

Participatory Food Systems Governance

Exploring Settler-Indigenous Engagement in Food Systems Governance

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Summary

This paper shares how Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) engage with Indigenous communities and organizations to make food systems more sustainable and just. Food is more than sustenance, as it connects to histories, identities and cultures. Food also reveals power imbalances and tensions in historical and ongoing colonialism in Indigenous traditional territories. The research in this paper shows that settler-CSOs are striving toward Indigenous partnerships, sharing challenges and opportunities and why it is important they keep working towards these relationships. Lack of funding and resources is a common challenge when building and maintaining these relationships; resources from funders and governments are required to support this work. The settler-Indigenous relations shared in this paper are loosely sorted into three forms of engagement: inner work; internal organizational governance; and external governance relationships. There is no one way forward in this work. Relationships in these networks are best formed contextually, whereas every situation, Indigenous group and CSO is unique. Uncertainty in doing things “right” should not hold settlers back. Rather, the paper offers considerations for deepening settler-Indigenous relations as an ongoing process.

Examples of settler-CSO and Indigenous relationship building

Inter Pares

- Considered the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action as building blocks to create an Indigenous Rights Action Plan
- Generated a list of actions to advance reconciliation

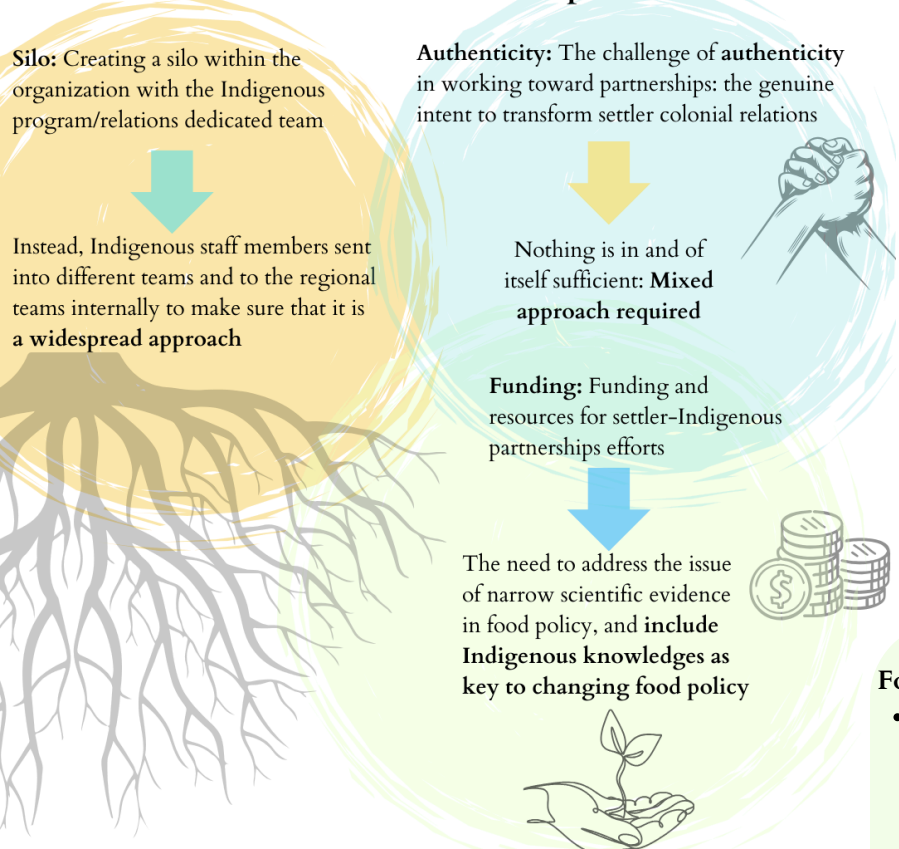
FoodShare

- Established an Indigenous Advisory Circle with representatives from local Indigenous communities to routinely meet with the executive director
- These meetings led to internal and relational outcomes: public-facing solidarity statements, an organization-specific land acknowledgment, an Indigenous Food Action Coordinator, and the channeling of resources to support Indigenous-led organizations

Earth to Tables Legacies

- Five years of exchange across diverse Indigenous and settler food actors informed the creation of short story vignettes, photo essays, and videos, available online and in a book, to think through their relationship in a more intimate way
- Focus: collaboration and knowledge exchange, learning from one of the Indigenous organizers that “good food is requisite for good governance”

Common Issues & Responses



“Organizations are changing and becoming way more diverse and anti-racist and working in solidarity with Indigenous people”- program manager from international social justice CSO

“Very much a long-term kind of journey to be on”- director of a national farming non-profit

“We’re trying to do a lot more work around Indigenous awareness sensitivity training and around supporting Indigenous communities better”- director of a national food charity

Key Concepts & Considerations



Literature Review: A few main ideas

Food governance & sovereignties in Canadian settler state

- Settler state governance has **displaced and disrupted Indigenous food systems** by way of social, political, cultural, economic, and ecological injustices, leading to food injustices.
- Food used as a means to assimilate, erase and eliminate Indigeneity.
- Michelle Daigle calls upon settler actors to **reflect critically on their own positionality and intentions in settler-Indigenous dialogue**, negotiation and solidarity building.
- Daigle pluralizes “sovereignty” to **argue that Indigenous food sovereignties are multiple and contested.**²
- Furthering Indigenous food sovereignties, therefore necessitates a very different relationship between Indigenous nations and the Canadian settler state, and requires settler CSOs to engage meaningfully with Indigenous peoples in their food systems governance work.

Tensions & challenges in settler-Indigenous collaborations

- Tensions arise from **attempts to incorporate Indigenous issues and approaches into existing food systems initiatives** without meaningful engagement and critical reflexivity.
- Daigle argues that settler CSOs need to “**interrogate the legitimacy of legal frameworks that colonial governments and capitalist industry continue to mobilize to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their food harvesting grounds**” (p. 15). Otherwise, the state’s possession of lands now known as Canada remain uncontested, and by extension, so does settler access to and understanding of land as private property.²
- Settler claims to the right to grow food on Indigenous lands without appropriate sovereignty and stewardship considerations reveal tensions between settler and Indigenous assertions of food sovereignty.³
- Opportunities for working together in solidarity **should be based on what is different** rather than what is similar or common, leading to collaborative approaches that are more **relational, responsible, and/or accountable to Indigenous peoples.**⁴

Forms of Settler-Indigenous Engagement



1. Walters, K. 2012. <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442661509-026>; Daschuk, J.W. 2013. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780889772977>; Burnett, K., T. Hay, & L. Chambers. 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ech.2016.0030>; Robin, T., M.K. Dennis, & M.A. Hart. 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872820916218>

2. Daigle, M. 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2017.1324423>

3. Bowness, E., & H. Wittman. 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2020.1803842>

4. Tuck, E., and W.K. Yang. 2012. <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/18630>