



## ⚙ Growing Capacity for Food Security Through Policy Change:

### ⚙ The Experience of the Kids Action Program

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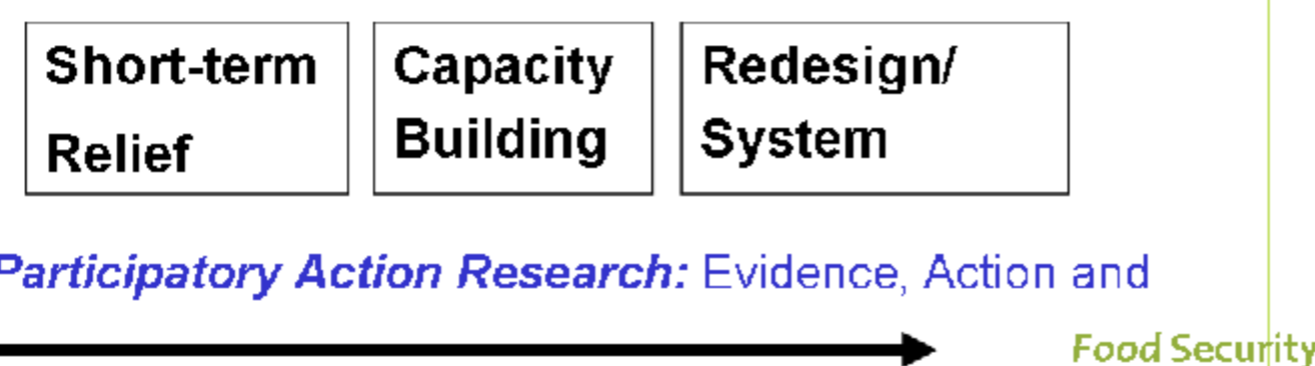


#### Introduction

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 since 2005 when SN3 was formed with the intention of exploring areas of the social economy related to food security and community economic development.

#### 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

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. Meaningful community involvement is an essential component of PAR; SN3 has reached out to the community through events such as the Food Security and Social Economy forum that was held in the fall of 2007 and will be enhanced by a follow up forum that will occur in the fall of 2009.

The Participatory Food Costing Project is also based on the four pillars of PAR such that it involves a 'train the trainer' approach in which participants of various community programs, such as those offered by KAP, collect the data used to determine the cost of a nutritious diet and then work with partners to inform policy change. Another project in which KAP conducts PAR is the gardening project, which has entailed providing space in which to garden as well as the tools and skills needed for participants to produce their own food.

KAP has been an active partner in SN3 research primarily through the gardening project and the food box project evaluation. An evaluation of the KAP food box program brought researchers together with current program participants, potential program participants, producers and suppliers through interviews and focus groups in order to determine how the food box program was currently contributing to the social economy and ways in which it could be improved and potentially expanded.

#### Community-University Collaboration

KAP functions primarily as a community organization dedicated to developing and implementing intervention and prevention programs to enhance the health, social and economic outcomes for families within Annapolis, Kings and Hants Counties. This project involved collaboration between this very community-based organization and researchers from Mount Saint Vincent University to work towards the common goal of influencing policies on multiple levels that facilitate KAP's mission to enhance community wellness.

## KAP is Involved with Policy Change...

#### Key Findings

The process of involving persons living with food insecurity in PAR related to influencing food security related policy empowered them to think about food insecurity in a different way. Participants have begun to see their situations through a policy lens enabling them to question and challenge the policies that contribute to food insecurity. By encouraging participants to question and challenge policies that perpetuate food insecurity and working collaboratively in a community-university research alliance, KAP serves as an example of how an organization may be only one small part of the social economy yet still have a large influence on policy change.

Evaluation of the food box program highlighted areas where positive changes could be made, specifically, the contents of the box included non perishable items easily accessed through other means. Participants identified the need for increased amounts of produce. High costs of purchasing fruits and vegetables through conventional avenues made access more difficult. Changes to the food box contents were put into place as soon as this research data was available.

KAP has also been assessing its own internal policies and been pro-active in terms of policy changes regarding local sustainably produced food and its procurement. In addition, KAP has influenced policies within other organizations.

#### 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 own internal policies to provide participants with the best programming possible
- ⚙ Provides programming that help 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: net work processes & linkages at community, provincial and national levels; history of collective action; multiple stakeholders; sustainability.
- ⚙ acquiring and sharing 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 have 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.
- ⚙ By continuously re-evaluating and modifying policies to facilitate the KAP mission has allowed KAP to model policy change and environmental adaptability for effectiveness.

