

Building Sustainable Local Food Solutions: How Some Canadian Indigenous Communities Are Using The Social and Solidarity Economy To Implement Zero Hunger

Jennifer Sumner, M. Derya Tarhan, JJ McMurtry
OISE/University of Toronto, York University
UNTFSSSE Conference
Geneva, Switzerland, June 26, 2019

Background

- We are settler researchers who study the social and solidarity economy in Canada
- We are interested in understanding how Indigenous communities use the social and solidarity economy
 - Initiatives like community gardens and co-operatives that aim to address issues of hunger

Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE)

- Involves forms of economic activity that prioritise social and often environmental objectives, and involve producers, workers, consumers and citizens acting collectively and in solidarity (Utting 2015)
 - Co-operatives, non-profits, fair-trade networks, social enterprises
- Unlike neoliberal economy, SSE has the ability to deliver an enormous range of goods and services to:
 - Those who can afford them
 - Those who cannot
- But does the SSE deliver on this promise?
 - Food?

Social and Solidarity Economy and Food

- Food is central to considerations of the SSE
 - A life good
 - A human right
- Examples of food and the SSE:
 - Food co-operatives, food recovery programs, urban agriculture, buying clubs, community-supported agriculture and fisheries, soup kitchens, social food procurement, alternative food initiatives, marketing boards, food banks, and community kitchens, greenhouses and gardens
- These initiatives can use the SSE to move food from producers to consumers
 - Particularly those in need
 - Sometimes bypassing the conventional market completely
- Set a precedent for a shift that sees food less as a commodity and more as a basic human right
- Have the potential to contribute to zero hunger

Zero Hunger: Sustainable Development Goal #2

- 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- SDG #2 – Zero Hunger – focuses on:
 - Ending hunger
 - Achieving food security and improved nutrition
 - Promoting sustainable agriculture
- Can the SSE help to implement SDG #2?
- Look at sustainable local food initiatives in some Indigenous communities in Canada
- Can these forms of the SSE be a means to implement Zero Hunger?

Indigenous Communities in Canada

- Indigenous people – First Nations, Inuit and Metis
- More than 600 Indigenous communities across Canada

For well over a century, the goals of Canada's policy regarding Indigenous people included eliminating their governments, ignoring their rights, terminating the treaties made with them, and causing them to cease to exist through processes of assimilation, such as forcing children into residential schools, which has been described as cultural genocide (TRC 2015)

- We must cultivate respectful relations with Indigenous people
- We are all treaty people

Indigenous Communities and Food

- Food has long been a weapon of Canadian government policy aimed at Indigenous people
 - First Prime Minister of Canada withheld the food promised in signed treaties to coerce Indigenous people onto reserves (Daschuk, 2015)
 - The scanty meals served to Indigenous children forced into the residential school system resulted in high levels malnutrition, sickness and death throughout the twentieth century (TRC, 2015)
 - The food currently imported into many northern communities are not culturally grounded, often low-quality ultra-processed foods, and significantly overpriced
- Many communities have become colonially structured food deserts
 - Innovative solutions through the SSE

Indigenous Communities and the SSE

- Two reasons why the SSE has become an effective tool of Indigenous community development:
 - Allows for a range of forms
 - Maintains control in the hands of communities (Wuttunee 2010, 210)
- Indigenous SSE initiatives have much to teach non-Indigenous people
- Quadruple bottom line
 - Economic, social, environmental and cultural

Research Project

- We assembled a data base of sustainable local food initiatives in Indigenous communities in Canada:
 - Public knowledge on the Internet
 - A range of both popular and academic publications
- We found 166 SSE initiatives:
 - 58 community gardens and greenhouses
 - 42 co-operatives
 - 17 school gardens
 - 9 food markets
 - 9 community-based food programs
 - 7 advocacy and support groups
 - 5 harvesting and hunting initiatives
 - 5 education and training programs
 - Plus institutional food programs, community kitchens, procurement initiatives, a food bank, a food distribution centre, a combined food market/community garden/greenhouse, a harvesting and hunting initiative based on food aid

Map

- <https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1oJUIKoPXI-vVxB6kjEt-yWwV5x6Qmpu&ll=64.36461409103454%2C-97.79295494999996&z=3>

Case Study: Northern Manitoba Food, Culture and Community Collaborative (NMFCCC)

- Non-profit organization
- Provides financial and technical support to Indigenous-led food initiatives in northern Manitoba
- Overall goal – to increase food security and economic development
- Operates within a larger context of widespread food insecurity in northern Manitoba

NMFCCC

- Recent report highlighted 20 food-related projects, including:
 - Three school gardens, four community gardens, one community greenhouse, a hub for training and research on northern boreal food production, a food producers' co-op, a chicken project, two beekeeping projects, and a farm



NMFCCC and SDG #2 – Zero Hunger

- The aims of these projects include:
 - Increasing food security
 - Improving food access
 - Improving vegetable and fruit yields in the community
 - Establishing knowledge of healthy living
 - Making the garden sustainable
 - Sharing food
 - Promoting healthy eating habits
 - Supporting community members in starting their own gardens and greenhouses
 - Increasing access to affordable and locally grown organic food options

NMFCCC and SDG #2 – Zero Hunger

- Peguis Community Garden Project
- Under the leadership of Elder Carl McCorrister
- Encapsulates the spirit of the SSE and SDG #2
- *Aim: Regain our heritage and culture of community agriculture by engaging community members to grow their own healthy foods, in the hope that their children will continue this cultural activity and provide food security for all*

NMFCCC and other SDGs

- SDG #3: Good health and well-being
- SDG #4: Quality education
- SDG #8: Decent work and economic growth

- NMFCCC initiatives have something important to teach us about the role of the SSE in implementing the SDGs

SSE – Conceptualization

- The SSE is fundamentally neither the state nor the market
- In spite of efforts to push the SSE toward the market, we need to articulate it in ways that shift the focus to a different actor

The social economy involves economic activity neither controlled directly by the state nor by the profit logic of the market, activity that prioritizes the social wellbeing of communities and marginalized individuals over partisan political directives or individual gain (McMurtry 2010, 4)

- Community and its wellbeing become the focus, not the state or the market

SSE – Practice

- Conceptualization mirrors the reality of many of the sustainable local food solutions initiated by Indigenous communities in Canada
- Community comes first and residents decide upon their form of engagement

When confronted with problems, Indigenous people must find solutions that are not disconnected from their own ideas about society and social order and economies (Wuttunee 2010, 183)

- The SSE provides solutions that are not disconnected and thus it has emerged as an effective tool of community development
 - Allows for a variety of forms
 - Maintains control in the hands of Indigenous communities

Conclusion

- When asking whether the SSE can help to implement the SDGs, we can learn from these initiatives in Indigenous communities
- We need a robust, collaborative form of the SSE to address the complexity of the SDGs – one based in community needs, not private gain or political partisanship
- Definitions of the SSE based on the market or the state will not be sufficient
- To achieve zero hunger, new definitions must prioritize community needs, community ownership and community control
- Such new definitions will help to deliver on the promise of the SSE

Policy Implications – Indigenous Communities

- Implement the Calls to Action of the TRC
- Create a national food strategy
- Settle land claims to guarantee access to country foods
- Recognize and respect Indigenous approaches to food
- Implement SSE policies at all levels of government (keeping in mind that Indigenous SSEs are qualitatively different)
- Nurture umbrella organizations like the NMFCCC
- Support Indigenous control of their own resources

Policy Implications - SSE

- Develop a national SSE policy based on:
 - Patient and non-exploitative capital
 - Recognition of the distinct nature of SSE organizations to facilitate them as a central economic player with all benefits
 - Training and support for new and emergent SSE organizations, recognizing that they have higher barriers to entry
 - Recognition in policy of SSEs as distinct entities that are recognizably different from capitalist firms

References

- Daschuk, J. (2015). Food and health on the western reserves: The deep roots of Indigenous food insecurity. Keynote address at the annual meeting of the Canadian Association for Food Studies, Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, Ottawa, Ontario, June 4.
- McMurtry, J.J. (2015). Prometheus, Trojan horse or Frankenstein? Appraising the social and solidarity economy. In P. Utting (Ed.), *Social and solidarity economy: Beyond the fringe* (pp. 57-71). London: UNRISD/Zed Books.
- McMurtry, J.J. (Ed.). (2010). *Living economics: Canadian perspectives on the social economy, co-operatives, and community economic development*. Toronto: Emond Montgomery.
- NMFCCC. (2017). Community stories 2017. Accessed November 3, 2018. http://tidescanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/NMFCCC_2017CommunityStories.pdf?platform=hootsuite
- TRC. (2015). *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Accessed June 2, 2018. <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=890>
- Utting, P. (2015). Introduction: The challenge of scaling up social and solidarity economy. In P. Utting (Ed.), *Social and solidarity economy: Beyond the fringe* (pp. 1-37). London: UNRISD/Zed Books.
- Wuttunee, W. (2010). Aboriginal perspectives on the social economy. In J.J. McMurtry (Ed.), *Living economics: Canadian perspectives on the social economy, co-operatives, and community economic development* (pp. 179-215). Toronto: Emond Montgomery.