

# **INTERNATIONAL UNION OF NUTRITIONAL SCIENCES**

## **TASK FORCE: INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' FOOD SYSTEMS AND NUTRITION**

### **TASK FORCE REPORT: MAY, 2005**

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#### **Introduction**

The task force was created in a meeting of the IUNS Council in March, 2002, in recognition of the significant nutrition issues facing Indigenous Peoples with regard to food security, food sovereignty, nutrition and health. The Task Force is chaired by Dr. Harriet of McGill University, Montreal, Canada.

Traditional food systems have the potential to enhance the quality of life of Indigenous Peoples through several means, including nutrition and cultural expression. Advancing the understanding of food systems and the effects of both natural and human-generated environmental phenomena will contribute to nutrition and health promotion using traditional food. The objectives of the Task Force are to extend understanding of methods to define traditional food systems of Indigenous Peoples living in rural areas around the world, and to document case studies of improved nutritional status of Indigenous Peoples when traditional food contributes to the diet. Research with Indigenous Peoples' food systems, and documentation of the wealth of food diversity in them, as well as their potential to contribute to health promotion, calls attention to the need for food diversity for all humankind.

Research and program activities with Indigenous Peoples on traditional food systems and other health issues require particular sensitivity and awareness of local issues. Development and implementation of good participatory technique for work with Indigenous Peoples is an important part of the work of this international Task Force.

#### **Members**

As a Task Force of the IUNS, membership comprises nutritionist members of Adhering Bodies to the IUNS. Each member will be responsible for developing participatory relationships with local Indigenous Peoples in their areas. Nutritionist members at this time are: Suttalak Smitisiri (Thailand), Lalita Bhattacharjee (India), Salome Yesudas (India), Hilary Creed Kanashiro (Peru), Gail Harrison (USA), Prakash Shetty (FAO), Laurie Chan (Canada), Kerin O'Dea (Australia), and Chinwe Okeke (Nigeria). Every effort has been made to involve members in activities of the Task Force. We have also involved other scholars in our activities (see below).

## Activities

1. A document on good participatory technique for research management on traditional food systems and health of Indigenous Peoples was completed and published by WHO in early 2003.

**Sims J and Kuhnlein H (2003) Indigenous Peoples and Participatory Health Research: Planning & Management/Preparing Research Agreements. WHO, Geneva.**

2. A conference attended by participating Task Force members was held in Bellagio, Italy, in July, 2004. This meeting was planned for Task Force academics and their indigenous partners to report on traditional food system research activities, and to write proposals for further work. There was a ceiling of 23 participants.

3. Students at McGill University have contributed to compilation of regional/country lists of Indigenous Peoples, their cultures and population numbers. In some cases, traditional food system lists, and evidence of recent nutritional status evaluations have been compiled as well.

4. A presentation was made at the IUNS Symposium in Marrakech, Morocco, February 8, 2003, with subsequent publication in the *Asia Pacific Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.

**Kuhnlein HV, Johns T and the IUNS Task Force on Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems and Nutrition. (2003) Northwest African and Middle Eastern food and dietary change of Indigenous Peoples. Asia Pacific J Clin Nutr; 12 (3): 344-349.**

5. In partnership with FAO and IDRC (Canada), WHO, and potentially other organizations contributing to funding and knowledge development, our plan is to document case studies of improved nutritional status of Indigenous peoples when traditional food is available and used.

a. From 2001-2003 a project supported by IDRC (Canada) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) was conducted during the sabbatical leave (2001) of Dr. Kuhnlein, when she was a Visiting Scientist with FAO. The goal of the project was to identify and document traditional foods and their use in 5 different Indigenous populations, provide information on their nutritional value, and identify future research needs, and to develop a manual on the process and methods that can be used in working with Indigenous populations using traditional food systems. The ultimate aim is to improve nutritional status of Indigenous Peoples, with special attention to micronutrients.

The 5 Asian case study partner teams and their Indigenous colleagues were: Karen with Dr. Suttalak Smitasiri of Mahidol University in Thailand; Bhil with Dr. Lalita Bhattacharjee and Dr. Gopa Kothari of FAO Bangkok and the Child Eye Care Charitable Trust in Mumbai, India; Sichuan Miao with Dr. Li Dan and Dr. Zhai Fengying of the

National Institute of Nutrition and Food Hygiene, China; Mogh and Nayakrishi farmers with Farida Akhter and Dr. Salek Ahmed of UBINIG, Bangladesh, and the Dalit of Zaheerabad with Salome Yesudas and P.V. Satheesh of the Deccan Development Society, India.

The methodology in 4 steps to document food systems was used in each of these case studies. One important activity was to screen the world literature for food composition data on each of the species identified. This was conducted through the INFOODS network at FAO, Rome. An evaluation of health improvement as a result of promotion of traditional food was completed with the Dalit, assisted by graduate student, Martina Schmid. The 5 step methodology is published on the web.

**Kuhnlein HV, Smitasiri S, Yesudas S, Bhattacharjee L, Dan L, Ahmed S with collaborators Sirisai S, Puwastien P, Daoratanahong L, Dhanamitta S, Zhai F, Satheesh, PV, Kothari G, and Akhter F. (2005). Documenting Traditional Food Systems of Indigenous Peoples: International Case Studies. Guidelines for Procedures. 120 pages. <http://www.cine.mcgill.ca/ia2.htm>**

Two reports from Asian case studies were published by FAO:

**Kuhnlein HV, Smitasiri S, Yesudas S, Ahmed S, Kothari G, Bhattacharjee L, Dan L. and Fengying Z. (2003) Documenting traditional food systems of indigenous peoples: Process and methods with international case studies. Proceedings: Measurement and Assessment of Food Deprivation and Under-Nutrition. Pp 255-257. FAO, Rome.**

**Bhattacharjee L, Kothari G., Ramaswamy V, Kuhnlein H. and Nandi B. (2003) Traditional food patterns and dietary intake of Bhil tribes in the Dang district of Gujarat, Western India. Proceedings: Measurement and Assessment of Food Deprivation and Under-Nutrition Pp 259-260. FAO, Rome.**

Two full color posters with photographs and data about the excellent nutritional and cultural values of traditional food use by Indigenous Peoples were prepared by CINE and published by FAO for international distribution. The posters are also located on the CINE website. <http://cine.mcgill.ca/posters1.htm>

**CINE, FAO and IDRC. 2004. Celebrating the International Decade for the World's Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous Peoples Food Systems in Asia (poster 1); and Indigenous Peoples' Global Food Systems (poster 2).**

b. Several proposals were developed, and funded to date, by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Global Health Initiative, and the USAID. Other proposals for case studies are pending. The overall goals of the program are to demonstrate the diversity, stability and resilience in local food systems of Indigenous Peoples still resident in rural homelands that prevent both undernutrition and overnutrition, and to develop health promotion strategies focusing on issues of energy balance, micronutrient

deficiency, non-communicable disease and functional diversity of diets. This research program builds upon the objectives of the IUNS Task Force, and the FAO/IDRC project noted above.

The 12 case studies are:

- 1) Nuxalk Nation, Canada, with academic partner Dr. Nancy Turner, Univ. Victoria
- 2) Inuit community of Baffin Island, Canada, with academic partner Dr. Laurie Chan, CINE
- 3) Gwich'in Dene community of the Northwest Territories, Canada, with academic partner Chief Bill Erasmus, Assembly of First Nations.
- 4) Karen community of Thailand with academic partner Dr. Suttalak Smitasiri, Mahidol University, Salaya
- 5) Bhil community of India with academic partners Dr. Lalita Bhattacharjee and Dr. Gopa Kothari, FAO and Child Eye Care Charitable Trust, Mumbai
- 6) Dalit community of Zaheerabad, India, with academic partners Salome Yesudas and P.V. Satheesh, Hyderabad
- 7) Ingano community of Colombia with academic partner Dr. Mark Plotkin, Amazon Conservation Team, Washington DC
- 8) Aguaruna community of Peru with academic partner Hilary Creed-Kanashiro, Institute of Nutritional Investigations, Lima
- 9) Maasai community in Kenya with academic partner Timothy Johns, CINE, and Prof. Ruth Oniang'o, Nairobi
- 10) Igbo community in Nigeria with academic partner, Dr. Chinwe Okeke, University of Nigeria, Nsukka
- 11) Ainu community in Japan with academic partner, Dr. Masami Iwasaki-Goodman, Hokkaido
- 12) Pohnpei community of Mand, Madolenihmw, with academic partner, Dr. Lois Englberger, Pohnpei

CIHR funding to date has ensured that all case studies complete phase 1 (documentation of their traditional food systems) with special thanks to the IUNS for letters of support within the proposals. Proposals for all case studies are to complete a 2 year health promotion activity using traditional food resources. We intend to have these projects completed and reported by 2007. To date, case studies in the Nuxalk Nation and Dalit in India have completed and evaluated their programs.

**Kuhnlein HV (2004). Indigenous Peoples Food Systems for Health Promotion: Development of an international research program. Global Health Connections 2:3. (May, 2004 [www.ccghr.ca](http://www.ccghr.ca))**

7. As a representative of the Centre for Indigenous Peoples' Nutrition and Environment (CINE), Harriet Kuhnlein attended the Standing Committee on Nutrition meeting at UN Headquarters in New York City in March, 2004, and Brasilia in March, 2005 and described the work of the Task Force.

**Kuhnlein HV, Johns T, Spigelski DL, and Erasmus B. (2005) Indigenous Peoples' food systems and health.**

6. Plans for the International Congress on Nutrition (ICN) in Durban, South Africa, September, 2005

Following a meeting with Prof. Este Vorster, our Task Force has prepared a Safari on methods to document traditional food systems with special attention to the Zulu food system to be held September 17-18, and a Symposium for the actual Congress (Pathway 8, symposium 5.8). The Safari is sponsored by combined funding from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, and the International Development Research Centre.

It is hoped that all Task Force members, and others associated with our activities, can attend the ICN and present their findings.

Respectfully submitted,  
Harriet Kuhnlein  
May 10, 2005