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Introduction to Systemic Barriers in the Context of Land Access

PRESENTED BY



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Present Day Barriers

Informed by interviews

General Systemic Barriers

Not knowing / Understanding History

“You can’t talk about land access without (addressing) settler colonialism, capitalism, genocide and the removal and enforced labor of black and brown folks.”

“Color Blindness”



“White folks don’t understand race and equity; this is challenging for BIPOC folks.”

General Systemic Barriers (cont.)

Institutionalized White Supremacy

“Land Trusts want to increase land access, but often the barriers require so much of the farmer. To access (land) you have to be ready, but we have been systematically excluded from the opportunity of being ready.”

Purposeful re-dispossession of land

Lack of Generational Wealth

“Most people don’t get inheritance of land or much financial resources.”

“Not everyone has family wealth to be able to ask a relative for money or a loan.”

Generational Trauma and Its Impacts on Health & Somatics

“Our bodies carry the effects of white supremacy.”

General Systemic Barriers (cont.)

Living in poverty
Accumulating debt
Working multiple jobs



“My social justice oriented farming work I’m only able to do by choosing to live in poverty. The whole down payment comes from farmers and going into debt. I’m fortunate to have a stable (old) vehicle, for example, but if I’m experiencing difficulties...”

“The only reason we can farm is because we support our income with additional jobs.”

General Systemic Barriers (cont.)

Finding service providers from their communities

“Finding technical assistance providers of color that understand your lived experience and why you do farm work is tough. Not just land trust or government staff, but real estate agents, finance people, etc. There is generally little support for farmers of color.”



General Systemic Barriers (cont.)

Translating the perspective of farming as a way of life, to sustain life

“In my experience, technical assistance providers seem to have an inability of understanding that the main goal is a social goal, and not prioritizing financial goals. It’s about feeding people.”

“The work that we are doing is very complex, emotionally and spiritually. How can technical assistant folks respect and accept the decision to help people in the context of farm viability? Don’t tell me giving free food to people in need is not profitable. I know it’s not profitable. Don’t tell me to quit because I won’t. What are other ways to generate income?”

Exercise

Identify systemic barriers

“People in South King County are taking three buses and walking a mile to get to a farm and then work. Showing up to farm a ¼ acre or less that has been intensively produced on and needs a lot of remediation. A farmer in a situation like that is put in an awful position.”

Land Access Barriers



Land Access Barriers - *Financial Readiness*

Institutional definition of “business viability”

“In order to access resources you have to be a ‘viable business’, but this is racialized bias. Technical assistance providers don’t condition you to viability. They are dismissive. They don’t believe you can succeed or in what you do.”

“I don’t believe incubator farms are working. They are not moving anyone to financial readiness. In terms of financial readiness for long term lease, purchase or credit readiness, I feel stuck with nonprofit landlords as my only way to move our work forward. The web of dependency between land access and nonprofits is not meeting my needs or those of farmers that I know.”

Land Access Barriers - Financial Readiness

Farming as a social justice goal

“Experiencing precarity for having a social mission is a systemic barrier. I shouldn’t need to build the case that this type of work is needed to access capital and support.”

“It’s hard to be a farmer and survive with this profession as a sole livelihood. I’m navigating it (systemic barriers) by luck and thanking the universe, a high level of curiosity and resilience.”



Land Access Barriers - *Financial Readiness*

“We need a narrative shift around ‘readiness’. When all your choices are bad, can you even be ready? Farmers need a universal basic income, a salary just to farm (\$30K/ yr flat rate) plus canceling student debt, and having secure housing. Help support folks with zoning; make sure it’s not financially impossible to put a house in the farm. This is all necessary when food prices don’t reflect the cost of production, and we don’t want food to be a luxury item.”

Land Access Barriers - Searching for Land

**Fear of Landlords
(typically white)**

**Navigating the system
to acquire land**

*“There is lack of education in the
process to acquire land.”*

“There is a lot of technical jargon.”

**Feeling Unsafe
(particularly in a rural environment)**

“The location where the land is usually in rural, conservative areas.”



*“Rural areas in WA are white, conservative and hostile.
The population shift to black and brown communities is very slow
because it is too expensive and unsafe.”*

Land Access Barriers - *Searching for Land*

Lack of housing at the farm

Lack of autonomy to make decisions concerning land use

Water (utility) challenges

**Land is not farmable or demands
□ resources + time investments**

“Municipal water is too expensive.”

Collective farming areas are already maxed for irrigation limits, despite having additional space to farm.

Can't take infrastructure investments in lease land

Land Access Barriers - Affordability

It's difficult for marginalized individuals to afford land

*“I have been leaning on cooperative models and started a collective land ownership discussion with other farmers. **The 6 to 8 farmers don't qualify alone for a farm loan; it takes all of them to put a proposal together**, which is a burden in figuring out that intimacy level, exit plans, etc. It is a beautiful thing, but with a lot of extra work.”*

Land Access Barriers - Affordability

↑ Cost of Land

So, what does affordability mean, then?

“There is no affordable land.”

“Affordable means free or extremely low cost.”

“BIPOC can’t compete with developers.”

*“If I had to put a price on a lease:
\$300-500 / year per acre max, including water.”*

“Affordability is relative when prices keep going up.”

“I imagine affordable land access as systems of public investment that don’t presently exist.”

“Affordability will never be accessible to me in WA.”

“Let’s instead talk about reparations and rematriations as land access to BIPOC folks.”

Land Access Barriers - Security

Scarce Long-term Leases

“ I have seen long term leases as options, but marginalized folks get marginalized land; that gives no security when rehabilitation of the land takes 2-3 years and by that time, usually the lease is over.

On top of this, we have climate change and are already seeing heat domes, droughts, and flooding.

What does secure mean in that context?

We need to think about climate change, water rights, and political shifts.”

Leasing Agreement Support



“Security means that everything is laid out on the lease after having sat down with a lawyer or someone knowledgeable that helps advocate for you and sits down to really understand the terms of the lease; they would consider what terms are non-negotiable to you, what happens if the landowner dies, etc.”

Land Access Barriers - Security

Real Estate Development

“Pressure from real estate development cannot be ignored. We need more money (from governments and nonprofits) to compete with real estate.”



Land Access Barriers - Security

‘What does security mean to you?’

“Farmland in perpetuity.”

“A Community Land Trust for BIPOC.”

“Cross-organizing with others towards security.”

“Security has to do more with social conditions than financial (aspects). Farming in peace without the police being called, weapons brought or other intimidation tactics. I don’t see myself leaving the peri-urban area. I see security in farming as a community place - a personal circle of safety for us and visitors with farmland tenure.”

Land Access Barriers - Security

Accessing State and Federal Programs

Eligibility requirements - “*Prior distribution experience’ was required and even though we were doing last mile distribution, we still didn’t qualify.*”

Program types - “*Resources available through USDA, like EQIP, are for land owners. We need more programs for people who are renting land.*”

Applications - “*Paperwork is complex to intentionally keep some folks out.*”

The following words were used to describe the experience with applications:

“painful experience”

“too complex”

“impenetrable paperwork”

“too much time”

“not straightforward”

Land Access Barriers - Security

Accessing State and Federal Programs

Applications (cont.)

“Service providers are so removed from the land and what farmers go through that it is difficult to understand that a million forms and timelines are difficult to follow. But this shouldn’t be a barrier to meaningfully engage.”

The Role of Service Providers

Informed by interviews

Historic engagement - *Prior negative experiences*

- Not hearing back from service providers.
- Surveillance with cameras; lack of trust.
- Acquiring or wanting credit for BIPOC accomplishments or material(s) developed (e.g. curriculum).
- Lending practices have generally been negative for BIPOC folks. There is distrust in lending institutions.
- Being offered land that is not farmable or that requires a lot of work and investment to make it farmable.
- Not being allowed to lease land in an incubator farm without going through their practicum, despite farmer having gone through a different practicum program and having a business plan.
- Transferring from one incubator to another and being told by the new program farm manager that they didn't know why they were trying to farm was a painful and traumatizing experience.

Historic engagement - *Things that are NOT working*

- “Technical assistance providers are not looking to make things equitable; they/their organizations are focused on the ‘feel good’ from we helped this many BIPOC farmers.”
- “Some technical assistance providers don’t see themselves as service providers; they see themselves as gatekeepers. They don’t approach their work from the ‘I’ll meet you where you are at’ point of view.”
- “Unqueer processes”
- Making assumptions (racialized bias), being dismissive and sharing negative comments.
- “(Institutional) Food Systems and agriculture have explicitly excluded the level of mutual aid support of technical assistance, and rather source complex models and resources like NRCS and USDA.”
- “‘One type of model, one type of land access fits all’ mentality.”
- Incubator program evicting families.



“Technical assistantship has not been culturally relevant.”

“You can’t train cultural competency into people who are not from those cultures. You can’t train cultural empathy to people who can’t relate to the lived experiences of folks in marginalized communities. This doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t educate (people from outside those communities), but they need to bring new people into their organizations that belong to those communities.”

Self-improvement - *Things that marginalized folks wish you understood*

- Understand why you are doing this work.
- “Who you are / The real you, is going to come out eventually. This is not just about relationship building. If you are not in it to meaningfully help people, then don’t even show up; don’t waste their time.”
- “Understand that you are working with people for which these conversations are heart-hitting issues.”
- Be prepared to be honest and vulnerable. You don’t have to know all the answers.
- “The only difference between the technical assistance provider and the farmer is power. Technical assistance providers have to be an extension of the farmer.”
- Understand how life changing your decisions can be, especially for BIPOC. “Folks are looking for a hand in, not a hand out. Just asking for an open door: Can you help unlock the door?”
- Knowing that the power you hold perpetuates systems of white supremacy and hold people of color back.
- Focus on building trust and know your/your organization’s history of discriminatory practices.
- Only offering support on business plans and finances is dehumanizing.

Taking it to the next level- *Things marginalized folks wish you'd work on* AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

- Be open to conversations to dismantle systems of oppression.
- “Need empathic people. Don’t want allies, but people who ‘get it’ and not just feel like they have to do this work. Need people that understand emotional and spiritual stress.”
- Ongoing, continued self-education in Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. “Stay relevant; things are always changing.”
- Create conditions for safety; go to their community and don’t expect them to go to you.
- “Technical assistance providers need to care about their jobs. Take time to ask questions and learn about the farmer - humanize the situation.” Try to understand what they want to do and why. Ask questions to better understand the farmers goals and the best way to be helpful.
- Provide one-on-one technical assistance for applications (e.g. USDA programs, such as Coronavirus Food Assistance Program) and be clear about deadlines.
- Do more work on facilitating the land inquiry or land purchase / transaction. Don’t just share the listing of land.
- “Share with beginning farmers that there are water and soil tests that they should do prior to leasing or purchasing land; help them do it, as well as their food safety plan development. And if you can’t do it, point them to someone who can.”

Taking it to the next level- *Things marginalized folks wish you'd work on*

AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

→ “I wish technical assistance providers would see themselves as care workers or case workers.

“Someone who is mentoring me and be in the room with me with the NRCS or whomever, while moving at the speed of trust, with patience, working on developing the relationship; they got to want to develop a relationship. But understand too, that some farmers are not going to be interested in developing a relationship: some will just want the resources, connections, and support and they would be done.”



▲ Yolimar engaging with Pablo Silva of Silva Family Farm.

Roland Dahwen Wu

Taking it to the next level - *Things marginalized folks wish you'd work on* AT THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

“Currently, (historically white-led) organizations are not well positioned to do case management; they need to develop their programs differently, from a Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) approach with trained JEDI advocates and lived experience. Asking questions that use a **human dignity approach**, like:

- How do you get to the farm?
- Do you have a vehicle for transport? Is that resource stable and safe? If not, let's find a way so that it is.
- What is your experience in food access at home?
- Do you get to eat the produce you grow?

(Historically white-led) Organizations are not capable of providing this level of care support, but people in our marginalized communities have been doing it and would love to do paid work.”

Taking it to the next level - *Things marginalized folks wish you'd work on*

AT THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

- “How can we get more brown technical assistance providers to support BIPOC farmers?” “I wish technical assistantship would be provided by another person of color who values you, understands you, and understands why you do this.”
- Equity training. Add this to your annual budget!
- Commitment to JEDI work (not white saviorism).
- Allocate resources (time, land, money) and help shift power to marginalized folks.
- Properly resource technical assistance providers and ensure they have reasonable workloads.
- Reimagine technical assistantship to be supported via peer to peer; farmers mentoring farmers.
- Train technical assistance providers to understand what a 100 year floodplain is and to know whether they are pairing folks with a viable piece of land. Get them to know which county programs, USDA programs, etc. there are of use/help to the farmer.

Taking it to the next level - *Things marginalized folks wish you'd work on* AT THE SYSTEMS LEVEL

- “I want to see a new wave of technical assistance providers that specialize in working with marginalized communities (BIPOC, LGTBQ+, and others).”
- Need folks to work on policies change.
- Keep farmers at the table and decision-making; particularly around policies.
- Work towards farmer sovereignty - farmers making decisions about their farming: “For farmers, by farmers.”
- *“Remember that this is an intergenerational, long term journey of dismantling barriers and systems of oppression. Be okay with not being able to change things within your lifetime.”*

Taking it to the next level - Things marginalized folks wish you'd work on

AT THE SYSTEMS LEVEL

“Need movement across technical assistance providers to establish 503c4 political organizing and come out of the shadows.

One of the best things that could happen is to bring new people that have different backgrounds and do things in a different way that is relevant to the community. (Historically white-led) organizations need to come up with plans and ideas to transfer the power that they hold (training, positions, data). They need to create opportunities for grassroots leaders to learn the skills and have them train their people (train the trainer).

We also need increased transparency. This FNG curriculum, for example, is happening in close quarters and the information is not easily accessible to organizers in the community.”

Homework Activity (Journal)

- What actions will you take to dismantle systemic barriers to land access? What does accountability look like for you? *Think about org level, systems level, individual level.*
- What aspects of your work and approach will you continue to practice, and what do you need to leave behind?



Complicit

Questioning

Dismantling

Frontlines



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