



Community food initiatives during times of crisis: Resiliency attitudes towards a sustainable food system.

By: Olivia Rodrigo

Faculty Supervisor: Professor Michael Kessler, Trinity College | Feeding Our City: Pandemic and Beyond
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Research Questions

- During times of crisis, what does community engagement through partnerships and collaborative food initiatives with Toronto food banks look like?
- How do these initiatives work to alleviate immediate food insecurity in the communities they serve?
- Through established relationships, what patterns can be identified that are indicators of a resilient system?

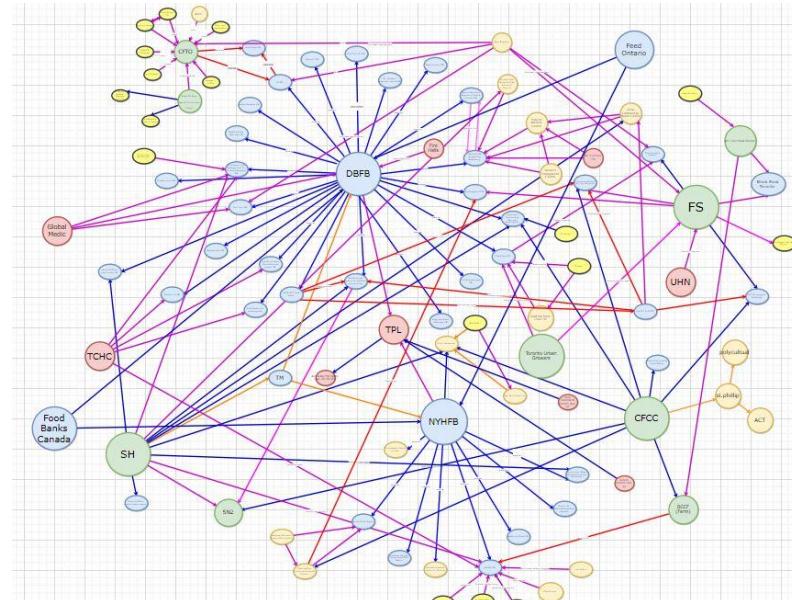
Background: Food Banks and Food insecurity

- **Food banks (Poppdieck, 1998)**
The charity food model has been criticized in the quality of their food security response. Their services are limited by the amount of donations/volunteer time, despite the good intentions. Food banks are an unsustainable “band-aid solution”
It also establishes a power hierarchy of power and dominance in how low-income individuals access food. This leads to feelings of shame and degradation.
There are also various accessibility issues that are present such as access to cultural foods, or lack of knowledge about certain foods.
Grocery store model/subsidized markets as a step forward to address these criticisms. Many centres also provide referrals to social supports, and are involved in food justice research.
- **Food insecurity**
It is defined as the inability to readily access healthy, culturally accessible food. It is a symptom of poverty attributed to inadequate incomes and social security supports.
Food insecurity and food bank usage has risen by 30% since 2008 recession and COVID-19 has increased the rate of food insecurity and food access due to unemployment and isolating precautions

References

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Methodology :



- The model started with 60 community food organizations operating during the pandemic across Toronto and its boroughs from the Feeding Our City Database collected by previous RAs. Snowball sampling of partner organizations was collected through mining social media and local news outlets and organized in a table.
Approx. ≈ 140 connections total between 97 total organizations were documented in this network.
- The organizations were categorized as food bank, food organization, public institution, local business (non-restaurant), restaurant, and community spaces. These partnerships and relationships are organized by type of organization, type of contribution, and duration of collaboration. Types of contributions included: Resource donations, grants, delivery, volunteers.

Applications: Resilience, Sustainability, and Mutual Aid:

- **Resilience** → address shock, build adaptations to shock, work towards long-term mitigation (Bene et. al, 2016).
- **Sustainability** → dynamic process of a system, working towards establishing an equilibrium between multiple interdependent processes/systems (Loring, 2020).
- **Mutual aid** → Response to the charity food model. The basis of many ad-hoc initiatives during the pandemic.
All these methods require the inclusion and the participation of diverse knowledge systems and are unique to each community.

Preliminary Results and Discussion:

- Indication of resiliency processes and behaviours in community food initiatives on micro and macro scale, despite distancing and financial limitations. Though organizations are addressing immediate needs, they are also working towards long-term security and community building.
- Mutual aid is growing among communities, though many agree that for long-term change, policy must be implemented. This requires the careful and considerate communication between the government and community.
- Further research is needed into understanding food policy in Toronto and what avenues of government action are available or can be applied to ensure action towards support during food security crises and resolving long-term food insecurity.

