Unique Get Together Society (UGTS) and Urban Indigenous Food Insecurity in British Columbia

A systematic analysis of the disproportionate rates of food insecurity experienced by Indigenous communities in British Columbia

With special thanks to Tatyana Daniels and Debra Abraham
British Columbia has the **second-highest** Indigenous population in all of Canada.

61,455 urban Indigenous Peoples reside in Vancouver alone.

Indigenous households experience one of the highest rates of household food insecurity, with 1 in 3 Indigenous households being food-insecure.
What is food security?
The Food and Agriculture Organization defines food security as when “all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”

What is household food insecurity?
Household Food Insecurity is the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints.

What are traditional foods?
Coastal Indigenous communities include traditionally harvested and processed food such as: salmon, game meats, shellfish, etc.

Who are Indigenous Peoples?
A monolithic term that fails to address over 198 diverse First Nations cultures in BC.

What are urban areas?
Urban areas are a concentration of population at a high density. It is the opposite of rural, where the population is not concentrated but dispersed at a low density.
Urban areas allow for a mixture of Indigenous populations to gather from many different communities. Addressing Indigenous food insecurity in urban areas presents the challenge of considering the 198 distinct First Nations in BC without treating all Indigenous Peoples as a single monolith.
Urban Indigenous food insecurity is firmly held in place by a complex interplay between oppressive systems.

Stakeholders are highly interconnected, government, economic and environmental sectors play the biggest roles. For true, lasting change, collective action between all stakeholders must be adopted.
Focusing on the **Key Root Causes**

*(Government, Economic & Environment Sectors)*

---

**Food Security in Urban Areas for Indigenous Peoples in BC**

### National, Provincial, Federal Government
- In Canada, there is currently **no unified policy** to address increasing food insecurity rates.
- There is some funding distributed to various provincial, federal and community initiatives attempting to address food insecurity.

### Connection to First Nations Community
- Indigenous Peoples living in urban areas can **lose cultural connections**, leading to fewer skilled hunters and fishers resulting in less access to traditional foods, which can increase risk for food insecurity.

### Education, Employment & Income
- Education can lead to better employment, leading to **higher income** which can increase food security.
- Indigenous Peoples face **systemic racism** in areas such as education and employment, leading to lower wages and income to purchase food, which can increase risk for food insecurity.

---

**Reinforcing Loop**

- Connection to cultural practices (like sharing) and traditional foods can **increase food security**.

**Balancing Loop**

- Education leads to better employment, leading to higher income which can increase food security.

Perpetuating the Status Quo

Food Banks & Systemic Racism are keeping urban Indigenous Peoples food-insecure

**Food Banks**
- Government continues to fund food banks to relieve pressure of fully addressing food insecurity. Food banks give the illusion that an existing initiative is in place, despite evidence showing that food banks do NOT improve food insecurity.

**Systemic Racism**
- Systemic racism allows those in power at the top of the system (government) to benefit from the exploitation of marginalized groups, such as Indigenous Peoples.

**Food Security in Urban Areas for Indigenous Peoples in BC**
- Indigenous Peoples living in urban areas can lose cultural connections, leading to fewer skilled hunters and fishers.
- Education can lead to better employment, leading to higher income and can increase food security.

**National, Provincial, Federal Government**
- There is some funding distributed to various provincial, federal and community initiatives attempting to address food insecurity.

**First Nations Community**
- Connection to cultural practices (like sharing) and traditional foods can increase food security.

**Education, Employment & Income**
- Education can lead to better employment, leading to higher income and can increase food security.

**Systemic Racism affects areas such as education, employment and income for Indigenous Peoples. This makes it significantly more challenging to achieve higher income, which is correlated to food security.**

**We all pay the price for racism. Food insecurity can lead to poorer health outcomes, which increases government tax spending on health care.**

**In Canada, there is currently no unified policy to address increasing food insecurity rates.**

**Systemic racism plays a role in the poor living conditions on reserve which can result in Indigenous Peoples leaving their home communities for education and employment opportunities. This can lead to the loss of connection to their community and less access to traditional foods, which can increase risk for food insecurity.
Symptoms of Urban Indigenous Food Insecurity

Health consequences

- Higher prevalence of non-communicable diseases (type II diabetes, obesity, hypertension, etc.)
- Poor dietary quality, including changes to dietary intake
- Decreased connections to tradition and culture
- Can reduce opportunities to learn traditional knowledge
- Can reduce opportunities to share cultural foods (e.g., traditional foods)

Higher prevalence of mental health illnesses

Urban environment often favours purchasing over sharing of food
Urban Indigenous Food Insecurity is More Than Just Lack of Access to Food

**Events**
- Intergenerational trauma: from residential schools & colonialism contribute to poorer physical & mental health, lack of finances to balance food security & health care.
- Blame: is placed on Indigenous communities when interventions fail to alleviate food insecurity — programs fail to address complex root causes so the situation does not improve.
- Stereotyping and discrimination: of Indigenous Peoples, many believe situation is brought upon the communities by themselves.

**Behaviour Patterns**
- Imbalance of power: between Indigenous Peoples and settlers. Indigenous Peoples are often silenced.
- Colonial ways: of evaluating food security & initiatives that do not align with Indigenous ways of knowing.
- Western approaches: that do not align with Indigenous approaches are used to address food security.
- Deficit-based perspective: when addressing Indigenous communities and research, instead of strengths-based.

**System Structures**
- No accountability: for well-intended, uninformed initiatives that end up re-traumatizing and harming Indigenous communities.
- Colonial structures: oppress Indigenous Peoples in society resulting in the least amount of opportunities for growth.
- Policies: lack flexibility and are generalized, lack intersectionality.
- Settlers of Canada: benefit off the exploitation of Indigenous Peoples, true "reconciliation" is vague and will likely take many years to achieve.

**Mental Models**
- Lack of accurate representation: in media do not allow many Indigenous communities a voice of their own, many are not aware of the challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples.
- Colonial structures: oppress Indigenous Peoples in society resulting in the least amount of opportunities for growth.
- Differing world views: Western worldviews (the dominating perspective) view everything, including food, as a commodity. This opposes Indigenous worldviews, where interconnection is the core and is explained by the phrase "all my relations" which describes how everything is related and that the universe is connected.
- Many stakeholders: are not informed about traditional practices, land-based health, or Indigenous knowledge. This may lead to inappropriate approaches to food insecurity initiatives.

**Harmful stereotypes & oversimplified beliefs** such as substance abuse, "special treatment" from government, residential schools have no lasting effects and Indigenous Peoples are "uncivilized" lead many to believe current health disparities are deserving and self-inflicted.

**Centuries of oppression and mistreatment** make it difficult for Indigenous communities to trust external organizations.
Relationships Between Key Stakeholders

Government

- policy makers
- implement policies that affect

Educational Institutions

- [researchers, professors, industry professionals]
- laws impact
- can conduct little well-rounded research
- can perpetuate harm on

Local Market

- grocery stores
- farmers markets
- affects access to food for

Indigenous Community*

- Knowledge Keepers
- Chiefs
- Indigenous Women
- Indigenous Youth
- Elders
- Friendship Centres
- Indigenous-led organizations
- share knowledge and traditions with
- provide support to

Local Community

- advocacy groups
- organizations
- mutual aid
- non-Indigenous community
- aim to collaborate with
- aim to provide short-term/emergency food relief and support for
- can collaborate with
- can place pressure of cultural assimilation on
- impacts amount of income for

Urban Indigenous Peoples*

International Organizations [WHO, FAO]

health authorities

job market

government-funded food programs

government-funded food programs

collaborate with

collaborate with

collaborate with

collaborate with

*Indigenous Peoples have constitutionally protected rights and are not considered mere stakeholders
Solutions Landscape

International
- Welfare "Quarantining"

National
- Nutrition North Canada (NNC)

Provincial
- BC Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon Program

Community
- Urban Agriculture
- Non-Profit Organizations
- Charitable Food Programs
- Food Recovery Programs

Private
- BC Farmers' Donation Tax Credit
Food insecurity is a complex challenge that requires holistic multi-dimensional interventions that support food sovereignty.

**Charitable Food Programs** provide short-term relief to those experiencing food insecurity but do not address the root causes or barriers.

**Non-Profit Organizations** like the UGTS Essential Food Basket Program eliminate stigma by delivering food and by not requiring proof of need.

**Food Recovery Programs** collect perishable foods and redistribute it to food banks and shelters, however, no evidence has shown that this improves food insecurity.

**Urban Agriculture: Tu’wusht Garden Project** is an Indigenous-led initiative that created a safe space for intergenerational teachings and promotes healing through gardening for medicine and sustenance while building a connection to land and knowledge.

**BC Farmers’ Food Donation Corporate Income Tax Credit** encourages farmers and farming corporations to donate produce to receive a 25% credit of their donation, however increasing donations to food banks are ineffective.

**BC Farmers’ Market Nutrition Coupon Program** provides low-income recipients coupons that can be redeemed for fresh food at local farmer’s markets. This program reached over 16,000 individuals in 2020 with 22% identifying as Indigenous and has been a powerful food security tool over the years.

**Nutrition North Canada (NNC)** was created to make nutritious foods affordable and accessible in Northern communities. After the full implementation of NNC, food insecurity increased by 13.2% and has been deemed a "failure".

**The Australian Federal Government** implemented welfare "quarantining" which restricted a portion of payments that could only be used to purchase food. However, many food-insecure individuals often sacrifice food when other basic needs like rent or medicine are a higher priority.

**Food Recovery Programs** collect perishable foods and redistribute it to food banks and shelters, however, no evidence has shown that this improves food insecurity.

**Urban Agriculture: Tu’wusht Garden Project** is an Indigenous-led initiative that created a safe space for intergenerational teachings and promotes healing through gardening for medicine and sustenance while building a connection to land and knowledge.

**BC Farmers’ Food Donation Corporate Income Tax Credit** encourages farmers and farming corporations to donate produce to receive a 25% credit of their donation, however increasing donations to food banks are ineffective.

**BC Farmers’ Market Nutrition Coupon Program** provides low-income recipients coupons that can be redeemed for fresh food at local farmer’s markets. This program reached over 16,000 individuals in 2020 with 22% identifying as Indigenous and has been a powerful food security tool over the years.

**Nutrition North Canada (NNC)** was created to make nutritious foods affordable and accessible in Northern communities. After the full implementation of NNC, food insecurity increased by 13.2% and has been deemed a "failure".

**The Australian Federal Government** implemented welfare "quarantining" which restricted a portion of payments that could only be used to purchase food. However, many food-insecure individuals often sacrifice food when other basic needs like rent or medicine are a higher priority.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective Initiatives</th>
<th>Ineffective Initiatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benefit and address aspirations of the community</td>
<td>Do not include Indigenous voices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster self-determination</td>
<td>Fail to recognize the importance of cultural and traditional foods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-create &amp; co-develop initiatives</td>
<td>Do not address barriers and stigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote Indigenous self-governance and value Indigenous voices</td>
<td>Exploit Indigenous Peoples while adopting colonial strategies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Before the gaps and levers can create meaningful change...

it is essential for stakeholders to build relationships and establish trust and respect within Indigenous communities

All stakeholders need to

1. Empower Indigenous voices and communities
2. Recognize the intergenerational trauma that exists today
3. Be informed of Indigenous ways of knowing and learning
Government, Educational Institutions & Non-profits

- Indigenous communities and stakeholders must co-create interventions together with involvement of Elders, Chiefs, councils and Indigenous community.
- Acknowledge that Indigenous communities are diverse in culture, thus have different preferences.

Educational Institutions

- Include Indigenous perspectives and take time to learn each Nations’ customs.
- Ensure outcomes benefit the community and findings are disseminated back.
- Acknowledge positionality of researchers.
- All research policies involving Indigenous Peoples must implement the First Nation Principles of OCAP.
- Incorporate sharing circles in research and teaching methods.
- Distinguish research between urban, rural and specific Indigenous communities.
- Allow Indigenous Elders and other Knowledge Keepers to also be knowledge translators.
- Advocate for strengths-based research, as current colonial perspectives on Indigenous Peoples are deficit-based.
Gaps & Levers

Stakeholder Action

**Government**
- Policies must focus on addressing the Social & Indigenous Determinants of Health
- Prioritize reducing food insecurity for urban Indigenous Peoples
- Instead of only consulting Indigenous Peoples they should be co-developers when co-creating initiatives together
- Mandatory implementation of UNDRIP at all levels
- Implement provincial Indigenous Food Framework

**Organizations**
- Advocate for policy action together with the Indigenous community

---

Government
- Allocate low-barrier funding specifically for BIPOC-led non-profits
- The Federal, Provincial and Municipal government must consistently fund effective, Indigenous-led local organizations and initiatives. Many Indigenous-led organizations are impactful, but are shut down due to underfunding
- Expand funding to support current successful initiatives instead of creating new initiatives