

## **Philanthropy must go beyond charity to fund transformational food system change**

COVID-19 is raising hard questions about food, hunger and human rights. As feeding lines lengthen across the world, millions of dollars are being directed to food banks to address the sudden spike in household food insecurity as falling consumer demand at foodservice outlets generates increased amounts of food waste along agro-industrial supply chains. In the United States for example, the federal government is leaning heavily on charitable food networks to distribute over \$5 billion worth of agricultural surplus in 2020, banking on the philanthropic sector to foot the distribution bill. In Canada, the United Kingdom, the European Union and across the world, governments have announced similar food purchase and redistribution programs to redirect agricultural surplus toward food insecure communities.

Over the past forty years, food charity has captured the social imagination of funders and policy makers eager to resolve the contradictions of a society that produces hunger amidst plenty. Decades of investment into food banking infrastructure have woven a porous safety net for millions of low-income households left behind by rising inequality, low wages, and the erosion of public entitlement programs. While food banks work to address some of the immediate symptoms of an exploitative food system, their focus on emergency responses leaves these organizations unable to meaningfully address the race, gender and class dynamics coded within it, and the structural inequities that ensue from this status quo.

We cannot afford to merely meet short term emergency needs during this time of great transformation. Food is a human right to be guaranteed with dignity, not a need to be inadequately met through charity. This will involve re-imagining unjust hierarchies of power that corporate charity tends to reinforce. Our funding strategies, both public and private, must seek to reform the food production, distribution and labor practices and the punitive welfare policies that aggravate the inequities currently mapping onto our feeding lines. Doing so will mean directly addressing decades of corporate deregulation and welfare retrenchment, but even more so the histories of colonialism, slavery and Indigenous genocide that continue to haunt contemporary foodways.

The inequities in our food systems have been in place long before the novel coronavirus outbreak. While those working in fields, processing factories, kitchens, grocery stores, regional food banks and local charities are now clearly deemed “essential”, their labor has long been exploited and devalued by a racist, colonial, sexist and capitalist food system that prioritizes shareholder profit over community well-being. Many of those essential workers are themselves vulnerable to food insecurity and rely on food banks to make ends meet. It is thus critical that those with the power to allocate resources make every effort to fund organizations that explicitly address the root causes of inequality in our food system by pushing back against the monopolistic tendencies and ever greater concentration of our food corporations, the uneven distribution of land and capital, and uneven access to the institutional resources and political spaces that shape food policy.

The Global Solidarity Alliance, a group of non-governmental organizations, national networks, grassroots activists, and scholars concerned about hunger and poverty in wealthier countries, calls

on the philanthropic community to abide by the following principles in its efforts to address issues related to food and hunger in the years ahead.

- 1. Commit to organizations in a spirit of slow philanthropy with the understanding that food system transformation is a long-term commitment to social change.**
  - a. reduce data collection demands, including monitoring and evaluation pressures, on front-line organizations serving those in need
  - b. standardize data collection practices across public and private funding networks
- 2. Commit to projects and policy that shorten food bank lines through emphasizing the realization of the right to food, income security and investing in community wealth building projects.**
- 3. Commit to grassroots organizations working to address the root causes of food system inequity including:**
  - a. projects led by people from Black, Indigenous and other historically marginalized and oppressed communities.
  - b. projects that abide by principles of democratic decision making.
  - c. projects that prioritize agroecology and climate justice.
  - d. projects that prioritize the equitable redistribution of wealth
- 4. Commit to strengthening networks that contribute to the resilience of regional food systems.**
- 5. Commit to strengthening networks that build power from the bottom up to reshape food policies that serve people over profit.**
- 6. Commit to funding organizations that involve experts-by-experience in decision making and governance structures.**

The strategies, institutions and movements supported during this crisis will surely impact our food and nutrition landscape for decades to come. We thus urge program officers, board members and other decision makers in the philanthropic sector to fund interventions that go beyond food charity to meaningfully engage in the food system transformation required to end hunger.

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