

Challenging Power Relations in Food Systems Governance: A Conversation About Moving From Inclusion to Decolonization

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At the 2021 Global Food Governance Conference, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) authors/scholars/activists/practitioners discussed issues within the dominant food system. Power systems in food governance in Canada, USA and Australia typically place the voices of white people and settlers as dominant. This results in a racist power structure that shapes food systems, marginalizing the voices of BIPOC communities and those living in Global South countries, despite their active resistance. Dominant food systems then continue to produce inequalities in food distribution and consumption and modes of food production that are also environmentally harmful. The discussion at the conference therefore aimed to share different ways to organize food systems governance. Presentations at the conference demonstrate the need for the reconfiguration of existing governance models and the creation of new models to reflect the values, leadership and interests of BIPOC communities. To solve food issues that impact people (disproportionately BIPOC people and those in the Global South) and the planet, the dominant food system needs to address the unequal power structures and reshape these food systems.

Considerations to create participatory & equitable forms of food systems governance:

1. Inclusion

- Include a more diverse range of people in food systems organizations and governance initiatives to meet the needs of BIPOC communities.

Important first step, though by itself it is not enough. Inclusion needs to be combined with other methods to ensure true diversity and equity.

2. Frameworks

- Break down and challenge basic structures, assumptions, terminology, paradigms, and power distributions that inform governance models.
- Adopt anti-racist, feminist, decolonizing frameworks in policies; include active support for Indigenous self-determination, treaty rights, and restitution; and change organizational operating styles, cultures, values and decision-making processes.

3. Engagement

- Engagement with BIPOC communities and residents of Global South includes: A genuine sharing of resources, power, authority, and leadership.
- New initiatives that reflect different values, cultures, traditions, and decision-making styles are needed. Food systems are not universal, but contextual and place-based with diverse (and sometimes conflicting) viewpoints.

4. Approach

- Decision makers to learn from Indigenous frameworks and understandings of food and food systems to challenge white norms of governance.
- Reframe basic terminology and conceptualizations on which food systems governance is based (e.g. interconnections between food, health, and the environment).
- Take on a holistic approach to recognize relationships between food and the health of humans/the planet.

5. Acknowledgement

- Address the root causes of exclusion and the deeper structural forms of power in food systems (i.e. settler colonialism, patriarchal power structures and institutions, capitalism, food systems corporations).
- Acknowledge and facilitate efforts of BIPOC communities to exercise their own sovereignty, self-determination of Indigenous peoples so that BIPOC/Global South communities have greater control over governance of their food systems and over political/governance structures.

Key Concepts

Governance: Power and control exerted through processes, rules, practices and structures that shape decisions and systems.

Whiteness: A powerful social construct based on beliefs, values, behaviors, and attitudes resulting in a system of privilege based on skin color, invisible and rarely acknowledged.

Neocolonialism: Describes the relationships between decolonizing peoples and countries and former colonizing peoples that continues the colonization process through reinforcing and continuing colonial power structures, actions, behaviors, attitudes, beliefs.

Settler colonialism: An ongoing process of invasion that systematically erases and displaces Indigenous Peoples with settler populations and identities.

These ideologies **intersect with capitalism and patriarchy to produce power relations** in dominant forms of food systems governance that typically **undermine the voices, perspectives, and self-determination of BIPOC communities, despite their ongoing efforts to assert those voices and perspectives**

Dr. Renzo Guinto

- A planetary health approach which is also a decolonial approach is needed to advance the health of people and of the planet. This approach, enriched by Indigenous wisdom, can be incorporated into discussions of food systems, at the front and center of climate change, and in relation to food and health.

Fiona Wiremu

- Western conceptions of food is unable to fully account for the Māori understandings related to kai [food].
- Kai is a culturally defined Māori notion. It is a holistic and spiritual notion that is deep-rooted in Māori identities and origins.
- The purpose of the research project discussed was to determine whether kai research met the kai sovereignty goals.

Presenters: Main Points

Kip Holley

- Equity means changing the systems drastically, not just making space in current systems, but changing them in foundational ways.
- Equity needs to be more than simply inclusive to create culturally authentic ways of empowering people who are not usually involved.

Dr. Rāwiri Tinirau

- Kai sovereignty projects must be deeply rooted within the community.
- Kai sovereignty initiatives must respect that kai has whakapapa [genealogy], and the links between and across the domains are critical in understanding the importance of kai.

Dr. Sherry Pictou

- In Mi'kmaw perspectives, food is animals, plants, and fish that come from the land and waterscapes, which have become displaced by neocolonial development and conservation and industrial food systems.
- We must consider the role of women and 2SLGBTQ+ persons in governance systems.
- We need to reform the process of Indigenous inclusion to address power structures of inequity and the commodification of Mi'kmaw food systems.