

# INSIGHT 06

## THERE IS A NEED FOR A STRONGER AND SHARED ANALYSIS ON CHARITY VS. JUSTICE AS IT RELATES TO FOOD SYSTEMS CHANGE.

During this process, we developed two codes that often overlapped. “Charity” is defined as the giving of food and/or financial resources. “Saviorism” is working to uplift or help others while denying the agency and leadership of those they aim to help.

Although charity is sometimes considered the opposite of justice, that is not necessarily true. This insight explores the differences and similarities between the two concepts. It is also important to differentiate between charity and rapid response within the food system.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there were several programs that provided financial support and food to businesses, individuals, and communities across the state. However, the North Carolina Food System Resilience Strategy Report<sup>4</sup> highlights that even short-term charitable deeds take accountability off of state and federal governments to create solutions that would alleviate the need for rapid response.

How charity is perceived depends on the intent of how food and compensation is given. Charity can be seen as problematic, or it can be considered mutual aid. If the voice that is guiding the work isn't from inside the community, the perspective is clouded and usually leads to charity work. Charity work in the system often perpetuates more charity. It creates a cycle of dependency within communities by not addressing long-term inequities.

Youth/elder identity conversations revealed differences in how charity was viewed. Elders would rather work for what they have than receive charity. In contrast, youth emphasized the importance of charitable giving when discussing the success of donating food to different communities.

**“A truly equitable food system is where we’re supporting the farmers because they’re selling the produce we want, not just doing it for charity work.”**

- YOUTH\*

**“There is certainly hope for that [paying for health instead of healthcare] but we all know this is a systemic problem, which means it has to have a systemic solution. The food banks, speaking from our [local food bank] point of view, should not be part of the system, but we’ve [local food bank] become part of the system.”**

- ELDER\*

4 [https://wfpc.sanford.duke.edu/sites/wfpc.sanford.duke.edu/files/NCFoodResiliencyStrategy-August-2021\\_0.pdf](https://wfpc.sanford.duke.edu/sites/wfpc.sanford.duke.edu/files/NCFoodResiliencyStrategy-August-2021_0.pdf)

Recognizing historical and systemic oppression, and providing the access to resources that communities ask for to support themselves, was seen as the first step towards justice.

The quantity of resources, collaborations, and volunteers for emergency food programs have increased in response to COVID 19. The quality has shifted with funder flexibility, delivery format, types of foods offered, etc. Although we heard sentiments of gratitude, there were also concerns expressed about how to leverage the innovation from the pandemic into future action.

Some participants stated being proud of this service, without connecting the failures within the system that create and perpetuate the need. Race was discussed by participants regarding the support of BIPOC farmers in 2020 as justice in response to recognizing historical disinvestment and disproportionate investment.

A societal conversation is needed to address the size of our charitable food systems and how we can shift towards solutions to hunger centered around justice. We have to stop viewing food as an independent/ individual problem and see it as a societal issue. There is a systemic and historical context related to hunger, and it's time to make the shift to seeing food as a right. This raised the question, what if we expected people to have access to food as a right that is not determined by your ability to work or produce? Additionally, in what ways are gatherings, collaborations, or group programs perpetuating ideas of a charity mindset or serving as opportunities to create systemic shifts?



### **Calls to Action:**

- We need a cultural and policy shift towards viewing food as a fundamental right and fair wages/compensation for agricultural work as a priority.
- Representation of community needs at the policy level by individuals that are members of those communities is crucial.
- We need to have a framework for food justice and mutual aid that benefits communities more than charity and reliance on rapid response. Promoting small farms was also a suggested approach to responding to future disasters and crises.