

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# Food in indigenous schools

challenges to incorporate practices and knowledge



Comissão Pró-Índio  
de São Paulo

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# Introduction

In the early 2000s, the challenge of food sovereignty was an issue brought to the Comissão Pró-Índio de São Paulo (CPI-SP) by women of the Guarani indigenous people. At the time, they pointed out the difficulties of practicing agriculture in tiny lands and the growing dependence on food purchased in the city - which is an additional problem, since they do not have sufficient and regular income to purchase these products.

From 2014, women brought out another important issue: the need to adapt the food offered in indigenous schools. The issue is of particular importance for indigenous peoples in São Paulo, who experience a reality of food insecurity in which the school is an important channel to enhance the power of youth and children.

Responding to this challenge, CPI-SP, with the support of Christian Aid and DKA Austria, has promoted initiatives to discuss the challenges to ensure food sovereignty of indigenous peoples in São Paulo and, more specifically, the need to ensure healthy and culturally appropriate food in schools. While providing opportunities for women to cook together and talk about food and culture, between 2014 and 2015, debate moments were organised with the presence of educators, women and indigenous leaders, representatives of federal, state and local governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

This executive summary presents a synthesis of the publication *Food in indigenous schools: challenges to incorporate practices and knowledge* (original title in Portuguese: *Alimentação nas escolas indígenas: desafios para incorporar práticas e saberes*), launched by CPI-SP in June 2016, aiming to share with a wider public the reflections raised in those moments and thus boost the discussion of food sovereignty of indigenous peoples in Brazil. The publication in its entirety is only available in Portuguese.

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# Earth and Food Sovereignty

“*Until we have more land, we can't have a more dignified existence.*”

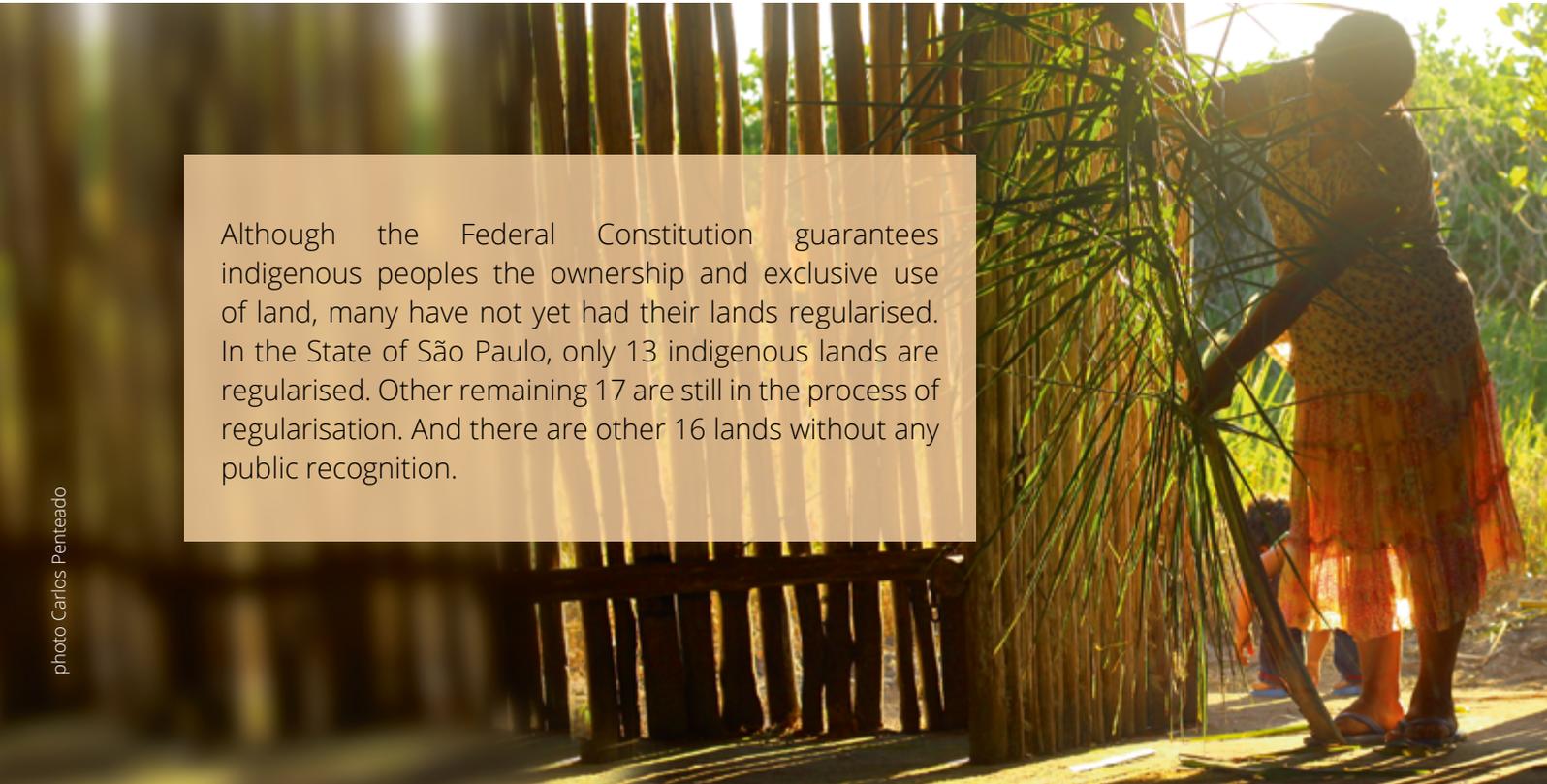
Adriano Karai Poty Verissimo, Tenondé Pora Indigenous Land.

*“We only have this corner to plant, just in the same place. So the land is very worn out. In the past, the indigenous lived two or three years in a place, then moved to another one. And now they can't do this anymore because the land that belonged to the Kaingang people are all with farmers.”*

Gerson Cecilio Damasceno Gundju, Vanuíre Indigenous Land.

Putting the right to land into effect is the first step to ensure food sovereignty of indigenous peoples, given the fact that the autonomy of ownership and access to natural resources are the conditions for food production. However, even the indigenous people with regularised land are struggling to promote their food sovereignty.

The State of São Paulo is the largest economic and industrial centre of Brazil. The process of occupation of the region ended up confining the indigenous peoples in small size lands which, together with the growth of the indigenous population and the adoption of new eating habits built the scenario of food insecurity.

A photograph showing a woman in a patterned dress working with large bundles of green palm fronds. She is standing in front of a wooden fence made of vertical posts. The scene is outdoors, with sunlight filtering through the trees in the background.

Although the Federal Constitution guarantees indigenous peoples the ownership and exclusive use of land, many have not yet had their lands regularised. In the State of São Paulo, only 13 indigenous lands are regularised. Other remaining 17 are still in the process of regularisation. And there are other 16 lands without any public recognition.

## Food insecurity of Indigenous Peoples in Brazil

In 1995, the *Mapa da Fome entre os Povos Indígenas no Brasil [Hunger Map of Indigenous Peoples in Brazil]* highlighted the difficulties of indigenous peoples to ensure their food sovereignty. The study carried out in 297 Brazilian Indigenous Lands found that at least 66.67% of them had problems of food security and hunger among the population.

More recently, in 2014, food insecurity of indigenous peoples in Brazil attracted the attention of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) which, recognising the success of the country in the fight against poverty and hunger, cautioned that several indicators point to the indigenous as people in chronic vulnerability. In the second edition of the study, in 2015, the UN body said that there is urgency to tackle inequalities experienced by indigenous peoples. It, therefore, recommends that the Brazilian public policies focus *“especially on the most vulnerable<sup>1</sup> groups, such as the indigenous communities, riverine, traditional, and Quilombola peoples and the rural population.<sup>2</sup>”*

The reality of food insecurity and inequality of indigenous peoples in Latin America was also pointed out by the World Bank. In the study *Indigenous Latin America in the Twenty-First Century - the first decade<sup>3</sup>*, launched in February 2016, the World Bank warned that the unprecedented reduction in poverty in Latin America - which enabled more than 70 million people to move out of poverty over the first decade of this century - did not reach the indigenous population in the same way. The report shows that the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous population in Brazil, in fact, was accentuated.

<sup>1</sup> FAO, **O Estado da Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional no Brasil**. Um retrato multidimensional. Relatório 2014. FAO-Brasil, Brasília, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> FAO, **O Estado da Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional no Brasil**. Agendas Convergentes. Relatório 2015. FAO-Brasil, Brasília, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Banco Internacional para Reconstrução e Desenvolvimento / **Banco Mundial, América Latina Indígena no Século XXI - a primeira década**, Washington, DC: Banco Mundial, 2015.



## Changes in Eating Habits

*“There are many factors to have a healthy diet. The first thing is the land. The second point is to do the traditional land clearings, bringing people who know to do these clearings and, from this, the third point, which is to wean people from GM foods, from Juruá [non-indigenous] foods, to try to change to our traditional food. It would be a really great job in the long term.”*

Tiago Honório dos Santos, Jaraguá Indigenous Land.

A change in eating habits and the challenge of ensuring healthy eating is a recurring concern among the indigenous people. One of the difficulties faced by them is that some lands do not have appropriate environmental conditions to ensure their food sovereignty.

This is what happens in the Vanuíre Indigenous Land, already demarcated, where Kaingang and Krenak people live. Its 245 inhabitants in allocated 706 hectares plant potatoes, cassava, maize, beans, groundnuts and pumpkin in sandy soils, thus, so unproductive for agriculture. Deforestation in the region silted streams, reduced water sources, caused erosion and intensified community impoverishment.

The need for industrial goods arriving in the villages through purchase, but also through food parcels provided by the government and school feeding has harmful implications for the health of indigenous peoples, for example, overweight and obesity among adult women and children under five years of age.

The change in eating habits and health hazards are not only a reality of indigenous peoples in São Paulo. The endocrinologist João Paulo Botelho Vieira Filho, a professor at the Federal University of São Paulo, warns that the gradual abandonment of the traditional diet and the incorporation of processed foods - sometimes provided by the government - allied to the abandonment of physical effort in agriculture, hunting and fishing have harmed the health of indigenous peoples in various regions of Brazil.

Vieira Filho points out that because of genetic characteristics of indigenous peoples, the negative impacts can be even more serious, *“we cannot feed everyone equally when genetic inheritance is different. The condition for the survival of indigenous peoples in Brazil is to maintain the traditional diet.”* According to him, the indigenous population in Brazil is genetically prone to obesity and diabetes type 2. For thousands of years, this gene was beneficial for the survival of this population exposed to periods of abundance followed by food poverty. However, in a context in which they no longer face adversity for food, the same gene tends to cause overweight and obesity.

Finally, the professor highlights the importance of indigenous knowledge for the global diet: *“You have to remember that they gave food to the world and they can't lose this. They gave the world the beans, fava beans, manioc, cassava, sweet potatoes, yams, corn, pumpkin, and papaya they produce.”*



### Food is Culture Too

*"Cooking helps us preserve the culture. The food is the culture of the Guarani [people]."*

Marcia Vidal, Tenondé Pora Indigenous Land.

The food culture involves not only the nutrient, but mainly a way of eating that defines both what is eaten and also who is eating. Eating involves several symbolic aspects: tastes, habits, culinary traditions, representations, identities, practices, preferences, repulsions, rituals and taboos.

Indigenous peoples have their own food cultures that need to be known, valued and promoted in the design and adoption of public policies, including those relating to school meals.



photo: Carlos Penteado

# Food in Schools of Indigenous

“

*We recognise that our food will not be like it was before, but we're fighting for food that respects our origins”.*

Adriano Karai Poty, Tenondé Pora Indigenous Land.

*“In the State school it is all canned and we always say to the government that we want healthy food and, especially, traditional ones. But they claim that the State is a single pattern, which there's no way to change that. But in the legislation there is 'different school'. There is inconsistency between what they say and what's on paper. The law provides for a different school, so we have to say how it should be different.”*

Tiago Honorio dos Santos, Jaraguá Indigenous Land.



photo Carlos Penteado

The food offered in indigenous schools in the state of São Paulo is constantly criticised. Indigenous educators have denounced the situation for years, but no effective measures have been taken to reverse this situation. Overall, the menu ignores the food culture of the indigenous people and includes processed foods of low nutritional quality.

Supported by the Brazilian law, leaders, educators, and indigenous parents demand changes in the menu offered in schools. The Brazilian Constitution recognises the social organisation, customs, languages, beliefs and indigenous traditions. And the rules governing the indigenous education state that school feeding should respect the community eating habits (decree N°. 6,861 / 2009).

There is still a large gap between what the law establishes, what the Indigenous people crave, and the food offered in indigenous schools. The preparation of menus should respect the nutritional references, eating habits, culture and food tradition. However, it is clear that there is resistance from sectors responsible for school meals in the cities and states in the creation of different meals. Proportionally,



the indigenous population is always a minority, and preparing a menu only for this group can represent an increase in bureaucratic and administrative activities of the professionals involved. Therefore, the usual is that the food offered in indigenous schools is the same that come to schools for non-indigenous children.

Another barrier to the implementation of the guidelines is the complexity to meet the cultural criteria and food tradition in menus. Although it represents only 0.47% of the total population, there are in Brazil 246 indigenous peoples, speaking over 150 different languages, living in the five Brazilian biomes. Thus, understanding what each people think is respectful to the traditions and culture is not a quick and easy task.

The need for improvement of the National School Feeding Programme<sup>4</sup> to meet the specificities of indigenous school feeding led the National Fund for Education Development of the Ministry of Education to create, in 2012, a Working Group on Indigenous School Feeding which is still ongoing.

Sineide Neres, consultant nutritionist for the National School Feeding Programme, recognises that *"there is still a lot to do."* In fact, Neres says, not all municipalities and states enforce the obligation to use at least 30% of funds transferred by the federal government for school feeding to purchase products from family farms. However, she states that there is an increasing improvement and, in 2014, more than 60% of the municipalities in Brazil met the determination.

<sup>4</sup> The National School Feeding Programme (PNAE) aims to contribute to the growth, development, learning, school performance and the formation of healthy eating habits by offering school meals and food and nutrition education. It is intended for students of all basic education enrolled in public schools, philanthropic schools and community organisations (contracted out by the government), through the transfer of financial resources. At least 30% of funds transferred by the National Fund for Education Development (FNDE), under the PNAE, should be used in the purchase of food directly from family farmers.

## Experiences in Progress

*"We do not want privileges, we want to enforce the law."*

Liliam Gomes, Piaçaguera Indigenous Land.

### The Centres for Education and Indigenous Culture in São Paulo

The food offered by the Government of São Paulo in the three Centres of Education and Indigenous Culture (CECI) is an example of how to move forward in offering a more adequate food. Since 2014, education centres have corn flour, corn meal, wheat flour and grits to make dishes from the Guarani cuisine that are offered for the children.

In the CECI of the Jaraguá Indigenous Land, three times a week children learn some of the hundreds of traditional recipes using corn, peanuts, cassava, sweet potato. Pedro Karai Macena, educator in CECI Jaraguá, remembers that in the beginning, they had a lot of trouble to make themselves understood: *"we sought people knowledgeable of Guarani cuisine and discussed the ideal diet for the children. So, together with the leaders, we called the staff of the Secretariat of Education of the City and made it clear that we did not want tinned food, we want 'fresh' food for the children because they are small children. That was when we managed to get this food for the children, a different food."*

Adriano Verissimo, CECI educator in the village of Tenondé Pora, estimates that there are not so many cases of child malnutrition in the villages in São Paulo because of the food at CECI: *"it is something as close as possible to the ideal that we want. It has organic and non-industrialised food. Then, I think that balances a little the child's meals because the people in the village are used to eating a lot of junk, too much soda, snacks, and these are what children love the most. In CECI, we teach a little of our culture and have to adapt some things, because in the past there was no need to talk about food because we had sweet potatoes, corn, peanuts."*



## Dialogue for Change begins in Piaçaguera Indigenous Land

After 12 years of claims, in May 2015, the Indigenous people of Piaçaguera in the South coast of São Paulo managed to get a commitment from the Town Hall of Peruibe for the improvement of food offered in their schools. Until recently, the menu of the five schools of the indigenous land contained many industrialised and high-calorie foods such as ready meatballs, sausages, chicken nuggets, chocolate and stuffed biscuits.

After a complaint sent by the Indigenous people and the Comissão Pró-Índio de São Paulo to the National Fund for Education Development of the Ministry of Education, the City agreed to include some foods requested by indigenous leaders. It is not the ideal scenario, but it is a breakthrough.

The struggle to change the menu won another battle, in September 2015, with the commitment made by the State Department of Education, Peruibe's Town Hall and Funai to establish a Working Group to define together with the indigenous people specific guidelines to the food offered in the schools of Piaçaguera.

The meetings of the Working Group began in April 2016. The expectation is that this experience of dialogue between indigenous educators, nutritionists, public officials and NGOs can result in healthier and more culturally appropriate school feeding and bring learning to the challenge of incorporating knowledge and indigenous flavours in school canteens. To Lilian Gomes, professor and leader of Piaçaguera, the initiative is very important *"I'm sure that it'll bring good results. We only hope that the bodies have commitment."*





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CPI-SP (Pro-Indian Commission of São Paulo) is a non-governmental organisation founded in 1978 that works with the indigenous peoples and the Quilombolas to secure their territorial, cultural and political rights, aiming to contribute to empower democracy, gain recognition of the rights of ethnic minorities, and fight discrimination.

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