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Building Forward – Charting a Path to Resilience

Every year on October 17th, the United Nations encourages the world to pause and reflect on the ongoing reality of poverty across the globe. This year, the theme for the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty is “Building Forward Together: Ending Persistent Poverty, Respecting all People and our Planet”.

What does it mean to “build forward”?

We can think of building forward as a counterpoint to building back. The ability to build back is the essence of resilience; in the face of crisis, we do not break under the strain, but persist and recover. We are able to build back and regain what was lost.

But for many people, what was lost wasn't working for them in the first place. Food insecurity, homelessness, precarious work, isolation and debt were all endemic in the world that Covid entered. In fact, it was many of these aspects of that pre-Covid world that left us highly vulnerable to the ravages of a pandemic.

Building forward challenges us to consider a new, different, better state. Building forward is an important prospect to consider as we continue to grapple with the realities of Covid. When this pandemic is eventually behind us, is it sufficient to merely return to the kind of society we knew before?

Covid has revealed the fault-lines in our economic, social and political systems. Highly polarized worldviews that exploit divisions between people on the basis of their ethnicity, gender identity, or economic status have not served us well. The glorification of competition that pits us against each other has not served us well. The drive to gain and cling to power at all costs has not served us well. The ideology of individualism and independence at the




expense of our shared responsibility to community has not served us well. Underlying this is the breakdown in trust – in our leaders, in our institutions, in our media, in scientific knowledge, and in each other. This truly has not served us well. So we have buckled under the strain of a crisis no one imagined, unable to come together at the precise moment history required it of us.

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Research on resilience gives us insight into what truly resilient systems (and societies) look like. Such systems are highly diverse and cooperative, with shared power and leadership. And at the root of those properties is the critical element of trust. If we have the courage, we might consider such a world and strive to build forward toward it.

Building forward requires vision and courage. There is no map that shows us the way. But if we simply settle for building back what was lost with all its fissures and cracks, we are destined to once again buckle under the strain of the next great crisis. Instead, if we set our sights on a different star, it might guide us to a different destination. This might require us to take turns and follow directions that seem uncomfortable, unfamiliar, or counter-intuitive. Change and growth usually do. But in the end embracing that risk is the only way to build true resilience. 

Towards Climate Justice: Addressing the Risks to Marginalized Communities

As the climate continues to change, severe weather events such as this are expected to increase in both severity and frequency.

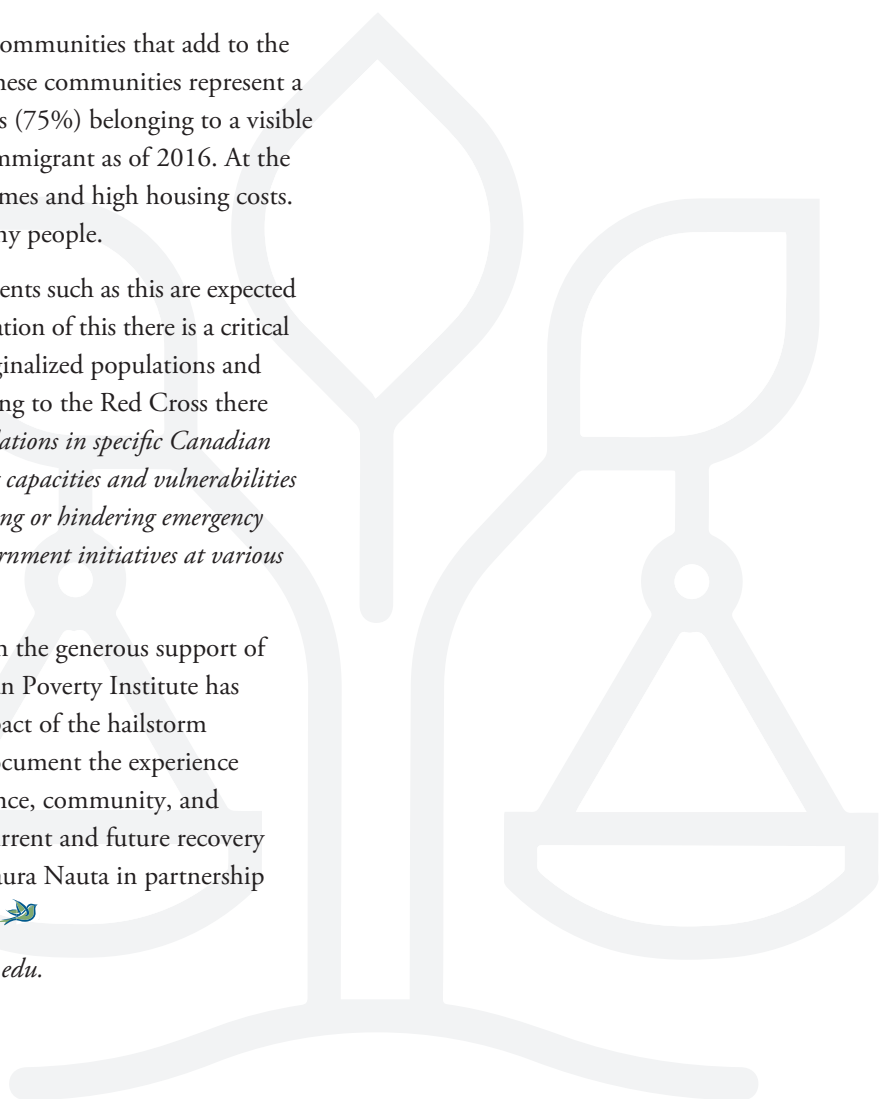
On June 13, 2020 several communities in the northeast quadrant of Calgary were hit by a catastrophic hailstorm. With damages of upwards of \$1.2 billion, this was one of the most expensive weather events in Canadian history. The storm happened while residents were already experiencing the financial and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic that led to, for example, job loss, food insecurity, and social isolation. Since then, many residents continue to struggle with the social and financial after-effects of the storm. As this was an insurable event, it has been challenging for the community to access the needed recovery support given the complexity of the situation.

This part of Calgary is comprised of highly diverse communities that add to the overall strength and richness of Calgary's culture. These communities represent a variety of languages and cultures, with three quarters (75%) belonging to a visible minority group and just over half (53%) being an immigrant as of 2016. At the same time, many households struggle with low incomes and high housing costs. This has heightened the impact of the storm for many people.

As the climate continues to change, severe weather events such as this are expected to increase in both severity and frequency. In anticipation of this there is a critical need to better understand the specific needs of marginalized populations and communities during and after emergencies. According to the Red Cross there is a need to *“capture the experiences of high-risk populations in specific Canadian emergencies and disasters, track social changes affecting capacities and vulnerabilities in targeted population groups, identify factors facilitating or hindering emergency preparedness in voluntary organizations, compare government initiatives at various levels and evaluate good practice strategies over time.”*

At the request of the affected communities, and with the generous support of The Co-operators Insurance Company, the Canadian Poverty Institute has launched a project to understand the long-term impact of the hailstorm on peoples' lives. The purpose of the project is to document the experience of community members and identify gaps in insurance, community, and government disaster responses in order to inform current and future recovery efforts. The project will be led by CPI Researcher Laura Nauta in partnership with a Community Lead and Steering Committee. 🌿

For more information contact Laura.Nauta@ambrose.edu.



CC4AR: Building Cultural Capital for Anti-Racism Among Racialized Youth

Dr. Rita Yembilah and Dr. Nketti Johnston-Taylor

In the fall 2020 Issue of *Spero*, the CPI reported on our participation in The City of Calgary's systemic racism consultations. Dr. Rita Yembilah presented on the increased risk of exposure to racism as a result of living with low-income and vice versa, and Dr. Nketti Johnston-Taylor, presented on the increased risk of exposure to legal problems as a result low-income and the reverse. At the same venue, Mr. Ike Kenzo of SOS Congo, a local support group for black youth committed to telling the positive stories around blackness presented, bemoaning the lack of funding for homegrown initiatives to work proactively to pre-empt racism and other aspects of social injustice. A few connections later, the CPI invited SOS Congo to co-apply to the City's anti-systemic racism capacity building fund, under the banner of the Cultural Capital for Anti-racism (CC4AR) project.

A successful application for \$65,000 for a year's project implied that CPI and SOS Congo could set to work delivering a youth-involved co-designed curriculum based on the separate yet linked concepts of cultural capital, multidimensional poverty and wellbeing, and empowerment. The aim of the project was to sensitize youth participants aged 13-22, and SOS Congo facilitators on multidimensional poverty, emphasizing self-perception poverty, structural poverty and relationship poverty; in addition to low-income as part of the experience of poverty and/or impoverishment. We also delved into cultural capital, discussing the set

of skills, circumstances, competences and accesses that enable a more confident living of life, accompanied by an arguably reduced risk of experiencing social injustice. The corollary of high cultural capital is empowerment, which gives people tools and permission to advocate for self and others. Based on an effective collaborative effort, CPI and SOS Congo curated a great list of guest speakers to provide interactive COVID-19 induced online sessions.

Speakers from CPI, Ambrose University, Calgary Women's Immigration Centre (CIWA), Bank of Montreal, University of Calgary, anti-racism advocacy, led capacity building sessions discussing financial literacy, starting a business, blackness and mental health access/promotion, black history in Alberta, accessing and affording tertiary education, research for advocacy and how government works. The aims were to link these additional topics to the foundational ones of multidimensional poverty, cultural capital, and empowerment, and use that linked information to discuss how to identify and stop individual and/or systemic racism. The CC4AR involved up to 15 youth per session as well as five SOS Congo facilitators working alongside CPI and guest speakers to bring the first intake of the CC4AR to a conclusion and to keep the model for ongoing work with black youth.



A key output of this project is a toolkit that SOS Congo will use adaptively to create more capacity building sessions with youth. Another key output is the CPI and SOS Congo commitment to issuing certificates of completion as an aspect of social recognition, as well as an aspect of cultural capital building. A key outcome of this project has been to observe the growth of knowledge in majority of the youth, and the degree to which they exhibit more interest in avoiding becoming victims of racism. Work that is yet to be evidenced is the progression to becoming anti-systemic racism advocates, but the seeds have been sown. Due to COVID-19 spread, plans for an in-person celebration of all participants this fall are undergoing review.

We would like to thank Mr. Derek Cook, Director, CPI for supporting this initiative from the ideation stage; all the guest speakers, Mr. Noah Boakye-Yiadom, Ms. Cheryl Foggo, Dr. Monetta Bailey, Mr. Samuel Adeyemi, Ms. Helen Tesfari, and Mr. Derek Cook for providing topic specific content to bolster the foundational sessions. A similar thank you to SOS Congo for answering the call for collaborative work to plant seeds that contribute to staving off racism and social injustice. In one there is progress; in more, there is more progress. 🐦

“Back to Normal”... Really?

Dr. Jim Cresswell

The global pandemic has created massive disruption in life as usual, including amplifying the systemic injustices that impact people in poverty. In partnership with the Tamarack Institute’s Cities Reducing Poverty network, the Canadian Poverty Institute is seeking to understand how COVID-19 has changed the face of poverty in Canada. Working in six communities across Canada, the project focuses on the “newly vulnerable”: those who were not in poverty but have been put at risk due to economic and social pressures linked to the pandemic. Participating communities include Calgary, Alberta; Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; London, Ontario; Region of Peel, Ontario; the Counties of Perth-Huron, Ontario; and Cape Breton, Nova Scotia.

The project involves an exploration of this relatively unknown population of newly vulnerable in an unprecedented social context of a global pandemic. With funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), this project is a response to a need expressed by members of the Canadian Poverty Institute to (1) identify the characteristics of who is newly vulnerable and the gaps in

service facing this group, (2) how the face of poverty and precarity is changing post-COVID, and (3) strategies that members of the CPR could develop to address these emerging needs.

Currently we are wrapping up Phase One of the project! We have completed a targeted literature review focused on how underlying system processes, relational perceptions and collective emotions have led to an increase in vulnerability and poverty and the efficacy of currently available strategies. We also developed a system map of organizations serving people at risk of poverty in the project sites and completed research on the impacts of COVID in these target sites. Most significantly, we have just completed a large survey of nearly 1500 participants which will illuminate key characteristics of the newly vulnerable.

In the next few weeks, we will be moving into Phase 2 that involves pursuing 1-2 hour, phone or technology assisted interviews with Key Informants: those working with newly vulnerable people that are positioned to see the impacts of COVID-19. Participants will



be asked to reflect on the report developed in the previous phase through a “Future Backwards Exercise”. This form of inquiry addresses the key components of the conceptual framework and involves the following six steps: (a) describe the current situation in their own words; (b) describe how the current situation came to be; (c) visualize several years in the future to imagine how things have gone unbelievably well and ask for several descriptors of this wonderful future state; (d) imagine themselves in a place where things have gone dreadfully wrong and offer to describe the state; (e) brainstorm a set of fictitious turning point events that could lead to the wonderful future state; and (f) brainstorm a set of fictitious turning point events that could lead to the impossibly bad situation.

It is hope that this work can inform future planning to both mitigate the impacts of Covid-19 and lead to a more resilient future. 🐦

Upcoming Events

Poverty: It’s A Trap Join Poverty Talks for an in-depth conversation about poverty in Calgary, led by people with lived experience. Learn about the challenges of living in poverty and how everyone can be a part of the solution.

October 17 • 1:00 – 3:30 pm (MT). Register online at: <https://bit.ly/3at7d1h>

Anti-Oppressive Social Work Practice The Canadian Poverty Institute is pleased to present an online workshop with Dr. Prospera Tadam (United Arab Emirates University) who will offer new perspectives on anti-oppressive practice in the post-George Floyd and Me-Too era. Dr. Tadam brings a simplified language to a dense set of topics discussed in her new book “Anti-Oppressive Social Work Practice.” Using her 4D2P framework she provides strategies for dealing with difficult topics, confronting systemic oppression, and working toward equity for people at risk of “othering” and social marginalization.

October 22 • 9:00 – 10:00 am (MT). Register online at: www.eventbrite.ca/e/a-public-talk-on-anti-oppressive-social-work-practice-tickets-170553827088

Recent Publications

- **Ward Poverty Profiles** – In collaboration with Vibrant Communities Calgary (VCC), the Canadian Poverty Institute produced a series of profiles to highlight issues of poverty in each Ward in Calgary in advance of the municipal election. The profiles are available at:
<https://enoughforall.ca/action/poverty-profiles-2021>
- **A Theology of Poverty** – In conjunction with the CPI research project on the role of the church in poverty reduction, the article Human Flourishing and a Theology of Poverty Alleviation was published in the International Journal of Public Theology. Co-authored by Nikayla Reize, Beth Stovell and Colin Toffelmire, the article is available online at:
https://brill.com/view/journals/ijpt/15/2/article-p177_3.xml
- **Achieving Environmental Justice Through Calgary’s Environmental Strategy** – In April, the Canadian Poverty Institute prepared a submission to The City of Calgary to provide input to the new city Environment Strategy. Our submission highlighted the connection between poverty and the environment, and urged The City to pursue justice as a key aspect of its strategy. Read the submission here:
www.povertyinstitute.ca/s/Environment-Strategy-Submission-2021.pdf
- **Protecting Canada’s Vulnerable Workforce in a Digital Age - Fulfilling** Canada’s commitments to the progressive realization of economic rights requires new and innovative approaches to employment standards and social protection. This submission to The Government of Canada provides background and recommendations for reforms to protect precarious workers in the gig economy.
www.povertyinstitute.ca/s/Gig-Worker-Protections-Submission-2021.pdf
- **Energy Poverty Factsheet** - Learn about Energy Poverty in Alberta through this new factsheet produced for the Energy Poverty Roundtable available at:
http://energypovertyroundtable.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/What-is-Energy-Poverty_.pdf

Support the CPI

- The Canadian Poverty Institute welcomes individuals and organizations who wish to support the Canadian Poverty Institute financially. If you wish to become a supporter, please visit <https://ambrose.edu/donate> and indicate you wish to designate your gift to the Canadian Poverty Institute.
- The Canadian Poverty Institute is a community partner of Sponsor Energy. Customers of Sponsor Energy can direct a portion of all profits from their utility bill to the Canadian Poverty Institute. For more information, please visit:
<http://www.sponsorenergy.com/community-partners/>



About the CPI

The Canadian Poverty Institute is an inter-disciplinary research and teaching institute housed within Ambrose University in Calgary. Our mission is to contribute to the healing of poverty in Canada through teaching, research and public education.

We are grounded in the Christian tradition of extending compassion while seeking justice and reconciliation for the marginalized and oppressed.

The Canadian Poverty Institute is a member of:

- Vibrant Communities
- Canadian Council of Churches, Commission on Justice and Peace
- The Calgary Alliance for the Common Good



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