

Food and Water Security Course Module 1: Food Security and Insecurity Indigenous Food Insecurity Video Transcript

A lack of justice for Indigenous farming communities necessitates a better understanding of Indigenous people's food procurement systems, who globally account for 370 million inhabitants and a third of the world's impoverished population (UN 2009). Indigenous people's food systems are indicative of the shift away from traditional and nutritionally valuable native plant and wildlife foods, known as country or traditional (or ancestral) food, to a diet that is predominantly based on market food (CCA 2014; FNFNES 2011; Ostry and Morrison 2010; Paci et al. 2004; Wilson 2019). This transition has consequently resulted in higher rates of obesity, acute myocardial infarction mortality, diabetes, mental health problems such as depression, and substance abuse indicating that people who are food insecure are more susceptible to these and other chronic health problems (CCA 2014; Paci et al. 2004).

However, it is widely acknowledged both in the literature and through lived experience, that food insecurity in Canada's northern and remote Indigenous communities is a severe problem (CCA 2014). In these regions, almost one million First Nation people in Canada are in a desperate situation, becoming the most marginalized of all groups and experiencing what is known as 'silent hunger' (Chan et al. 2011; McIntyre and Rondeau 2009; Tarasuk 2016; Tarasuk et al. 2014; UNFAO 2012a, 2012b). In the 2007 – 2008 International Polar Year Inuit Health Survey, Nunavut was identified as the highest rate of food insecurity for any Indigenous population in the global North due to several confounding factors (Rosol et al. 2011). The factors include the vast geography, remote communities, shifting climate change, changing economies, and social environments of its communities, among other socio-political factors (CCA 2014).

While this data is indicative of on-reserve Indigenous populations, off-reserve households in Canada experience food insecurity that is more than double of all Canadian households from 27 percent to 33 percent - three times higher than the national average where households with children and more women than men are affected (CCA 2014). In some Indigenous communities, especially in the North, levels of food insecurity reach 75 percent (Fieldhouse and Thompson 2012; Thompson et al. 2011). Higher food prices due to the disruption of traditional food procuring practices, processes of colonialism, environmental dispossession and change, economic transitions, and material poverty are just some of the factors that are ubiquitous among all Indigenous groups in Canada (CCA 2014) where centuries of colonization have dislocated Indigenous communities' ability to govern their own food production systems (Mihesuah et al. 2019).

Willows et al.'s (2009) study of poverty rates of Indigenous people in Canada concludes that increased rates of poverty persist among economically vulnerable groups and are especially widespread within First Nations, Métis, and Inuit populations in the lowest household income category. Consequently, in Indigenous households who receive social assistance, monies meant for food are often prioritized towards essentials such as housing and utilities, clearly linking the interrelated concepts of poverty and food insecurity in Canada (Willows et al. 2009). Furthermore, Barker et al. (2015:3) examine vulnerable populations of street children in



Vancouver, Canada and conclude that Indigenous children suffer most from perpetual poverty, lack of housing, and food insecurity.

As indicated in the slide, of 12 million non-Indigenous Canadian households and 196,000 off-reserve Indigenous people surveyed in 2004, 33 percent of Indigenous households were food insecure compared to nine percent of non-Indigenous households (Willows et al. 2009:1152). Of Indigenous households, 19 percent experienced moderate food insecurity and 14 percent experienced severe food insecurity compared to non-Indigenous household statistics of six percent and three percent, respectively (Willows 2009:1152).

Dominant approaches to address British Columbia's poverty and food-related challenges resonate with food security discourse. In 2014, 30,000 B.C. children relied on food banks, an increase of 23 percent from 2008 (First Call 2015). It also bears mentioning that children of recent immigrants and refugees, Indigenous children, children of female lone-parent families, children of racialized families and children with a disability are at the highest risk of living in poverty. It is a much more dismal situation for Indigenous children which according to a study using 2006 census data, the poverty rate for status Indigenous children in B.C. was 48 percent, and the rate for other Indigenous children was 28 percent, compared to a poverty rate of 17 percent for non-Indigenous children (MacDonald and Wilson 2013).

Respecting, maintaining, strengthening, and nurturing traditional, locally-based Indigenous food systems alongside local agricultural food producing regions is one possibility of mitigating against further increases of food insecurity where agriculture and fisheries make up the primary food sector in Canada (De Schutter 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014; Feagan 2007; Ghanem and Cross 2008; UNFAO 2012a, 2012b).

