Making Research Actionable: Insights from a participatory scenario planning process to improve the Flint food system

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Background

The Flint Leverage Points Project (2018-2023) is a community-engaged research partnership between Michigan State University and the Community Foundation of Greater Flint aimed to identify ways to improve the Flint food system

Guiding Question How can researchers translate academic findings into actionable outcomes that can inform community decision-making?

- Illustrate a novel participatory scenario planning method
- Synthesizing results into actionable strategies for community-led change
- Share community-defined scenarios

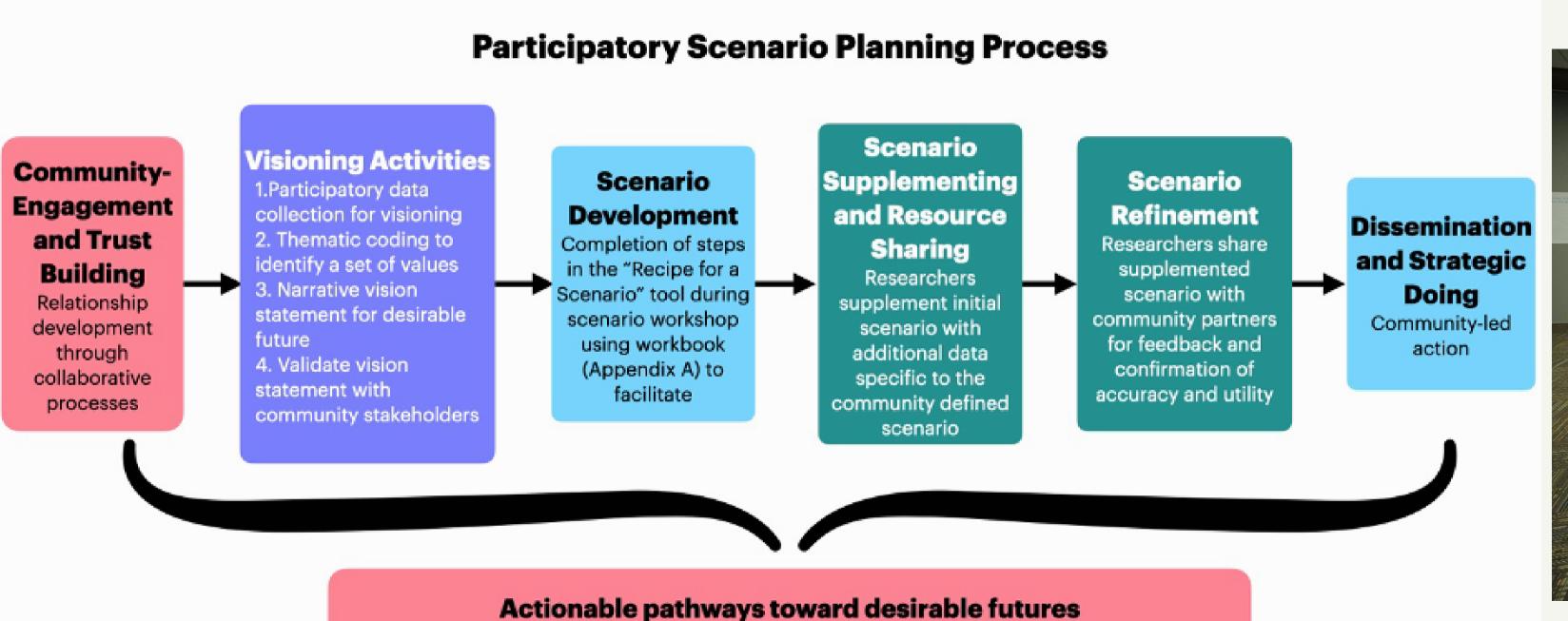
Key Definitions

<u>Scenarios:</u> Storylines that descripe a plausible and desirable future system and the steps that can be used to achieve them

Participatory Scenario Planning: Collaborative process in which community partners co-produce actionable pathways to achieve positive change, considering a 20-year time horizon (2042)

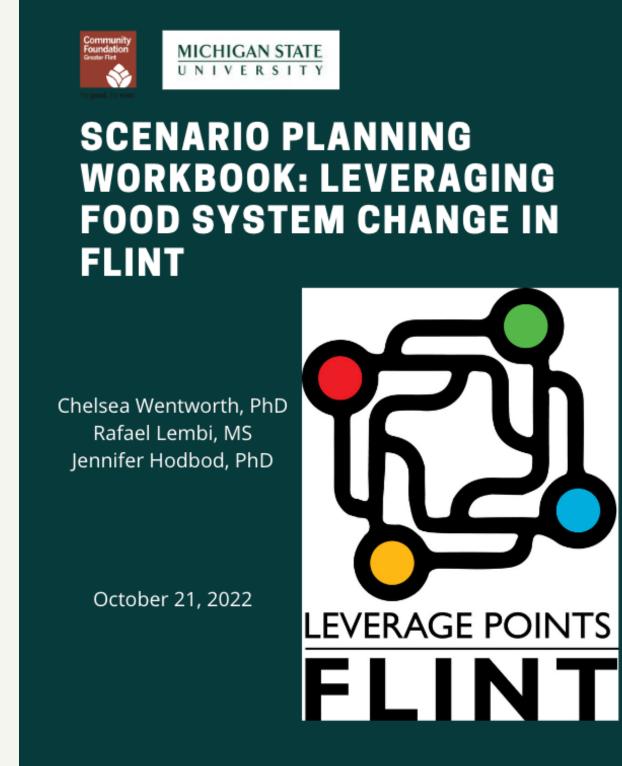
Method

- Conducted participatory scenario planning workshop October 2022.
- 19 stakeholders in Flint food system.
- Used workbook tool and cooking metaphor "Recipe for a Scenario" for facilitation.
- Qualitatively analyzed workshop transcripts





Workshop at the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan



Workbook for workshop facilitation

<u>Summary of resulting scenarios from the workshop</u>

"Community Unity"

Currently: Limited resources and silos put organizations in competition for funding, promoting self-interested collaboration and limiting system-level innovations. **Desirable Future:** Community service providers collaborate with resource providers, government, nonprofits, residents, faith-based organizations and retail for mutual benefit, achieving authentic community-based



"Empowering Choices"

Currently: Focus on emergency food and meeting immediate needs limits work that will transform the food system and achieve equity and food sovereignty.

Desirable Future: With increased resident direction, control, and ownership, the food system improves food access to achieve equity, social, and economic justice for residents.

Detailed scenario report can be found at: www.canr.msu.edu/FlintFood



this scenario is keeping people engaged in eating healthier foods through cooking, gardening, and shopping. We will do this by ensuring a variety of foods and food processing and cooking equipment is available, sharing community knowledge, and ensure overall community value of food that respects quality of life for all involved in the food system. To achieve this we will engage in gathering resident participation, ongoing evaluation of community needs and resources and ensuring choices are appealing to residents. By 2042, when the scenario is achieved, the food available in Flint is reflective of community desires and needs. The choices of food available meet desires/needs so that

people are empowered to cook, garden, and make healthy choices. The process of food system change helps people **Sunderstand the urgency to make change while** understanding the reality of daily life, so people can continue these activities far into the future.

"Nutrition, Equity, and Justice"

Currently: The food system is focused on supplying emergency food, rather than preventing need, due to current high demand

and needs of community. **Desirable Future:** Food system changes reduce the need to access emergency food services like food banks and soup kitchens for greater food independence, and resident food equity.

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Actionable pathway written by Participants: In Flint, there is a need to lift people out of poverty and out of the trauma caused by numerous crises (e.g., GM closures, Water Crisis, COVID-19). Lots of programs come and go, but still, they are "only scratching the surface on something that could be bigger". Therefore, there is a need to foster collaboration across the different groups and organizations working in Flint to achieve bigger, systemic results. To address this issue, this scenario proposes the creation of a working group (or several working groups) in the spirit of authentic collaboration. One of the participants describes authentic collaboration in the following way: "if you authentically collaborate, you don't give up ownership of anything. You leverage your ownership with somebody else's ownership to achieve a greater result." Although framed as a working group, this scenario is focused on using it as a starting point to go beyond and foster a movement and the creation of a community gathering point. The group summarizes the scenarios in the following way: "We gather the community in spirit of authentic collaboration to ensure nutrition, equity and justice across the underserved. The efforts must be informed and co-created by

persons experiencing food insecurity and food injustice. We are

and capacity into actionable steps towards shared promising

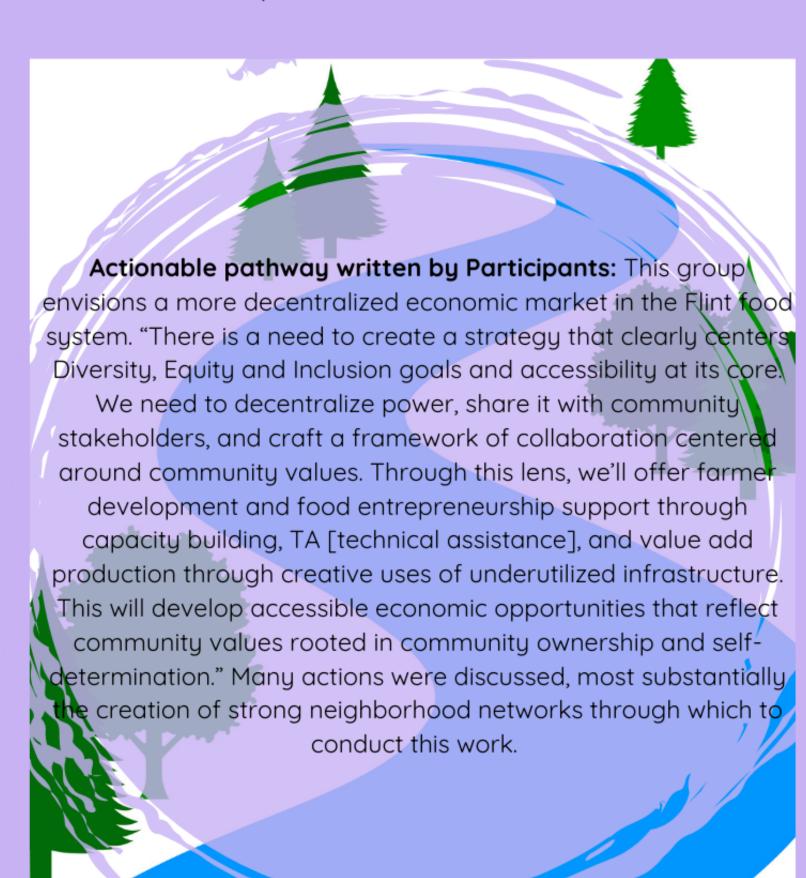
going to invite people to be a part of the solution by building trust

<u>"The People's Market"</u>

Currently: Economic investment heavily focuses on emergency food distribution rather than preventing need. Jobs are low-paying and ownership of the food system lies with people outside of Flint. Desirable Future: Drawing on the many assets within our community, future economic investment results in Flint-based ownership within the food system. Economic development fosters cultural growth, is culturally appropriate and improves quality of

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life for all residents.



Key Lessons

- · Our context-specific approach to participatory scenario planning enabled creative and engaging conversations about how to achieve a desirable future for the food system in Flint driven by participant voices.
- Our workbook tool effectively structured conversations resulting in the above actionable pathways towards positive futures, linked to leverage points and detailed recommendations in the full scenario reports.
- The co-creation of scenarios enabled participants to gain understanding of previous research findings and translate them into actionable strategies for positive food system change.

