

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

Rafael Lembi, PhD Student, Department of Community Sustainability, Michigan State University (lembi@msu.edu)
 Chelsea Wentworth, Assistant Professor, Office of Medical Education Research and Development, Michigan State University
 Jennifer Hodbod, Lecturer, Sustainability Research Institute, University of Leeds



Background

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

Guiding Question

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

Goals

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

Key Definitions

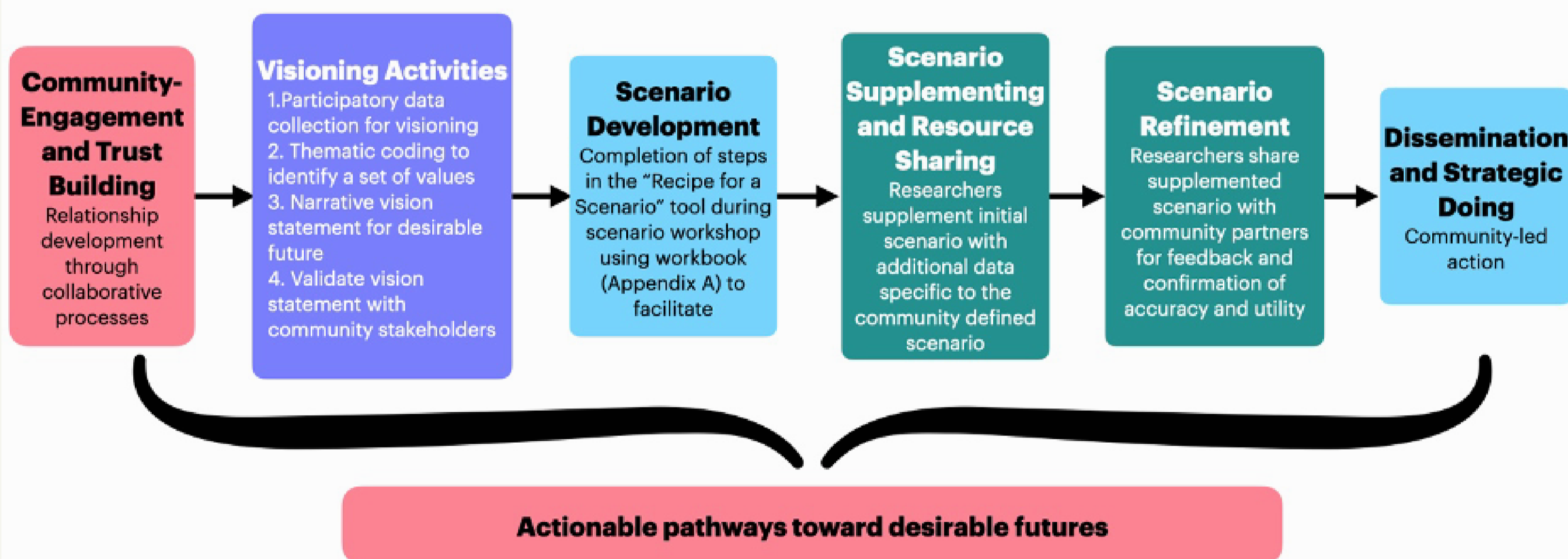
Scenarios: Storylines that describe a plausible and desirable future system and the steps that can be used to achieve them

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

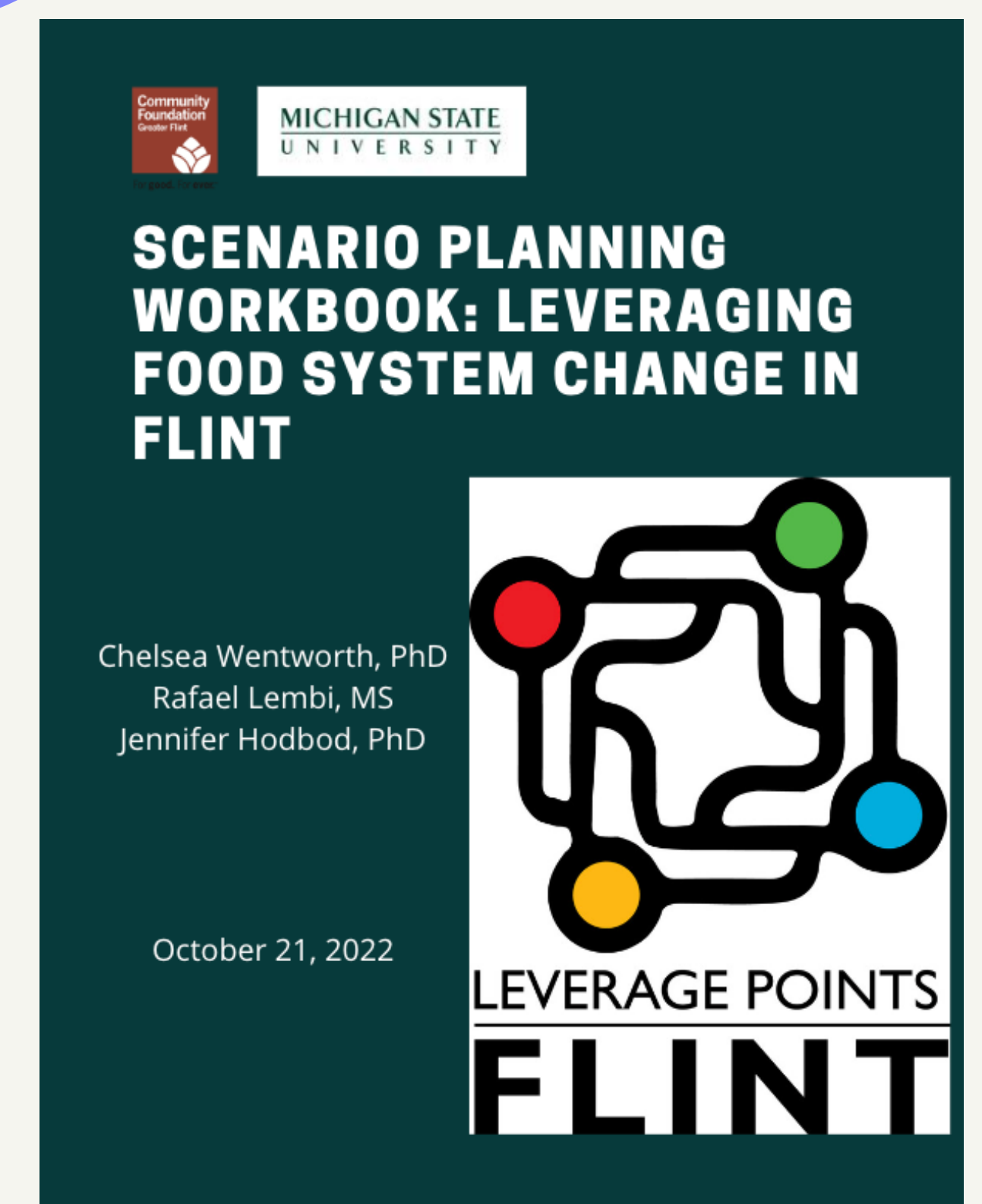
Method

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

Participatory Scenario Planning Process



Workshop at the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan



Workbook for workshop facilitation

Summary of resulting scenarios from the workshop

"Community Unity"

Currently: Limited resources and silos put organizations in competition for funding, promoting self-interested collaboration and limiting system-level innovations.

Desirable Future: Community service providers collaborate with resource providers, government, non-profits, residents, faith-based organizations and retail for mutual benefit, achieving authentic community-based collaboration across all sectors.

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



"Empowering Choices"

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

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

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

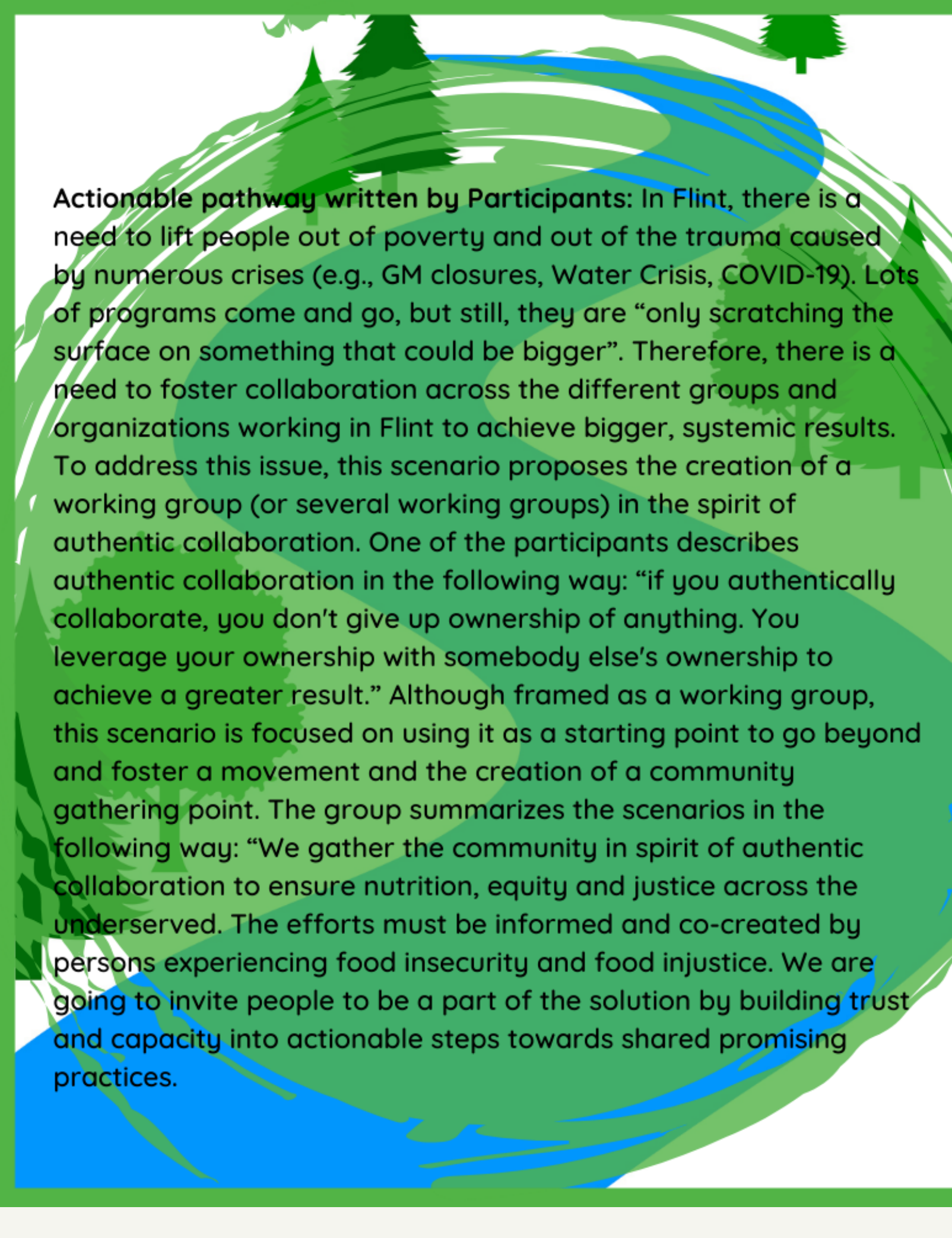


"Nutrition, Equity, and Justice"

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

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

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

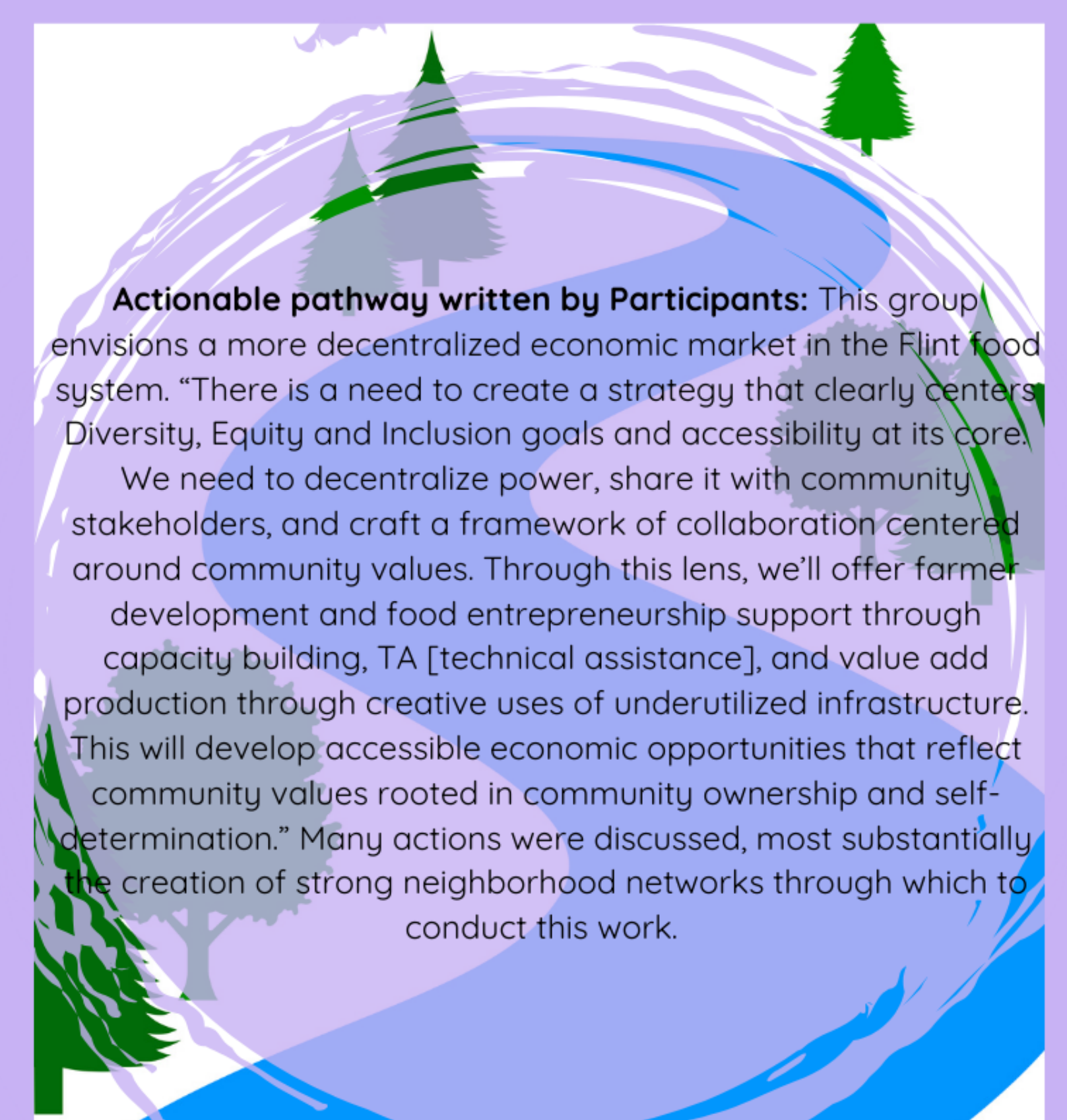


"The People's Market"

Currently: Economic investment heavily focuses on emergency food distribution rather than preventing need. Jobs are low-paying and ownership of the food system lies with people outside of Flint.

Desirable Future: Drawing on the many assets within our community, future economic investment results in Flint-based ownership within the food system. Economic development fosters cultural growth, is culturally appropriate and improves quality of life for all residents.

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



Key Lessons

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



SCAN ME