Representation and Engagement toward Equitable Food Systems Planning

Authors: Tebogo T. Leepile[1], Aaren Topley[2], Colin Dring[3] & Robert Newell[3.]
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Executive Summary

Problem Statement

The agri-food system is a complex, yet crucial, part of British Columbia's socio-economic development. Agricultural prosperity significantly contributes to food security, health, and well-being, through food production, distribution, processing, and retail. Despite these societal contributions, the sector reinforces and reproduces inequalities. To date, a significant proportion of equity-deserving groups are disproportionately faced with systemic barriers to enter and succeed in agriculture. These barriers which include limited access to funding, information, and land compromises their participation and role in agriculture and further perpetuate disproportionate rates of poverty and food insecurity (Farmers for Climate Solutions, 2021). For example, in 2021, an estimated 15% of BC households were food insecure; the situation was markedly higher among Indigenous, Arab/West Asian, Black, and other racialized communities (Tarasuk, Li, and Fafard St-Germain, 2022).

A growing imperative for decolonization and equity is the prioritization and application of Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) interventions and activities, in agriculture and food initiatives to foster justice and transformative systemic change towards just and resilient food systems (Klassen and Murphy, 2020; Ostenso et al. 2020; Sterling et al. 2021). In Canada, policies, including land and food discourses, are historically underpinned, and shaped by oppressive colonialism legacies. These practices perpetuate procedural inequities; for example, the current policies continue to discriminate against Indigenous people by restricting their access to traditional lands, thereby suppressing Indigenous food pathways. Moreover, the current white, male-centered, "conventional" agriculture system rests on a racist legacy of Indigenous land dispossession (Kepkiewicz and Rotz, 2018). Ignoring these realities is indicative of a pure denial of time and history's influence on the attainment of sustainable and just food systems.

This work is premised on the Public Health Association of BC's previous project funded by the Real Estate Foundation BC in 2020; aimed at exploring current community agriculture policies and practices and subsequently aligned them with community visions and outcomes using case studies in Kamloops, Vancouver, and Victoria. This work identified recommendations on how to integrate food system policies and practices with community goals and draws attention to inequities across municipalities as espoused in [Urban Foodlands: A Case Study of Kamloops, Vancouver, and Victoria](). Among other recommendations, the report suggested to create a shared equity framework that can be applied to assess community agriculture and food systems initiatives. The lack of clear and intentional JEDI programming, implementation, and evaluation is common and not exclusive to agricultural policy; similar policy gaps have been identified in other related domains such as education (Sterling et al. 2021; Valley et al. 2020).

There is a broad spectrum of local government intervention in agriculture at a community level which includes but is not limited to community gardens, boulevard gardens, farm stands, and inner-city farming. The policies and practices used by municipalities to support community farming differ greatly and have various levels of adoption and support among municipalities. While some municipalities have a vision or suite of policies to support community farming and allow for policy adoption across departments, many municipalities do not. This has resulted in inequities across municipalities in BC; those with stronger supportive policies and those without.

While social justice has been recognized and espoused in policies by local government and other levels of governments, enacting equity in practice and policy implementation is still a challenge. In most cases, there is ambiguity around the equity goals which compromises procedural justice. Procedural justice is a notion that advocates for fairness in processes through equitable inclusion of all the stakeholders and the intended beneficiaries. There is a scarcity of data on the facilitators and barriers to developing and implementing social-justice-oriented policies in agriculture. Moreover, it

is unclear whether the institutions and employees possess the capacity and knowledge to successfully implement social justice in their practices.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was twofold: i) to build capacity of individuals and community organizations to integrate JEDI in community food system planning; and ii) to trial an equity planning tool for addressing problematic patterns of representation and engagement in community food system planning processes.

Research Approach

We conducted two hybrid interactive workshops with community members in Prince George to address two questions: i) How can social justice be embedded within community food systems planning efforts? ii) How can food system actors be aware of and reduce the reproduction of inequities that arise from food system issues and in proposed interventions?" The workshops entailed individual reflections and small group discussions and activities about how inequalities show up in food systems.

The first workshop held on June 29th, 2022, introduced participants to key JEDI concepts, and the importance of applying JEDI perspectives in different community and governance structures. Using relevant examples, the participants also discussed the common ways in which anti-JEDI practices and behaviors often show up in everyday conduct, systems, and communities and further explored the mitigation strategies and the related challenges that impede change. Moreover, we used the "bus within us" method to guide internal and group reflections and identify reactions that can hinder social justice practice. The "bus within us", is a method that uses the analogy of a bus with different decks and passengers where one imagines ones emotional and cognitive reactions as driving the bus, or as passengers sitting at different places (Andreotti et al. 2022). The goal is to become familiar with and accept (without endorsing) all the passengers within; "the good, the bad, the ugly, and the broken" within us thereby creating safer spaces for difficult and complex conversations through transparent and flexible self-introspection (Andreotti et al. 2022).

The second workshop themed Equity Planning Tools for Community Food Systems held Prince George on the July 4th, 2022, entailed three distinct activities: familiarization with existing common food system myths, power mapping, and exploration of the representation and engagement planning tool. A website was developed to facilitate the participation of online participants. The workshop focused on three areas were, i) *Unpacking common myths in community food systems* - identify, examine, and debunk existing JEDI myths and assumptions that perpetuate disparities and injustices in community food systems, ii) *Power mapping* - assess and describe the different power dynamics and their influence, and iii) *Understanding Representation and Engagement* - explore and practice using a Representation and Engagement tool to support social justice in community food system planning.

i)   *Unpacking Common myths in foodlands:* In a recent podcast (2020), Ali Conrad identified and discussed eight narratives, steeped in white supremacy cultural ideologies of individualism, neoliberalism, paternalism, and universalism that commonly show up in policies, programming, and practice to derail food system work. These narratives include *"if they only knew," "vote with your fork," communities can't take care of themselves," "failure to listen," "build it and they will come," "pull yourself up by the bootstraps," focus on food charity, good versus bad food"* (Conrad, 2020). We adapted the framework, simplified the terminology for easier comprehension, and created a participatory workshop activity for further engagement. In the interest of time, we explored two ("if they only knew", "good versus bad food") of the eight myths where participants discussed the myths and how they show up their work.

ii)   *Power Mapping*: The session started with a self-reflection activity to foster an understanding of the concept of power, directionality, and the implications of these relational networks involved in promoting (or hindering) social justice.

Power mapping is a visual tool familiar to social advocates for identifying the individuals, relationships, and dynamics in a society that influence social change (Bonner Curriculum, 2022; Hagan and Smail, 1997). Two distinct directional categories were discussed; "Power To" versus "Power Over." "Power To" refers to the capacity or ability to achieve an individual/group's goals and desired outcomes. In contrast, "Power Over" is defined as authoritarian power and is traditionally what power is thought of. The participants were instructed to identify six different actors, assign them power levels (based on a scale of 1-10), and provide the rationale for their decisions. The power level was determined by the influence that an actor was perceived to possess in relation to decision-making and change. Following the individual activity, the participants convened in two smaller groups to determine directionality of the different actors and to discuss the rationales for the choices.

iii) *Understanding Representation and Engagement:* The Representation and Engagement Tool was adapted from the HEADSUP framework, a critical literacy tool based on identifying common problematic ideologies and patterns of thinking and forming relationships in education. Developed by Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti, HEADSUP is an acronym for seven fundamental concepts and practices that continue to entrench and perpetuate past legacies and contemporary practices of inequality (HEADSUP, Andreotti et al. 2012). The HEADSUP tool is valuable in cultivating engagement and confronting difficult dialogues on past, contemporary, and future interventions for eradicating inequalities in society; therefore, it aligned with the research team's goals of prioritizing social justice in food planning. We modified the framework's categories, questions, and examples to explore representation and engagement issues in community food systems planning. These include Supremacy, Universalism, Denying the influence of time, removing dissent &

power, Saviour complex, and Uncomplicated solutions (HEADSUP, Andreotti, 2012). In community food system planning, we applied the Representation and Engagement Tool to support community evaluation and identification of the connections between historical lineages and contemporary systems and to initiate conversations about the utilization of universalized white-supremacy underpinnings for contemporary food policy and how that contributes to harm reproduction.

Following the individual reflections, the participants selected the categories they felt comfortable with and collectively identified examples of inequalities (behaviors and practices) in their local communities on the flip charts with the facilitator's support. The purpose of the tool was to build capacity and provide a practical experience of how people/ideas/problems, etc., can be problematic and reinforce the status quo. Due to time constraints, only two categories were discussed (Denying the influence of time; Savior complex). The following questions were explored for Denying the influence of time: How do discussions about issues and problems place them in time? Are they introduced in the present without a reference to historical, and ongoing, events? How do benefits/burdens from the past enter the analysis of food problems and solutions? Is responsibility/ complicity in problems recognized? Who has the power/authority to give voice to the future? Who has the power/authority to make the future a reality? For the Savior complex category, participants discussed the following question: Who is to be celebrated/elevated for identifying problems and creating potential solutions? How are recipients of 'help' represented? How is the relationship between the two groups represented? How does the creation and maintenance of hierarchies between them perpetuate injustice & harms?

Summary

Overall, most of the participants were open-minded, curious, and engaging and could easily situate the different JEDI concepts in real life. Using examples from lived

experiences, they acknowledged and identified the various inequalities in food systems that are facilitators and barriers to equity and procedural justice. Most importantly, they expressed their commitment to continually challenging the status quo in various ways, such as cultivating JEDI conversations within their networks and onboarding their colleagues by sharing the skills and knowledge gained from the workshops. However, some topics were confrontational, thereby requiring a degree of emotional labor comprising self-introspection, questioning, and the complexities of learning and unlearning. For example, during the power mapping exercise, the participants were comfortable with identifying and mapping other players while they skirted around their roles. There was a consensus that a lot remains to be done to continue building community capacity and normalizing the integration of equity in food policy. Going forwards, it would be helpful to provide more training opportunities to empower community food system actors on JEDI, to conduct a comprehensive document analysis to establish the extent to the JEDI is embedded in policy, and to engage a more diverse group of stakeholders such as the food industry leaders, political leaders, and scholars, to get more insights into the different individual and institutional dynamics.

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