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Case Study: Temporary Migrant Agricultural Worker's Right to Permanent Residency

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DESCRIPTION OF THE CASE AND RECOMMENDATIONS



CONTEXT

The project community partner was the Radical Action with Migrants in Agriculture (RAMA), a grassroots migrant justice not-for-profit group dedicated to advocating for the rights and wellbeing of temporary migrant agricultural workers (TMAWs) in the Okanagan Region of British Columbia (BC). RAMA's efforts center around key issues including fair wages, safe working conditions, access to healthcare, and addressing immigration status challenges faced by TMAWs in the agricultural sector. RAMA is committed to raising awareness about the hardships experienced by migrant workers and actively seeks to bring about social and policy changes that enhance their living and working conditions.

WHAT IS THE EQUITY CHALLENGE?

Although TMAWs are legally entitled to a safe workplace free from discrimination in Canada, their closed work permits mean they are bound to specific employers who wield control over their employment (e.g., compensation, work conditions), prohibiting access to job security and mobility, while making them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Closed work permits makes it impossible for workers to exercise their rights and seek protection over fears of being deported or losing employment. This situation has led the United Nations to call the Canadian temporary foreign worker program “a breeding ground for contemporary slavery”. While access to permanent residency (PR) would provide workers with opportunities to attain rights and protections against abuse, there persists pervasive reluctance from government and public to afford migrant workers opportunities for PR, despite their significant contributions to Canada's economy.

WHAT WAS THE EQUITY RESPONSE?

A Systematic Equity Action-Analysis (SEA) framework was used to integrate equity throughout the entire partnership research process, leading to the co-creation of a communication strategy campaign for RAMA that aims to gain supporters for the #StatusForAll campaign among attendees of the Kelowna BC's Farmer's Market. This campaign advocates PR pathways for TMAWs, with the goal of attaining rights, protections, and increasing well-being for TMAWs. The communication strategy sought to achieve its objective by increasing public awareness about TMAWs societal contributions and their challenges accessing basic human rights; mobilizing constituents to advocate for policy changes by encouraging them to sign a petition urging federal government to support PR for TMAWs; and amplifying the campaign through personal networks and social media channels.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

In this process, I not only learned about the systemic inequities faced by TMAWs in Canada and the invaluable work RAMA conducts to support the human rights of migrant workers in British Columbia, but also the importance of centering equity in partnerships with local organizations to address real world issues and generate applicable knowledge to support a unified goal. Since a gap often exists between what is known from research and the actual implementation of research results, intentionally making space for groups with firsthand experience in the creation of knowledge provides opportunities to address research-action gaps to improve health equity for TMAWs.