

COOPER INSTITUTE ACTIVITIES REPORT 2013



With the support of many generous donors Cooper Institute has been active in the community for 30 years.

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About Coalitions

Cooper Institute is fortunate to be able to carry out our work in collaboration with a wide range of groups and individual who are also committed to social justice. The value of this style of working is that it promotes cooperation and provides the opportunity for sharing knowledge and strategies. It is an environment in which we learn with, and from, each other. Also it is an efficient use of time and energy. It cuts down on the duplication of efforts.

In this form of work we are privileged to be in daily direct contact with people who are impoverished and who are left on the margins of society. We are face-to-face with unionized and non-unionized labour, including temporary foreign workers. We are with the elderly and the young. We are part of the fight to maintain public healthcare, and the inclusion of alternative health care for all who prefer it. We are united with equality-seeking women who fight for reproductive rights.

We work with various groups to bring major issues to more people through **Cinema Politica**. We join with groups that stand for protection of our land and seas from the devastation of oil and gas exploration and extraction.

We are with environmentalists, public transport

enthusiasts, and people with disabilities. We hear constantly the voice of food producers who value the ecosystem and who work toward people-centered food systems. We are closely associated with all who see adequate, safe, healthy food and water as a right for all people. We remain close to recent immigrants and those who are still being denied full entry into Canada. We appreciate and thank all our associates. Together we can contribute to the creation of new and just solutions.

Remembering Andrew

Andrew Macdonald, known to many Islanders as "Father" Andrew, died on April 18, 2013. He was a founder of Cooper Institute, a visionary, a creative man, and deeply dedicated to social justice. We have missed his capacity to mourn with the people on the margins and with the wounded earth. We have missed his excitement about every step taken to make the world a loving and safe place for every person and all of creation. In times of crises in Cooper Institute, we could rely on Andrew to be full of new ideas and to come up with a new path. He loved life, and music, and the joy of having many friends. Gone but not far from us! Sing your heart out, Andrew.



PEI Working Group for a Livable Income

The PEI Working Group for a Livable Income (WGLI) has a ten-year history. It is made up of twelve community-based organizations, most of which are Island-wide. WGLI believes that all citizens of PEI have **a right** to an income that allows them to live in good health and with dignity. Our goal is to influence attitudes and actions of the community, employees, employers, and public policy makers in an effort to make livable income a reality for all Islanders.

By **livable income**, we mean an income that allows families and individuals to pay their rent or mortgage and monthly bills, buy medicine and nutritious food, use transportation and childcare, participate in the community and have money left for some extras and to cover emergencies. Livable income is about all kinds of income that individuals and families rely upon. For some, wages are the most important source of income; for others, income may come from pensions, Social Assistance, Employment Insurance or the Disability Support Program.

In 2013, one concern of the WGL was the PEI Government's *Social Action to Reduce Poverty*. WGLI members presented their concerns to the Premier about the lack of an overall, inter-departmental plan. There is little indication that the Government is interested in changing its model from charity to social justice.

Early in the year WGLI published a guest opinion about how HST would disadvantage people on low incomes. The Working Group appreciates the calls it gets from various media for comments on the effects on people with low income of increases in rents, in fuel costs and of inadequate minimum wage standards.

Fair Employment Insurance

The PEI Coalition for Fair EI is led by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) PEI. Along with other unions and community-based organizations, Cooper Institute is an active member. The Coalition began in January with town hall meetings in four Island communities, explaining the changes in EI and providing residents with an opportunity to speak in a relatively safe environment about how the changes were affecting them, their families, and their communities. The Coalition sent media releases. Employers and politicians - municipal, provincial, and federal - participated in various helpful ways.

A welcome development in April 2013 was that after reviewing polls regarding citizen concern about the EI changes, the Atlantic Premiers made a commitment to stand united in urging the Federal Government to reverse the new regulations. In PEI,

65% of those polled opposed the changes. The four premiers formed the **Atlantic Canada Premiers' Panel on the Impact of Changes to Employment Insurance**. One person from each province was appointed to the panel. In preparation for this effort the Coalition for Fair EI conducted a town hall meeting in each county, inviting people to "tell their stories". Residents had an opportunity to hear about the purpose and process of the panel. Many wrote heart-rending messages on large poster paper, with many people hiding their faces when their messages were photographed. This work was later made into a video.

The Panel held four meetings in PEI in January 2014. The Coalitions presentation to the Panel included the messages recorded in the town hall meetings. These outlined new difficulties in having a claim approved; fewer weeks allowed on claim; calculation of benefits based on all weeks, including "short" weeks, giving a lower EI payment; many more people not qualifying; claims delayed; inaccessibility of the new appeal system; working while on EI is not worthwhile for most people; families and communities are negatively impacted by so many people moving away to work. Over all this is the pall of fear that is generated by the systems real or implied threats. The majority of people are afraid to appear or speak in public about their situation. Many people admit that they have lost hope. The Coalition will have a challenging year ahead.

Basic Income Guarantee (BIG)

From its beginning, *the PEI Working Group for a Livable Income* has held that some form of a social justice-based guaranteed income must be the alternative solution to the current unacceptable impoverishment and inequality in PEI. In April 2013 we hosted an expert on guaranteed annual income, Rob Rainer, for three days. Rob now leads a national organization on Basic Income Guarantee. After two days of public sessions with Rob, WGLI decided to devote much of our time and talents to developing a BIG campaign for PEI.

The campaign has five components and respective committees: designing a strategy to implement the BIG program for PEI; developing a communications plan and strategy; creating and delivering a community educational campaign; achieving engagement and buy-in from strategic partners; developing and maintaining connections with basic income work happening nationally & internationally.

For more information on BIG, see the opinion page on the last page of this Activities Report.

PEI Food Security Network

The PEI Food Security Network (FSN) is an education and action organization committed to achieving food security/sovereignty in Prince Edward Island. It is dedicated to changing community attitudes and public policy to promote: environmentally appropriate practices for the production and distribution of food; availability of affordable, healthy, culturally appropriate and personally acceptable food; livable income for producers; the right to food; and PEI self-reliance in food. Cooper Institute is an active member the FSN since its founding in 2008. Two working groups carry on the actions of the PEI FSN - **Food Access, Food Costing and Food Skills Working Group**; and **Sustainable Production and Distribution Working Group**.

On March 4, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter delivered the formal report of his 2012 visit to Canada to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. Members of the PEIFSN joined activists from across Canada to hear him present highlights by webinar. Among other issues, De Schutter tackled inadequate social assistance levels; low wages; short-sighted agricultural policies; health, obesity and chronic disease from poor diets; particular challenges facing Northern and Aboriginal communities (including access to country food and land issues) international food aid and student nutrition.

The **Sustainable Production and Distribution Working Group** devoted considerable time to researching the history and impact of the PEI Lands Protection Act. At the Horace Carver Commission, the working group made a comprehensive oral and printed submission. The presentation was based on the Pillars of Food Sovereignty: Focus on Food for People; Food Producers Valued; Localized Food Systems; Local Control; Knowledge & Skills Development; Working with Nature; Food as Sacred. The PowerPoint Presentation (and other information about the PEIFSN can be found at: <http://peifoodsecurity.wordpress.com>).

The Annual Meeting of the PEIFSN, held in May, highlighted some of the work being carried out in Nova Scotia as part of the 5-year project, Activating Change Together for Community Food Security. As well, PEIFSN members heard about the issues surrounding Temporary Foreign Workers in this province, and were presented with a brief summary of the presentation that had been made to the Carver Commission.

The Network responded in the media to several issues, notably the report on Household Food Insecurity in Canada, which revealed that PEI had the

second highest level of household food insecurity among provinces and territories and that in this province, one in four children is living in a food-insecure home.

Later in the year researchers from UPEI and the FSN released the results of a food costing study. They found that the cost of providing a nutritious diet had increased by 40% since 2005, whereas the amount that people on social assistance receive has stayed nearly the same. The FSN used this information to advocate for the re-establishment of a food-costing system for PEI, and for increases to social assistance rates.

Save Our Seas and Shores PEI

SOSS PEI is a coalition of groups and individuals who have come together for a single purpose – to prevent drilling for oil and gas in the Gulf of St Lawrence. The group is affiliated with the St Lawrence Coalition in Quebec and SOSS chapters in other Atlantic provinces.

In 2013, coalition members collected over 1,200 signatures on a petition that was presented in the PEI Legislature in April. Later in the year, SOSS contacted municipalities across the province, encouraging them to endorse a resolution calling for a ban on drilling in the Gulf. Members of SOSS made a presentation to two standing committees, and met with the Minister of Environment. As a result of a presentation to the Standing Committee on Agriculture, Environment, Energy and Forestry, on November 26th, that committee recommended to government that there be a moratorium on drilling in the Gulf.

In October, efforts of the coalition went into organizing a five-day visit to PEI by Sylvain Archambault, of the St Lawrence Coalition. This involved 4 very well attended community meetings and a day-long strategic planning session with fellow activists from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador.



SOSS PEI hosted an interprovincial strategy meeting in October

Don't Frack PEI

After almost three years of actions around the threats of Hydraulic Fracturing (fracking) in PEI, **Don't Frack PEI** was formally established on January 22, 2013. The group has roughly 80 members, organizations and individuals, who met four times over the year. Cooper Institute is part of the Steering Committee that carries out the day-to-day work, responding to requests for presentations, maintaining a presence in the media, meeting with policy-makers and administering a lively website:

www.dontfrackpei.com. They made ten successful community presentations and participated in the showing of *Promised Land* at City Cinema.

Don't Frack PEI is finding that Islanders are on high alert about fracking and that they are developing zero-tolerance of any development that has even a slight impact on the fragile sandstone aquifer underlying PEI and our limited water supply. People know that oil and gas industry interests are not the same as the interests of the majority of PEI residents.

Members of **Don't Frack PEI** made presentations to many policy-makers and politicians throughout the year, including: the PEI Minister of Environment; three MPs; the PEI Standing Committee on Agriculture, Environment, Energy and Forestry. In the PEI Legislature, on November 26th 2013, the Standing Committee presented to the government (as per the request from **Don't Frack PEI**) the recommendation of a moratorium on High Volume Hydraulic Fracturing. Two Island MPs have read a PEI no-fracking petition in the House of Commons. Plans for 2014 include wider community engagement, using a train-the-trainer program to promote local community leadership for action.

Cinema Politica

Cinema Politica Charlottetown hosted 10 film screenings in 2013, partnering with the Food Security Network, UFCW, Holland College Green Machine, CUPE PEI, the Island Peace Committee and others. The CP collective, in which Cooper Institute plays an important role, is attracting new members, and is building its audience. The documentaries – which in 2013 were about the politics of food, faith and resistance, mining (and resistance), the decline of bees, water, and migrant workers – have provided opportunities for people to take a break, be entertained, and maybe engage in a thoughtful discussion of the topic at hand.



Seniors Lead

Seniors Lead is a project of the Voluntary Resource Council aimed at opening up opportunities for seniors' involvement as members and directors of voluntary, community-based organizations. The project consisted of 15-hour's instruction and skills-development for work on boards of voluntary organizations and for engaging other seniors. Cooper Institute designed and directed the program.



Seniors Lead 2013

In Focus

The **InFocus** project is a pan-Canadian project of the Canadian Association for Community Living and the DisAbled Women's Network. Its ultimate goal is to develop strategies to ensure that people with disabilities can be safe, and healthy in their communities. The project does that by exploring the issues of violence and abuse, and access to health care from the point of view of men and women with disabilities, and bringing together individuals, service providers and advocates.

In PEI, Cooper Institute is the lead organization, and was responsible for planning a half-day "awareness forum" in April. The forum attracted almost 100 participants and featured a panel of men and women with disabilities who spoke of their experiences of violence in their lives, and of the challenges they face in maintaining good health.

In the late fall, several focus groups were organized in order to gather more information about the extent of abuse among men and women with disabilities, and about their experience getting help once they were abused. An on-line survey was also developed and will be completed by early 2014. Also being planned is a series of workshops on health for people with disabilities and service providers.

Seeds of Community

In 2013 Cooper Institute expanded its food sovereignty work to focus on Seed Sovereignty, and to build awareness, skills, and community capacity for seed saving among farmers and gardeners. The initiative involved community engagement, building a movement, education on seed sovereignty issues and seed saving. The goal of the project is to support and strengthen community seed libraries in all three counties of PEI.

Throughout the spring and summer of 2013 a small, inaugural seed library was compiled with donated seeds and volunteer seed packaging, with weekly distribution at the Charlottetown Farmers Market, at the Dandelion festival in May, and to the Desbrisay Community Gardeners. Several workshops on garden-scale seed saving were held throughout the spring and summer. A seed swap at the Confederation Centre Public Library in December was well attended.

The seed library, seed saving network is growing rapidly and more people are becoming interested and involved. The plans for 2014 are to establish a network of seed libraries housed in public libraries across the province, and to continue to hold seed trainings, seed swaps, and seed cleaning events.

We thank the City of Charlottetown, The Small Change Fund, the Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security, and all individual donors for their support in this project.



A seed exchange, held at Confederation Library, attracted gardeners and farmers alike

Temporary Foreign Workers

In 2013, Cooper Institute's work on the issues surrounding Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) Program continued to build on work that had been accomplished in previous years. On a national scale, there was much publicity and critique of the TFW program. Federal changes, including some changes to the Employment Insurance Program, have had a negative impact and have presented new challenges on the provincial level.

In PEI, Cooper Institute continues to participate in the steering committee for the *Justice Options for Immigrant Women and Girls* project. One part of this initiative was a forum for service providers at which Cooper Institute made a presentation on issues specific to women migrant workers in PEI.

In collaboration with UFCW and Cinema Politica Charlottetown, Cooper Institute hosted a public screening of the documentary *El Contrato*, and later organized a private film screening in Spanish for a group of Mexican farm workers.

In 2013, Cooper Institute's work on TFW issues became better connected with other organizations working on a national level, as a result of a public workshop in Charlottetown with a representative of the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR), of which Cooper Institute has become a member. Cooper Institute contributed significantly to the CCR's [Migrant Worker Report Cards](#) initiative, which rated each province in Canada on their support for Temporary Foreign Workers. The report cards received excellent media attention across the country.

Cooper Institute was represented on the organizing committee for and helped to facilitate CCR's first national Strategy Meeting on Migrant Worker Issues, which was held in Kitchener, Ontario in November.

PEI is now funding settlement services for TFWs, resulting in a new staff position at the PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada (PEI ANC). This has represented a significant change in the landscape of work with TFWs in PEI. A fruitful and mutually beneficial working relationship has developed, and this collaboration resulted in public engagement workshops entitled "Foreign Workers and PEI Communities" in three Prince County Communities: Summerside, O'Leary, and Alberton. The workshops were very well attended by community members and migrant workers and are leading to closer relationships, support and accompaniment and assisting Temporary Foreign Workers to advocate for themselves.

Organizational Development and Support

Over the past year Cooper Institute has worked with and supported many organizations in various ways:

Société St. Thomas d'Aquin - member involvement & leadership

PEI Parkinsons Society - two members involved as primary organizers

International Women's Day 2013- organization of celebration

Breaking the Silence - member involvement

P.E.I. Supported Decision-Making Coalition - planning, presentations to policy-makers

PEI Public Transit Coalition - coordination of meetings, media

Voluntary Resource Council - fundraising; orientation workshop; board

Public Transit Coalition - organization, administrative support

National Farmers Union - Lands Protection Act submission; national convention; preparation of information resources; ongoing leadership (2 members)

Partners for Change - participation in coalition to stop institutionalization of persons with intellectual disabilities in PEI

PEI People First - support for members with intellectual disabilities to participate in various committees; administrative support

Atlantic Council for International Cooperation - participation in events; organizing meetings

Latin American Mission Program (LAMP) - Daniel O'Hanley Memorial Lecture on mining; Lenten Mission Education Program on the Lands Protection Act

Council for Health Improvement through Research and Practice (CHIRP) - member of the Board of Directors and organization of first conference

ALERT - advocacy on behalf of Islanders on Social Assistance

Justice Options for Women – member of steering committee

Cooper Institute Funding

Support for Cooper Institute's work in the community comes mainly from private sources. Some of these are foundations; we also receive fees for services from other organizations, the amount depending on their ability to pay. We are especially thankful to the many **individual donors** who make generous contributions every year. We estimate that almost one third of our income is from private donors.

Cooper Institute invites other interested people to donate. This can be done in the following ways: pre-authorized monthly donations; an annual contribution; a memorial for a deceased family member or friend; a bequest in your Last Will and Testament. Cooper Institute is a charitable organization. (#10114 4541 RR0001)

Cooper Institute is Turning 30!

In 1984, a group of social activists came together to form the Cooper Institute collective. Thirty years later, some of the same activists form the core of Cooper Institute – others have come and gone. Times have changed but the issues largely remain the same. In 2014, we look forward to celebrating 30 years of joyful partnerships with our friends and allies, and reminiscing about some of our memorable campaigns, projects and actions.

Members of the Cooper Institute Collective:

Josie Baker	Maureen Larkin
Irene Burge	Leah MacLeod
Marie Burge	Reg Phalen
Joe Byrne	Selvi Roy
Eddie Cormier	Debbie Theuerkauf
Irene Doyle	Ann Wheatley
Marie Hendricken	



Missing from the photo: Irene Doyle, Marie Hendricken

CETA – a pact shrouded in secrecy

Canada is in the process of negotiating the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) with the European Union. People who know about the NAFTA Agreement of two decades ago and its impacts have reason to question CETA's promises of an economic bonanza for Canada.

In January of 1994, Canada, the United States and Mexico entered into the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). A majority of Canadians had voted against this pact in the 1988 free-trade election but that made no difference to the governing Conservatives and it apparently made no difference to the Liberals at the time – they had campaigned against it in 1988 but implemented it when they came to power in 1993. Proponents of NAFTA predicted that the benefits would accrue once the playing field was adjusted. “More trade equals more jobs”, they thundered, with “better pay and a better life for everyone”. They based their claims on economic thinking that said that the creation of wealth would be the rising tide that raised all ships. They labelled opponents to the trade arrangement as isolationists, as extremists who were holding Canada back from the 21st century.

The two decades since NAFTA are a good illustration of what we should be wary of when the economic and political elite team up in secret to negotiate something that should be better for everyone. Since 1994, what we have seen in Canada is stagnation in real wages, losses in the manufacturing sector, and an increasing gap between the poor and the rich. At the same time there has been massive investment in oil and gas development including the environmental disaster that is the tar sands. We live in communities where our friends, family and neighbours have no option but to head to the west or to the north to work in the oil industry. The inflated promises of 1988 and 1994, of more jobs and economic security have not been realized. What **has** happened is that our sovereignty has been compromised, as under the terms of NAFTA, our elected officials are now forced to cede national interest to international capital interest.

CETA is about more than trading goods with Europe. Rather, it should be understood as a constitutional-style document that affects matters that are normally decided by elected legislatures after public debate. It is astonishing to think that any seemingly developed democracy could even consider signing a pact like this without broad public engagement and dialogue. The text of the pact has not been released but the Harper government is already celebrating an agreement in principle. We can see the broad strokes of how the agreement will affect various economic sectors. These sectors include: public procurement/public services, water, pharmaceuticals and health care, investor rights, indigenous rights, environment, food security and farmer's rights, and energy, among others. The least we should expect is open discussion.

It is the role of government to act in the best interest of all its citizens. There are disturbing questions about the economic disadvantages that CETA will bring to Canada. Scott Sinclair has noted in his excellent article for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives² that the economic modelling used in the negotiations is based on errant assumptions. If NAFTA is any guide, the track record for predicting economic benefits and the distribution of those benefits was simply wrong. The current trade deficit with Europe is actually projected to worsen even in the models that the negotiators are using. Our experience with NAFTA indicates that we should anticipate a similar loss of production capacity and it seems that our only compensation will be more raw logs, potash and heavy crude oil heading across the Atlantic.

However it seems the most dangerous aspect of CETA is that it is an economic pact that will tie the hands of our elected legislators to structure our economy, environment, and society in a way that benefits all Canadians. As a country we should always consider how the production and preservation of wealth has a negative impact on our neighbours around the world, but CETA is not addressing worldwide redistribution of wealth (or even redistribution between Canada-EU). It is about making it easier for corporations to increase their wealth. Signing CETA is a way to weaken democracy at a time when we need to engage more people. Trade is an activity that helped build this country and which is naturally seen as one part of our economic engine but this particular deal, negotiated in secret so far, does not meet even minimal expectations for organizing trade for the benefit of all.

For more analysis of CETA, see:

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

<http://www.policyalternatives.ca>

Council of Canadians

<http://www.canadians.org/ceta-info>

or look for

Islanders against CETA on FaceBook.

²<http://policyalternatives.ca/publications/commentary/ten-questions-about-ceta>

Basic Income Guarantee

By 1:11pm on January 2, the first official working day of the year, Canada's top 100 CEOs had each already pocketed \$46,634 — what it takes most Canadians an entire year, working full-time, to earn.

Income inequality has become a feature of Canadian society. As wages and social assistance rates fail to keep up with the cost of living, and pensions and employment insurance programs fall short of meeting workers' needs, people with low incomes become poorer and more marginalized, while at the other end of the scale, the rich just keep getting richer. This is no accident. It is a result of governments failure to provide adequate social supports and services, and policies that benefit the corporate elite and the accumulation of extreme wealth.

Most people would agree that everyone has a basic right to adequate food, clothes, and shelter. In fact, that is exactly what Article 25 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights says: *Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.*

One strategy to address inequality, promote human rights, and provide everyone with a livable income *and* dignity is a Basic Income Guarantee – otherwise known as Guaranteed Annual Income. It's an idea that's been around for some time, and has gained attention over the past few years, in places as far apart as Switzerland, Namibia, and Brazil. Closer to home, over the past year, the PEI Working Group for a Livable Income has focused its energy on Basic Income Guarantee. The premise is fairly simple. Every person is entitled to a single, unconditional, monthly (or biweekly) payment, enough income to meet basic needs. The basic income could replace or at least streamline the complicated system of income assistance programs currently administered by various levels of government. Because Basic Income is universal, there wouldn't be the stigma that is so often associated with welfare and other programs. It would promote dignity. There are options in terms of how the program could actually work. Under the *Negative Income Tax* scheme, people complete tax returns, which are then used to calculate how much more income they need in order to reach a predetermined threshold or "livable income level". They would then receive that amount on an annual basis. Another option is a *demogrant*: an amount of money is paid to every citizen, regardless of income. Some people would end up paying back some of that amount when they file their tax returns. Regardless of which option is chosen, the effect is the same – a simpler, more humane solution for poverty eradication.

It has been done before in Canada – In 1974, in Dauphin, Manitoba, the *Mincome Project* involved about 1,000 people living below the poverty line each received a monthly cheque for a period of four years. The project, although it is generally agreed that it ended too soon, found that the majority of people continued to work, with the exception of mothers who now had the opportunity to stay at home to care for their families, and teenagers who no longer needed to supplement their families income and could graduate from high school. Four decades later, Dr Evelyn Forget is reexamining the research, paying special attention to health outcomes. She says, "When you walk around a hospital, it's pretty clear that a lot of the time, that what we are treating are the consequences of poverty." Her analysis revealed that over the four years of the project, hospital admissions were reduced by 8.5%, which today would be equivalent to a savings of 4 billion dollars.



So, what difference would Basic Income make? It would result in:

- Improved health outcomes
- Food Security – access to affordable healthy food
- Healthy communities – people supporting local businesses

It would not cost any more than we are already spending on social programs, and we would save money that is currently spent on healthcare. According to some estimates it would cost \$85 million to bring the income of every person in PEI to the poverty line. In comparison, it has been estimated that the annual cost of poverty in this province is \$240 to \$320 million. The advances that our society has made this century in the fields of science and technology are huge. In contrast is our abysmal record on eradicating poverty and bringing dignity to the lives of people who are affected by it. We can improve that record, by looking seriously at implementing a Basic Income Guarantee. Across the country, around the world, and here on our gentle Island, activists are looking with renewed interest at this idea that has the potential to create a more equitable society.