Food insecurity and the community aspect of food

Gustav Chu-Ling February 2022

Te Puna Whakaaronui

Contents

The symbiotic relationship between people and food

"The recovery of the people is tied to the recovery of food, since food itself is medicine; not only for the body, but for the soul, food is the spiritual connection to history, ancestors and the land."

Winona LaDuke in Recovering the Sacred

For many communities, food is much more than simply sustenance, food is an integral part of culture and cannot be separated from a broader context – where you live or the economy of the time. In a 2021 report the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) focused on Indigenous Peoples' food systems, noting that their food production systems were geared towards not harming the environment and striving to maintain the biological diversity of that locale[1].

An example of this deeply entrenched social and cultural community significance can be seen in the symbiotic relationship between people and food in Pacific communities. Here, food is seen as a crucial feature of an ecosystem which binds people from different walks of life and preserves sociocultural norms[2]. For Pacific people, food is tied to cultural norms and practices such as respect, whereby the best crops and cuts of meat are reserved for honored guests[3]. Thus, food surpasses mere calorific needs and operates to sustain, maintain, and promote cultural norms by way of sharing knowledge/stories, and often signifies an event – one that is celebrated and crucially connected to food.

Similarly, in New Zealand, Māori have traditionally practiced manaakitanga (through sharing) when it comes to food[4]. The sharing of kai (food) is thought to not only sustain our physical bodies but facilitate knowledge sharing and a sense of connection to one's culture and others. Food is an extension of sociocultural norms such as cohesion and belief that an individual has a key role to play in the health of the wider community[5]. Therefore, in the context of food – from the gathering, to the hunting, preparation, and consumption, it is thought that one should be "hospitable to visitors, and (care) for people through sharing food"[6].

However, traditional values and sociocultural significance ascribed to food by various communities has been impacted by the modern food system. Under the modern food system, there are increased food miles, an emphasis on productivity which results in environmental degradation, and a focus on maximizing yield.

This contrasts with traditional views and practices of Maori and Pacific people in relation to food. The modern food system has distanced people from food and has redefined and impacted the community and cultural aspect of food. Furthermore, under the modern food system communities such as Maori and Pacific tend to be disproportionately represented in food insecurity numbers.

Food insecurity - a particular challenge for some cultures

Various communities who ascribe deep rooted meaning to food, such as Maori and Pacific communities, experience varying degrees of food insecurity.

2015/16 food insecurity numbers:
- One in five children live in homes which experience severe to moderate food insecurity
- Most prominent amongst Maori and Pacific children (figure 1 and 2)[7]

2020/21 food insecurity numbers:
- One in seven children live in homes which experience severe to moderate food insecurity [8]
- Increase in prominence of food insecurity among Maori and Pacific children (from 28% to 30%) and (37% to 45%).

[1] https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/cb5131en-compressed%20%281%29.pdf

[2] https://ana.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/PacificfoodsecurityreportfinalMarch09_3.pdf

[3] https://spccfpstore1.blob.core.windows.net/digitallibrary-docs/files/fb/fb0721565ed28e6cf962cb5fa94fb12d.pdf?sv=2015-12-11&sr=b&sig=Pigcbtw1avcXHB2JZbi2IhkvSOASEpYg000kiTiyXxo%3D&se=2022-08-05T23%3A21%3A50Z&sp=r&rscc=public%2C%20max-age%3D864000%2C%20max-stale%3D86400&rsct=application%2Fpdf&rscd=inline%3B%20filename%3D%22227128_1999_Pacific_foods_the_staples_we%20eat_col.pdf%22

[4] https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1747-0080.2012.01618.x

[5] http://familycentre.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Socio-cultural-factors-associated-with-food-security-and-physical-activity-for-Maori-and-Pacific-people-in-Aotearoa-New-Zealand-Final-HRC-report.pdf

[6] Ibid

[7] https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/household-food-insecurity-among-children-new-zealand-health-survey-jun19.pdf

[8] https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/annual-update-key-results-2020-21-new-zealand-health-survey#_ftn2

The impacts of food insecurity on the symbiotic relationships of Maori and Pacific people to food:

- **Food insecurity impacts self-determination**
- **Impacts well-being e.g. social welling and shame associated with inability to provide food for family**
- **Erodes mauri or life force of kai:**
- **an essential Maori philosophy**
- **Increases need for government support and dependency on food parcels**
- **Grows disconnect of people and food**
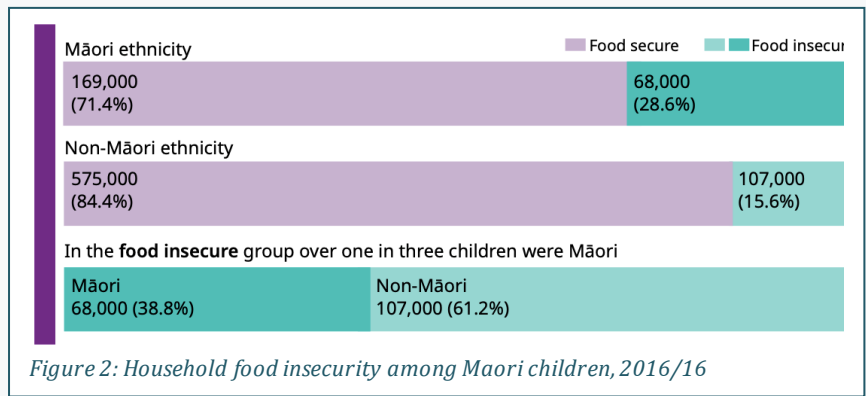- **Link to poor overall health**

Figure 2: Household food insecurity among Maori children, 2016/16
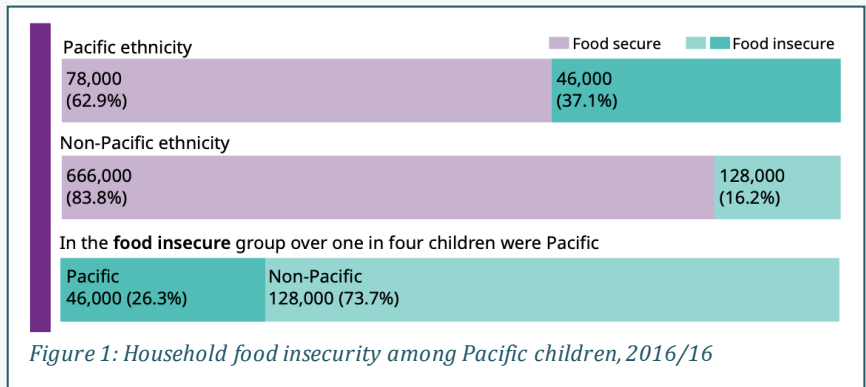

Figure 1: Household food insecurity among Pacific children, 2016/16

Context and focus

This report focusses specifically on South Auckland as a case study. South Auckland is a densely populated urban area with significant levels of food insecurity, and a highly diverse ethnic mix[9]. This region is home to an array of organisations that work tirelessly to address food related issues different communities may face. The intent of this report is to provide insight into the work of different organisations supporting those most susceptible to food insecurity, and to consider how food insecurity erodes the communal context that different communities ascribe to food.

What is food security?

Food security has a range of definitions, from the simple "all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access', to 'sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet dietary needs for a productive and healthy life'[10,] or a more holistic definition where it is 'not only about food – it is about resilient communities, adequate housing and income, affordable food, short supply lines, access to land and knowledge to grow kai and more.[11] This report utilises the latter definition of food security to understand the context of food insecurity in South Auckland. This definition recognises the broader importance of food and how the absence of food security often times impacts various communities in different ways – a central focus of this report.

Why is food insecurity a 'wicked issue'?

Food insecurity is often defined as not having enough appropriate food. Others define food insecurity as the lack of access to safe and nutritionally adequate foods which is obtained in a socially acceptable manner and meets cultural needs. For the Kore Hiakai Zero Hunger Collective, food insecurity is inherently tied to systemic issues such as cost of living and inadequate income. Despite slight variation in defining food insecurity, one thing is for certain – food insecurity is a 'wicked issue'. This references the complex and evolving nature of food insecurity – be its causes, drivers, and or possible short-term and long-term solutions, food insecurity is an issue which requires collective, co-ordinated, and societal action. Addressing food insecurity cannot be the role of a single organisation, nor can it be addressed holistically without highlighting systemic issues which plague the lives of those who are food insecure.

[9] https://www.newsroom.co.nz/food-parcel-demand-soars-in-lockdown
[10] https://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/food_security.shtml
[11]https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e8e4bf34078e655d8150f64/t/60aafe1ad9e07e2ed6fa7fc2/1621818927003/Food+Insecurity+and+Food+Security+-+definitions+May+2021.pdf

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Ripple effect on community and health

In '*Erosion of community and self-determination*', Jackson and Graham (2017), outline that families who are food insecure experience severe feelings of stigma and shame due to not being able to provide enough food, nor quality food, for their children[12]. At a community level, feelings of alienation from the community become pronounced as parents may be viewed as inadequate for not being able to provide food for their children.

This social exclusion can have a flow on effect, children who come from food insecure homes may not be able to participate in events such as shared school lunches. This impacts the whole family, who may develop an overwhelmingly negative sense of their social identity (how people perceive them)[13]. Similarly, there is the possibility that feelings of alienation and stigma may also lead to the erosion of self-determination.

For example, this may occur when people experiencing food insecurity feel like their situation and experience of being food insecure is viewed negatively by the wider community. Often food insecure people may hold the belief that the community views food insecurity as the result of personal actions or lack of ambition to better one's situation[14]. Those experiencing food insecurity often feel that the wider community view them as a burden on society and/or people who expect handouts. This view is detrimental to the establishment of social networks, which are already fractured and or non-existent for those experiencing food insecurity. Thus, food insecurity only further deepens their social exclusion (figure 3).

Figure 3: Impact of food insecurity on community and self-determination

Short term impacts:

- childhood development: food insecurity poses a threat to healthy development as it impacts diet due to lack of access to nutritious foods such as fruits and vegetables[15]. This has flow on effects in school settings – where learning and intellectual development become difficult for students who are food insecure;

- higher rates of stress in households who report food insecurity in comparison to food secure households[16]; and

- childhood obesity: due to insufficient fruit and vegetable intake, greater access to unhealthy foods such as fast foods and fizzy drinks. Children from a young age build unhealthy eating habits which compound childhood obesity issues.

Long-term impacts:

- obesity: link between food insecurity – lack of access to food and nutritious foods – is linked to adverse health impacts such as obesity[17];

- a range of non-communicable diseases: e.g heart attack, stroke, and diabetes[18].

- negative generational impacts on physical, mental and emotional health[19].

[12] https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Rebekah-Graham-2/publication/319723002_When_dollar_loaves_are_all_you_have_Experiences_of_food_insecurity_in_Hamilton_New_Zealand/links/59bb00e0a6fdcca8e55dec0e/When-dollar-loaves-are-all-you-have-Experiences-of-food-insecurity-in-Hamilton-New-Zealand.pdf
[13] https://journals-sagepub-com.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/doi/pdf/10.1177/1049732308330246
[14] Ibid
[15] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/1177083X.2017.1398175
[16] https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/household-food-insecurity-among-children-new-zealand-health-survey-jun19.pdf
[17] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/1177083X.2017.1398175
[18] https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/brief-evidence-reviews-well-child-tamariki-ora-programme.pdf
[19] Ibid

Foodbanks face 'staggering' need from struggling families as cost of living (and) covid bite hard.
– Stuff

Tackling South Auckland's food insecurity crisis
– Scoop

The land of plenty, just not for many
– Newsroom

There's something wrong when we're feeding the world, but our own people go hungry
– Stuff

The food problem NZ should not have
– The NZ herald

Lockdown extension has south Auckland food banks bracing for increased demand
– Stuff

Key drivers of food insecurity identified by South Auckland organisations

In order to understand some of the driving forces of food insecurity, this report draws upon critical discussions with various organisations to garner their experiences supporting those most at risk. These driving factors provide a general outline of the current food insecurity landscape of South Auckland and aspects which lead to, sustain and maintain food insecurity.

Disconnect to food: the distancing of food insecurity

The Papatoetoe Food Hub shared their opinion that food insecurity is linked to a lack of connection to the land and, as such, there is a disconnection between people and food. For the Papatoetoe Food Hub, whenua (land) is a pivotal element which many people who interact with the Hub do not possess. Land, or the lack thereof, determines the ability of families and communities to grow their own food. The Food Hub identify this as a key barrier which limits the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and establishment of organic networks between people that growing food can facilitate and encourage.

For the Papatoetoe Food Hub, land is not merely a space to grow food. Land, no matter the size, fosters social networks and engagement with the Hub and encourages the exchange of knowledge on the processes of growing, harvesting and maintaining crops. Social networks and engagement with food processes are key focusses of the Papatoetoe Food Hub. This view is shared by the Kore Hiakai Zero Hunger Collective; who say that community networks are vital for food sovereignty and access to food that is culturally relevant[20].

The issue of food sovereignty was also highlighted by the Papatoetoe Food Hub as something they aim to address. Food sovereignty is the ability of people to determine what, how and when they consume culturally relevant food(s). The quote below epitomizes their ethos and view that the disconnection of land and people operates to further the issue of food insecurity. This situation is far from an easy fix. Papatoetoe Food Hub, recognises that the issue of food (in)security is significant and requires local and national efforts to resolve. But for them, little by little, from small size gardens to potentially acres of cultivable land, they strive to connect people with food and to cultivate networks which foster and build social cohesion.

> *"What comes from the whenua, goes back to the whenua."*
>
> *– Papatoetoe Food Hub*

Differing norms: generational differences, and information silos

In their work with different communities and various age groups, organisations such as the Supreme Sikh Society of New Zealand and the Salvation Army pinpoint differences in norms as contributing factors to food insecurity. In the experience of the Sikh Society, older generations are more able to prepare meals from scratch and/or meals using limited ingredients in comparison to younger generations. They consider that differences in diets, where younger generations tend to adopt more western and fast-food inclusive meals, aids in growing the generatonal gap in regard to food. The food parcels they provide can be less useful for younger generations during times of crisis, such as COVID-19.

For the Salvation Army, differing norms between them and other organisations creates a fragmented picture of the current state of food insecurity. They say that in past times, there was more collaboration and transparency between organisations providing food support – which enabled collective efforts which were targeted and relevant to different individuals and families. However, now there is more fragmentation, and a growing gap in different norms such as assessment criteria's (e.g who is eligible for a food parcel), the Salvation Army argue this aids in creating food parcel dependency and can prolong the reliance of an individual or family on food parcels.

> *"Inequity is a long term and increasing problem in Aotearoa New Zealand, and one vital sign of inequity is food security. It is complex and there is no easy solution – but that does not mean we do nothing"*
>
> **Elaine Rush, Professor of Nutrition, Auckland University of Technology**

Food insecurity – a dynamic issue

A common theme in my discussions with different organisations is that – at a single time – many of those who experience food insecurity – are simultaneously experiencing reduced working hours and thus reduced income, people face increased need for more food due to COVID-19 lockdowns and kids being at home, and many individuals and families maybe relying on different government benefits. In light of COVID-19, my discussion with the South Auckand Foodbank found that a vast majority of food parcel recipients were wage earners who have lost their job due to the coronavirus, have had reduced working hours and or have a partner who has lost their job due to the pandemic. Lastly, along with wage earners, those on government beneficiaries were another majority whom rely on food parcels. For some beneficiary recipients, the 2021 Christmas period proved even more of a challenge than usual. With the Ministry of Social Development reporting a high number applications for different grants[21], and Work and Income experiencing delays over the Christmas break in regard to food grants, the South Auckland Foodbank show that many people had to wait as long as six days for a food grant. Thus, for many people assistance from the Foodbank was their only option. Addressing a highly complex issue: the work of different organisations supporting the most vulnerable

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[20] https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e8e4bf34078e655d8150f64/t/60aafe1ad9e07e2ed6fa7fc2/1621818927003/Food+Insecurity+and+Food+Security+-+definitions+May+2021.pdf

[21] https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/statistics/covid-19/the-impacts-of-covid-19-on-one-off-hardship-assistance.pdf

The Papatoetoe Food Hub: a space building food resilience

Conceptualised in 2017, the Papatoetoe Food Hub (PFH) has grown leaps and bounds. A community-led enterprise, with a focus on rescuing food and turning them into affordable meals for the community, PFH has rescued and repurposed 18.6 tons of food (September 2019 to May 2021)[22]. Partnering with more than thirty organisation's such as local schools, universities, and government agencies, PFH not only provide affordable food to the community – they hold on-site learning about traditional Maori and Pacific methods of cooking. They teach about connections between culture and food, and celebrate the diversity of South Auckland by holding cultural events, vital for maintaining the community aspect of food.

The 2021 PFH report shows that the Hub provides a space where the ingredients for transformative change are able to gel and mix together; PFH is supported by various (local and central) governments, has embedded structural and relational capacities, and works with different communities to build food resilience through equipping them with the knowledge to grow their own food and learn about the whakapapa (genealogy) of kai (food) [23]. This then provides a gateway for the connection and re-connection of Maori and Pacific people to food and the processes involved.

Figure 4: The Papatoetoe food hub approach

Salvation Army: breaking cycles of food parcel dependency

The work(s) of the Salvation Army is well documented and large scale[24], with support provided for various issues such as poverty, alcoholism and food insecurity, the Salvation Army are an important organisation which supports some of the most vulnerable communities across New Zealand. In my discussion with key members of the Salvation Army, a complex balancing act was revealed in supporting vulnerable individuals and communities (table 1).

On the one hand, the Salvation Army recognise that many people whom experience food insecurity prior to COVID-19 will now be struggling even more, and the unprecedented nature of COVID-19 has placed even more income stress on individuals and families to meet food needs. Thus, food parcels are still an immediate short-term option which is provided. However, on the other hand, 'dependent cycles' wherein people become reliant and or willingly choose to rely on food parcels is something that is pinpointed as a shift which needs to occur in the food security space. Dependent cycles do not allow for self-determination nor long-term alleviation of food insecurity.

Thus, for the Salvation Army it's about building independence and shifting away from food parcel dependency. Those most in need of support are provided a wide range of help in other areas, be it financially or otherwise, the Salvation Army recognise that food insecurity is an outcome of various inter-connected factors – therefore, they provide food advice and guidance around bulk buying, preservation of food, and general support with mental and physical well-being.

Support from Salvation Army	Breaking dependency
Food parcels	An immediate need for food often times prolongs the reliance of people on food parcels. To address this, the Salvation Army have scaled back on the volume of food parcels provided and have implemented stricter assessment criteria's in regard to who is eligible for food parcels. This scaling back is accompanied by increased support in regard to mental, physical, spiritual, and financial support in the form of counselling, advice, guidance and mentoring.

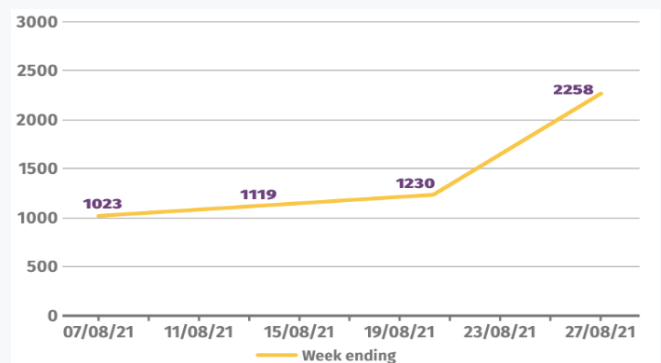Table 1: balance between providing support and breaking food parcel dependency

Figure 5: Salvation Army national food parcel distribution[25]

Keeping up with unprecedented food supply need

Supporting some of the most vulnerable South Auckland communities, the South Auckland Christian Foodbank have rallied together to meet food demands in times filled with uncertainty due to COVID-19. From supporting those who have lost their jobs, and or have had reduction in working hours, many of those whom face food needs are supported by the South Auckland Christian Foodbank.

[22]https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5cf74c8f2829e20001db724f/t/615122798e6b8d0a91c4a088/1632707207029/Papatoetoe+Food+Hub+Report+FINAL.pdf

[23] Such as where, who, and how food is grown

[24] https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/covid-19-coronavirus-nestle-donates-500000-of-products-to-kiwis-in-need-salvation-army-food-parcel-demands-soar/6KTI5KJB5IIYVAFFCRDV4RF6FM/

[25] https://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/sites/default/files/files/%5Bfile_field%3Atype%5D/sppu_covid-19_2021_update1_v3.pdf

Key challenges	Approach
Short-term food insecurity	To address the loss of employment and or a reduction of hours of different people due to COVID-19, the South Auckland Christian Foodbank provide food parcel support, and ran a Christmas dinner during the 2021 holiday season – the busiest time of year in regard to food support.
Long-term food insecurity	Short-term solutions are coupled with financial literacy courses and budgeting advice which aims to improve choices of families who are food insecure[26].

Table 2: Addressing short-term and long-term food needs

Although food demands have eased off, the new normal in regard to food support is 100% more than it was pre-COVID-19 lockdowns[27]

The Kai Collective Project: collaboration to meet record pandemic demand

The Kai Collective Project is a food hub which provides organisations such as local groups and community leaders with food in which they distribute to their respective communities. With a shared pool of resources , Kai Collective, works with various organisations to provide targeted support to those who require food assistance. Kai Collective differ to other food hubs as they work under a Collective Model (figure 7) frame instead of an Individual Model (figure 8).

The Collective Model enables the centralization of resources but a decentralized mode of distribution – a feature which in the past has been the Kai Collective's Achilles heel (reaching those most in need). The adoption of the Collective Model ensures efficiency and targeted efforts which allows the Kai Collective Project to meet record food demands.

Figure 6: Food parcel distribution by ethnic group

My discussion with the Kai Collective Project revealed that they encountered an array of issues and hurdles around the busiest time of year (the 2021 Christmas period) (Table 2). For the organisation, collaboration and bottom-up solutions were needed to overcome these hurdles and ensure families most in need are well supported.
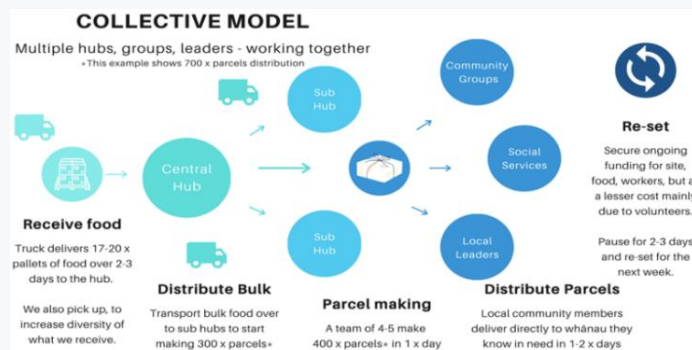

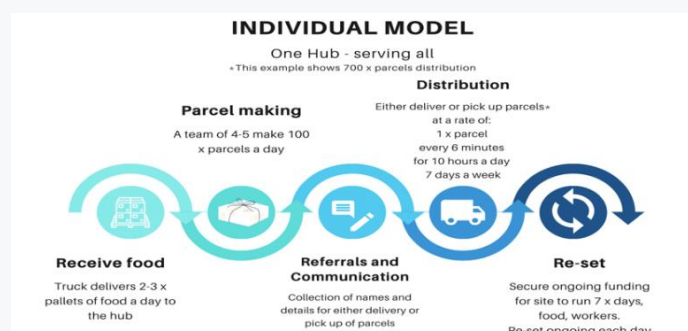*Figure 7: Kai Collective operational model*

Figure 8: A centralised model used by many food hubs
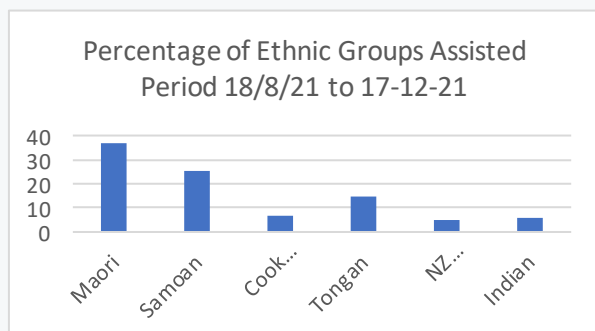

Figure 9: food parcel provided by Kai Collective Project

[26] http://www.sacfb.org.nz

[27] https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/122093506/coronavirus-demand-for-food-banks-double-precovid-levels-and-still-growing

Key issues	Collaboration to address issue
Resources • Lack of funding • Uncertain volume of food delivered weekly • inadequate facilities prepare food parcels	To address this, Kai Collective branched out and partnered with various organisations su as The Good Fale and Rakau Taukoko. At the heart of the work Kai Collective do – collaboration and engagement with different stakeholders is a focal means in which they address resourcing issues.
Distribution • Slow and time consuming methods of production and food preparation	The Kai Collective recognised that the Individual Model is ineffective in meeting foo demands of the community and therefore shifted toward a collaborative model which reinforces core values of Kai Collective
Community and food • Disconnect between food parcel items and demographic	The Kai Collective worked with local churche and community leaders to provide relevant and timely food support. Through this collaboration, implicit knowledge of the community by churches and local leaders revealed that people did not need food parce weekly – only during holiday periods and or when working hours were reduced. Through ongoing collaboration Kai Collective became aware that food parcel items such as tuna we not well-known to some Pacific people and therefore they were less familiar with how to prepare meals with it. This was swapped wit a more familiar alternative – Mackerel.

Table 2: Addressing resource, distributional, and disconnect to food through collaboration

Local solutions to fight food insecurity

COVID-19 has renewed a national focus on food insecurity[28]. The pandemic has resulted in mass disruption to the food system and brought to light the severe access, affordability and availability issues which many communities and people encounter in meeting food needs.

Much of the response to COVID-19 related food insecurity continues to be solutions and strategies which address immediate food needs and not systemic issues which have prolonged food insecurity in New Zealand[29]. This is a feature of food security response which the Salvation Army argues needs to be addressed[30]. Despite this, there is a recognition that due to the large scale impacts and disruptions of COVID-19 on food supply, cost, and availability, there is a need for initiatives which address immediate food security due to their ability to reach and connect with vulnerable communities directly[31].

"It shocked everyone when Covid hit in terms of food. I believe the community has the ability but not the tools to achieve food security. People have come to rely on handouts, we don't want to do another handout but a hand up"

Joseph Fa'afiu | Papakura Food Hub[32]

Some initiatives which directly link consumers to local producers and growers, provide donated meat to charity, and support vulnerable households have received government funding[33]. The pandemic has necessitated the operation and continuation of local solutions and initiatives to meet immediate food needs, and for communities in South Auckland whom have historically been impacted by food insecurity – these initiatives are ones they know and trust due to familiarity with community leaders and organisations who run them.

Brown Buttabean Motivation (BBM) Foodbank: a shining light in the darkest of times

Lines of people seeking food parcels during and after New Zealand's lockdowns have become the norm for many organisations providing food support. Brown Buttabean Foodbank serves those who struggled to meet food needs before lockdowns to, increasingly, families and individuals who have been unable to meet food needs due to the pandemic (some have never needed food support prior to COVID-19 lockdowns)[34].

In collaboration with supermarkets, local and central governments, and other organisations tackling food insecurity, Brown Buttabean Motivation (BBM) is working to build healthier Maori and Pacific communities. They aim to provide a platform where physical health emboldens South Auckland communities to live healthier and active lives. BBM gives agency to people to make better well-being choices and provides an environment which enables community connection and resilience building through support, physical activity, and access to food in difficult circumstances.

Reduce obesity amongst Māori and Pacific People in New Zealand through education thereby enabling them to choose a healthy and active lifestyle for the duration of their lives, their children, their wider family, and the community.

BBM Vision Statement

Te Maara Kai o Wirihana (Maara Fresh): improving community access to fresh produce and building food resilience

Growing fresh produce to support local families, food banks and community kitchens in Manurewa, South Auckland, Maara Fresh is a social enterprise working with the community and schools to produce locally grown food to fight food insecurity[35]. Located next to Manurewa High School, one of the largest multi-cultural schools in New Zealand, and a decile one secondary school that is located in a low-income area of Manurewa, Maara Fresh serves an array of functions (Figure 10).

[28] https://doi.org/10.3390/su12229369
[29] https://www.newsroom.co.nz/ideasroom/hunger-is-about-justice-not-charity
[30] https://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/sites/default/files/files/%5Bfile_field%3Atype%5D/sppu_foodinsecurityreport_oct2021_v4.pdf
[31] Ibid

[32] https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5cf74c8f2829e20001db724f/t/615122798e6b8d0a91c4a088/1632707207029/Papatoetoe+Food+Hub+Report+FINAL.pdf
[33] https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/govt-connecting-kiwis-affordable-healthy-food
[34] https://www.thebbmprogram.com/programs/bbm-foodbank/
[35] https://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/homed/garden/124689037/south-auckland-school-project-turning-into-a-community-hub
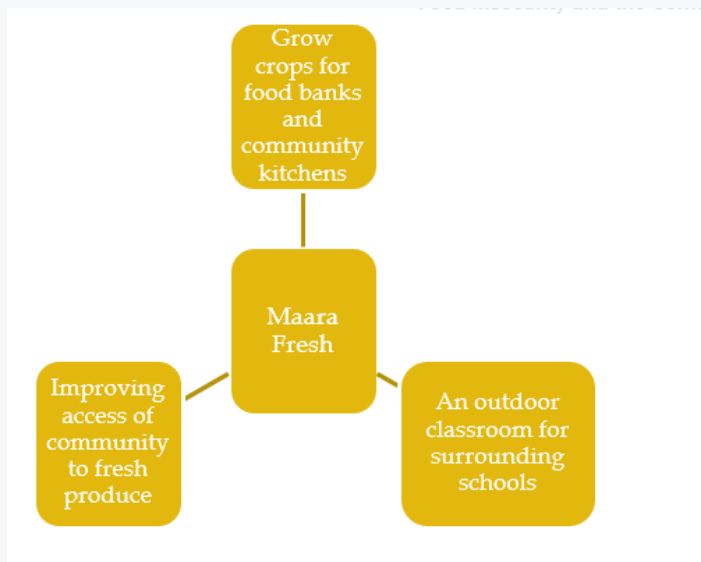
Figure 10: Different functions of Maara Fresh

My discussion with Manurewa High School principle, Peter Jones, revealed that despite many hurdles and challenges Maara Fresh has and continues to face in terms of funding and future sustainability, the core idea and values behind the social enterprise has garnered business support in the form of industry guidance and mentoring[36], support from the manurewa community and collaboration with Middlemore Hospital, Counties Manukau Health and Manurewa marae.

A core function and backbone to the direction of Maara Fresh is building food resilience; for school students this is in the form of workshops and outdoor lessons about growing food[37]; and for the wider community, they are able to volunteer and learn about the processes involved in growing food and get to make connections with those in their community. Maara Fresh, who had already facilitated student learning and community engagement, supported the local community by delivering fresh produce during lockdowns, hope to branch out even more. They aim to provide a pathway to encourage local youth and community members to pursue employment in horticulture, environmental science, health and nutrition, and business management[38]. In addition Maara Fresh plans to create a healing Rongoa garden which is based on holistic well-being traditions of Maori – with the hopes of fostering not only physical sustenance in the form of food grown in the garden but also mental and spiritual fulfilment[39].

"I want the students and those in the surrounding community to have greater access to freshly grown produce; as well as the opportunity to seek greater educational programmes and build their own career pathways, the same way the school has done for me."

Serenity, Marketing and Communications lead for Maara Fresh[40]

Location, location, location: evaluation food security in South Auckland

There are widespread efforts across South Auckland to address food insecurity through fostering community engagement and building food resilience. Others are enabling incremental change through sharing and teaching the processes involved in food preparation, growing and harvesting. This work has been invaluable in supporting the food needs of different communities, even more during the coronavirus pandemic.

Despite the valuable work of different organisations such as the Salvation Army and The Kai Collective Project, who are addressing the immediate need for food in the community, there is much work to do in the food security space. The crisis of accessing and affording food existed well before the pandemic. The renewed national level focus on food and food security presents an ideal time for evaluation and reflection of our responses to food security. Long before the coronavirus pandemic, New Zealand was not a land of plenty for all, today it is certainly a land of 'bare cupboards', as described by the Child Poverty Action Group[41]. This is despite New Zealand producing enough food to feed 40 million people (the bulk of food produced in New Zealand is exported)[42].

Despite their invaluable need, demand, and presence in the community, discussions with different personals working in organisations providing food support argue that food insecurity cannot and should not be addressed by what is meant to be a short-term solution – food parcels. It is the view of the Salvation Army that the work of local organisations should be coupled with disruptive innovations to ensure large scale efforts to address access and affordability issues many people encounter in meeting food needs[43]. Thus, this collective effort minimises the reliance and prominence of food parcel support – a temporary solution to a systemic issue.

The community aspect of food: a neglected discussion

As this report has outlined, food is not merely calories consumed nor solely for sustenance. Food rather has associated meaning for different communities. Thus, as communities such as Maori and Pacific continue to be over-represented in food insecurity indicators and are more likely to experience food insecurity in comparison to other demographics, it is surprising that the meaning which Maori and Pacific people ascribe to food does not feature prominently in food security discussions.

The community aspect of food is vital for the preservation of sociocultural norms, adherence to national goals such the Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018, and meeting international Sustainable Development goals of people's right to food and

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[36] https://www.cie.auckland.ac.nz/newsroom/maara-fresh-young-home-grown-entrepreneurs-give-back-to-manurewa-community/
[37] https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/12-days-of-christmas-middlemore-foundation-heart-shaped-garden-shows-covid-hit-community-the-love/FHNPXA5DTH26OQ2JRTPWS5MAC4/
[38] Ibid
[39] https://www.middlemorefoundation.org.nz/te-maara-kai
[40] https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/news/2020/12/08/maara-fresh-home-grown-entrepreneurs-give-back-to-manurewa.html

[41] https://www.cpag.org.nz/assets/191107%20CPAG%20Food%20Poverty%20Part%203%20FINAL%20WEB1.pdf
[42] https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/calls-to-feed-the-5-million-first-before-exporting-new-zealand-food/RYQ5ETC276D4RWDMUWTIKRJMYU/
[43] https://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/sites/default/files/files/%5Bfile_field%3Atype%5D/sppu_foodinsecurityreport_oct2021_v4.pdf

access to food which is nourishing and culturally relevant[44]. Initiatives such as Maara Fresh working in the food security space understand that food is inherently tied to cultural norms and traditions, and thus their work not only reflects the demographic in which they work with to build food resilience, but they also ensure that the manner in which food is grown, harvested, and distributed preserves/encourages the cultural and community element of food[45]. For Maori and Pacific people, the community element of food is dynamic, but it essentially involves and revolves around the idea that people and food are connected. Therefore, when people are food insecure, it impacts the symbiotic relationship between the community and food.

There is increasing recognition that the modern food system is in a state of major reconfiguration[46.] In light of COVID-19, a stressor which has disrupted the food system globally, and against the backdrop of climate change, the industrial food system is experiencing unprecedented disruptions. Furthermore, as consumer preferences shift away from foods unsustainability sourced and produced, modern alternative methods of production continue to rapidly advance and make better use of resources (e.g land and water). Modern alternative methods will also result in cheaper costs of proteins which will be a major disruption to the current livestock model[47]. In the context of this report, many questions serenade how communities who are food insecure will be impacted by a changing food system, some of whom have historically been food insecure even without major disruptions like the coronavirus pandemic. Further questions present themselves in regard to the community aspect of food and modern alternatives. How will cheaper and readily available foods under modern methods align with sociocultural meanings of food for different communities such as Maori and Pacific people? Or would the meaning/community aspect of food take a backseat to meeting calorie needs?

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[44] https://www.fao.org/right-to-food/background/en/
[45] Sharing of kai, ideas, and passing on knowledge to younger generations

[46] https://static1.squarespace.com/static/585c3439be65942f022bbf9b/t/5d7fe0e83d119516bfc0017e/1568661791363/RethinkX+Food+and+Agriculture+Report.pdf
[47] Ibid

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