Conference Proceedings

HSDNI's 9th Sustainability Collaborative Conference — 2025

13th and 14th May 2025

Toronto Metropolitan University

Proceedings Authors: Jennifer Park[1], Maiesha Rahman[2], Afiyah Islam[3]

Author roles & affiliations:

[1] Graduate, Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study, jennifer.en.park@gmail.com

[2] Master of Public Health, University of Toronto, mrahman@accessalliance.ca

[3] Department of Health, Aging & Society, McMaster University, helloafiyah@gmail.com

Introduction

Holistic Sustainable Development Network International (HSDNI) hosted its 9th Sustainability Collaborative Conference on the 13th and 14th of May 2025 at the Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU), in collaboration with the TMU Department of Environmental Applied Science and Management (EnSciMan), Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services, Tamil Canadian Centre for Civic Action, and Bangladeshi-Canadian Community Services (BCS).

HSDNI is a non-profit organization that creates, coordinates, and disseminates research relating to sustainable development. We strive to promote socio-cultural, economic and environmental well-being for all through knowledge mobilization, collaboration, network building, and facilitation amongst like-minded organizations and individuals, from the grassroots to the global level. Furthermore, we strive to reconcile economic growth with environmental interests and the protection of unique social and cultural practices, traditions, and heritage. Though we are based in Canada, we collaborate and work internationally, arrange conferences and seminars, and publish research in our peer-reviewed journal.

This year's conference brought together a remarkable and diverse group of scholars, researchers, community stakeholders, educators, social workers, and professionals. Keeping with the theme of "Public Health Sustainability", sub-themes of the conference included (1) social inequality and discrimination, (2) good governance, (3) public health, and (4) food insecurity.

Day 1, Session 1: Social Inequality & Discrimination

Opening Remarks

Presented by:

Dr. Nancy Walton, Associate Dean, Student Affairs, Graduate Studies, Toronto Metropolitan University

Dr. Shafi Bhiuyan, Associate Professor and SBS Program Coordinator, University of Memphis

Dr. Nasima Akter, Executive Director, Bangladeshi-Canadian Community Services (BCS) and Chair, Holistic Sustainable Development Network International (HSDNI)

Proceedings by: Afiyah Islam

Session 1 of Day 1, themed "Social Inequality & Discrimination", began with an address by Dr. Nancy Walton, the Opening Speaker for this session. She introduced the concept of "wicked problems", complex, interconnected societal and cultural issues that are difficult to solve and resistant to traditional, linear solutions. As they lack shared definitions and are constantly evolving, addressing wicked problems requires perseverance, collaboration, and openness to perspectives outside of one's own.

To ground this concept, Dr. Walton reflected on her work with *L'École de Choix*, a small rural school in Mirebalais, Haiti. The school had achieved success in improving educational outcomes against staggering odds; while less than 0.2% of Haitian children completed school nationally, *Choix* graduates regularly ranked top in their classes and passed national exams.

50

Beyond a well-rounded curriculum co-developed with local academic partners, the school also offered holistic support, including nutritious meals, nursing care, vaccinations, and vitamins for students, literacy support for parents and families, and professional development for faculty. However, due to escalating political instability and the collapse of donor funding, the school was forced to close its elementary program in 2024. In early April 2025, Mirebalais was violently overtaken by gang violence, leading to the displacement of countless families and a near-total collapse of all public services and civilian infrastructure. This marked a devastating loss for the school and community.

Reflecting on this tragedy, Dr. Walton emphasized that Haiti's challenges are deeply interconnected, rooted in historical trauma and violence, food insecurity, poverty, and systemic failures, embodying the nature of wicked problems. Despite this, she expressed hope in the capacity to rebuild, emphasizing that progress begins with collaboration, shared values, will, and tenacity. In closing, Dr. Walton commended the diverse assembly of speakers and topics planned for the conference and encouraged attendees in their dedication to addressing wicked problems.

Following Dr. Walton's opening, Dr. Shafi Bhuiyan, the Session Chair for the morning session, provided further remarks on the importance of multidisciplinary collaboration. Dr. Nasima Akter, the Welcome Speaker on behalf of HSDNI, then welcomed guests and introduced HSDNI's mission as an organization working collaboratively towards sustainable development. She thanked conference partners, staff, and student volunteers for their support in organizing the conference. Dr. Akter also briefly introduced the conference speakers.

Keynote Speech - Diasporas and the Rise of Right-Wing Extremism: The Role of Decolonial Education in Countering This Threat

Presented by

Dr. Helal Hossain Dhali, Postdoctoral Fellow, UQAM and University Faculty, McGill University and Dhaka University

Proceedings by: Jennifer Park, Afiyah Islam

Dr. Helal Hossain Dhali, the Keynote Speaker for Day 1, Session 1, spoke on the intersection between right-wing extremism (RWE) and diasporic vulnerability in the West, emphasizing the importance of decolonial education and solidarity. He particularly focused on Asian, Jewish, and Muslim communities.

"Diaspora" refers to immigrant communities who have moved from their homelands to settle in new societies. Approximately 8.3 million immigrants reside in Canada, accounting for nearly 23% of the country's population. These communities have shaped the culture, economy, and social fabric of Canada through contributions in healthcare, education, business, and other sectors. Despite this, diaspora communities continue to face suspicion, scapegoating, and violence, as they are often characterized by RWE as cultural threats and economic competitors.

Drawing on data from the 2024 Global Terrorism Index, Dr. Dhali noted the rise in right-wing (RW) ideologically-driven violence in the West, fuelled by white supremacist and white nationalist narratives. These narratives, deeply rooted in colonial nostalgia, racial superiority, and xenophobic fear, reflect an ethno-nationalist backlash against pluralism and diversity. Dr. Dhali also highlighted examples of anti-Asian hate, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia, further connecting these forms of hate to broader political movements. Right-wing populism, both in Canada and globally, exploits fears associated with demographic changes and cultural shifts. The Trump administration's populist rhetoric in the US was cited as having emboldened far-right movements in Canada. Online media platforms have also accelerated the proliferation of RWE ideologies through sensationalization, misrepresentation, and increased scrutiny of marginalized groups. Further compounding these challenges is economic insecurity, which can influence susceptibility to extremist ideologies and create an environment where racial minorities are scapegoated.

Canadian diasporic communities are navigating these threats in a socio-political landscape shaped by colonial legacies and systemic racism. They are often subjected to hyper-surveillance, silencing, and cultural erasure, and further censored or criminalized when speaking out. The historical sidelining of marginalized voices has often allowed extremist ideologies to take root with minimal pushback.

To address this, Dr. Dhali called for reimagining education not as passive instruction, but as a site of active transformation. Decolonial education rehumanizes marginalized communities, fosters critical consciousness, builds empathy and solidarity, and promotes democratic citizenship. Following this approach, post-secondary institutions must also uphold academic

freedom, ensure safe spaces for marginalized students and faculty, and incorporate anti-racism strategies into equity policies. Curricula must move beyond tokenism to meaningfully engage with histories of oppression and resistance. Furthermore, holistic and coordinated responses across law enforcement, education, and the community are needed to dismantle extremist narratives and reinforce inclusion. In closing, Dr. Dhali remarked that addressing RWE demands more than just condemnation; it requires critical education, empathetic leadership, and brave collective action.

Presentation 1 - Awareness and Attitudes towards Racism and Discrimination within Bangladeshi, Nepalese, Iranian, and Nigerian communities in Toronto

Presented by

Mohamed Kaiyyum, Youth Volunteer, Bangladeshi-Canadian Community Services (BCS)

Proceedings by: Jennifer Park

Mohamed Kaiyyum, a Youth Volunteer at Bangladeshi-Canadian Community Services (BCS), presented a study on attitudes toward racism and discrimination within South Asian, Nigerian, and Iranian communities in Toronto. This study was conducted by BCS to offer recommendations and guidance for raising awareness and future initiatives.

The study employed a qualitative design within a community-based research framework. A total of 412 participants were selected through convenience sampling from community members who received services from BCS and agreed to participate. The data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire from January to June 2024, distributed and collected by four interviewers, and analyzed with SPSS 26.

Participants represented a range of nationalities, including Bangladeshi (62.1%), Nepalese (12.1%), Iranian (9.7%), and Nigerian (16.0%). In terms of age distribution, 12.9% were seniors, 69.9% were adults, and 17.2% were youth. Regarding immigration status, 51.5% were Canadian citizens, 31.8% held permanent residency, and 16.7% were living in Canada under a refugee status, visas, or other arrangements. The survey revealed that the primary sources of information on discrimination and racism were people (53.4%), followed by media (43.7%), personal experiences (33.0%), and community organizations (8.0%). Overall, 42.7% of the participants demonstrated good awareness of racism and discrimination (>4.5 mean scores), and 57.3% had poor awareness. Youth participants exhibited greater awareness levels (54.9%) compared to adults (42.4%) and seniors (28.3%). When comparing ethnic groups, Nigerian participants reported the highest awareness (90.0%), followed by Iranian (50.0%), Bangladeshi (33.3%) and Nepalese (22.0%). Notably, participants who accessed multiple information sources showed significantly greater awareness (62.3%) compared to those who relied on a single source (35.9%).

44.4% of the participants reported experiencing racism, with women reporting higher incidents (48.4%) compared to men (38.1%). Only 25.2% of the participants reported familiarity with relevant policies to combat racism and discrimination. Regarding help-seeking behaviour, 46.2% of participants showed a willingness to seek help — this was notably high in seniors (62.3%) and Nigerians (75.8%). Lastly, only 33.3% felt comfortable addressing racism and discrimination in public, indicating that those with a greater awareness of racism are more likely to publicly share their experience.

The study concludes that the overall awareness of racism and discrimination was generally low. Additionally, youth showed a higher level of awareness compared to older adults. Many of these groups also do not seek help after experiencing racism and often choose to avoid confrontation. To combat racism and discrimination, the study recommended active engagement between community organizations and youth to raise awareness. Furthermore, more educational series, demonstrations, and campaigns are needed to enhance community awareness and engagement with local members. Nonetheless, community organizations should take the lead in publicly sharing individual experiences related to racism and discrimination and creating a safe space for community members to address these issues and explore possible solutions.

Presentation 2 - Education and Allyship to Combat Racism and Discrimination

Presented by

Jannatul Islam, PhD Candidate, EnSciMan, Toronto Metropolitan University, Executive Director, HSDNI and EAP Equity and Event Coordinator, Bangladeshi-Canadian Community Services (BCS)

Umme Tasneem Hyder, MSc, EnSciMan, Toronto Metropolitan University and EAP Ambassador, Bangladeshi-Canadian Community Services (BCS)

Proceedings by: Jennifer Park

Jannatul Islam, Event and Equity Coordinator at Bangladeshi Canadian Community Services (BCS), and Umme Tasneem Hyder, Education and Allyship Program (EAP) Ambassador at BCS, jointly presented the design and outcomes of EAP, a youth-led antiracism and anti-discrimination initiative. Funded by the Canadian Federal Government, the project aimed to

educate youth ambassadors and volunteers about racism and discrimination, engage with the wider community, document their experiences using digital toolkits, and promote allyship.

The presentation began with a reflection on the stark inequalities that persist in Canada and the impact on racialized communities daily:

- In 2018, 43% of reported hate crimes were motivated by race or ethnicity.

- During the COVID-19 Pandemic, over 1,150 anti-Asian racism incidents were reported nationally.

- 50% of racialized households live in unaffordable housing, and one in five live in poverty.

- Studies show employers are 40% more likely to interview someone with a non-ethnic name despite equal qualifications.

This 18-month project, launched in 2023, was built around four key pillars: Education, Action, Allyship, and Toolkit and Resource Development.

- Education focused on the content and method of a specific learning environment: "Be learned and share."

- Action referred to the strategy of achieving the prescribed goals: "Start discussion and response."

- Allyship promoted active support for marginalized communities by individuals outside those groups: "Engage and Collaborate."

As part of the EAP program, guest speakers were invited to share their lived experiences with racism and discrimination. Topics covered included "Education & Allyship 101",

The Trajectory of Sustainable Development
Volume 9, Issue 1, September 2025 (*ISSN 2818-0178)*

Formerly: Journal for Worldwide Holistic Sustainable Development (JWHSD), ISSN 2409-9384
(online version) & ISSN 2414-3286 (print version)

"Understanding Canadian Policies to combat racism and discrimination", and so on. Drawing from these sessions, youth ambassadors designed and delivered community workshops tailored to local needs and contexts such as "Resources to combat racism and increase its availability", "Info session for new immigrants: Minimizing racism and discrimination", and "September 30- orange day/Anti-Oppressive Practices (AOP)-People Centred approach". As a result, the program achieved significant reach and engagement:

- Over 25,000 individuals were reached through social media campaigns.

- Approximately 2,000 individuals engaged directly with the program.

- More than 1,000 people were directed to related events.

- 412 individuals participated in the *Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices (KAP) towards Racism and Discrimination* study.

- Dozens of organizations partnered, allied, or collaborated with EAP through various forms of engagement.

Through the EAP initiatives, the participating youths redefined racism and discrimination based on their learnings. Racism was defined as a set of attitudes, beliefs, and practices used to justify the belief that one racial category is somehow superior or inferior to others. Discrimination was defined as the action that denies or grants advantages to members of a particular group.

Participants also reflected on how racism is embedded within systems, institutions, and everyday interactions. It manifests across various places, including schools, workplaces, transportation, retail spaces, restaurants, and service providers. Key contributing factors were identified as language barriers, lack of knowledge of different cultures, lack of social exposure to multicultural communities, and fear of not being taken seriously after reporting

The Trajectory of Sustainable Development
Volume 9, Issue 1, September 2025 (*ISSN 2818-0178*)

Formerly: Journal for Worldwide Holistic Sustainable Development (JWHSD), ISSN 2409-9384 (online version) & ISSN 2414-3286 (print version)

incidents of racism. However, none of the factors justify the act of discrimination or hate crimes against racialized individuals as such actions have harmful societal consequences, including increased societal tensions and violence, a rise in hate crimes, promotion of generational prejudice, and the reinforcement of cultural dominance.

The presentation concluded with a strong message on how to combat racism, linking back to the four pillars of the EAP program.

- Continue learning and educating others about racism, discrimination, and constitutional rights as Canadians.

- Foster allyship by engaging with friends, families, and community members through meaningful dialogue and action.

- Promote collaboration, recognizing that the fight against racism requires collective effort.

The youth participants learned that there is no alternative to allyship and collaboration for any kind of sustainable actions in fighting racism. The EAP initiatives and the ongoing efforts of its youth leaders will continue to address racism and discrimination in their communities.

Presentation 3 - Advancing Racial Justice Through Youth Leadership and Community Engagement: Insights From the Together End Racism Toronto Campaign

Presented by

Urbi Khan, Investigative Journalist and Community Worker, Program Associate and Coordinator, Bangladeshi-Canadian Community Services (BCS)

Anuva Hasan, BSW Student, School of Social Work, York University

Proceedings by: Jennifer Park

Urbi Khan and Anuva Hasan jointly presented the impact of the Together End Racism in Toronto (TERT) campaign in promoting racial justice. This campaign was led by the Youth Leadership Program at Bangladeshi-Canadian Community Services (BCS), in response to the realities of racism driving inequality faced by marginalized communities. It aims to empower youth leadership and advocacy for community mobilization against racism.

Despite the impact of systemic racism on racialized youth in education, employment, and public life, the power of youth leadership in driving social change and racial justice is often under-represented. As a result, racialized youth leaders are rarely seen and their personal experiences are disparaged in policymaking and advocacy. Moreover, the TERT campaign defined racial justice beyond preventing individual acts of discrimination; it's about challenging and transforming the systems, rooted in colonialism, patriarchy, slavery, and economic inequality, that sustain racism.

The TERT campaign was launched between March 2024 - March 2025 to address racism and discrimination and to support communities in confronting racism by fostering discussions on multiculturalism, diversity, and religious discrimination. A total of 69 youth leaders, aged 13 to 29, actively participated in this campaign, leading activities such as leadership training, community education events, anti-racism campaigns, town halls, and media outreach.

The effectiveness of this campaign was assessed and evaluated through data collection via surveys, interviews, and focus groups from the youth participants, community members, and BCS staff. The result showed that the campaign activities played a key role in preparing the participants to engage in anti-racism efforts, with 88% reporting moderate to high levels of confidence. Moreover, the evaluation indicated the effectiveness of the campaign in equipping youth with practical knowledge and skills, with 83% confirming that they applied what they had learned in their daily lives and at work. Nonetheless, 89% of the participants found the campaign to be very or highly effective in raising awareness and understanding racism and discrimination in their communities.

The results also highlight the diversity of engagement to counteract racism. The participants successfully engaged 1,766 people in conversations about anti-racism and discrimination, leading to a significant 99% confirming active knowledge-sharing with peers, family, and community members. Moreover, 48% of the participants attended a policy dialogue or town hall meeting, and 33% shared concerns about racism with elected officials. Finally, 41% engaged in policy advocacy discussions and shared their personal stories. Cumulatively, these results demonstrate the potential of youth as change agents, playing a critical role in counteracting racism and promoting racial justice.

The Trajectory of Sustainable Development
Volume 9, Issue 1, September 2025 (*ISSN 2818-0178*)

Formerly: Journal for Worldwide Holistic Sustainable Development (JWHSD), ISSN 2409-9384 (online version) & ISSN 2414-3286 (print version)

The TERT campaign proved the powerful impact of youth leadership in advancing racial justice and mobilizing diverse communities. Therefore, it is essential to support youth leaders with ongoing mentorship and guidance to continue effectively combating racism and promoting racial justice.

Presentation 4 - Addressing Racism Against South Asians in Ontario: Legal Support and Community Empowerment

Presented by

Anchal Bhatia, Lawyer, South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO)

Proceedings by: Jennifer Park

Anchal Bhatia, a lawyer working with the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO), presented key legal and policy regimes in Ontario, Canada, related to human rights and anti-racism.

Racism is defined as "any prejudice, discrimination, or hostile behaviour against individuals or groups based on their race, ethnicity, or cultural background", according to Anchal Bhatia. She explains that racism can be manifested in various forms, largely categorized into Direct Racism and Systemic Racism. Direct racism involves intentional actions or words to harm someone based on their ethnicity, while systemic racism involves institutional barriers due to policies, practices, and procedures that disadvantage specific racial groups.

Challenges with addressing racism against South Asians include underreporting. Due to fear of retaliation and social stigma, or worsening the situation, many South Asians feel discouraged from reporting discriminatory incidents. Financial restraints and a lack of awareness about the rights and legal system also make it challenging for them to seek

appropriate help. Therefore, Anchal Bhatia shares relevant legal codes that may support efforts to advocate for individuals or the communities after facing hate crimes, through the legal system.

The **national legal framework** includes the following:

- The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms – section 15

- Canadian Multiculturalism Act

- Federal Anti-Racism Strategy and Anti-Racism and Anti-Discrimination Secretariat

- Canadian Human Rights Act

- Criminal Code

The details of the **provincial legal framework in Ontario** include the following:

- Ontario Human Rights Code:

  - Enacted in 1962 to prohibit actions that discriminate against people based on a protected ground in a protected social area, to be free from discrimination.

  - Applies to both private and public actions by any individual or organization if they engage in discrimination or harassment.

- Anti-Racism Act, 2017:

  - Aims to eliminate and prevent systemic racism and cultivate racial equity by focusing on policies and services that disadvantage racialized communities.

  - Mandates public institutions to collect race-based data to track disparities, identify systemic barriers, and create more equitable policies.

- Mandatory Indigenous Cultural Competency and Anti-Racism Training

- Municipality-based By-Laws & Strategies

The Trajectory of Sustainable Development
**Volume 9, Issue 1, September 2025 (*ISSN 2818-0178)*

Formerly: Journal for Worldwide Holistic Sustainable Development (JWHSD), ISSN 2409-9384 (online version) & ISSN 2414-3286 (print version)

The recommended steps to address discrimination are to first document the details of the incident, such as dates, times, location, and any involved parties. Next, contact the Ontario Human Rights Commission to seek guidance – free information and resources related to human rights. Reaching out to the Human Rights Legal Support Centre (HRLSC) also provides free legal support about the incident.

Day 1, Session 2: Good Governance

Opening Remarks

Presented by

Neethan Shan, TDSB Chair and Trustee, Former City Councillor, City of Toronto and Executive Director, Urban Alliance on Race Relations (UARR)

Proceedings by: Jennifer Park

Session 2 of Day 1, themed "Good Governance", was opened by Neethan Shan with a brief speech defining factors contributing to effective governance based on his experience governing the Toronto District School Board (TDSB).

Neethan Shan starts the speech by introducing his responsibility as the Chair of TDSB. He explains that the TDSB supports over 250,000 students and an additional 100,000 adult learners, operating across multiple cities and managing the largest real estate portfolio in Toronto. In addition to educational responsibilities, the TDSB manages numerous facilities and supports over 40,000 staff, making it one of the city's largest employers. Drawing from his governing experience, Neethan Shan highlights several key points of good governance.

The first point Shan addressed is the importance of ensuring that the governance body reflects the population it serves. Because the governing body represents diverse communities, it must also embody diverse perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds. This inclusivity is essential

The Trajectory of Sustainable Development
Volume 9, Issue 1, September 2025 (*ISSN 2818-0178*)

Formerly: Journal for Worldwide Holistic Sustainable Development (JWHSD), ISSN 2409-9384 (online version) & ISSN 2414-3286 (print version)

to making decisions that are representative, equitable, and responsive to the needs of the entire community.

The second is to be prepared. Good governance requires thorough preparation, such as reading materials in advance for a meeting, understanding relevant legislation, and being aware of the risks and different perspectives that come with certain decisions.

The last key point is to make the governance accessible and understandable to the general public. When the governing body uses complex jargon or keeps the operation applicable to certain groups, it risks losing relevance. Good governance must be accessible and inclusive to the public, allowing people to connect.

Moreover, Shan emphasizes the difference between governance and operations. Good governance guides and leads the group through oversight and strategic direction, rather than micromanaging staff or handling day-to-day tasks for efficient operation. The governing body must clearly understand its scope and responsibilities to govern effectively.

Shan concludes the opening remark by contrasting good governance with bad governance. He identifies key elements of bad governance, including lack of preparation, poor decision-making, corruption, misuse of power, failure to recognize conflicts of interest, and deliberate use of abusive power. In contrast, good governance sets a clear vision and direction to move forward and continuously improves by accepting feedback. Ultimately, good governance ensures that the governed group remains accountable, transparent, and responsive to the needs of the community it serves.

Keynote Speech - Deconstructing the Myths of Good Governance: The West's Civilizing Mission and the Imperative of Linking Democracy with Social Development

Presented by

Dr. Fahim Quadir, Vice-Provost and Dean, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs, Queen's University

Proceedings by: Jennifer Park

Dr. Fahim Quadir, the Keynote Speaker for Day 1, Session 2, examines the concept of good governance, tracing its origins in Western development paradigms and calling for a more locally rooted, inclusive, and interdisciplinary approach to governance.

Upon the start of his speech, Dr. Quadir explains how "Good Governance" is a controversial and contested concept, and is often referred to as a dominant development paradigm. For over three decades, good governance has been a vital foundational concept for economic growth and building a just, sustainable, and inclusive society. A key belief in this idea is that political democratization is necessary for development. However, critics argue that good governance often imposes a Western-centric model, aiming to create a unified framework despite the diverse forms of communities and countries.

In 1989, good governance originated in the context of economic reform programs by the World Bank, aiming to foster a healthy structure of a market economy to combat the major debt crisis in most African nations. However, the initiatives did not benefit the poor, and most people continued to suffer financially. Rather than acknowledging the shortcomings of its economic reform programs, the World Bank shifted the blame to weak state institutions. It was at this point that the World Bank first introduced the definition of good governance:

The Trajectory of Sustainable Development
Volume 9, Issue 1, September 2025 (*ISSN 2818-0178*)

Formerly: Journal for Worldwide Holistic Sustainable Development (JWHSD), ISSN 2409-9384 (online version) & ISSN 2414-3286 (print version)

"The manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social development".

Dr. Quadir emphasized that the World Bank did not focus on helping the countries shift towards democracy. Instead, it prioritized four key elements to improve economic performance, rather than advancing democratic or political rights.

The first element was Public Sector Management, which aimed to reform government institutions that were seen as insufficient and prone to mismanagement. The goal was to make the public sector responsible and responsive to public needs.

The second element was accountability. To avoid engaging with political reform, the World Bank emphasized accountability to ensure that elected leaders were answerable for their actions and decisions.

The third element was the legal framework for development, which focused on creating a business-friendly environment to attract foreign investment to address issues such as bureaucracy and red tape challenge businesses to invest.

The last element was transparency and information accessibility, which emphasized open decision-making processes. This was intended to build trust in institutions by ensuring that the public could understand how decisions were made and who was responsible for them.

Together, these four pillars reflected the World Bank's attempt to improve economic efficiency and institutional performance in developing countries. However, as Dr. Quardir pointed out, these initiatives largely avoided promoting political reform or democratic participation. Instead, the emphasis remained on creating conditions favourable for market growth and foreign investment. This approach has drawn criticism for prioritizing economic growth over democratic or political rights.

Dr. Quadir continued by discussing the expansion of the good governance paradigm. In the years that followed, the United Nations and donor agencies such as USAID introduced three additional aspects of governance, intending to attain sustainable human development:

1. Building a healthy market (economic)

2. Developing the structure of an electoral and/or liberal democracy (political)

3. Building a responsive, efficient, and effective public sector (administrative governance)

These additions marked a shift toward a more holistic view of governance, incorporating political and social dimensions alongside economic performance.

Dr. Quardir concluded his speech by criticizing the modern dominant paradigm of good governance, which is Eurocentric and rooted in colonialism and the legacy of Western exploitation. He emphasized that the current framework lacks focus on the Global South, ignores colonial pasts, cultural differences, and alternative systems of knowledge. To build governance systems that are truly inclusive and effective, Dr. Quadir called for an interdisciplinary approach, respecting local contexts, individual narratives, and indigenous knowledge.

Presentation 1 - Bad Governance and Cronies in the Bangladesh State: The Political Economy of Neo-Patrimonial Plunder

Presented by

AKM Khairul Islam, Faculty, Pilon School of Business, Sheridan College

Proceedings by: Jennifer Park

Dr. AKM Khairul Islam, a faculty member at the Pilon School of Business, Sheridan College, presented a study on the weak state of governance in Bangladesh, highlighting the rise of neopatrimonialism and cronyism. He emphasizes that these social phenomena hinder the development of a rational political system and sustainable economic growth.

The neopatrimonial plunder in Bangladesh, characterized by the abuse of state power for personal enrichment, presents numerous challenges that extend beyond developmental obstacles such as corruption, nepotism, inefficient public institutions, and high income inequality.

A high Fragile States Index (FSI) and a low World Governance Index (WGI) both reflect the poor state of governance in Bangladesh. The FSI, an annual report by The Fund for Peace, assesses the social, economic, and political challenges that contribute to the country's fragility. Bangladesh scored 85.9, ranking among the more fragile states in comparison with other South and Southeast Asian countries. Similarly, the country scored 42.4 on the WGI, ranking 132nd out of 195 countries. These indices underscore Bangladesh's high vulnerability to collapse and political instability, driven by inadequate security measures, a concentration of power, and state corruption.

Poor governance produces a multitude of consequences, including a weak state, power left to be captured by vested interests, crony capitalism, a fragmented party system, and a lack of

political ideology. These factors contribute to political instability, which hinders economic growth. This is evident in the country's GDP growth over the past 43 years. While Bangladesh has shown growth in GDP per capita, it has not been as impactful as that of other South and Southeast Asian countries. The Bangladesh GDP increased from 181.0 to 2,551.0 between 1980 and 2023, resulting in a 14.07% growth rate. Similarly, in Bhutan, the GDP growth rate was 14.76%, Sri Lanka was 16.59%, and the Maldives showed the most growth with a rate of 48.64%. In contrast, some countries had lower growth rates, such as Pakistan, with a rate of 5.48%.

Dr. Islam concludes the presentation with a brief introduction to his research topic. Over time, the occupation of the majority of the legislators shifted from lawyers to businessmen from 1954 to 1991, in pursuit of greater political power. In 1954, lawyers made up 55% of the legislature (116 members), but by 1991, their number had declined to 19% (56 members). In contrast, the number of businessmen accounted for only 4% (11 members) in 1954 but rose to 53% (160 members) by 1991, alongside 17 former army officers (6%). As a result, businessmen have acquired considerable political power, and in many cases, continue to abuse state power for their personal use. This contributes to the current imbalance in Bangladesh's political system.

Dr. Islam's study will examine how the weak and patrimonial nature of the state and the rise of cronies created considerable obstacles to developing a legal and rational political system and a free market economy, both of which are prerequisites for democratic consolidation and sustainable economic development.

Presentation 2 - Protecting Farm Data under Intellectual Property Law

Presented by

Dr. Mahatab Uddin, Adjunct Faculty and Postdoctoral Researcher, School of Environmental Design and Rural Development, University Of Guelph

Proceedings by: Jennifer Park

Dr. Mahatab Uddin, Adjunct Faculty and Postdoctoral Researcher at the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development, University of Guelph, presented his study on protecting farm data under intellectual property law. His research focuses on issues of data ownership in climate-smart agriculture. Dr. Uddin started the presentation by asserting that legal mechanisms play a critical role in ensuring good governance.

In response to unprecedented climate change, climate-smart agriculture (CSA) practices have expanded across the farming sector. This requires large-scale deployment of AI-driven digital technologies, including big data analytics, machine learning, and deep learning. This process raises concerns about personal data invasion as farmers must provide farm data and some personal information to the Agricultural Technology Providers (ATPs). Moreover, since the ATPs may be required to share the data with relevant stakeholders, the risk of personal and farm data breaches increases. Therefore, the CSA practices underscore the need for effective farm data protection measures.

This study explores different types of intellectual property laws as potential means of protecting farm data: Patents, Copyrights, and Trade Secrets. To obtain a patent for farm data, it must meet the three requirements of Article 27 (1) of the Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS): novelty of the invention, non-obviousness, and industrial application. As each farm has new and unique data, it is eligible for novelty.

71

Additionally, the farm data can be used at other farms to produce advanced products, proving industrial applications. However, in terms of non-obviousness, it is difficult to find originality as the nature of the industry requires advancing from existing data through comparisons. With challenges to prove the advancement of new farm data from the prior art, it is deemed ineligible for patentability.

Copyright protects the original expression of the human mind that reflects intellectual effort. For farmers, it is difficult to prove the originality as farm data is generated by AI-driven technologies rather than individual input or through the expression of their minds. However, if the data were compiled into a database with intellectual input from the farmer, the database may be protected under the copyright law. Unfortunately, under current copyright law, protection does not extend to individual data sets themselves. As a result, while the database itself may be protected, the individual raw data remain publicly accessible and can be used without the farmer's consent.

To claim farm data as trade secrets, it must meet the following three fundamental requirements: the information in question must be kept confidential, the information holds commercial value because of its secrecy, and lastly, reasonable measures must be implemented to maintain the secrecy of the information. Although ways to access farm data are becoming common, farm data is likely to stay confidential. Moreover, since farm data can improve productivity and efficiency, remaining confidential will contribute to increasing the economic value of the farm. Therefore, among the three intellectual property laws–patents, copyrights, and trade secrets–trade secrets emerge as the most viable option for establishing ownership of farm data.

Presentation 3 - Leveraging Participatory and Collaborative Governance in Renewable Energy Partnerships among Indigenous communities in Canada

Presented by

Dr. Reddi Sekhara Yalamala, Former Mitacs Postdoctoral Fellow, Dalhousie University

Proceedings by: Jennifer Park

Dr. Reddi Sekhara Yalamala, former Mitacs Postdoctoral Fellow at Dalhousie University, presented his in-depth study on renewable energy (RE) partnerships with Indigenous communities in Canada. His research explores new pathways for achieving energy security and reconciliation through participatory governance and inclusive engagement with Indigenous communities.

Dr. Yalamala began by introducing Canada as an emerging global leader in RE. Over the past four decades, the country has invested in large-scale renewable projects, particularly in solar, wind, and hydroelectric power, across most provinces. This aligns with Canada's commitment to climate action and economic development. He emphasized that Indigenous community, as stewards of natural resources, have a critical role in this transition, while the government, given its fiduciary responsibilities, must ensure equitable and inclusive partnerships. The government and Indigenous communities are keen on joint partnerships since RE development is integral to economic growth, regional prosperity, and empowerment of the Indigenous communities.

Dr. Yalamala conducted a systematic study using semi-structured interviews with the Indigenous community members and policy stakeholders representing Indigenous organizations across Canada. The study aimed to:

1. Understand the current state of renewable energy partnerships.

The Trajectory of Sustainable Development
Volume 9, Issue 1, September 2025 (*ISSN 2818-0178)*

Formerly: Journal for Worldwide Holistic Sustainable Development (JWHSD), ISSN 2409-9384 (online version) & ISSN 2414-3286 (print version)

2. Identify research gaps in RE growth and participation of Indigenous communities or organizations.

3. Understand the Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) outcomes and community engagement for RE partnerships.

4. Explore the ways that joint RE partnerships rendered equity, economic growth, and nation-building.

The study applied a bottom-up, community-centred approach, prioritizing inclusivity and local engagement, especially with remote Indigenous communities.

Through interviews and qualitative data analysis, several critical gaps were identified:

- Limited research on clean energy projects.

- Insufficient feasibility studies examining socio-economic and environmental impacts of RE initiatives.

- Inadequate long-term budgeting for RE firms to attract sustainable social and financial capital.

- Knowledge and capacity gaps in business practices and renewable policy frameworks.

- Need for capacity building, including energy literacy, project management, entrepreneurship development, and support for local/international collaborators.

- Limited government use of technological tools to support RE projects.

- Need for greater partnerships with RE proponents such as NGOs, private companies, government, and the communities.

- Lack of budget to cover the initial costs of RE technology.

Respondents expressed general awareness of the potential benefits of renewable energy within their communities. However, the high costs and complexity of the projects were identified as major barriers. Additionally, the lack of proper consultation and informed

consent, as well as a lack of awareness of power purchase agreements and other logistics of RE projects, has led to negative impacts on local communities. Many emphasized the need for more partnerships that prioritize capacity building with a community-conscious approach, rather than externally driven, top-down projects that often overlook cultural, social, and environmental contexts.

Dr. Yalamala also highlighted the harms caused by past large-scale energy projects in British Columbia (Site C Dam) and Newfoundland and Labrador, which lacked proper consultation and led to environmental degradation and cultural disruption. These examples highlight the need for Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) and adherence to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in future RE projects.

In conclusion, Dr. Yalamala advocates for reciprocal, equity-driven partnerships rooted in participatory governance. He concluded that Canada must prioritize bottom-up, culturally sensitive approaches to renewable energy development to better understand Indigenous culture, achieve meaningful reconciliation, and sustainable community empowerment.

Day 2, Session 1: Public Health

Introduction

On May 14, 2025, Access Alliance collaborated with the Holistic Sustainable Development Network International (HSDNI) for its 9th Sustainability Collaborative Conference and facilitated the Global Public Health session. The primary purpose of the session was to showcase Access Alliance's decade-long research impact on community development, in addition to bringing attention to a wide range of emerging and evolving topics in the realms of public health, such as Social Prescribing. The research impact report presented in the symposium highlights the impact of the Access Alliance Community-Based Research (CBR) Department's activities on individuals, communities and system-level policy changes. It provides a thorough examination of Access Alliance's commitment to a CBR framework, principles and practices.

The session presented an opportunity to learn about Access Alliance's commitment to advancing a vision of equity in research by emphasizing the role of social determinants of health and the production of knowledge and action items with community partners to tackle systemic inequities. The speakers – ranging from field experts to early career researchers – embraced Access Alliance's CBR Ethos, highlighting the importance of collaboration and community engagement that reflects that Access Alliance's research is rooted in the community and ends back in the community for advancing social inclusion and health equity.

Opening Remarks

Presented by:

Dr. Andrew Laursen, Graduate Program Director, EnSciMan, Toronto Metropolitan University

Dr. AKM Alamgir, Director of Knowledge & Learning, Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services and Adjunct Professor, Faculty of LA&PS, York University

Cliff Ledwos, Acting Executive Director, Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services

Proceedings by: Maiesha Rahman

In his opening remarks, Dr. Andrew Laursen, Interim Graduate Program Director of the Environmental Applied Science and Management Programs at Toronto Metropolitan University noted that the world faces several interconnected challenges related to persistent inequalities, public health, food insecurity, governance issues, environmental degradation and climate change. These issues do not occur in isolation and are symptoms of systemic problems and dysfunction. Graduate programs have a responsibility to support students in being well-positioned to engage in systems thinking and consequently, make sense of some of these complexities. Specialized knowledge – commonly a product of academia – is essential but not sufficient.

When thinking about reforming our current approach to education, it is essential to acknowledge four core needs:

- Enhanced understanding of systems-thinking, particularly how economic, ecological and social systems interact: We need to better comprehend how a decision that is made to address one problem may have an impact on other areas. Systems-level thinking involves a focus on potential unintended consequences and mapping stakeholders to understand who is impacted, how they are impacted and how to engage them. Relatedly, students need to be equipped to understand power dynamics and the flow of resources.

- Stronger collaboration between policy, politics, and governance: Graduate programs should offer training on how to effectively navigate policy spheres, understand the fundamental tools available and recognize the limitations of these tools. Students should be required to learn how to more effectively engage government, NGOs and private institutions, while keeping equity and sustainability at the centre of the decision-making process.

- Strengthen focus on environmental justice and equity: There must be increased awareness of the historical and social roots of environmental health, recognizing who bears the burdens of decisions made. Above all, it is critical that students are trained on ethical decision-making – ethical solutions are efficient solutions.

- Transdisciplinary: Graduate education should be at its very foundation interdisciplinary, with an emphasis on problem-based and team-oriented collaborations.

Dr. Akm Alamgir, Director of Organizational Knowledge and Learning at Access Alliance, commenced the session by welcoming event attendees. He shared an anecdote of a third grader who raised funds for Access Alliance, highlighting that the student is neither part of Access Alliance nor related to anyone involved. Still, this generosity reflects the true spirit

and roots of the organization. He also underscored that Access Alliance serves and contributes to community development by providing an interprofessional care system. It offers medical care, allied health services, settlement programs, demographic-based programs and services and a robust language services department capable of translating most languages and dialects. The Community-Based Research Department of the organization generates evidence on community needs, incorporating community members in improving collective well-being. This inclusive and democratic research model relies on the trust of Access Alliance's supporters, partners and collaborators. He appreciated the learned panellists, academics, researchers, community partners, colleagues at Access Alliance and the members of Access Alliance's Board of Directors for their presence and participation in the symposium.

Cliff Ledwos, currently serving as the Acting Executive Director at Access Alliance, opened by acknowledging and appreciating key community partners and collaborators ("big brains") for their commitment to Access Alliance and its mission and the immigrant and refugee populations the agency serves and impacts. He emphasized Access Alliance's role in bridging the gap between researchers and the community to inform policy and practice through evidence-based work. Cliff reflected on the value of research in eliminating assumptions and guiding meaningful action, reinforcing that Access Alliance has strived to advance data and evidence for over 35 years.

The gathering is framed as an opportunity to network, build relationships and hear from both experienced professionals and emerging voices in the field. Cliff encouraged attendees to actively listen, reflect and use the insights shared to improve outcomes for vulnerable populations.

Keynote Speech - Health Equity Focused Social Prescribing at The Alliance for Healthier Communities

Presented by

Natasha Beaudin, Social Prescribing Project Lead, Alliance for Healthier Communities

Proceedings by: Maiesha Rahman

Social prescribing centres on non-clinical programs and services that support health and well-being. In reflecting on factors that support well-being outside of the healthcare system, audience members identified sports, social interaction, engagement in the arts and family connections as key contributors. The Canadian Medical Association states that 25% of what makes you sick or healthy may come from your healthcare, but 50% of what makes you healthy or ill is your life – your social determinants of health. The social determinants of health have a significant impact on health, namely education, employment, food security, income security, racism and colonialism. Social prescribing involves a client – a unique individual with their own set of characteristics and interests – and the prescriber, a healthcare provider, health promoter, social worker, link worker or navigator who identifies non-medical issues and makes a social prescription. Social prescribing emphasizes the role of non-traditional partners, such as shopping malls that host health fairs or an art gallery. Instead of inquiring "what's the matter with you?" social prescribers ask clients "what matters to you?" and assist them in connecting to necessary supports. The speaker recounted their experience of coordinating stress reduction programs as a health promoter. Clients were referred to the program by clinical colleagues. Feedback demonstrated the impact of attending the sessions, with clients reporting reduced anxiety.

The Alliance for Healthier Communities (The Alliance), a network of over 120 community-governed primary healthcare organizations across Ontario, leads various social prescribing, health-equity-focused projects and initiatives. One such project is the Links to Wellbeing: Social Prescribing for Older Adults. Since 2021, through a partnership with the Older Adult Centres' Association of Ontario, the goal has been to make a clear referral pathway from healthcare to community organizations such as the Seniors Active Living Centres. Presently, there are more than 200 healthcare organizations and over 200 Seniors Active Living Centres participating in this initiative.

Panel Discussion

Presented by

Dr. Sander Hitzig, Assistant Professor, Indigenous Health and Nutrition, Toronto Metropolitan University

Dr. Basak Yanar, Scientist, Institute for Work & Health and Assistant Professor, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto

Dr. Rosanra Yoon, Assistant Professor, Daphne Cockwell School Of Nursing, Faculty Of Community Services, Toronto Metropolitan University

Dr. AKM Alamgir, Director of Knowledge & Learning, Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services and Adjunct Professor, Faculty of LA&PS, York University

Proceedings by: Maiesha Rahman

A moderated discussion on social prescribing featured panellists from diverse backgrounds, including clinical care and research. Panellists were asked to reflect on how social prescribing fits in within their different areas of expertise. The following are key points covered:

- Social isolation has profound health consequences, including higher risk of hospitalization, dementia and premature death – comparable to or worse than smoking, inactivity or air pollution. Health programs should proactively address loneliness by designing group activities as spaces for meaningful connection. Support from family or peers can play a crucial role in improving health outcomes. Low-pressure, recurring social gatherings, like coffee drop-ins, are effective entry points for re-engaging isolated individuals and can lead to greater participation in health-promoting activities.

- Immigrants and refugees are more likely to work in hazardous jobs with little protection and often experience fear for their safety. Language can also pose a barrier; immigrants frequently struggle to access workplace or health supports in their native language. Greater system collaboration may help, including workplaces connecting employees with local support services and social prescribing initiatives.

- Speakers emphasized that social determinants, such as income, food security, housing, and time, often outweigh access to medical care in shaping health outcomes. Leisure and community participation are essential for well-being, but remain inaccessible for many due to economic pressures and demanding work schedules. Achieving equity requires systemic change, namely revisiting workplace conditions and upstream economic policies, as well as implementing cross-sector solutions to address disparities in access to benefits like paid leave, job security and health coverage.

Keynote Speech - Community Development for Community Health

Presented by

Dr. Jay Shaw, Tier 2 Canada Research Chair and Assistant Professor, Department of Physical Therapy, University of Toronto

Proceedings by: Maiesha Rahman

The mandate and initiatives of community-governed, comprehensive primary healthcare organizations like Access Alliance highlight the fundamental nature of local communities. While commonly geographically defined, communities can be conceptualized in a myriad of ways. The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) defines a community as a group that shares any commonality. For example, the Inuit community is geographically dispersed across a vast area, yet it remains a cohesive community. Just as "community" is subject to varied interpretations, so too is "community health." Community health is distinct from population and public health, albeit these concepts are frequently conflated. A key difference is that community health examines what makes the community healthy, not just the individuals within it. There is a conventional view that equates community health with the health status of a given group. But it can also be community-determined, defined by the community itself. What does the community say constitutes its health? This approach reflects the work spearheaded by Access Alliance.

When commencing community development work, it is pivotal to inquire, "What does it mean to be healthy as a community?" Community health can be interventional – similar to how an individual might say, "I do public health," one can also "do community health," implying engagement in community development and health promotion activities, which are the practice of community health. Community development has a well-known definition from

the United Nations: it is a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems. Community development is not necessarily about health in a narrow sense, but it intervenes in the social, political and commercial determinants of health. It is a way of influencing community health by helping community members build the capacity they need to unite around shared health goals.

When describing the initiatives led by Access Alliance, the term "Community Worker Plus" can be used to encompass the diversity in the roles that contribute to community health. The title "Community Health Worker" is a familiar term with a definition provided by the Community Health Workers Network of Canada, which has since evolved into the Cross-Cultural Health Brokers Network of Canada. This shift highlights the flexibility in both the title and the role itself. Thinking broadly, community workers vary in their responsibilities depending on where they work, but they share a common focus: promoting health and well-being, bridging the gap between marginalized communities and mainstream services, addressing the social determinants of health, building community capacity, advocating for equity, and catalyzing change.

Community workers undertake the work of community development to promote community health.

An ongoing project involving four Community Health Centres in Canada – two in Ontario and two in British Columbia – seeks to identify practice improvements that would strengthen their ability to fulfill their mandates:

1. Building a pan-Canadian movement, including one that clearly articulates the scope of these roles. For funding and policy decisions, a clear scope and rationale are necessary; a national network can help articulate these.

2. Creating a strong advocacy network for deeper policy investment. Some roles are federally funded – for example, community health representatives in First Nations communities – while others fall under provincial and territorial health systems. Hence, coordinated advocacy is essential.

3. Addressing emerging challenges, such as ensuring training around digital health misinformation and recognizing the role that Community Health Workers can play in climate resilience.

Access Alliance Presentation - Highlights of the CBR Department Impact Report 2015-2025

Presented by

Dominika Kawecka, MSW Candidate, School of Social Work, York University

Proceedings by: Maiesha Rahman

Access Alliance's Community-Based Research (CBR) Department's Impact Report has three main goals: (1) measuring the Department's impact as it relates to resource investments and advocacy, aligned with the missions of both the organization and Department; (2) assessing how effectively the CBR Department is meeting the needs and priorities of the communities it serves; (3) setting sustainable goals to guide the Department's future development and impact. The Report offers a comprehensive review of key research and practices conducted over the past decade, focusing on the Community-Based Research Framework, partnerships with academic institutions, the development of toolkits and resources, and research training initiatives.

Since 2015, Access Alliance has led 46 research projects, with seven more proposed for 2025 and 11 currently undergoing knowledge mobilization. There have been 52 projects launched in collaboration with 77 unique partners, resulting in 39 publications that have been cited over 570 times in 21 journals, with 105 authors contributing. Among the seven active projects that Access Alliance is spearheading, two are considered flagship initiatives: the CANRISK Data Collection Project and the Hubs of Expressive Arts for Life (HEAL) Program. The organization's knowledge mobilization efforts include the creation of accessible and multilingual materials – such as infographics, toolkits, blog posts, presentations and videos – used in outreach, community training and evaluation. 12 infographics, six toolkits, 42 blog

posts, 21 presentations and eight videos have been compiled. Access Alliance's work has been featured at conferences and public platforms, including the Tenfold Podcast and the 7th International Conference on Gender in Barcelona.

At the individual level, Access Alliance strives to meet the needs of community members by offering culturally-sensitive and client-centred services. It gathers client experience and feedback data to enhance health outcomes for priority populations. The organization supports talent development by providing training to students, researchers, and staff. The CBR Department has provided placement opportunities for numerous students and trained over 25 Fellows across eight cohorts through its Immigrant Insight Scholar Program. To extend its impact, Access Alliance maintains strong partnerships with academic institutions, community organizations and public health agencies. Its advocacy efforts have entailed empowering community members to participate in research and influencing policy through initiatives like Undocumented. Stories that collected 125 handwritten stories from undocumented individuals in Toronto, which were later published in a book and exhibited in a gallery. Further, organizational staff have collaborated with the Internationally Trained Professionals Access Coalition to advocate for the integration of skilled immigrants in healthcare, influencing government policy through the Ontario Health System Stability and Recovery Report.

The prospective goal of Access Alliance's CBR Department is to ensure long-term sustainability and improvement. As the Department evolves, Access Alliance remains committed to making a lasting impact on the communities it serves and advancing learning, innovation and equity in the research sector.

Access Alliance Presentation - Compounding Disadvantage: The Impact of COVID-19 on Immigrants Living with Cancer or Mental Health & Addiction Disorders

Presented by

Dr. Mandana Vahabi, Professor, Daphne Cockwell School of Nursing and Co-Director, Centre for Global Health and Health Equity, Toronto Metropolitan University

Proceedings by: Maiesha Rahman

During the pandemic, immigrants accounted for approximately half of all COVID-19 cases, despite making up only 25% of the population in Canada. The highest infection rates were observed among individuals identifying as South Asian, Indo-Caribbean, Black, Southeast Asian, Arab, Middle Eastern or West Asian. In addition to long-standing structural inequities, social and economic vulnerabilities (e.g., being employed in a high-risk, low-paying and precarious job with limited workplace protection) contributed to greater exposure to the virus.

The research project sought to assess the impact of COVID-19 on immigrants and refugees living with cancer or mental health and addiction issues, and to identify community-driven solutions to support their health during the pandemic and future crises. Phase one involved a population-based retrospective cohort study using linked administrative social and health data from the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences. Five key health outcomes were examined: COVID-19 infection rates, hospitalization, ICU admissions, and mortality and vaccination uptake. These outcomes were compared across immigrants and refugees with cancer or mental health and addiction issues, non-immigrants with or without these conditions and immigrants without these conditions. Phase two engaged community members, service

The Trajectory of Sustainable Development
Volume 9, Issue 1, September 2025 (*ISSN 2818-0178)*

Formerly: Journal for Worldwide Holistic Sustainable Development (JWHSD), ISSN 2409-9384 (online version) & ISSN 2414-3286 (print version)

providers and policymakers in two virtual half-day "team tank" sessions – one focused on cancer and the other on mental health and addictions.

Evidence from the study demonstrated that immigrants experienced significantly higher COVID-19 infection rates across both the cancer and mental health populations. Among immigrants with active cancer, the infection rate was more than twice that of their non-immigrant counterparts (7.4% vs. 3.2%). Similarly, among those with mental health and addiction issues, the infection rate was 9.2% for immigrants compared to 5.2% for non-immigrants. Vaccination uptake was consistently lower among immigrants, regardless of cancer or mental health status. Rates declined further with each subsequent dose, suggesting ongoing barriers related to access, trust, or both. Immigrants with cancer were among the most severely affected by the pandemic: they were 66% more likely to contract COVID-19, 3.3 times more likely to be hospitalized, 3 times more likely to be admitted to intensive care, 4.2 times more likely to die from the virus and about 50% less likely to be vaccinated than non-immigrants with cancer. Similarly, immigrants with mental health and addiction conditions also faced elevated risks across nearly all health outcomes. These patterns reveal how immigration status, when combined with complex health needs, substantially increases vulnerability during a public health crisis.

Recommendations from team tank sessions reflected a need for a holistic and culturally responsive approach to improving health equity for immigrant communities. Key recommendations emerging from the discussions included:

1. Engaging internationally educated health professionals as Community Health Ambassadors, leveraging their clinical expertise, multilingual abilities, cultural insight and established trust within their communities.

The Trajectory of Sustainable Development
**Volume 9, Issue 1, September 2025 (*ISSN 2818-0178)*

Formerly: Journal for Worldwide Holistic Sustainable Development (JWHSD), ISSN 2409-9384 (online version) & ISSN 2414-3286 (print version)

2. Ensuring early connection to health and social services for newcomers, ideally beginning at the stage of the immigration medical examination.

3. Expanding the capacity and reach of Community Health Centres, which frequently serve as the primary point of access for individuals without a family physician?

4. Developing a centralized provincial health portal offering multilingual, culturally safe information, a particularly critical resource when in-person services are restricted, as in the case of public health emergencies.

5. Cross-sector collaboration to address the underlying determinants of mental distress among newcomers.

6. Co-designing mental health programs with community members to ensure they reflect lived experiences and cultural values.

7. Mandating cultural competency training for frontline workers with a focus on anti-racist, trauma-informed care approaches.

8. Enhancing digital and health literacy, recognizing that many newcomers face hurdles when seeking virtual care and navigating health systems.

Presentation 1 - Paternal Mental Health in Canada: The Overlooked Crisis in the Perinatal Period

Presented by

Indrani Paul, Clinical Researcher & MSc Candidate, Experimental Medicine, McGill University

Proceedings by: Maiesha Rahman

Paternal mental health pertains to a father's emotional and psychological well-being, particularly during the transition to parenthood. While maternal mental health has rightly received attention, this period of adjustment is often overlooked for fathers. Untreated paternal depression is linked to impaired bonding with the infant, emotional distress in mothers and behavioural issues in children. In Canada, 1 in 10 new fathers report experiencing postpartum depression, a rate comparable to that of mothers. Nearly 22% of fathers report high levels of anxiety and depression within the first year of their child's life. During this period, fathers may face up to a 50% higher risk of depression and anxiety rates can increase by 17%. Globally, the prevalence of paternal depression during the perinatal phase is estimated at 5-10%.

Multiple factors contribute to poor paternal mental health – for instance, financial stress and unemployment and a lack of social or emotional support, specifically in isolated nuclear families, unplanned pregnancies, substance use and infant sleep problems. Failing to acknowledge these risk factors can delay access to necessary interventions, place strain on relationships, impair healthy child development and lead to emotional and financial hardship that spans generations.

Several recommendations have been proposed to address this issue, including enhancing systems that engage both parents to improve outcomes for the entire family, integrating fathers into routine perinatal mental health screenings and designing gender-sensitive interventions tailored to their specific needs. Further, healthcare providers need training to recognize psychological distress in fathers, which may present differently than in mothers. Public health campaigns, support programs, more funding investments and policy frameworks represent key measures for consideration.

Presentation 2 - Mediterranean Lifestyle for South Asian Women: Acceptability & Challenges

Presented by

Yamini Bhatt, PhD Candidate, Urban Health, Toronto Metropolitan University

Proceedings by: Maiesha Rahman

The Mediterranean lifestyle, commonly abbreviated as "MedLife" is a holistic approach to living that draws on traditional practices from countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea and is well-documented for its protective effects against cardiovascular diseases (CVD). The primary components comprise a plant-based diet with moderate consumption of dairy, fish and poultry, minimal red meat and limited alcohol intake, along with at least 30 minutes of physical activity per day, 6 to 8 hours of daily sleep and conviviality which involves sharing meals with family and friends and participating in collective sports.

CVD is the leading cause of mortality worldwide and the second most common cause of death in Canada, accounting for 16% of global deaths and 17.7% of deaths in Canada in 2023. South Asians experience a disproportionately high burden of cardiovascular disease due to biological factors such as central obesity, insulin resistance and genetic predispositions, as well as lifestyle changes post-migration, including sedentary behaviour and acculturation stress. South Asian women in Canada, in particular, face additional CVD risk factors like preeclampsia and gestational diabetes, hormonal disorders and adverse reproductive events. Research also demonstrates that South Asian women have lower levels of physical activity compared to other ethnic groups and face cultural and structural barriers, compounded by gender bias in healthcare and a lack of women-specific cardiovascular

guidelines. To address these challenges, there is a need for culturally tailored cardiovascular prevention strategies.

The objectives of the proposed study are to evaluate the acceptability of MedLife as a preventive approach for cardiovascular diseases among South Asian immigrant women, to examine how their health beliefs—particularly perceived CVD risk—influence adoption and to explore the cultural and social factors that influence acceptability and feasibility. The significance of this research lies in addressing a critical gap in CVD prevention research relating to an underrepresented population. The study aims to promote sustainable behaviour change by proposing tailored modifications to interventions. Healthcare educators and practitioners can use the findings to promote the Mediterranean lifestyle or other lifestyle changes in a way that is accessible and relevant to South Asian immigrant women.

Presentation 3 - Cultural Competence among Healthcare Workers Providing Intervention Care to South Asian Immigrant Women in the Postnatal Period: A Rapid Review

Presented by

Anoushka Anoushka, BScN Student, Toronto Metropolitan University and Research Assistant, Bridging Divides

Proceedings by: Maiesha Rahman

Postnatal care is often rooted in cultural beliefs and practices. For many South Asian women, healing after childbirth extends beyond medications and checkups – it is about rest, warm food that is made with intention, care from family and community and a rich postnatal knowledge bank they bring from their home countries. The Western biomedical paradigm tends to prioritize physical recovery while undermining cultural elements. Cultural competence remains underdeveloped and under-informed for this particular population. Genuine culturally competent care encompasses listening, exhibiting respect and adapting care to meet people where they are – paying heed to their language, identity and lived experiences.

The rapid review project aimed to explore how healthcare providers deliver culturally competent care to South Asian immigrant women, and barriers and facilitators that exist in this process. Several findings were discerned:

- Healthcare providers encounter organizational constraints that limit interpreter use. Even women who are proficient in English report dissatisfaction, often feeling rushed or dismissed. This suggests that issues go beyond language and include

communication styles and systemic time pressures, which translation tools alone cannot solve.

- There is often cultural misalignment between healthcare delivery and the postpartum needs of South Asian immigrant women. Frequently, little to no importance is afforded to traditional practices due to hospital policies or providers not inquiring about them. Women also feel pressured to resume physical activity too soon, their pain and fatigue dismissed, and hospital food not meeting cultural expectations for healing. South Asian women commonly display a willingness to adapt traditions (e.g., modifying foods), highlighting that the barrier lay more in the healthcare system's lack of cultural awareness than the women's reluctance to change.

- Healthcare providers often demonstrate limited understanding of differences within South Asian communities. Lack of awareness or knowledge about ethnicity, language and religion, along with misinterpretation of modest behaviours, can lead to stereotyping and misunderstanding.

- Despite providers playing a central role in postnatal care, their perspectives were underrepresented in the literature, as indicated by only two of the four studies including their views and just one exploring barriers from their standpoint. This gap reveals the dearth of insights available on providers' understanding and capacity to deliver culturally competent care.

Implications for Action:

1. Participatory research is essential, and South Asian communities should be recognized as experts in their own care. Healthcare systems must engage them directly by presenting issues, soliciting input and co-developing solutions.

2. The narrative must shift from what healthcare systems assume patients need to what these communities need in reality.

3. Cultural competence must be redefined, not as a checklist of cultural traits, but as an ongoing, dynamic process grounded in human connection and cultural exchange.

4. Cultural safety training should emphasize critical reflexivity and learning from patients as a source of knowledge. For providers to reflect meaningfully, more extensive research is needed into how they understand and approach culturally competent care, especially in the postnatal context.

Closing Remarks

Presented by:

Cliff Ledwos, Acting Executive Director, Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services

Proceedings by: Maiesha Rahman

Cliff Ledwos reflected on the morning's session by likening it to a nourishing and fulfilling meal shared among friends:

- Atmosphere: The morning felt like being welcomed into the home of a close friend, surrounded by people they enjoy and respect.

- Structure of the event:

    - Appetizers: Small but flavorful pieces of research that left the audience wanting more, fueling the curiosity and hunger to learn more.

    - Main Courses: Presentations offering rich, diverse insights and in-depth knowledge.

    - Desserts: Three final, energizing contributions that were both impactful and satisfying, again leaving the audience wanting more.

- Research was compared to nourishment that jointly feeds the brain and the heart. It is meaningful, community-connected work that addresses real-world issues – workplace environments, healthcare, pandemics, fatherhood and women's reproductive health.

- Access Alliance is commended for its long-standing commitment and initiatives to mobilize partnerships with expert researchers ("big brains") and the communities they serve.

- Cliff encouraged the session attendees to continue engaging with one another, reflect on the insights gained and appreciate the collective effort and knowledge brought together in the gathering.

Day 2, Session 2: Food Insecurity

Keynote Speech - Political Uses of Access to Food

Presented by

Dr. Mustafa Koc, Professor Emeritus, Department of Sociology and Director, Centre For Studies In Food Security, Toronto Metropolitan University

Proceedings by: Jennifer Park

Dr. Mustafa Koc, the keynote speaker of Day 2, Session 2, criticized the political uses of access to food and underlined the importance of implementing universal principles to defend human rights, global peace and security, ultimately emphasizing the need for collective action to address food insecurity.

Dr. Koc began by emphasizing the importance of food in human life; it is a basic human need, providing nutrients and energy for survival. The World Food Summit of 1996 defined food security as a global objective and referred to the condition where all people have access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food. During the summit, the estimated number of people suffering food insecurity was 824 million people, and the countries committed to reducing the number by half by 2015. Despite the commitment, the projection made in 2010 did not show a promising result: 610 million people in 2015 and 440 million people by 2040.

Dr. Koc continued to share statistics from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) 2023, showing key causes of food insecurity and the number of people affected:

- Extreme weather has affected 57 million people across 12 countries.

- Economic shocks, including inflation and an increase in food prices, have affected 84 million people across 24 countries.

- Wars and armed conflicts have affected 170 million people across 19 countries.

Moreover, the most recent data from January 2025 showed that roughly 900 million people are suffering from food insecurity or malnutrition, and 2.8 billion people cannot afford a healthy diet. These figures highlight the ongoing and escalating nature of global food insecurity, emphasizing the ned for collective action.

As previously mentioned, one of the causes of food insecurity is climate change, which adversely impacts crop yield and reduces the productive capacity of agricultural systems. While many researchers are working on new technologies and climate-resilient crops, there remains a lack of sufficient focus on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the primary driver of global warming.

In addition, water scarcity and the over-reliance on fossil fuels in food production were cited as major issues affecting food insecurity. The food system itself is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, accounting for 19-29% of total emissions. Furthermore, up to 40% of all food produced is either lost or wasted, further exacerbating food insecurity and environmental harm.

Dr. Koc also linked food insecurity to chronic poverty, disruptions like financial crises, natural disasters, and wars. These events can lead to long-term poverty and food insecurity, creating a cycle of hunger. The World Food Programme 2020 Hunger Map identified conflict-affected countries such as Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya, and Syria as particularly vulnerable to severe food insecurity due to instability and violence.

Dr. Koc highlighted the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza, due to the Israel-Palestine war, as a stark example. He cited the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, who described Gaza's hunger crisis as the most rapid and complete in modern history. A recent BBC report noted that 500,000 people (1 in 5) are currently facing starvation, and 71,000 children under 5 are expected to suffer acute malnutrition over the next 11 months. Overall, 1.95 million

people, accounting for 93% of Gaza's population, are facing high levels of food insecurity, with 244,000 people experiencing catastrophic conditions.

In conclusion, Dr. Koc urged the global community to take collective global action to address food insecurity. This includes addressing political problems, finding common ground, and advocating for justice and equity in global food systems.

Presentation 1 - Leveraging Urban Agriculture to Address Food Insecurity Among Urban Poor Communities: A Case Study from Colombo, Sri Lanka

Presented by

Dr. Chethika Gunasiri, JSPS Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Institute for Future Initiatives (IFI), University of Tokyo

Proceedings by: Jennifer Park

Dr. Chethika Gunasiri, a JSPS Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Institute for Future Initiatives (IFI), University of Tokyo, presented her case study on urban food insecurity, exploring the feasibility of using urban agriculture to address food insecurity among low-income urban communities.

Food insecurity is particularly critical in urban settings, with statistics indicating that over 75% of the moderately to severely food-insecure population resides in urban settings: 40% in urban areas and 36% in peri-urban areas. Moreover, urban food access is largely dependent on commercial supply chains, shaped by various urban systems such as food, housing, water, energy, and sanitation. Consequently, disruptions in the supply chain disproportionately affect low-income groups, including marginalized communities, due to a lack of economic capacity, limited access to food markets, inadequate urban infrastructure, and more. As a result, rising urban poverty has significantly increased the vulnerability to food insecurity.

The interconnectedness of urban systems further complicates the issue, making it difficult to design a targeted intervention to address urban food insecurity. Thus, food insecurity must be recognized as a systemic challenge rather than an isolated problem. Urban agriculture offers a promising solution to address this issue by providing fresh, local, and affordable produce while contributing to resilience, food justice, and sustainability. It also offers multifunctional

The Trajectory of Sustainable Development
Volume 9, Issue 1, September 2025 (*ISSN 2818-0178*)

Formerly: Journal for Worldwide Holistic Sustainable Development (JWHSD), ISSN 2409-9384 (online version) & ISSN 2414-3286 (print version)

benefits to related urban challenges. However, the success depends on local feasibility, especially social acceptance and access to the space.

This case study examines the feasibility of urban agriculture in Colombo, Sri Lanka, a rapidly urbanizing city with stark income disparities. Approximately 15% of the urban population lives in poverty, and 50% of the population suffers from food insecurity. Furthermore, a healthy diet remains unattainable for more than 40% of the population due to an increase in the cost of a healthy diet, rising from $3.58 to $4.77 per person per day between 2017 and 2022. This study addresses three primary research questions:

1) What's the interest of low-income urban communities in farming?

2) What factors influence their willingness to participate in farming?

3) What are the key barriers to urban agriculture?

Dr. Gunasiri surveyed 166 households from a particular urban underserved settlement to understand their interest in urban farming, motivation, barriers, and social demographic factors, including age, gender, education level, and household size. Findings indicated that 78.3% of respondents expressed willingness to contribute to urban agriculture. Age and education level were significant factors influencing their level of interest. Elderly citizens showed more interest, possibly due to their traditional knowledge and leisure time. Also, a higher education level was associated with higher interest, possibly due to greater awareness of the health and economic benefits of urban agriculture. Although the data was not significant, women and larger households also showed stronger interest in urban agriculture, recognizing the advantages of urban agriculture.

The primary constraint of urban agriculture in Colombo was the limited land availability. Colombo is interwoven with canal banks, resulting in residents lacking private spaces suitable for farming. The study suggested innovative solutions such as sac gardening, vertical

farming, or community plants, which have been implemented in other developing countries. Moreover, a lack of integration with policy impedes its adoption despite the increasing trend of promoting urban agriculture in many cities. Therefore, it is vital to identify the needs in urban agriculture and incorporate them into local development and planning, including providing access to land, technical training, and support systems to residents willing to start urban agriculture.

Urban agriculture shows strong potential to reduce food insecurity in Colombo, offering co-benefits such as psychological well-being, climate adaptation, and waste management. The key to the success of urban agriculture will be community willingness, space access, and supportive policies. Dr. Gunasiri concludes the presentation by guiding future research to include pilot interventions and study the long-term impacts of urban agriculture on counteracting food insecurity and other urban challenges.

Presentation 2 - Justice: A Web-based and Mobile Application for Food Bank Users and Food Bank Operators

Presented by

Dr. Amanda Wedge, Manager, Social Innovation Research Centre, Centennial College and President,

Scarborough Food Network

Proceedings by: Jennifer Park

Dr. Amanda Wedge, President of the Scarborough Food Network and Manager of the Social Innovation Research Centre, presented her ongoing research project on developing a new application for food bank users and operators in Scarborough. The initiative seeks to meet users' needs by providing timely, organized, and accessible information. It wlil also enable effective communication, collaboration, and resource coordination among food bank operators.

This three-year project is divided into three phases:

- Phase 1: Community Needs Assessment | July 2024 - June 2025

- Phase 2: Developing and Launching the Application | July 2025 - June 2026

- Phase 3: Evaluation and Application Optimization | June 2026 - July 2027.

The web-based and mobile-friendly application targets users who struggle to navigate and manage information about the food banks in Scarborough.

Phase 1 involved identifying the needs of both food bank users and operators that could be addressed by the application. A team of six student Research Assistants developed survey and interview questions and collected 192 food bank user surveys, 6 food bank operator surveys, and 7 food bank operator interviews. The survey was translated into the following seven

107

languages based on community input: Arabic, Bengali, Farsi, Hindi, Simplified Chinese, Spanish, and Urdu.

The findings revealed that 63% of food bank users never discard items received from food banks, while 37% do; 33% reported sometimes, and 4% reported often. The primary reasons for discarding the items were: items past their best-before dates (34%), personal preference (12%), and unfamiliarity with how to cook with certain ingredients (12%).

As an intervention to help prevent discarding items from the food bank, the new app may include educational resources on the difference between best-before dates and expiry dates for the food bank users. Moreover, the app may also provide simple recipes on how to cook certain items from the food bank.

During the survey, the food bank operators reported key features that would be very useful in the new app:

- Ability for the food bank in Scarborough to communicate with one another

- Ability to request donations of specific items and fundraising initiatives

- Ability for food bank users to make a private profile for food banks to see their household size, dietary preferences, etc.

Features considered somewhat useful included inventory tracking to manage stock and reduce excess food waste, and volunteer recruitment functions. The food bank operators also indicated that volunteers are most likely to update the app, and 80% believed a weekly update would be feasible.

Dr. Wedge concluded the presentation with an overview of Phase 2, which will focus on developing and launching the application. Her team plans to hire six software development students from Centennial College to develop and test the web-based application based on the analyzed Phase 1 data.

With 20-25% of Canadian households, especially the marginalized community, experiencing food insecurity, this project will be an important tool in reducing barriers to food access and enhancing community collaboration.