HISTORICAL REPORT OF TASK FORCE ACTIVITIES (1990-2021)
International Union of Nutritional Sciences
Task Force on Traditional and Indigenous Food Systems and Nutrition
Historical report of Task Force activities (1990-2021)
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Reviewed by T Longvah and G Kennedy
Chronology of Task Force Activities and Publications

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Summary of achievements

For the past three decades, the International Union of Nutritional Sciences (IUNS) has provided a very important international platform to raise the profile of the food systems of Indigenous Peoples. Since 1990 Dr. Harriet Kuhnlein and Task Force (TF) colleagues have been documenting nutritional values and contributions of culturally based food biodiversity used and maintained by Indigenous Peoples to improve nutritional status. Some of the highlights over more than thirty years of work include partnerships with over 50 culture-specific communities to document and publish their traditional and Indigenous food systems. This has resulted in several publications of methodological guides and case studies. This body of work, led by IUNS Task Force teams has influenced and inspired continued study to benefit people who are among the most marginalized globally.
See list of Members for Task Force by date

The TF developed a project that addressed vitamin A deficiency with natural food sources in traditional communities. Funding and publication were through the International Nutrition Foundation for Developing Countries and the International Development Research Centre (Canada). Workshop and meetings took place at McGill University’s Centre for Indigenous Peoples’ Nutrition and Environment (CINE) and Washington, DC. Field site testing of a rapid assessment methodology took place with local teams in Chamis and San Vacinte, Cajamarca, Peru; the Aetas of Canawan, Morong, Bataan, Philippines; Doumen Village, Henan Province, China, the Hausas of Filingue, Niger; and Sheraguda Village, Andra Pradesh, India, with site visits by HV Kuhnlein and GH Pelto. Publications were released in 1997:

HV Kuhnlein and GH Pelto (eds.). 1997. Culture, Environment and Foods to Prevent Vitamin A Deficiency. IDRC and INFDC. 

1994-2000. This was an intensive period of interdisciplinary development and research by CINE at McGill University, Montreal, that quickly interfaced with institutional support for development of the following IUNS Task Force.

2. 2001-2008. IUNS Task Force on Indigenous Peoples’ Food Systems and Nutrition (2 cycles)
2001 – Creation of the TF following the IUNS meeting in Vienna, with the objective to have support from FAO and IDRC to create a methodology by documentation of traditional food systems (TFS) of 5 groups of Asian Indigenous Peoples: Bhil (Gujarat State, India), Dalit (Medak District, Andhra Pradesh, India), Karen (Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand), Miao (Sichuan Province, China), and the Nayakrishi (UBINIG) and Mogh (Makeshkhal Island) of (Bangladesh).
Meeting of Asian case study partners at Mahidol University, Salaya, Thailand, to draft the food system documentation methodology, including participatory research.
Participatory Health Research with Indigenous Peoples: Planning and Management and Preparing Research Agreements.

2004 – Meeting of case study partners at the Rockefeller Foundation’s Study and Conference Center in Bellagio, Italy. Confirmation of phase 1 research methods and plans for intervention proposals. Creation of CINE web document for IP food system documentation methods. https://www.mcgill.ca/cine/resources/data (see 2006 publication below)

2004-2006 – Creation of 12 Indigenous case studies for Phase 1 of the research, and funding quest. Case studies were: Ainu, Saru River Region, Japan; Karen, Sanepong Community, Sankhlaburi District, Thailand; Awajun, Cenepa, Amazon, Peru; Ingano, Caquetá State, Colombia; Inuit, Pangnirtung, Baffin Island, Canada; Nuxalk Nation, Bella Coola, British Columbia, Canada; Gwichin Nation, Tetlet Zheh, Northwest Territories, Canada; Dalit, Zaheerabad, Andhra Pradesh, India; Bhil, Dang District, Gujarat State, India; Maasai, Kajaido District, Kenya; Igbo, 4 states (Delta, Abia, Anambra, Enugu), Southern Nigeria.

2005 – Meeting of Aguaruna and Ingano partners in Lima. Preparation of draft versions of adaptable food security and physical activity interview methods. CBD initiative with SCN, including our IUNS Task Force, established in Brazilia. Funding established for photo documentation of 12 Task Force case study food systems.
16 presentations from Task Force members at the IUNS meeting in Durban and published in the Proceedings.
Meeting of case study partners in the Futululu Environmental Centre in St. Lucia, South Africa following the IUNS meeting in Durban; hosted by a KwaZulu community.

https://www.mcgill.ca/cine/resources/posters

Case study partners’ meeting in Montreal to compile Phase 1 results publications.
2007 – Second meeting of case study partners at The Rockefeller Foundation’s Study and Conference Center in Bellagio, Italy. Details completed on Book 2 of 12 chapters of Phase 1 results. Consideration of appropriate definitions of Indigenous Peoples. Considering policy activities for case studies at several levels. Agreement that the food system documentation should be used to benefit the communities, and proceed with plans for Phase 2.


2008 – Case study partners met for a third time at the Bellagio Study and Conference Centre in Italy.

Reports on intervention strategies used, and drafts of chapters for the third publication as Phase 2 from the IUNS Task Force.


2009 – Release of Peer-reviewed Task Force Publication 2 with 12 chapters prepared by Task Force members and others. FAO contributed editing and publication costs.


https://www.fao.org/3/i0370e/i0370e00.htm

Funding from multiple sources and website developed to present 7 DVDs of case studies overviews: Overview; Awajun, Rio Cenepa, Peru; Gwichin Nation, Tetlit Zheh, Northwest Territories, Canada; Inuit, Pangnirtung, Baffin Island, Canada; Maasai, Enkereyian, Kajaodo District, Kenya; Nuxalk Nation, Bella Coola, British Columbia, Canada; Pohnpei, Island Food Community of Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia. www.indigenousnutrition.org

Meeting of the Task Force and case study partners at the IUNS ICN in Bangkok. A symposium and several publications were delivered at the ICN and published in the ICN Proceedings.

Following the ICN a satellite workshop for the TF was held and hosted by the Karen case study partners at Mahidol University, Salaya, and in the Karen Community in Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand.
2010 - Submission of 16 peer-reviewed chapters for the Task Force Publication 3 (Book 3). Nine interventions were conducted with case studies and form the basis of Book 3; external and internal reviews were conducted, and chapters were finalized and submitted. FAO contributed editing assistance and publication costs. Submission of proposal for Task Force renewal to IUNS Executive. Proposal approved with suggestions for name change to Task Force on Traditional, Indigenous and Cultural Food and Nutrition.

2011 – Case studies for Karen, Igbo, Awajun and Micronesia continue activities and presentations nationally and internationally. Meeting at FAO Rome on Biodiversity and Sustainable diets with several Task Force members presenting. Interaction with INFOODS Task Force.


2014 – Decision to address gender roles as a theme for TF activities. Invitation from The Indigenous Partnership (P Roy) to research matrilineal Indigenous societies in Northeast India and create and present a symposium at the Indigenous Terra Madre (ITM) in Shillong, Meghalaya State, India in 2015.
A planning meeting was held at FAO and with researchers at Bioversity International. Research began and proceeded rapidly to be ready for the meeting the following year. For two case studies in India, Longvah arranged support from the National Institute of India for research on the food biodiversity, dietary patterns, and nutritional status. Women’s roles in use of biodiversity, food and nutrition were also studied. The Indian case studies were with the Khasi, a matrilineal tribe in Meghalaya, and the patrilineal Chakesang rural Indigenous People in Nagaland with field work reviews by Drs. Longvah and Kuhnlein. Delormier conducted research with Mohawk Haudenosaunee in Quebec, Canada; Sirisai and colleague Sinee Chotiboriboon researched matriarchy and Buddhism with colleagues in the Indigenous Karen Community of Sanephong; Iwasaki-Goodman worked with Ainu knowledge of mothers and daughters; Ene-Obong and colleagues studied gender roles in the Ohafia matrilineal society in Nigeria; Belahsen contributed research with the Berber (Amizigh) in Morocco; and Roche and colleagues described how mothers’ groups enrich traditional Quichua diets in Ecuador.

2015 In February Drs. Longvah and Kuhnlein attended several meetings in Rome to discuss methodology for the current TF projects: FAO Nutrition Division (Dr. Lartey), Bioversity International (P Roy); and the FAO Indigenous Peoples’ Partnership Group. Drs. Delormier and Kuhnlein presented at the IFAD Indigenous Peoples’ Forum and Dr. Kuhnlein joined a panel presentation for the IFAD Governing Council. Drs. Longvah and Kuhnlein presented the IUNS Task Force to officials of the Government of Nagaland and to Government Science College in Kohima. Task Force members H Eneobong, R Belahsen attended the 11th IFDC organised by Longvah in Hyderabad after which they travelled to Shillong to attend the Indigenous Terra Madre (ITM). The ITM in October was a remarkable event that drew participants from 169 tribes from 64 countries, including more than 50,000 local attendees. During the days of the Congress, several lectures by Task Force members were contributed to local colleges and universities in Meghalaya. Following the ITM Task Force members Sirisai, Delormier, Lemke and Kuhnlein presented at St. Mary’s College, Northeast Hills University Campus, and Martin Luther Christian University, all in Shillong, Meghalaya, India. Following the ITM, Task Force members present met over 2 days in Guwahati, India, arranged by Dr. Longvah and discussed issues pertaining to Indigenous Peoples’ food systems. The IUNS agrees to provide costs for editing and publication for an open-access publication of 11 contributions by Task Force members in the journal, Maternal and Child Nutrition, with opening remarks by Drs. Anna Lartey and Catherine Geissler.
2016- Task Force members prepared a symposium for the IUNS ICN in Buenos Aires, Argentina based on the recent publication. E Falahi (Iran) and N Omidvar and colleagues invited Drs. Kuhnlein, Longvah and Iwasaki-Goodman to present at the Iranian Nutrition Congress in September. They also presented a workshop on behalf of IUNS at the National Institute of Nutrition and Food Technology in Tehran entitled “Understanding the potential of local, Indigenous food.”

2017 – Drs. Kuhnlein and Longvah presented at the 12th IFDC in Buenos Aires, Argentina that preceded the ICN. Task Force members presented a symposium (Longvah, Kuhnlein, Ene-Ebong, Roche), at the ICN in Buenos Aires. Several Task Force members presented multiple free communications as posters and presentations. The special issue of the journal, Maternal and Child Nutrition which included several articles by Task Force members (Lemke, Delormier, Kuhnlein, Longvah, Belahsen, Sirisai, Chotiboriboon, Iwasaki-Goodman, Ene-Obong, Roche) and colleagues was introduced at the symposium.


Task Force and IUNS agreement to rename the Task Force as Traditional and Indigenous Food Systems and Nutrition. Dr. Gina Kennedy was proposed and approved as Chair of the renewed Task Force and Drs. Kuhnlein and Longvah as the Steering Committee.

5. 2018-2022 Task Force on Traditional and Indigenous Food Systems and Nutrition (TIFSaN)

2018 – Consolidation of the Task Force.
2019 - Preparation of Commentary for the journal Current Developments in Nutrition


Proposal prepared and accepted for a Supplement in Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems: Sustainable Food Systems: Local, Traditional and Indigenous Food Systems in the 21st Century to Combat Obesity, Undernutrition and Climate Change. Editors are R Kanter, G Kennedy and S Boza (Univ. of Chile).
IUNS requests reports of independent activity of Task Force members as part of annual reporting. In 2019: all TIFSaN members have been active in scientific conferences and publications. Notable events include a plenary presentation by HV Kuhnlein at the Fourth Annual Native American Nutrition Conference in Shakopee, MN, with Gwich’in Elder Norma Kassi from Old Crow, Yukon Territory, Canada, and T Delormier of CINE regarding the history and development of the Centre for Indigenous Peoples’ Nutrition and Environment (CINE); T Longvah delivered the keynote lecture at the Kohima Institute, India, titled "The Indigenous Peoples’ Food System and the Need for its Preservation"; T Longvah presented on "Mainstreaming Indigenous Foods: Perspectives from Northeast India" at the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation conference in India; and N Omidvar chaired the Fourth Food and Nutrition Discussion Forum in Tehran, Iran, on Concepts, Approaches and Challenges on Food and Nutrition System Analysis.

2020 - Zeyuan Wang (Graduate Student at the University of Toronto) became a volunteer with the Task Force to assist publication formatting and with the UN Food Systems Summit Dialogs. A symposium proposal was prepared and accepted for the Tokyo IUNS ICN (extended to December 2022). Symposium title: The advantages and challenge(s) of incorporating traditional foods in food-based dietary guidelines (FBDG) for more sustainable and inclusive population guidance. Chairs: Larthey and Kennedy. Presenters: Kuhnlein, Covic, Omidvar, Delormier. Panel discussion following. Kuhnlein is organizing a social event for current and former Task Force members at the 22nd IUNS ICN in Tokyo.

2021 – TF members met 4 times on Zoom. UN Food Systems Summit. Covic, Maundu, and Kennedy prepared and recorded a UNFSS dialog with the African Nutrition Society. H Kuhnlein participated in several dialogs organized by FAO North America, and several discussions by the FAO-HUB on the UNFSS. Kuhnlein and Kennedy contribute to FAO-HUB publication: The White/Whipala Paper on Indigenous Peoples’ Food Systems. FAO, 2021. The International Congress on Agrobiodiversity was held and included presentations by TF members Kennedy, Kuhnlein, Longvah, and Covic.
2022- Several activities are ongoing in 2022 by the Task Force and will be reported separately in the 2022 report to the IUNS secretariat. Activities include a special issue in Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems, an article in the Journal of Food Science and Technology, and activities for the 22nd IUNS-ICN Congress in Tokyo December 6-11, 2022.
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