

## **The Conscious Food Systems Alliance**

#### **CoFSA Mission**

The Conscious Food Systems Alliance (CoFSA) is a movement of food, agriculture, and consciousness practitioners, convened by UNDP, and united around a common goal: to support people from across food and agriculture systems to cultivate the inner capacities that activate systemic change and regeneration.

## **Collection of Case Studies**

This compilation of case studies showcases the application of consciousness practices and approaches that have the potential to unlock food systems' transformation.

It serves as a tool to advance the exchange of knowledge and learning on conscious food systems and to build the evidence basis for this pioneering field of practice. It also seeks to promote the work of CoFSA members and inspire others to engage and collaborate on this agenda.

To find out more about the Conscious Food Systems Alliance and how to be involved, see our website: <a href="https://www.consciousfoodsystems.org">www.consciousfoodsystems.org</a>

Please contact us if you would like to share a case study with the CoFSA Community.

Main author: Bernard Guri, CoFSA Indigenous Peoples Engagement Advisor

Contributors: Luz Elena Navarro & Thomas Legrand, CoFSA Secretariat

**Acknowledgement:** A special thanks to all the traditional wisdom keepers and participants of the Traditional Wisdom Dialogue series (Appendix)

**Citation:** Guri, B. (2023). Traditional Wisdom for Conscious Food Systems: Main outcomes of the CoFSA Traditional Wisdom Dialogue series.

For any inquiries please contact: <a href="mailto:luz.navarro@undp.org">luz.navarro@undp.org</a> & <a href="mailto:thomas.legrand@undp.org">thomas.legrand@undp.org</a>

"Know the ways of the ones who take care of you, so that you may take care of them.

Introduce yourself. Be accountable as the one who comes asking for life.

Ask permission before taking. Abide by the answer.

Never take the first. Never take the last.

Take only what you need.

Take only that which is given.

Never take more than half. Leave some for others.

Harvest in a way that minimizes harm.

Use it respectfully. Never waste what you have taken.

Share.

Give thanks for what you have been given.

Give a gift, in reciprocity for what you have taken.

Share.

Give thanks for what you have been given.

Give a gift, in reciprocity for what you have taken.

Sustain the ones who sustain you and the earth will last forever."

— Honorable Harvest, adapted by Robin Wall Kimmerer

**9**%

"The existence of the tree gives me the breath."

— Vandana Shiva



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## **CoFSA Traditional Wisdom Dialogue Series**

#### **MAIN OUTCOMES**

## 1. Background and Consultation Process

The <u>Conscious Food Systems Alliance (CoFSA)</u> is a movement of food, agriculture, and consciousness practitioners, convened by UNDP, and united around a common goal: to support people from across food and agriculture systems to cultivate the inner capacities that activate systemic change and regeneration.

CoFSA is reflecting on how to meaningfully engage with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs)<sup>1</sup> to support their work and priorities, as well as the role of traditional wisdom for regenerative food systems. For this purpose, a **CoFSA Indigenous Peoples and Traditional Wisdom Dialogue series** (4 sessions of 1.5h each between June and September 2023) was organized to discuss various topics, including:

- Information session on CoFSA Traditional Wisdom Dialogue series: An introductory session on CoFSA and the Dialogues agenda.
- Dialogue 1. What does CoFSA agenda on inner capacities/traditional wisdom for regenerative food systems mean from the perspective of IPLCs (e.g. ancestral knowledge / indigenous knowledge systems) and how they can be leveraged for regenerative food systems.
- Dialogue 2. CoFSA collaboration with IPLCs and work on traditional wisdom:
   How IPLCs want to engage in CoFSA and what kind of activities can be developed,
   including on traditional wisdom.
- Dialogue 3. Discuss recommendations on IPLCs Engagement and the role of traditional wisdom in CoFSA and next steps.

In addition, 10 bilateral dialogues were held to deepen the conversations on traditional wisdom for regenerative food systems. In total, 30 IPLC representatives participated in the dialogues, held in both English and Spanish. Finally, the dialogues build on existing literature and initiatives related to IPLC food systems, ancestral knowledge, and traditional wisdom.<sup>2</sup>

### 2. Main outcomes from the Dialogues

## a. CoFSA agenda of work from the perspective of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities

The main concepts associated with the CoFSA work agenda from the perspectives of IPLCs are:

- Local and indigenous knowledge systems (LINKS)
- Ancestral wisdom
- Culture and spirituality, which is directly linked to the territory
- Sacred relationship to land and food
- Indigenous economy<sup>3</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Traditional wisdom and knowledge refer to the understandings, philosophies, and practices developed by local, rural, and indigenous peoples with a long history of presence in a determined territory. In Latin America, the term "indigenous peoples" is preferred, while in Africa, communities would rather identify themselves as "local communities". For this reason, CoFSA decided to include indigenous peoples with local communities.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> For more information, please refer to the Appendix and the Bibliography.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> In Central America, the Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests (AMPB) developed this term, from the community base, to describe how indigenous peoples live, act in their surroundings, take what is needed to nourish their body and spirit, harness the resources, and act in community.



- Interculturality<sup>4</sup>
- Intraculturality
- Community and collectivity<sup>5</sup>

The concept of consciousness is complex, sometimes hard to translate and mediate in different languages, but associated to multiple notions and daily practices like farming, sharing food during meals, praying to ask permission before serving themselves from nature, songs, dances, stories, ceremonies, and rituals at all stages of the food cycle.

The main need in relation to this CoFSA agenda of work identified by IPLCs is ensuring intergenerational transmission of ancestral wisdom in relation to food and agriculture through identifying, documenting, protecting, and disseminating this wisdom within IPLCs, including the relevant knowledge and practices (e.g. through biocultural protocols).

The following other needs have also been identified by IPLCs:

- Raising awareness within IPLCs on the importance of traditional knowledge and practices in relation to food and land management.
- Supporting the continuation of traditional practices (e.g. ceremonies).
- Strengthening traditional political and spiritual authorities and governance systems within IPLCs.
- Strengthening learning and collaboration among IPLC communities on traditional wisdom for regenerative food systems.
- Collaborating with non-IPLCs actors on the CoFSA agenda in an equitable and respectful way.
- Rescuing, mediating and promoting key terms in IPLCs local languages through a "Dictionary of Cultural and Spiritual Concepts for Indigenous Food Systems" to prevent their disappearance.<sup>6</sup>
- Developing more research and publications on the role of ancestral wisdom for regenerative food systems.

Finally, it is important to note that from IPLCs perspectives, consciousness is not only a human quality but is present in all beings, and cultivating consciousness is not separated from food, land, and nature-related practical activities.

## b. Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities recommendations on potential CoFSA-related activities

- Develop a call for proposals to support IPLC interventions in their communities.
- Support in-person gatherings, networking, and dialogues.
- Research and develop methodologies for gathering indigenous knowledge, traditional wisdom and worldviews related to consciousness food practices that promote regenerative food systems.
- Develop a publication on the role of traditional wisdom for regenerative food systems (e.g. rationale for action).
- Develop an online global curriculum on traditional wisdom of regenerative food systems.
- Support technical assistance from IPLC wisdom-keepers and knowledge holders for food systems transformation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Some participants highlight the risk of non equitable and non respectful intercultural exchange with non-indigenous actors

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> To be conscious is to care for the common good, thinking and acting collectively, without alienating their individuality

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Ubuntu [Africa: humanity to others], Lekil Kuxlejal [Mexico: harmony of life], Panche Be [Mexico: the search of profound knowledge], Sva tha [India: self-established], Zume [Ghana: intuition], Vur [Ghana: the spirits in the person], etc.



- Immersion programs in IPLCs for food systems stakeholders.
- Develop wisdom cards based on indigenous wisdom from the various continents to reflect their local and indigenous knowledge and ancestral wisdom.
- Support an agenda for the legal recognition of traditional knowledge practices (e.g. through biocultural community protocols).
- Support research on this agenda and integrate IPLCs existing research in the CoFSA Online Library.

# c. Concrete recommendations to strengthen the meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples in the Alliance

- Developing strategic partnerships for IPLC organizations to lead the development and implementation of CoFSA-related activities in relation to IPLCs and traditional wisdom (e.g. integrating CoFSA approach in AMPB's Mesoamerican Territorial Fund, finding a partner for implementing a call for proposal, etc.).
- Have IPLCs represented in the CoFSA Inner Council and the CoFSA Secretariat.
- Compensate IPLC experts for their collaboration with CoFSA.
- Ensure translation in Spanish on main CoFSA events and resources.
- Have an online space for COFSA IPLCs members to meet and collaborate, in particular for researchers.

### 3. Conclusions

The results of the CoFSA Traditional Wisdom Dialogue series were presented during a <u>public launching event</u> for a "Collective Inquiry on Revitalizing and Strengthening Traditional Wisdom for Regenerative Food Systems" on November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023. This event was the starting point of a conversation with the objective of discussing these recommendations and finding partners and resources to further develop this work agenda. The CoFSA Secretariat will support the integration of these recommendations into its work and the development of this workstream in synergy with existing relevant initiatives.



## 4. Appendix

#### **Case Studies**

# Case Study 1 • An Indigenous Youth Leadership Initiation Ritual to support Regeneration in Cameroon

Reviving the spirit of Ndanifor in young leaders of permaculture ecovillages Initiation Ritual

Author: Joshua Konkankoh, Director of <u>Better World Cameroon</u>

Since 2013, a rehabilitation programme designed by Better World Cameroon has been implemented in the Bafut area of Cameroon to transform around 54 traditional villages into resilient ecovillages, where connection with nature is restored, high value agricultural products (HVAP) are grown, sustainable food forests are preserved, and biodiversity is protected.

Designing an integral ecovillage project, while safeguarding biodiversity and ensuring sustainable food production in Cameroon is one of the main goals of Joshua Konkankoh's mission, the man behind Bafut ecovillage and Better World Cameroon.

Joshua Konkankoh said: "To build ecovillages in Africa" - or what he defines - "peace villages"... "we need to understand what peace is and reconnect with ourself, nature and indigenous wisdom in order to learn the rules of trust, solidarity and love."

### **Ndanifor Permaculture Ecovillage**

Ndanifor Permaculture Ecovillage is the first demonstration site in Bafut that has been converted into a resilient ecovillage, through a combination of indigenous initiation rituals for leaders and permaculture training for the community; a combination that has supported the village's systemic transformation towards sustainability at both the individual and community levels.

The indigenous Ndanifor ritual is a leadership initiation practice for a group of local young people that enables them to flourish as leaders of the Ecovillage and peace workers. During a seven-day spiritual retreat in the forest, young people are guided by village elders on ancestral mindful breathing, deep listening to Mother Earth and prayer; the ritual involves a strict discipline of fasting and mindful eating, along with community healing activities such as bathing and water soaking together. On the journey, participants are encouraged to connect their souls to Mother Earth and dive deeply into themselves. The ritual evokes, through sacred chanting and the pouring of libations, the presence of the ancestors to spiritually instruct those undertaking the transformation.

The Ndanifor ritual is linked to the belief that if young people are constantly connected to Mother Earth for seven days, they develop their consciousness by receiving the wisdom and knowledge of their ancestors. At the end of the journey, a celebration of leadership initiation is held for those who have participated in the retreat and who aspire to become the new village leaders of the Bafut communities. This initiation supports young leaders' involvement in outer ecovillage activities such as regenerative agriculture, medicinal gardens, from a mindset grounded in interconnection with nature.



## Case Study 2 • Regenerative Mindsets for the Private Sector – The case of Bhutan's Mountain Hazelnuts

### **Cultivating more than nuts**

Author: Sean Watson, CEO of Mountain Hazelnuts

Mountain Hazelnuts (MH) was founded in 2009 as the Kingdom of Bhutan's first Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in a public-private-community partnership with the Royal Government of Bhutan, based around a shared commitment to lasting social, environmental, and economic impact. This partnership is based on a 30-year Memorandum of Understanding, structured with the aim of creating sustainable income for farmers in place, slowing rural-to-urban migration, supporting Bhutan's unique heritage and rich biodiversity. MH currently partners with over 8,000 smallholder families (44% women led) across 4,300 acres and 19 of Bhutan's 20 districts. The company endeavors to grow to 15,000 grower partners, which, assuming an average family size of 5, constitutes 10% of the county's population. In addition, MH collaborates with two local value-chain entrepreneurs, Bhutan Growers and Yiga Chocolate, specializing in the production of Hazelnut Oil and Chocolate, respectively, funded in collaboration with a local NGO, the Loden Foundation.

MH's mission is to generate long-term income, revitalize vulnerable communities, and enable sustainable land stewardship through the planting, production and sale of premium-quality hazelnuts and provision of ecosystem services. Our vision is to establish a thriving Bhutanese hazelnut industry, ensuring sustainability and prosperity in partnership with smallholder farming communities. Bhutan as a country represents an important regenerative seed of cultural knowledge as the only remaining tantric kingdom. Our project helps remote communities to remain vibrant and in place by enabling meaningful income generation in areas that have few other opportunities. Bhutan's rich and important cultural knowledge is embedded in village life. If these villages are allowed to hollow out through rural-to-urban migration this knowledge will be lost.

### Mountain Hazelnuts' model to cultivate regenerative mindsets

MH builds on deeply rooted cultural and spiritual fabric of Bhutan, where the company has focused to translate existing local behaviors into a corporate setting, with the goal of creating a 'beautiful' company—a novel approach to conducting business. It draws on 3 main pillars:

<u>I. Mindfulness and Bhutanese Cultural Practices:</u> These practices represent the cornerstone of the company's philosophy, carefully selected as essential elements drawn from the rich tapestry of Bhutanese traditional culture, which bears the influence of both Buddhist and Hindu traditions. These practices are deeply rooted in promoting self-awareness, emotional resilience, and inner peace. To ensure inclusivity and accessibility, more secular mindfulness meditation sessions are conducted as part of the project, allowing participants to acquire valuable skills for personal growth while respecting the diverse cultural tapestry of the region.

<u>II. Integration with Local Communities:</u> MH actively embraces an integration-with-community approach. This approach fosters communal solidarity and mutual well-being, while participating in local festivals, rituals, and customs. Mountain Hazelnuts participates in and organizes community events, workshops, and support groups, providing a platform for community members to come together, share experiences, and build meaningful relationships. By intertwining our initiatives with local traditions, MH honors the diverse heritage of the regions they work in, nurturing a culture of inner capacity development within the broader community.

<u>III.</u> Gross National Happiness (GNH): MH's embrace of the GNH framework is deeply rooted in Bhutan's distinctive development philosophy, where GNH stands as a foundational principle. This holistic approach, encompassing not only economic and environmental indicators, but also the spiritual, emotional, and mental well-being of individuals and communities, has been a guiding



beacon for the project. In taking inspiration from their government partners, who have consistently championed GNH as a pivotal driver of Bhutan's advancement.

## Box 1. Mountain Hazelnuts' initiatives to foster a harmonious and spiritually mindful work environment

MH is committed to fostering a culture of spiritual well-being and community harmony. To achieve this, MH has established a set of practices and initiatives that reflect their deep respect for the well-being of all sentient beings and the welfare of their employees. These initiatives include:

- **1. Annual Rimdro Rituals:** Every year, we conduct the traditional Rimdro rituals with the intention of promoting the welfare of all sentient beings, as well as the prosperity of our company. Employees are encouraged to participate in these rituals, with financial support provided by the Hazay Welfare Fund.
- **2. Shrine (Chösham) in the Conference Room:** We have a dedicated Chösham in our conference room where daily morning and evening prayers and meditations are offered for the benefit of all sentient beings and the local deities.
- **3. Daily Mindfulness Meditation**: Our staff is encouraged to practice daily mindfulness meditation to enhance their well-being and promote a mindful workplace culture.
- **4. Support for Local Festivals:** We actively support local Tsechus (annual festivals) that are aligned with the community's well-being and values.
- **5. Hazay Welfare Fund:** Our staff-led Hazay Welfare Fund, primarily established to assist with funerals and the rituals to assist the deceased navigate to the next life. It is financially supported by the Company.
- **6. Astrological Consultations:** Prior to initiating any new projects or major decisions, we seek astrological consultations to choose auspicious dates and approaches for success, a common and highly regarded practice in Bhutan.
- **7. Ground Breaking Ceremonies:** We conduct ground-breaking (Salang Tendrel) ceremonies before construction begins to appease local deities, ensuring the welfare of the environment and all beings affected by the project. These ceremonies include traditional offerings, hiring of local monks to recite prayers, and celebrating the milestone as per Bhutanese traditions.
- **8. Working Time Flexibility:** Our staff is granted flexibility to attend spiritual teachings and blessings, enabling them to nurture their spiritual growth.
- **9. Ceremonies in July:** In July, we support ceremonies in local temples to honor and support the well-being of all insects and worms that may be affected by farming activities.
- **10. Community Beautification and Clean-Up Campaigns:** We actively engage in community beautification and clean-up campaigns, embodying our commitment to mindful community service.
- **11. National Religious Calendar:** We observe and celebrate religious days according to the national calendar, encouraging our community to attend temples and teachings that resonate with our shared values.
- **12. Collaborative partnerships with Monastic institutions**: We lease land and establish orchards with local temples and Monasteries, with a long-term commitment to mutual benefit.



## **Traditional Wisdom Dialogues Participants**

NAME	ORGANISATION	COUNTRY			
SPANISH GROUP					
Maria Clara Piedrahita	<u>Casa Naranja</u>	Colombia			
Seyrin Rinjwi Marquez	Universidad de La Salle	Colombia			
Tarcila Rivera	CHIRAPAQ - Centre for Indigenous Cultures of Peru	Peru			
Mindahi Bastida	The Fountain	Mexico			
Francisco J. Rosado-May	Universidad Intercultural Maya	Mexico			
<u>Déborah Sánchez</u>	Alianza Mesoamericana de Pueblos y Bosques	Panama			
<u>Dina Júc Súc</u>	Alianza Mesoamericana de Pueblos y Bosques	Guatemala			
<u>Isabel Pasos</u>	Coordinadora de Mujeres Líderes Territoriales de Mesoamérica	Nicaragua			
Irma Consuelo López Esquivel	Asociación de Comunidades Forestales de Petén (ACOFOP)	Guatemala			
Basilio Velázquez Chí	Fondo Agroecológico para la Península de Yucatán (FAPY)	Mexico			
Luisa Sánchez	MASTA/Pueblo Miskito	Honduras			
María Areli Castellanos Vivanco	Limaxtum Veracruz / Red Mocaf	Mexico			
Lesbia Ruby Pérez Cifuentes	Asociación Utz Che'	Guatemala			
Nelly Coleman	MASTA / Miskito	Honduras			
Fredy Alonso Duque	Fundación Indígena FSC	Colombia			



Berta Maldonado	SUCO	Honduras			
Amelia Vásquez	Congreso Kuna Yala	Panamá			
Antonia Reyes	SUCO	Honduras			
María Pedro de Pedro	Red Utz Che'	Guatemala			
Carlos	Limaxtum	Mexico			
ENGLISH GROUP					
Zeddy Chikukwa	CELUCT NGO The Chikukwa Permaculture Project	Zimbabwe			
Joshua Konkankoh	Better World Cameroon African Way	Cameroon			
David Millar	Center for Cosmovision and Indigenous Knowlege	Ghana			
Yahaya Sekeja	POMETRA	Uganda			
Carson Kiburo	Jamii Asilia Centre	Kenya			
Datu Lanelio Sangcoan	Tribes and Natures Defenders Inc.	Philippines			
Unnikrishnan Payyappalli	University of Trans-Disciplinary Health Sciences and Technology (TDU)	India			
Dekila Chungyalpa	Director of Loka Initiative - <u>Centre of Healthy</u> <u>Minds</u>	USA			
David Fletcher	Peoples Development	Canada			
Wim Hiemstra	COMPASS Network	Netherlands			
<u>Daniel Saseri</u>	CIKOD	Ghana			
<u>Dalmas Tiampati</u>	Maasai Center for Regenerative Pastoralism	Kenya			
Tarek Soliman	Lush Cosmetics / Lush Spring Prize	Egypt			



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