



## SEEDHEADS TRANSCRIPT

---

### Episode 12: ANAN LOLOLI English

*SeedHeads is produced for audio listening and we encourage you to listen to the recording if you're able to. This transcript was generated by a combination of speech recognition software and human transcribers, and may contain errors.*

**{music}**

**Steph Benoit:** Hello and Welcome to *SeedHeads*, the cross-pollinating podcast where our Canadian seed heroes tell their stories, share their how-to tips, and talk about the seeds they love. I'm your host, Steph Benoit, coming to you from Ottawa, Ontario on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabeg people. Today, I had the true honour of talking to Anan Lololi. Anan is a food sovereignty activist, seed saver, and musician, who joined me from his home in Toronto on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples.

**{music}**

For over 20 years, Anan was executive director of Afri-Can Food Basket, and now chairs Toronto's Black food sovereignty working group. Anan was an early leader in the Food Justice movement in Canada and continues to advocate passionately for the food sovereignty of Black folks and other marginalized communities. In this episode, we talked about one of his favorite veggies to cook with and save seeds from callaloo, the history of his work, effective allyship from white people in the food movement, and so much more. As always, thank you for listening. I hope you enjoy this episode. Well, hello, Anan. Thank you so much for joining me this afternoon.

*SeedHeads is produced by The Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security, a program of SeedChange*

**Anan Lololi:** Hi, I'm honoured to be here to take part in this conversation and seeds and food sovereignty. It's definitely an honour for me to be here.

**Steph:** Well, thank you. We were just before we started recording just chatting about how busy you've been, and maybe you could speak a little bit to your different roles previously with the Afri-Can Food Basket and now as the Chair of Toronto's Black Food Sovereignty Working Group. What are the things that have been keeping you busy?

**Anan:** Well, first I like to acknowledge the land on which I'm operating on in Toronto, and my responsibility to steward it well. For thousands of years, this has been the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, the Anishinabeg, Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, the Wendat, and the Mississaugas of the New Credit. It's also the home of people of African descent. These communities are a reflection of the generation current and past and represent the ancestral history of those brought to this city and country involuntarily as a result of trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Today, this is the meeting place to stay home to many first nations, native and indigenous people from all across Turtle Island, and the proud people of Africa and the vast diaspora. This territory of unceded land covered under Toronto 2013 of upper calendar land surrenders.

Well, as I said before, it's an honour to be here and talking about this city that I love so much. We like to count ourself as the most diverse city in the world and really and truly my seeds saving experience has been out of this world because I have been able to see the world in a garden in the city. I could talk to myself as one of the persons who really establish and help community established most of the community gardens in Toronto.

I've worked on over a hundred backyards and community gardens in all, but a lot of work intentionally in what we call community garden animation. That is going into communities and helping them to animate the garden. You know animation, big things to life?

**Steph:** Yes.

**Anan:** Is about bringing these communities and predominantly, the work I did is in low-income communities. The low-income communities is where we'll find new immigrants who come to Toronto, who are now getting the opportunity to give the children good healthcare, good education, and hopefully a good meal. With them, they bring the culture of food with them. Many of them brought some interesting features in the different species of seeds and varieties. I know our conversation will be a lot on my favorite, callaloo.

**Steph:** Yes.

Over 27 years ago, I was one of the founders of the Afri-Can Food Basket and was a consumer nonprofit food-buying club. We are members of the consumer co-op would buy a small basket of food for \$15 or a large one, \$25. Every couple of weeks in the month, we distribute this food to the community. We did that for 11 years and then decided we want to grow the food to put in the basket. It's so happened for the last two-plus years, we have been doing just that.

We have been complementing the tropical foods that we put into the food basket with the foods that we're growing on the farm. That includes callaloo, that includes some okra, that includes some kale, some chard, tomatoes, and most importantly, we've been growing garlic at a tremendous rate. In between 11 years, from the second year, it started actually looking at urban farming. We grew a quarter acre of garlic just outside Toronto, about 15 to 20 minutes outside Toronto.

In that same year, we had a strategic gathering with some really knowledgeable folks within the Black community like Winston Husbands. He was a food policy expert. Nanika Feli, **[spelling?]**, his work was on community development and African-centered teaching. Solomon Ngoye **[spelling?]**, he was a master garden er and a horticulturalists, City of Toronto Committee Garden coordinator, more like a manager for that particular area of Parks and Rec. Then Yuga **[spelling?]**, is a brother from Uganda, who his type of program was an environmental program.

It really covers all the focus areas that from that time in 1997 to present, that we look at growing food, urban agriculture, and growing it ecologically with an ecological event and it being organic food. Making sure we look at food policy and also look at the food would have an African-centered perspective. I would say probably similar to indigenous food sovereignty.

We started looking at Black food sovereignty from a pretty early age, early time. We didn't call it food sovereignty in those times. We call it Community Food Security. We were delivering these what we call culturally-specific baskets and had things like avocado, coconuts, planting, edos, yams, sweet potato, and also like callaloo. Sometimes we put in Swiss chard. It had what we call in Caribbean, Irish potato, onions, garlic, oranges, mangos.

**Steph:** Oh, my gosh.

**Anan:** When folks get that basket, especially the seniors, it was an absolute delight, especially in the middle of winter. When they get a basket, maybe we get so much praise, and we get so much of "thank you. Hallelujah". It was a blessing. The young children in these families and these are young children who grew up and born in Canada, they can't wait for a pack of planting chips. They accustom to potato chips, but when they get planting chips it's like, "Wow."

**Steph:** Oh, my gosh. Yes, isn't that supposed to be? [chuckles]

**Anan:** They just run for the basket and take out the cover, dive in, and sometimes there's a fight for the planting chips.

**Steph:** [chuckles] I don't blame them.

**Anan:** In the summer of 1998, we also started a youth food program called A Full-year Youth Program. We wanted to make sure Black youths got involved in food programming. Especially growing food and cooking and knowing about culturally-specific foods because they grew up in apartment buildings, and they don't have a sense of where food is grown. We focus a lot intentionally on low-income communities because we want to make sure we bring community food

security to the most vulnerable in communities. We engage these young people from these communities and they got a chance to know about food, but they got a chance to get a cultural orientation as people of African descent.

That's from 1998 until present. Every year, we run youth programs. It varies according to the funding opportunities, but we have been consistently having them undergrown whether in community gardens or in urban farms. Because we have access to urban farming with the young people, we started what we call incubator farming. We're able to get Black farmers to get the opportunity from urban areas to be able to farm. We have a 2-acre farm, and we give farmers between a 0.5-acre and 1/8th-of-an-acre farm. They get a chance to really try out what farming could feel like. They would grow the food, and then the African Food Basket, we would sell the food at farmer's market. We've done that for a number of years also.

It's incubator farmer, we call it farming tech learning farms where people could come and learn to farm. At the same time, they'll get a piece of land and get the farm also at the same time. We also did that for a number of years. We give people the opportunities that they need. Sometimes we are over 20 farmers. Sometimes a 0.5 acre or 1/8 of an acre might have four people on that farm. The idea is to make sure people could work together cooperatively so that they could see how they could eventually purchase land, and work together to manage a larger farm that are most number of acres. We got some good opportunities where we see folks able to step out the program and do just that.

**Steph:** Oh, my goodness. These days, you're now working with the Black Food Sovereignty Working Group in Toronto, correct?

**Anan:** Yes. This is my main area of focus. In 2019, we approached the city because the City of Toronto have a pretty unique program. It's called the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit because of the many recommendations to the city over the years from the 1960s straight up. There was always recommendations, and they were never carried out. The city stepped up to the

plate and said, "You know what? We can set up this unit," and they're doing a great job.

The studies continue to show that anti-Black racism still exists in the city of Toronto, affecting the life and chances of more than 300,000 people of African descent. One of the recommendations was the area of food. We approached them because of our over 24 years experience at that time in food programming in Toronto, and without bragging and boasting, we probably won the first culturally-specific programming in food at a food institution in Canada at that time.

When we approached them, we approached them with tried and tested food systems programming. What we would do, we would come into partnership with them, and we look at the possibility of exploring the area of Black Food Sovereignty. From that time to now, we initiated community dialogue with the Black community in Toronto on what is food sovereignty, and what is culturally appropriate food that is produced ecologically sound and sustainable method, and their own right to defining their own agriculture and food system.

It was good conversation because Toronto is one of those beacons of light in general, where sustainable food systems have lots of things happening here. They didn't have that cultural focus lens. Although this is one of most diverse city in the world. We still have problems of anti-Black racism. We were able to organize and engage our community. Anti-Black I presume are one of the greatest predictors of food insecurity for African, Caribbean, and Black communities in Toronto. Food insecurity, we have a situation where over a third of Black children are food insecure, completely 11% of white children.

The backlash of something like that in one of the most wealthiest countries in the world is definitely embarrassing and atrocious that needs to be remedied. Advancing Black Food Sovereignty has been a very positive move forward. The report that Toronto border helped put forward is that they provided an update on the creation of a Black food family plan to improve access to affordable,

healthy, and culinary-appropriate food as part of the City of Toronto's COVID-19 response.

From my experience, over the last 27 years I've been doing this work, I realize the challenge and the systemic barriers of increasing access and opportunity, and ownership of the food system has to be by the Black community. Due respect to all my colleagues and these are mostly the institutions that are white-led, they're doing a good job, but the job is not enough. Food offers us a cultural lens, it need people in the community, just like indigenous food sovereignty, to be able to determine where it's going. There's lots of monies going to these huge organizations, but it's not enough. These organizations need to come into the Black community to develop the leadership, the skills, and the knowledge.

Instead of giving a person a fish, you show them how to fish. Then they will be able to look after themselves. Is as basic as that. People of African descent been in Canada since 1604. We are not just to come, we've been landing in Nova Scotia since 1600 to 1700s and we've been coming through whether it be Alberta or whether it be Ontario but at Windsor. We've been here a long time, but it's hard to identify a Black farming community.

**Steph:** That's so true.

**Anan:** We had a plan where the conversation on Black Food Sovereignty is to really change the paradigm of how we look at development of sustainable food systems that are culturally-specific.

**Steph:** In your opinion, is that what differentiates food security from food sovereignty? You were talking about before, the model was a food security lens, and now it's shifted towards more food sovereignty?

**Anan:** Yes. Honestly, for me, we started around 1995. We started in 1995, and the food sovereignty movement actually I think started in 1996. We were actually practicing urban food sovereignty from that time because we were growing food organically, and we intentionally had an African-centred lens on the work we're

doing that this is what we're doing. The food had to come from a cultural lens, it had to be culturally appropriate.

The menus, we work with Black youths for Black youth leadership in the movement. We've been doing this, but recently, we realize we need-- The whole concept about food security has been corrupted by corporations and this whole takeover, where they ban out seed companies. It's the most unsustainable way of looking at food of the future. We realize food is a human right. Food have to be managed by the people and not as a commodity. It has to look at the key focus and principles of food sovereignty to be something that is workable to advance the area of sustainable food systems.

**Steph:** Coming back to what you were saying before about having food be culturally appropriate and your love of callaloo, could you talk a little bit about callaloo for someone who's never tried it, what it is and why it's so important in the Black community in Toronto?

**Anan:** My dear, you are missing out. Callaloo, definitely up there as one of the premier league vegetables. I've been eating callaloo. I'm originally from the northern coast of the Amazon where the Atlantic meets the rainforests in Guyana in South America. I've been eating callaloo from that time. Now, the variety I grew up eating in Guyana is a little different than the one that predominantly grows up here. The one that predominantly grows up here is a variety that comes from Jamaica, the Jamaican callaloo.

At the University of West Indies, they've been breeding this particular variety. The popular variety of callaloo is the Jamaican callaloo. The leaves are much larger than the Asian varieties. My time in Toronto, I've been growing callaloo in my backyard since the '80s. A lot of times, it's the Jamaican variety or it's the Greek variety. Callaloo come from the main group, I would say, when you talk about callaloo is amaranth. The variety from Jamaica is one from the amaranth family. There are so many varieties and so many species and we won't go into that.

That whole area is something that needs to be looked at, but the variety from Jamaica, we've been saving these seeds over and over. I also like to make sure that from time to time, I order seeds from Jamaica, just to get a fresh variety because the pollination process, they cross-pollinate very easy. Now, in Toronto, on the farm, we have a farm right there, which I'm a farmer in Toronto, we see the cross-fertilization. There's a wide variety that grows in Toronto.

**Steph:** Oh, really?

**Anan:** Yes, the leaves are a bit paler, and it seeds pretty quick. I would tell you that variety to me is a much more nutritious variety than the variety from the Caribbean. It tastes more earthy. It is more natural. The thing about it is that it doesn't look good. It have a kind of pale green. In food culture, if you see a carrot in a food store and it looks funny, you would go for the ones that look good, but sometimes the sweet one is that one that you pass. You never know. You just assume. Looks are deceiving. I would say the same thing about the local callaloo. In one callaloo plant, you could get between 30,000 to 40,000 seeds.

**Steph:** Oh my gosh.

**Anan:** That's why the variety that grows traditionally in Ontario, Ontario farmers called it pigweed. They feed it to the pigs and animals. Now what they don't know is that this same callaloo that they're feeding the pigs and animal, well, they might have the wrong variety, but it's callaloo that they feed to people because they grow the same way. If you take that variety and you grow them singular, it could come out to be something. We've never experiment enough with it, but they feed it to the pigs. This same leaf vegetable is the most expensive leaf vegetable in Toronto, callaloo. When you go in a Caribbean food store or when you go in Asian food store, it's the most expensive leaf vegetable.

Now because Afri-Can Food Basket with what we do, and we popularize callaloo so much across the board. Not just for people from the Caribbean because we've been selling it at farmer's market and people have been buying them by the bunches. Lots more people are growing callaloo, so the price has come down a

bit, even for organic callaloo. Supply and demand. You've got lots, you get it at a reasonable price. If it's shortage, is a more expensive price.

Now everyone's going callaloo. People who grow it in the backyard, are the farmers from the Caribbean and Africa, they grow it in the farm plots. It's a good thing. At first, I used to be batting for the Jamaican farmers that they could send the callaloo up here, so we don't have import substitution. When I look at the state of the world and the environment, I realized you know what, we have to grow as much food here as possible. That is why it's important.

I know the Ontario government is way behind, they don't have a clue. They're still seeing the food system as a European food system in the most diverse province in the world, in Ontario, and they're not growing a lot of these tropical foods, but realized, you know what? We can't keep importing this food from Jamaica and Pakistan when this food can be grown here.

**Steph:** Right. And there's demand for it.

**Anan:** Yes. The Ontario farmers, they stick to their cultural foods that they distribute from Europe. It's not a large enough variety of foods. Edo, Chard. They could grow okra, they could grow callaloo, they could grow bitter melon, they could grow lime beans, they could grow pak choi. pak choi is one of the popular foods from Guyana, which is vegetables. Growing pak choi in Toronto, it produces a larger plant than in the Caribbean. Also, it's very weather-tolerant. A Pan choi plant can grow until about November in Toronto.

Callaloo by the time mid-September-- This year there's a whole lot of things, global warming, callaloo is blooming because it's still warm. It's usually colder now, but by then this time of the year usually, the callaloo has started to come out of the season because it can't take the cold. Saving the seeds of these culture-specific foods, these new immigrant foods. They call them war on foods, I don't know where they get that from. They should be growing more of these foods so that we won't have to be importing these foods from all across the world.

They should make an intentional effort to support a lot of folks who come to this country as new immigrants, who have degrees in botany and horticulture. All of these people, they're not working within the food system and that is sad. I know this good system, her name is Khadija. She has a degree in botany from Somalia, and she was driving a school bus. She should had a good job promoting the foods that she know from Somalia and have the same opportunity with her degree, but we're working on it. That's why when we talk about Black anti-racism, these are some of the areas that we know we need to look at.

With the Black Food Sovereignty plan, hopefully, we'll promote the idea of callaloo more and the idea of people saving the seeds so that much more people can be growing callaloo. Every year, we are to save one plant could grow nearly over 20,000 to 30,000, 40,000 seeds if you grow it in a way just for the seeds. Imagine just one plant, you're able to have enough callaloo for a couple of acres well that particular-- We've been doing that for a while, as I've been doing it before I got involved in food systems. We've been growing callaloo.

**Steph:** It's a very generous plant, it sounds like. Very generous with its seeds.

**Anan:** Very generous. When we talk about callaloo and the scientific name amaranth, it all goes back to Mexico. The Aztecs and Incas, they use it in their religious ceremonies. They use it in chocolate. It has even been said that because of the way they use it, European colonizers actually banned them from planting amaranth, and it has something to do with the religious way they're doing stuff. Colonization they tried to change everything. Everything has got to be Holy Mary, Mother of God **[audio unclear 00:28:36]**. The folks, the Incas had their own thing, and callaloo, more so, amaranth was a major part of that religious and cultural tradition.

**Steph:** It's also so interesting to think about the way that one plant can be culturally significant in so many different places as the plant travels and the people who are attending it travel. In that, now, in a place like Toronto, something like amaranth or callaloo can really thrive under the stewardship of

people who have brought it with them because it is so important to them, and it holds an important place in their culture.

**Anan:** Yes. As I said, this city is so bless as the indigenous people said, the Toronto, the meeting place. A place where people meet and people actually meet. What I love most about the city is diversity. I've been a vegan for over 45 years and in this city, I could eat Chinese vegan, I could eat some Asian vegan. I could eat Caribbean vegan, especially the Rastafari food, we call them ital food. I could eat African-American vegan, all types of different vegan options available within this city. That's the best. Just like the same way they bring their seeds.

As I said before, I see people saving seeds in community gardens, and they grow all different types of vegetables. That is why I enjoy most as being a community garden animator within the city. There's this one particular garden I like to talk about, actually, it's one of the largest community gardens probably the whole of North America. It had over 110 plots. I count 110 plots. The average community garden would have at least 15 to 20 plots. This garden had over 110 plots, and it was in an area where it is mostly predominantly middle eastern. It's with this family from Lebanon. This woman was growing her whole plot in one particular type of herb.

**Steph:** Her whole plot?

**Anan:** Yes, her whole plot. I think the particular vegetable that she was grew, I think it was out of \$14 a pound. I can't remember the name of the plant, but it was so expensive that she could grow this whole plot and the plot is about 4 feet by 12 feet. I see people growing all these different types of food. They finally would come from whether it be Lebanon, whether it be Afghanistan or Congo or Kenya or China. They would bring the seeds.

**Steph:** Food is so wrapped up in our identities. There is no culture without food.

**Anan:** Exactly, there's no human race without food. I like to tell people food is the single most important thing in a human being. There's nothing more important, you could live naked in a cave. You got to get food. When we talk

about Black food sovereignty, one of the biggest festivals in Africa is what they call the Yam Festival. Now doing this work and worked with Black community, I realized the people of African descent is what we call yam people. I didn't even know about the festival. I just said it because one of the things people of African descent do they cook soup. They cook this soup with peas and [?] and other vegetables.

My mother used to cook what we call spit pea soup. That's a special for Guyana. Probably, some other places are Black-eyed peas soup, and they always make sure they have yams inside. That's why when people talk about Usain Bolt, they say, "Oh, Usain Bolt?" We talking about he uses steroids or using drugs. The drug he's using is yam. He's using yams and that special sweet potato that comes from Jamaica. That is why got them running so fast. They running the yam, the yam got them running so fast, you know what I mean? they got America over 40 million people of African descent and so much hundred thousand of people and still they can't catch the Jamaicans. It's because of the yam and the potato and probably the callaloo.

**Steph:** Yes, that's awesome. I was going to ask as well, a lot of your work has been with youth over the years. What's your experience been getting young people involved with seed saving or with growing traditional foods that maybe they didn't grow up in the country where that food was being grown, but this is being passed down culturally?

**Anan:** Well, first of all, I'm so honoured to be able to work with youths in the City of Toronto. It's been my best experience that it has kept me young. As a musician, I honour their respect. I got a chance to get into hip-hop music and be a part of that tradition because I like to stay in touch with what they're doing. Now the combination of programs that we had for young people is youth leadership. It was more so building their leadership and not so much in food system but just there being leaders. Other than youth leadership, it's like job skills.

I say we work intentionally with youths in low-income communities. We want to make sure we encourage them to stay in school. We had what we call a community food security program where they learn about what is food security, what is the sustainable food system from seed to table? We also learn them about food justice and the component of growing food. They learn how to grow food, and they learn to grow most importantly culturally-specific foods. We empower them so that they can tell their children now know we eat callaloo. we don't necessarily eat Brussels sprout, kale. We use callaloo, pak choi, and bitter melon. That's what we eat.

They learn how to grow the food, they learn how to harvest the food, they learn how to sell the food at farmers' market. Engaging young people in all aspects of sustainable food systems. They also learn a bit about saving seeds. They learn how to save bitter melon, learn to save what we call long beans. In the Caribbean, they call it body and bora. They learn how to save callaloo, and learn how to grow callaloo plants, too. They get us some sense. The main idea is not for them to really become farmers, which allows them to venture in that direction but to know about the food system.

You grow up in an apartment building like some kids grew up in an apartment building and they drive in the countryside and they see a cow and they call it a dear. They can't relate where food come from. I think it's young children between the age of 6 and 11 and you ask them where food come from. You know what answer you get? McDonald's, Wendy's, Bugger King. They don't have a clue.

That's why our work was intentionally to make sure community gardens were at the back of these apartment buildings or back of these townhouses in low-income communities, so the children could actually see where food coming from. Tell you when they see a cherry tomato on the tree plant and they pick it and they eat it, that is what is called real magic for those kids.

**Steph:** Yes, that is magic.

**Anan:** Definitely.

**Steph:** There's so many kids who don't know where their food comes from. There's also so many adults having so many conversations just to get beyond like food doesn't just come from the grocery store but to take it one step further and like food comes from a seed. To get that seed, you have to grow a plant with the intention of growing a seed and just that whole cycle and continuing it further. It's just one of the greatest gifts I think you can give to a kid is to let them in on the secret early that food is magic and it is [crosstalk].

**Anan:** That's right.

**Steph:** I have two more questions for you. Is there anyone else out there who you want to uplift or shout out who's doing really important work in this space that you think people should also check out?

**Anan:** My good brother, he's in Detroit, Malik Yekini. That is my special brother, and he is doing some tremendous work. Right now, they set up what you call it People's Food Co-op. That alone for people of African descent is a model for development. In Toronto, at SeedChange, and that is the person sponsoring this program definitely, Ama Leticia Deawuo. I'm in trouble because I might pronounce her name wrong but Sister Ama.

There's one thing I would say, for sure, you should speak to my good brother from Somalia, his name is Bashir Monier. He's a chef, he's a food sovereignty activist, and he's also a professor at George Brown College teaching culinary arts and cooking and that kind of stuff. Who else? My good brother who is at Food Policy, his name is Winston Husbands. Another young person is Nicole Austin. There's folks who are actually doing some pretty interesting. The movement is getting much more stronger. We need much more sustainable food system soldiers to fight this battle of food insecurity.

**Steph:** Coming back to what you were saying earlier, at the forefront of these movements needs to be people in the communities who are or people from the communities who are affected. That is something that is so foundational is to lift up the people who are in those communities to empower them to do the work. In your perspective, how can organizations that have historically been largely

white-led or currently largely white-led meaningfully ally themselves with organizations like the Black Food Sovereignty project in Toronto?

**Anan:** Allyship. My sister, allyship for me have to be a area of study, especially in the food system. Now sometimes people take colonization, racism, and all these discriminating attitudes for granted that that is what it is. That is what white supremacy does, it normalizes everything. A lot of my colleagues, sometimes there's a term called "invisible racism" that they don't even know that they are trodding like a ghost with racist behaviour. People who I admire in many ways but they need to look at the study of racism. A lot of them, the first thing they say, "No, I'm not racist." I'm not saying you're not racist. What I'm saying is that we need to have a area of study. Very important.

I was at the beginning of the food justice movement in North America. A quick story. I was at a conference in 1999 in Chicago, and it was the Community Food Security Coalition of North America. They had over 500 member organizations, the largest nonprofit alliance of food security organizations. I went to Chicago, and when I look around, I was probably the only person of African descent in the room. I came to it from Toronto in a city like the US of A, in Chicago with that large percentage of Black folks.

You know when I saw a Black person? When they went on tour. They usually go on tour low-income areas. At a conference, they usually call for the committees, so they could contribute to developing the coalition. They call for the outreach and diversity committee members to meet and plan. They had official diversity, they had policy, they had youth, they had feed base, they had urban agriculture, and several other committees. When I went to the room at the hotel for outreach and diversity, I was the only person in that room. What that said to me-- Now, this was an institution, I think they were getting about \$6 million a year from US Department of Agriculture.

These white folks in the room, they were interested in fit, they were interested in organic, they were interested in policy, everything except outreach and diversity to bring the most food insecure into the room to learn about the

leadership. It took five years more for the outreach and diversity committee to really consolidate and become a committee, and that was at another conference in Boston. Same community for security coalition.

Basically, what I'm trying to say is that, out of this group, it was established that this group was the champion for food justice. I have stayed with that. I have practiced that in Canada. They always say, "You're representing Canada." I say, "I represent the oppressed, whether it be in the US or Canada or the Caribbean, I like to know that I looking at food as a human right."

One of the main areas and this was mostly for the benefit of the allies. They established food justice, and one of the main areas of interest in food justice are the vision was this mountain, racism in the food system. One of the main programming of the area of food justice was anti-racism training. Now, when you tell folks they need to do anti-racism training, they feel that you call them all of a sudden, they're racists. No.

Anti-racism training is for everyone, whether it be of African descent, indigenous descent, Latino, Latinx, Asian or European descent. It's training for everyone to understand racism, to understand the historical perspective of racism. We could work among each other respectfully. As I say, people practice racism, and they even don't know they're practicing racism because they won't want to learn. One of the things I think allies need to do is assessing organizational racism.

As I said, much of these groups, I work with these groups for 20-something years, and I realize good folks, a lot of knowledge, but they don't know about culture. They don't know how to navigate the areas of people of African descent because they don't read about people of African descent. They don't know people of African consent, honestly. They'd be trying things, but we don't try things, we practice Black Food Sovereignty in practice in our community. They are empowerment because that is the idea to really practice of being sovereign of looking after yourself.

Good example, you come in a community and you do some work and then you disappear. No. Train that person in that community to do the work, so they would do the work. In that way now, it's sustainable because that person is still in that community, still being an example for leadership so that a child in that community could aspire to that position. For instance, who make decisions in these organizations? Does the organization have a goal to dismantle racism? Is the goal reflected in decision-making process? Shared analysis of how decisions are made. It's like some idea some young people say it is a new form of colonization.

My friends, my allies, who I work with, they don't have a clue. They say, "Is another angry Black man or another angry Black woman." No, it's just that my friends who are allies, they need to learn more about people of African descent and the expectation that they have, they got to throw it out the door. That's why they have to do anti-racism training. That's why they have to read about it. It's a particular area.

When you living in a world of white supremacy, everything is right. If you don't understand, that's a area that they need to learn about. They got to unlearn colonized behaviour. It's about training. I think the best thing to do is start with anti-racism training. Learn about the history racism, what is racism, and it goes from there. So, allyship would be a partner with the terms of reference of respect. Who control, who developed the budget?

I could tell you something. I see some job descriptions, truly, and some people working for \$140,000 a year, right in this Toronto city. I have been working for 20-something years, most times less than \$50,000 a year. It was always a battlefield trying to stay African-centred, It could be a Black Food Sovereignty issue. You're not towing the line, you're not saying, "Yes, master. No, master." You're trying to be who you want to be as that person representing culture.

Sometimes people see it as you're being aggressive, but they said it's the decade of people are African descent. The reason why is that they want to make sure that they see more justice in the system. They see more development in the

system, people of African descent, and they come with leadership. We have to have leadership. For my allies and my friends who want to be able to help people, is to-- What are the cultures of your organization?

You got to cultivate food justice. Food justice is not like a food justice dinner or a food justice garden. It is a state of mind. Food justice is a state of mind of making sure that you have a food system that is just. Look at human rights from the perspective of it being human. Folks just think that you're not seeing them with their games that they're playing, but man, it's showing, man. You could see it.

They have saying in Jamaica, "You play the fool to catch the wise." You could see through it. Making community more food secure has to be intentional. For instance, there's a budget for \$16 million in Toronto sharing nutrition program. Now that's for the whole city. There's certain communities that don't even need that money. That money need to go in the most vulnerable food-insecure communities. I talk about in the Black community, where toward 6.6% of Black children in the city are food insecure.

In reason, the allyships, I would tell my friends, very good people. They need to read and learn about allyship, what it is. They got work to do. They got to go back to university. They got to go and learn this shit. You don't dream and wish for it. This is now wishing for it. You got to go and put your head in a book and learn about Marcus Garvey, about Walter Rodney. You got to learn about the relevant people to know about people of African descent. Thank you so much. This was so good.

**Steph:** Thank you so much. You have so much wisdom and so much knowledge. I appreciate you sharing your time with me.

**Anan:** Thank you so much, Stephanie.

**Steph:** *SeedHeads* is produced by the Better Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security, a program of seed change, whose main office is located under traditional unseated territory of the Algonquin Anishinabeg people. To find

episode, transcripts, and learn more about seed work in Canada, please visit [seedsecurity.ca](http://seedsecurity.ca).

**{music}**

### **Steph Benoit**

SeedHeads is produced by The Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security, a program of SeedChange. SeedChange's main office is located on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishnabeg People. To find episode transcripts, learn more about our programs, and to support seed work in Canada, please visit [seedsecurity.ca](http://seedsecurity.ca).

**{music}**