



BuildingPolicy4 the Social Economy

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Growing Capacity for Food Security through Policy Change: The Experience of the Kids Action Program

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Introduction

Kids Action Program (KAP) operates on a number of funding sources including the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP), Community Action Program for Children (CAPC) and various grants. It has been involved with food security work since its inception over 15 years ago, but only joined forces with university-based researchers in the area of food security in 2001 as part of the Participatory Food Costing project. Since then, KAP has worked with researchers and other partners through a variety of Participatory Action Research (PAR) initiatives to build participants' capacity and affect policy change at many levels. KAP has been part of Sub Node 3 (SN3) work with the intention of exploring areas of the social economy related to food security and community economic development since 2005 when SN3 was formed.

Background and Rationale

Strategies addressing food insecurity occur along a continuum in which the first stage involves *short term relief strategies*, while the second stage consists of *capacity building strategies* and the third stage is strategies *towards system change*. KAP is a social economy organization whose work spans this continuum aiming to support families and build food security by affecting policy change at multiple levels through multiple strategies.

Project Methodology

KAP's food security projects have followed the principles of PAR which involves generating new knowledge through the active involvement of those who will ultimately be affected by the research as well as facilitating the sharing of knowledge between researchers and participants. The process of PAR is based on four pillars: collaboration, mutual learning, action/change and research. KAP's involvement in PAR food security projects have included: 1) Food Box Project Evaluation (SN3 funded, 2006-07); 2) Community Forum on Food Security and Social Economy (SN3 funded, 2007); 3) Gardening Project; 4) Follow-up Community Forum on Food Security and Social Economy (Nov 2009); Participatory Food Costing Project (Dept of Health Promotion and Protection funded, 2002-2011).

Key Findings: KAP is involved with Policy Change...

- At a Personal Level:
 - Encourages participants to question their own personal policies
 - Facilitates participants' ability to act on personal policies
 - Challenges partners to critically evaluate their own personal policies
 - Facilitates development of skills and knowledge about food security, research & public policy processes
- At an Organizational/Community Level:
 - Evaluates and changes the policies of its food box program to support local producers and better meet the food needs of participants
 - Continuously revisits and revises its own internal policies to provide participants with the best programming possible
 - Provides programming that helps participants & partners recognize and address internal and external policies affecting food security
- At a Collaborative Level: Creates Positive Internal and External Relationships for Policy Change:
 - Internal: inclusive culture; supportive environments, respect for diversity; shared decision-making; shared vision / learning communities / reflection and analysis; peer networking and innovative forms of consultation and communication; leadership;
 - External: network processes & linkages at community, provincial and national levels; history of collective action; multiple stakeholders; sustainability.
 - Acquires and shares resources
- At a Systems Level:
 - Plays an Advisory Role in Government
 - Strategies in NS
 - Challenges public policy that poses a barrier to implementation of programs that support families
 - Influences system responses to food insecurity in NS, e.g., Model for Sustainable Food Costing; Use of food costing data by the Dept. Community Services to review Income Assistance rates

Implications for the Social Economy

While KAP is one organization within the social economy, its work on building capacity for policy change at multiple levels to address the issue of food insecurity has had a significant impact. Utilizing elements of PAR has allowed the organization to conduct research within its programs while empowering individuals and communities to think critically about the policies that impact their lives.

“I think within a Family Resource Centre these tools and the data... it makes us all like the experts in the whole subject in the community, so that when the [news] papers hear[about food security], they're calling the family resource centre and asking 'what can you tell us about that?' So now we're the experts in our communities to deal with food insecurity.”

(Focus Group, 2004)

As part of its involvement at multiple levels KAP has been able to add value to research through the addition of participants' lived experience in order to strengthen policy-change initiatives. Continuously re-evaluating and modifying policies to facilitate the KAP mission has allowed KAP to model policy change and environmental adaptability for effectiveness.