishing and gathering, they lack the financial resources required to cover the cost of transportation to harvesting sites. Furthermore, communities are challenged to find balance and social harmony in situations where polarizations exist between proponents for short term economic gain in large scale residential, recreational, and industrial economic activities and long term sustainability of the food, land, culture and environment.

For example, in the southern interior where ranching occurs on a larger scale than any other region in the province, there are serious concerns about the environmental impacts of unsustainable cattle rangeland practices on Indigenous land and food systems. While most agree that the cattle industry has made beef more readily available in the mainstream agriculture based economy, many of the most persistent traditional harvesters are concerned about the loss of culturally important plant and animal species in the forests, grasslands, and waterways due to: 1) heavy cattle grazing in traditional berrypicking and root digging sites, 2) compaction of soil in traditional root digging areas, 3) competition from introduced forage and invasive weed species, and 4) ways in which diseases such as the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) Mad Cow disease can spread from cows to humans and to culturally important animals, particularly Elk.

In the coastal regions, industrial open net cage fish farms are posing serious threats to wild salmon populations that are the main source of protein for most Indigenous peoples in all regions throughout the province. In addition, there is widespread concern over the potential of Individual Power Projects (IPP's) being licensed by the provincial government to drastically alter important salmon bearing streams and rivers, reduce the quality and quantities of fresh clean drinking water, and limit access to traditional land and food systems. Furthermore, licensing of IPP's promotes privatization of water which gives an unbalanced amount of control to individuals and corporations who fail to consider Indigenous food and cultural values. Many concerns have also been expressed over the threat of environmental contamination to traditional land and food systems posed by the large number of mining, coal bed methane and oil drilling activities being proposed and developed in various regions of the province.

Concerns have also been expressed over the commodification of traditional foods in the newly emerging Non Timber Forest Products industry. Proponents for the short term economic gains through the commodification of traditional foods in the NTFP industry believe it can: 1) provide a source of employment for traditional harvesters living on low incomes, 2) encourage, promote, and revitalize traditional harvesting strategies and practices in a neoclassical economic framework, and 3) make Indigenous foods more accessible to consumers in the market based economy. To the contrary, many of the most dedicated traditional harvesters whose priority is long term ecological and cultural sustainability of Indigenous food systems are concerned that it will: 1) further erode the tribal and ecosystem values inherent in Indigenous food economies, 2) lead to over exploitation, contamination and degradation of traditional foods, 3) devalue the highly localized nature of Indigenous food systems through international marketing schemes, and 4) limit Aboriginal jurisdiction to

harvest and take care of our relationships with traditional land and food systems. The neoliberal trade related policies asserting full control over Indigenous land and food systems continue to perpetuate the oppressive regimes that has eroded Indigenous peoples' ability to respond to their needs for healthy, culturally adapted foods. Traditional harvesters are challenged with the daunting task of asserting Indigenous food and cultural values in forestry, fisheries, rangeland, and agriculture reform where established decision making structures and processes do not encourage a balanced or restorative approach to reconciling Indigenous food and cultural values with those of mainstream society and economy. The resulting uncertainty, lack of information and loss of control has led to high levels of food insecurity and stress which has played a significant role in the epidemic proportions of food related illnesses in Aboriginal communities and has drastically reduced the numbers of people who participate in traditional harvesting and agriculture strategies and practices.

More Concerns and Situations:

Environmental and Health

- PCB contamination of marine foods (Vancouver, Vancouver Island, North Coast).
- contamination of land, food and water from mining activities - especially uranium, mercury, gold, oil, and coal bed methane (northern and interior).
- clear cut logging practices in traditional harvesting sites.
- reforestation practices – high stocking rates crowding out culturally important plant and animal species in forest understory.
- use of pesticides in forestry operations located on or near traditional harvesting sites.
- sewage disposal from large scale residential and tourist developments – contamination of water and fish – disposal of birth control, viagra, hormones, and antibiotics in water systems.
- recreational and commercial fisheries – declining populations in native food fisheries.
- contamination of land and water from pesticides and chemical fertilizers used in agriculture.
- global warming – movement of culturally important plant and animal species in or out of an area, changes in water levels and temperatures.
- impacts of Mountain Pine Beetle on hunting, fishing and gathering sites. (interior)
- invasive species crowding out native plants and animals and drastically altering forage for wild ungulates.
- domestication and/or genetic engineering of culturally important plants and seeds- changes to genetic composition outside of the historical range of variability.
- risks associated with introducing genetically engineered plants into Indigenous land and food systems.
- urban development – encroachment on traditional harvesting sites.
- food safety regulation prohibiting the preparation of traditional foods in schools and public places.
- environmental risk associated with locating new federally inspected meat abattoires close to water sources – Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) Meat Inspection Regulations.
- inhumane treatment of livestock.
- health risks associated with consuming medicated livestock i.e. antibiotics and growth hormones.

- high rate of diabetes, obesity, malnourishment and other food related illnesses.
- link between poor diet and poor mental health.

Socio-economic

- intellectual property regime i.e. appropriation of traditional knowledge through trade related patents and copyrights.
- federal opposition to race based fisheries.
- lack of public access to information about industrial development proposals and their impacts on Indigenous food systems.
- lack of access to arable land for low income apartment dwellers in urban areas.
- poverty and lack of affordable housing.
- high rate of single parent/low income families.
- lack of access to funding at the grassroots level to cover the cost of transportation to harvesting sites, and/or farming equipment (i.e tractors, irrigation etc...)
- bureaucratic barriers - lack of capacity and support (technical and human resources) to develop funding proposals and fulfill reporting requirements for funding agencies.
- highly subsidized commodity food system in the north.
- union policies prohibiting community gardens in schools and hospitals.
- cycle of oppression

Cultural

- mass media junk food campaigns promoting fast foods and highly processed foods.
- culture of computers and video games degrades healthy attachment relationships with parent, families and communities.
- peer oriented youth culture vs. parent and family oriented.
- values of individualism in mainstream culture and economy overriding tribal values and social structures.
- mentality of abundance – discourages people from realizing the possibility of not having enough food.

Strengths

The traditional knowledge, values and wisdom applied by traditional harvesters throughout the millennia is being given increasing recognition by anthropologists, ethno-ecologists and scientists who recognize its significant role in conservation of biological diversity for all. In this respect, the ability to adapt and maintain traditional harvesting strategies for thousands of years prior to contact with European settlers is ground proofed evidence of the efficacy and resiliency of Indigenous communities to work within the limits of traditional land and food systems to ensure adequate amounts of healthy, culturally adapted foods for present and future generations. Overcoming the current situations, concerns and challenges, calls for a strategy that: 1) promotes the re-establishment of local community based food economies, that combines traditional harvesting with ecologically and culturally sustainable agriculture practices, and 2) builds on the food related activities already taking place in Aboriginal communities.

Exploring the junction between traditional harvesting and sustainable agriculture.

Avoiding the limitations imposed by anthropologists who categorize societies into either hunting and gathering *or* agricultural societies, challenges us to explore the junction between sustainable agriculture and traditional harvesting strategies to find practical ways to bring the strategies down to what individuals, families and communities can do in their daily lives. Sustainable agriculture plays an important role in supplementing traditional diets, and challenges individuals, families and communities to work together to re-establish tribal social networks where knowledge, values, wisdom and work is shared by all. Establishing social networks where there are more hands to do the work, can help in the process of finding ways to balance the amount of time and energy spent in sustainable agricultural activities with the amount of time and energy spent hunting, fishing and gathering.

Adoption of sustainable agriculture in community gardens, greenhouse projects, wild berry & fruit tree maintenance projects, and seed banks (in situ and ex-situ) are ways to reconnect people with the land and promote a sense of responsibility that is necessary to establish community based economies. Cultivating traditional foods (such as; nuts, berries, root vegetables and perennials) in home landscapes can increase energy efficiency by reducing the amount of energy required to produce and transport food, and can also serve to establish a baseline for understanding the junction between Indigenous land and food systems and sustainable agriculture. In this context, bringing traditional foods into the present day agriculture experience can not only serve to revitalize the traditional harvesting strategies and practices that are being eroded through mainstream culture and society, but can also serve to restore the urban landscapes that have drastically changed Indigenous food systems and limited access to traditional harvesting sites.

Existing activities

Existing activities include various projects that enable individuals, families and communities to: 1) increase access to healthy foods, 2) acquire the skills necessary to grow, harvest, prepare and preserve food, and 3) become more aware of the many situations, concerns and challenges impacting their ability to respond to their own needs for food.

- good food box programs
- community gardens, greenhouse and kitchens
- fruit tree gleaning projects
- diabetes awareness counselling
- conferences, meetings and food forums
- building local food coalitions
- food policy councils
- traditional harvesting activities
- traditional food feasts
- language and culture programs in schools that pass on traditional food related knowledge through culturally relevant methodologies and curriculum.
- researching impacts of Mountain Pine Beetle in the Cariboo Chilcotin
- researching environmental contamination of traditional marine foods
- mapping traditional land use (harvesting sites)

Strategies and Solutions

Outreach meeting participants identified several ways in which the WGIFS and the communities can work together to increase food security by addressing the underlying issues of environmental degradation, socio-economic marginalization and cultural erosion. While much of the work rests with the individuals, families and communities themselves, the WGIFS can play an important role in informing, mobilizing, and supporting communities in their efforts of responding to their own needs for healthy, culturally adapted foods. Through organizing and facilitating discussions and media campaigns, the WGIFS can work to increase awareness so that communities are better able to respond to the situations through making informed decision and formulating strategies that will: 1) encourage re-establishment of diverse community based food economies that promote a combination of traditional harvesting and sustainable agriculture practices, and 2) advocate for policy reform in forestry, fisheries, rangeland, agriculture, environment and community and rural self-development agencies. It was also suggested that the WGIFS can also serve to provide technical support for overcoming the bureaucratic challenges associated with developing food related projects and establishing networks that link and strengthen community, regional and provincial strategies. Following three central themes and subthemes, the following solutions were identified.

Themes:

1. Education and Skill Building
 - Individuals and Families
 - School and Community Programs
 - Media Campaigns
2. Research and Mapping
3. Policy and Advocacy

Education and Skill Building

“Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day – teach him how to fish and feed him for a lifetime”. Cheryl Thomas, North Thompson Valley Food Coalition

Individuals and families

- Learn to survive in the forest.
- Homeschool children to teach them hunting, fishing and gathering.
- Observe spiritual protocols i.e. prayers, offerings, rituals and ceremonies.
- Organize berrypicking, fishing and hunting camps for children and youth - take children and families outside the boundaries of the cities.
- Learn about traditional foods and lifestyles of other Indigenous cultures. i.e. Cree, Ojibway, Mohawk etc...
- Encourage cooperation between generations. i.e. child, youth and Elders.
- Hold onto youth in rural communities.
- Model healthy behaviours and habits for children – eat smaller portions of food with higher nutrient values.

- Expose children to traditional farming practices i.e. raising and butchering cattle and chickens, gardening.
- Train professional butchers.
- Find practical ways to put knowledge into practice.
- Learn more about the differences between GE, hybrid and heritage seeds.
- Grow fruits and vegetables on abandoned lots in towns and cities.
- Recycle grey water in gardens.

Community programs

“If you are self-reliant and can function well in a healthy interdependent family and community you are not as easily controlled”. Outreach meeting participant – Clearwater.

- Social networking and community development - promote individual and collective responsibility.
- Promote cooperation and family and community connections - transcend divisions in the community.
- Bring the community together to share food regularly. i.e. potluck dinners
- Organize community feasts and harvest celebrations where people are encouraged to show and tell traditional foods.
- Explore the theme of food sovereignty through art projects that bring traditional harvesters, gardeners and communities together.
- Partner with schools and universities for teaching horticulture and conducting feasibility studies.
- Develop programs for teaching traditional food harvesting, preparation and preservation in schools - bring Elders into schools.
- Develop community programs where students can receive traditional food related teachings through their native language and methodologies (i.e. storytelling and participatory activities).
- Develop diabetes awareness projects specific to Aboriginal peoples cultures and lifestyles.
- Use modern tools to educate younger people about the nutritional values of Indigenous foods i.e. internet, computer games, media etc...
- Organize regular garden and ethno-botany tours.
- Create booklets and magazines about traditional foods.
- Promote cross cultural interactions and understanding of colonial history and relationships.
- Develop and deliver workshops that promote social harmony and justice - foster social intelligence, empathy, cross cultural understanding and a deeper understanding the cycle of oppression and lateral violence.
- Promote healthier choices in subsidized food system (north).
- Organize carpooling to harvesting sites.

Develop media campaigns that:

- Promote cooperation and systems thinking - encourage people to think about how we value food outside of the narrow industrialized notion of food production and distribution.
- Promote model projects that foster healthy relationships with land and food.
- Educate about the ways in which food impacts our health far greater than the health care system.
- Teach about the traditional lifestyles, history and cultural protocols of the local Indigenous peoples.
- Educate and develop programs on minimizing the destructive impacts of invasive plant and animal species.

Research and Mapping

- Map sensitive harvesting areas (hunting, fishing and gathering corridors).
- Develop tools that adequately assess the health and cultural risks associated with developments in traditional harvesting areas.
- Conduct research on the health risks associated with eating contaminated traditional foods.
- Make data on land use proposals more readily available to community members.
- Make data on the health and environmental impacts of land use activities more readily available to community members including traditional hunters, fishers and gatherers.
- Conduct surveys on the numbers of people that still eat traditional foods.
- Conduct food sovereignty assessments.
- Develop environmental monitoring programs that employ traditional harvesters.
- Research feasibility of eco-cultural restoration economic development projects.
- Identify local businesses that will sponsor food sovereignty work.

Policy/advocacy

- Take an integrated interministerial approach to forestry, fisheries, rangeland and agrarian policy reform and rural and community self-development.
- Give priority to traditional food and cultural values in contemporary forestry, fisheries, rangeland and agrarian management policies and practice.
- Give priority to Indigenous food and cultural harvesting over commercial harvesting in the newly emerging Non Timber Forest Products industry.
- Set aside adequate tracts of land for the protection, conservation and restoration of indigenous food systems as they are linked from region to region through hunting, fishing and gathering corridors.
- Make environmental protection and conservation of biological diversity a priority in land use planning.
- Mitigate the impacts of climate change on traditional land and food systems by exercising the precautionary principle in managing industrial economic activities that have potential to impact already changing water levels and temperatures in mountain regions and river systems.
- Allocate funding to include Indigenous peoples' and their knowledge, values and wisdom into contemporary land and resource management systems.
- Put a moratorium on industrial open net cage salmon farms on the B.C. coast.
- Put a moratorium on all Individual Power Projects that will adversely affect wild salmon populations.

- Allocate adequate funding for wild salmon enhancement programs that incorporate Indigenous knowledge and values with modern restoration techniques.
- Allocate adequate funding for community based programs that minimize the destructive impacts of invasive plant and animal species.
- Incorporate cultural, spiritual and health values into risk assessment structures and processes i.e. Environmental Assessment.
- Develop legislation and policies that encourage and reward corporate social and environmental responsibility.
- Incorporate a strategy on Indigenous food sovereignty into community planning and visioning.
- Incorporate Indigenous food sovereignty strategy into regional health plans.
- Work with health inspectors on food safety issues to find ways to have traditional foods available in schools and hospitals.
- Mitigate the environmental impacts of CFAI meat inspection regulations – place large scale meat abattoires in locations that minimize the risk of contamination of water sources and hunting, fishing and gathering corridors.
- Ban cosmetic pesticide use.
- Form alliances with NGO's and environmental groups.
- Put food security on the agenda of Aboriginal Education Advisory Councils.
- Allocate funding for sustainable agriculture infrastructure needs in Aboriginal communities i.e. farming equipment and irrigation systems.
- Allocate funding for paid Coordinator's to provide technical support to Indigenous communities in food security project development and implementation.
- Provide institutional support - make the time and space for projects and provide the facilities i.e. community kitchens, garden, smokehouses, gathering places, feasting halls, deprecation plants for clams in coastal communities etc...
- Allocate funding to employ Aboriginal Water Bailiff to monitor equitable use of water for gardens and fruit trees.
- Incorporate ecosystem and community based restoration project development into land use planning and management.
- Provide government incentives for people to set up local community gardens and food systems networks.
- Provide government incentives to encourage establishment of more local community based economies.
- Include community members (traditional harvesters and farmers) in decision making processes – find ways for the average citizen to be involved.
- Take a balanced approach to policy reform – balance responsibility with rights.

*90% of the people are waiting for the other
10% of the people to do the work – get involved
and take responsibility for the issues”.*
Outreach meeting participant - Kelowna

Next Steps

1. Seek funding for programs and projects that increase the capacity of the WGIFS in its efforts to:
 - network and share information via internet tools (email listserve and website development), conferences and meetings.
 - develop media campaigns and print based materials (brochures and booklets) that educate and increase awareness of the issues, concerns and strategies within both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.
2. Formulate a sustainable funding strategy that accounts for adequate amounts of time and energy to develop, coordinate and implement WGIFS projects that follow the three central themes and subthemes identified in this project.
3. Seek funding for more outreach meetings in the northern region and areas in the Lower Mainland with higher density populations.
4. Seek WGIFS representation on CFAI Advisory and other interministerial advisory committees.