

Jason McSparren: Good afternoon Uzoma, how are you today?

Uzoma Asagwara: I'm well, how are you?

Jason McSparren: Fantastic. Thank you very much for joining us today.

Uzoma Asagwara: Happy to be here. Thanks for having me

Jason McSparren: Fantastic. Okay, it is just about 2 p.m. we've got a little bit of a smaller audience to get started, but you'll see that people be coming in and out. Most likely, as I mentioned in the telephone call, we will begin with a brief introduction, we'll give you some time to present your ideas and then we'll have a discussion between you and I and then we'll open up to our audience to see what they think and allow them to ask you some questions as well. Okay. Alright, so let's get started.

Good afternoon friends of the Green Room in the Green Institute. Thank you very much for visiting us today. For our episode of The Green Room, featuring a member of the Manitoba legislative assembly in Canada, Uzoma Asagwara. Uzoma Asagwara is a registered psychiatric nurse. Her specialty is addiction and she's also a former member of the national basketball team. In 2019, they made history as the first black queer gender non-conforming crescent elected to the Manitoba legislative assembly and across Canada. Most recently Uzoma became the first black person to make a law in Manitoba where their bill, the Somali Heritage week Act was passed in December 2020 with unanimous support in the Manitoba legislature. Uzoma has been a longtime Advocate along with newcomers in refugee communities, to oSpirit lgbtq+ folks, youth and grassroots organizations. Friends of the Green Room, please welcome, Uzoma Asagwara to our discussion today.

Today we're going to be talking about 'how self actualization promote sustainable development.' So without any ado, I like to ask Uzoma Asagwara to address our audience, welcome to our program.

Uzoma Asagwara: Yeah. Happy to be here Dr. Sparren, happy to see you in Uh, yeah so I'm thrilled with the opportunity to talk about this subject, it's interesting because it is something I actually hadn't thought

It's interesting because it is something I actually hadn't thought about formally really to be honest with you in this way until the opportunity presented itself to talk about it in this manner. so I'm happy to be able to talk a little bit about my own experience, and contextualize sort of what I see self actualization in terms of

sustainability to be, and how and how I've navigated that on my own journey. So Jason did already touch on the fact that my background is, as a psychiatric nurse and a former member of the Canadian National Basketball team I was an addiction specialist as well I've only been an elected official since the fall of 2019, but certainly my journey has been fairly dynamic. And it's been not as a result of some intentional although I didn't know it in the beginning, some intentional steps that I was taking to move myself in a direction that for me was really about being the best version of myself possible, being the most true version of myself possible and figuring out a way to do those things in a manner that is in fact sustainable. So, I think I'm going to share my screen if that's okay.

I'm just going to get into it, then I can just talk about it. There's my I'm not like a fancy, you know PowerPoint or it's literally just slides with some words on it so no big deal.

The first thing I wanted to talk about is that basically for me when I think about self actualization. There's really a few key components that have helped me sort of frame the journey that I've been on.

And that I that helped me frame this kind of conversation because I've actually been having this conversation for a number of years now, with different communities, different community members, organizations, businesses, and certainly within the political landscape. This does come up. so the first thing that I that I think about when it comes to this is autonomy and the importance of autonomy and what that even means to us as individuals and to me, I think back to when I was done playing basketball and I spent most of my life being an elite athlete from you know young, young person playing every sport I possibly could. And being identified as somebody who was really exceptionally good at sports at a young age and so when I retired from playing basketball and was transitioning into my professional career as a healthcare provider, I had to deal with a huge loss of identity. I had to navigate no longer being that person who was the star athlete or, you know, always away from home because they were you know this part of the world or that part of the world competing.

And I had to resign myself in a way to being in my own mind is oddly like a regular person I was, I was like, oh so people aren't going to be taking care of my life in this way like you train every day as hard as you can, full time working toward this goal.

And going to the Olympics and that affords you really opportunities that I certainly wouldn't have had otherwise. And so the thought of, you know, going to work every single day doing something that I love, as a nurse, but also navigating sort of not having the experience of being on those larger platforms, or the

experience of being a part of something that felt so much bigger than me as an individual, and what it forced me to do was to figure out who I was outside of being an athlete.

And I realized in not part of my journey and not part of my life. I really didn't know who that was.

What that opportunity allowed me to do was to explore aspects of my identities that I had neglected for many years, aspects of who I am, that I had never invested in, I'd never reflected on simply because I was able to immerse myself in being this one thing, and rooting my identity in something that was for me exciting and felt really positive and pushed me to the limits of my physical and mental abilities as an athlete.

And so it was in that stage of my life, you know, starting this new nursing career, letting go of my, my prior big part of my identity as an athlete that I started to reflect on different aspects of my identity, who do I want to be as a healthcare provider, who do I want to be as a sibling, who's now living in Manitoba full time not traveling, not leaving for months at a time to go train someplace else who they want to be in our communities.

You know who was I even as, as somebody you know navigating the world as a young adult. And one of the things that really came up for me was my identity around being queer.

That was something that I essentially had. I don't want to say, I had neglected but I really had it was actually something that at that point in my life I was, I was kind of ashamed of, you know, there was some, there was some internalized shame, there was fear. There was confusion, there was a lack of self understanding around that, because that had been an area of my life, that, you know, I hadn't really had space to navigate relationships to talk to people about this safely and community at all to sort of be embraced as who I was in that identity.

And so that was where a lot of the deep work began, and recognizing that for me, my autonomy, was rooted in a commitment to being my true self. My autonomy, had to be about centering my needs, my understanding of self and committing to allowing understanding myself for who I was to direct my life.

And so the other part of that commitment had to also be like a radical commitment to honesty, you know, a radical commitment to understanding myself, unpacking all of the things that that had been packed into me as a person throughout my life. And, and making a commitment in that radical honesty. It's a learn about myself and learn to love myself for all of who I was, I had to commit as well to learning and unlearning so much of what we're boxed into.

And so the next big sort of category for me in terms of self-actualization is on learning and unlearning.

You know the learning part is really being truthful about who you are what you like, what your interests are, what your relationships look like what your friendships look like what serves you What doesn't serve you, how you want to serve in the world.

And unlearning, all of the things that contextualize us that maybe actually aren't even ours.

And so for me, the unlearning, the Learning was really about learning about queer identity, the learning was learning about what it means to be black, what it means to be first generation what it means to be a part of the diaspora, what it means to be all of these identities, working in a healthcare system that often perpetuates harms against the very communities that I belong to. And then I'm a part of and learning who I am in all of those spaces and places and identities and how I truly want to be as I walk in this world, and unlearning all of the ways in which we are taught to construct ourselves to fit into boxes that are prescribed and described to us. And so, you know, an example that I can give would be, you know, unlearning what it means to identify a certain way in terms of gender. You know I spent, I've known since I was as small as I can remember that I am a gender non-conforming person.

I've known that since I was a kid, I didn't have the language for it. I never saw anybody with those experiences on TV or read about them in books. I had no role model and no example but I knew from as long as I can remember that the gender identity ascribed to me that being girl and she didn't make any sense I actually really believe as a kid growing up that one day I would just become a boy, I was like, it doesn't make sense somebody messed up here, and that's okay because in my little kid brain I was like it probably just corrects itself at some point right and I'll just feel comfortable at some point, you know, and as you get older you just you, for me anyway, I learned that I had to fit into a box.

And you know, my mom and I've actually talked about it we can we can talk about it in a really good loving way now.

But she often says, you know, she's like I didn't understand a lot of some of your resistance as a kid to certain things, you know I didn't understand why you resisted so much, wearing certain clothes.

Being in certain spaces, and she couldn't have right because she also didn't have the language, and she also didn't have the experience and the information, and any visual sort of representation of what you know her kid was going through and what they were resisting. Right.

And so, it was for me doing the work of unlearning all of the boxes that I had been told my whole life I needed to fit in, in order to fit.

And that's really hard work. And it's really challenging work, because there's so much for just conditioned to that is an automatic response, we don't even think about it, it just comes up naturally.

And so, to me, that's a huge part of the process of self actualization is not as the learning, but the unlearning and the work that goes hand in hand with that.

And there's some really great folks that you know that I can look to. Now, you know, because we've got all these platforms that we can access on social media as a good example as folks who do some of that unpacking for us and I know Jason when you and I spoke before today. I mentioned a Luke I'm blocking on their last name I apologize, Alook, and they are outstanding artists they're brilliant, they give so much of themselves and deconstruct and unpack so much of what we will navigate in this world and give people permission to ask questions and permission to sort of pull back the barriers that are in the way of us getting to where we want to be in terms of who we are.

And the next part for me is something that I learned definitely as an athlete, and learned as somebody who you know you're, you're taught if you want to get some place, you got to set goals, and you should dream big and aim high and all of those metaphors.

But the next big component is just the journey.

Right, it's recognizing that it's a process.

And that whatever it is your goals are your vision or your dream. You have to be able to be present in the process, and recognize the gift of the journey that it is should be something that you can enjoy.

Not all of it, for sure. Absolutely. But, you know, it's a process. It's a journey that if you really pay attention. If you could commit to being present throughout it, you might be surprised at some of what you experience on that journey that you wouldn't have otherwise if you didn't have a big dream and a big goal.

And if you weren't being present throughout it, that actually might be more valuable to you than what you were pursuing kind of out of the onset.

And when I, when I think about what that means in my life, I think about the fact that, you know, my whole life I dreamed about being a superstar basketball player right so I'm a little kid, I'm watching the NBA. I'm convinced I'm going to play with Michael Jordan, like, I'm convinced he and I are going to be on the same team I'm going to make it to the NBA.

That's my dream. And then the W NBA comes along, you know, I, okay, dreams gotta change WNBA is probably the league that I'm going to have to shoot for that's cool. That became my dream.

And, you know, as I'm pursuing that dream and as I'm pursuing this big goal, what ends up happening along this journey is, I actually get the opportunity to be on the Canadian national basketball team.

At no point in my childhood did I ever think about the Canadian National Basketball team I actually knew very little about them.

And, you know, it was because I was pursuing this big goal this one dream that along the way these opportunities started presenting themselves, and they were opportunities that I was open to because I was really present, and it didn't happen in one go, you know, the first time I actually tried out for the national team, I wasn't sure I was even going to go but I thought you know what, this is an opportunity for me and I've been working really hard and I should maybe pursue this path.

First time I try, I couldn't make the team was actually told that I should probably pursue a different path, like maybe playing internationally than maybe the national team, this wouldn't be a good fit for someone like myself, And I don't like being told they can't do things. First of all, so that was a blessing and a curse in that moment, but you know it's it stayed with me I just put my head down I worked even harder. my training became a totally next level I just I invested in myself as an athlete in a way that I never had before, and I didn't even realize I hadn't been until in that moment someone looked at me and told me that maybe I couldn't do the thing that I was there to try and do.

And then eventually in my next opportunity and went back and I and I did make the team.

And, you know, I never made it to the WNBA but, you know, my experience with the national team which really hadn't been on my radar was one of the best experiences of my entire life, it changed me as a person, it exposed me to different parts of the world I never would have seen otherwise. And, you know, as a result I bought these lifelong beautiful relationships and experiences that have helped me on my path, even in politics to this day.

And so, enjoy the journey, embrace the journey and be present throughout the journey, because you never know what's going to come from that and don't minimize the importance of it.

You know, whatever your goals and your big your big dreams might be.

And then the last really big component in my mind anyway in terms of self actualization is contributing, it is contribution.

So, to me it's so important for us to respect and to appreciate that we are not existing in a vacuum as individuals, right,. We are not actually solitary beings as introverted and as, as much as some folks might like isolation I love solitude.

I love my own my own time. I spent a lot of time by myself and I enjoy it. I like myself, and not to really love hanging out with myself.

But, you know, it's, it's incumbent on us and I feel a level of responsibility to contribute to other people having a better quality of life, to other people enjoying their own journeys in as much as, as much as they possibly can.

And I think that the more we do those other things, the more that we, we understand the importance of autonomy and learning and unlearning, and we respect the journey more present in the journey enjoy that process, the more likely we are to want to contribute to our communities being better.

And that's a really invaluable way to actually enhance the areas of ourselves that we're committing to and investing in, in order to achieve, you know, a level of self actualization.

It's a part of being able to see your learning is reflected in other people and in the journeys of other people and in other spaces and trying to be a problem solver and contributing to the answers that our communities need and that our neighbors and loved ones need and versus being a part of the problem.

And, you know, the thing that really struck me is that my whole life. My and I can't overstate it my whole life changed when I committed to being exactly who I am and learning myself, learning who I am and learning to love who I am.

My whole life changed, my relationships changed, my opportunities, changed the ways in which I wanted to contribute to community changed, I became a community organizer and an activist and really saw the value in the importance and the transformative effect of what happens when you commit to not only those things for yourself, but when you share that with the world, the ways in which that gives other people permission to express themselves authentically, and ultimately how that benefits us collectively right when we're not hiding ourselves from one another when we know that we can be seen and appreciated as cool people. And, you know, that's, something for me that has been probably one of the greatest lessons of my life to this point anyway, is the value and the return on that, that investment you make in yourself and in your life when you contribute that to community what that means and what that can look like the, the impact it can have positively.

So, you know, at the end of the day, sustaining all of that takes work it takes practice, it takes missteps it takes you know hard times, but it's worth it, you know it's not something that happens overnight and I don't think that it's something you would want to have actually essentially probably all want it to happen overnight, but you know it takes time and sustaining that takes commitment and it takes, like I said practice.

It takes practice, and it's worth it, it's totally worth it, and it becomes much more sustainable when all of those areas of being addressed in a genuine way. And it just becomes, you know, a part of your, your day to day life. So, I think I'm going to leave it at that Jason if that's okay.

Jason McSparren: Certainly there's only thank you very much for sharing your story, it was very interesting. Before we move on, I just kind of want to build a

little bit of context for our audience. Again, we're talking about self actualization and how it can promote sustainable development.

And again, just a little bit on the background of self actualization. It's the idea comes from the renowned psychiatrist Abraham Maslow right and he talked about this in his theory of human motivation.

Moore's law is hypothesized that satisfying needs, drive human behavior needs like food and water and safety need to be met first. Then we strive to achieve social connections things about ourselves like self esteem.

So once all of those goals are met, we move on to seeking what he termed the idea of self actualization, which in essence is achieving our full potential.

And as Uzoma have been talking about, there are links which she has been saying into these four characteristics of the process of becoming self actualize. So again Maslow talks about, you have to cultivate an openness to experience.

You have to reflect on your values, you have to move beyond loving esteem needs and look at your own self esteem. And then you also have to live authentically.

So in the last few minutes we can hear that Uzoma has been a expounding on these very principles, talking about how in they are own experience, they felt that they had to be autonomous, right, being true to the self. Right. And being honest with the self, how you feel inside how you act and how you approach, others, and interact in the world.

The idea of learning and unlearning is again another really interesting term Uzoma has been a concept that Uzoma has always been talking about. And again this goes along the ideas, as I was talking about in terms of moving beyond loving esteem and living your authentic life.

And then they also mentioned that you have to enjoy the journey and identify how and how best, you may contribute to society into the self actualization that you see for yourself as a person, as an individual.

So again this is Uzoma I really appreciate you bringing this concept to the green room and getting us to start to talk about this.

I was wondering if you could you started to talk about but I was wonder if you can, expound on it just a little bit more, and talk about how this concept in this practice of self actualization can translate into sustainable development, either in the individual life which I think you've been focusing on but how about a little bit more for say community. Yes, please.

Uzoma Asagwara: Sure. So, you know, it's interesting because, as I mentioned I you know I was a healthcare provider before going into politics and I was also a community organizer and an activist.



And when I started to really lean into those I guests, and I didn't know it, like I said, the core principles around self actualization. I started to also really appreciate and understand how important that is to other communities and to individuals who are accessing healthcare and so policy development, right. So, when you have an understanding of what it means to do that work as an individual and you can enhance that and sort of expand that in relation to communities and when we can look at the fact that there are communities that are disproportionately impacted by policy by systems.

Then you can start to realize the importance of those principles in terms of the systems that we navigate. And so, you know, it's and I talked about responsibility before.

I feel a tremendous amount of responsibility as a legislator, to recognize that not everybody is working from the same place of resource personally or otherwise.

And so then how do I in my capacity previously as a nurse,

Previously as an organizer, how do I contribute to individuals to families to communities, having the capacity and the resource they deserve to have those experiences, right, to be able to self actualize, and how do you do that in a way that is sustainable.

And you know, fundamentally people do need to have their basic needs met if people's basic needs, aren't met, they can't do the work of self actualization if people's basic needs aren't met and they're simply focused on surviving.

There's a lot of other opportunity, there's a lot of other experiences that they just can't connect with because they're focused on staying alive, and we see that in our communities, and we see how in fact policies and structures can perpetuate that reality that many folks face of simply being focused on surviving versus moving beyond that and thriving.

And so you know there's a significant amount of responsibility to be somebody who's a part of the solution in terms of making sure that the policies we're putting forward the laws that are being passed the ways in which we are you know, as we evolve here. Building on to and building away from the systems that it is sustainable for everyone.

Right, that we're giving everyone the best opportunities, long term to have good outcomes. And I mean there's a lot that you can do in the short term to try and get small bursts of results that you desire.

But it's not about me, it's not about you know our individual needs. We have to be able to look at the collective and understand how we actually make decisions that are sustainable long term and positive for those folks who unfortunately haven't had an equal or equitable chance at that.

Jason McSparren: Excellent. Okay, very good answer I appreciate that very much. So, again looking at that linkage between self actualization in sustainable development and it's this idea that once we realize what it is that each individual wants to do. There really needs to be that space. And I think what you're saying is that as a politician, you have to look at the laws and the policies and the structures and try and do what can be done in order to create that space for people to be their authentic selves and pursue their authentic pursuits. Right,

Uzoma Asagwara: Absolutely. It just makes for better communities right it just makes for us, like again at the foundation of it, we have to make sure people have what they need in order to have the capacity in the space to pursue the rest to actualize the rest and it's like that's the space we want people to be able to navigate the world from right that's better. That's the best thing for all of us, if we've got folks who are working from that space.

You know like I think about what I was able to achieve what I've been able to do and people that you know I look at and been able to achieve and what they've been able to do because they have the capacity to do so.

Like I want everybody to have that opportunity but it takes intention to make sure that people do have those opportunities.

Jason McSparren: Absolutely.

Okay, at this point Uzoma, what I'd like to do is I'd like to look to our audience and see if anyone has any questions for you. And we I see that Kelly Missy has a question up for you.

So I'm going to ask. Excuse me, I'm going to read his question, because I do not have access to unmute him and allow him to ask himself. Okay. But, Colleen wants to know, how is it possible to achieve the goals of personal and societal development in light of the existence of racist policies and discriminatory policies imposed by the occupying state?

Uzoma Asagwara: That's a great question, and I apologize because I actually didn't situate myself when we started I'm here in Winnipeg, Manitoba treaty one territory maintain nation, and something that we have to face. You know face just head on, is the fact that we are navigating systems that are that are rooted in racist and discriminatory policies and practices.

And I see that as somebody you know who work in a healthcare system that we know systemic racism is a problem within. We know that and folks who try to

deny that or minimize that are not helping anything it's incredibly important, especially for political leaders to be able to identify that as a reality because if we don't face it we can't fix it. And so, you know, part of the work that is upon us, is in our own capacity I'll go back to that learn and unlearn.

A lot of people don't actually understand or know how systemic racism and discrimination functions, what does that actually mean within the context of any given system.

What does that mean in terms of policy development, what does that mean in terms of access to opportunity or lack of access to opportunity.

We have to be able to articulate that to teach that to share that with people in a way that is accessible, and that is meaningful, you know so that it's one thing to learn it, it's another thing for it to reside with you for there to be residual that you can apply to the ways you interact with the world. If you're somebody if you're someone like me, a non indigenous person does not experience anti indigenous racism, living here in Manitoba.

I am not going to understand it the same way an indigenous person who lives it will. It's not possible. But I do have to learn it, I have to make every effort to understand it's the best of my ability and also learn how it functions in our society, so that I can actively be a part of dismantling that actively be a part of ensuring that we're moving in a direction of true equality and truly being anti racist in the work that I'm doing.

And so, you know, when I apply that way of thinking you know to the learning part of it. We have to really make sure that people can learn it in a way that is meaningful for them and apply it to the ways in which they navigate the world.

And then the unlearning is also a big part of this in terms of unlearning the ways in which I'm learning the teachings and the lessons that we've been taught throughout our whole lives that perpetuate these racist and discriminatory policies.

And that's something that has to be a commitment at every level. it's not something that, that just, I can commit to it's something that all legislators have to be aware of and committee with something that teachers have to commit to be aware of.

It's something that, you know, business owners have to commit to and be aware of. It's something that, academics have to commit to and be aware of.

So, it is, it's a whole of society approach, and it takes time, but there are certainly some key areas and key people and leaders who need to make sure that they're doing this work, and that they're committed to it because folks on a grassroots level have been doing this work for hundreds of years, forever. Right. And what they need, or for folks in positions of power and authority or privilege or however you want to construct it or articulated, what those folks need is for people in those

positions, those decision making positions, to get on board and start doing their fair share of the heavy lifting.

Jason McSparren: Excellent, right, great.

I just like to mention to the audience. If anyone has a question please hit the raise your hand button. And we'll have somebody from the green room unmute you so that you can ask your question, or you can just type your question into the chat. And then I could ask Uzoma for you.

So if anyone has a question please post that.

I just want to say that again, Uzoma, I really appreciate the comments that you're stating, I appreciate where you're coming from. I think it's powerful to say that we really have to understand and look at the structures and how the existing structures either create space and opportunity for some people, while minimizing space and minimizing opportunity for other people in the way that you know self actualization works within that on the individual level, but also more broadly on the societal level.

As I'm waiting for any other questions from the audience to ask you a little bit about maybe your political platform. And as you know, what are some of the goals that you've set for yourself in the role as a legislative assembly member.

Uzoma Asagwara: I appreciate that question Jason, very much, um, you know, my goal first and foremost is to be a good representative.

You know I represent almost 20,000 people in a constituency that's in the core of our Downtown sea. And it's important for me, for people to get to know me and to know that I work for them right like I work for them and employed by the people, for the people.

And so it's so important for folks to understand what I do in terms of my job, what we can do to support them, what we can do to help advocate for them and for people to really understand and know that our job. My job is to make sure that their voices and concerns and needs are heard and the Manitoba legislature.

And it's interesting because I was elected like I said in the fall of 2019. And that was a historic election in Manitoba and not there was one of only three. I was one of the first three black people ever elected to represent this level of government, which is wild, when you think about it like in 2019 it took that long. But it's also reflective of the barriers that still exist for all of our communities to be equitably represented in government.

And part of my responsibility is making sure that people who have not had their needs heard the same way, or been centered and policy making that those folks are really heard in that building that I work in.

And you know that they have the opportunity and in our Manitoba parliament to know that somebody understands them, maybe in a unique way, and is fighting for them.

So, at the end of the day doing that work benefits everyone I represent everybody regardless if they voted for me or not. And I'm happy to, I want to be somebody who contributes to our society being the best that it can for everyone, for everyone to have a shot and having a happy, healthy life. And that's a privilege, it's a tremendous privilege to be in this role.

My background being healthcare, certainly has contributed positively to my experience and I think my skill set in, in being an opposition in terms of government and the critic for health, and I want to make sure that healthcare is the best it can possibly be. It needs to improve it needs to become more fair more accessible, more efficient, and I'm committed to that.

Jason McSparren: Really appreciate that. It's really nice to hear you speak, you're talking about. You want to represent not only the people voted for you but the entire community. It's really nice to see that, you know, in your authentic in your proponent in your expectations for the society, and not just one or two groups of people the specialty groups, etc. So it's really good to see that you're looking to create more equity in the society and that's something that all societies would benefit from.

Let me see. Are there any questions from our audience, this coil is given anyone a chance to raise their hand,

UzomaAsagwara: See a question about, I think from in the chat

Jason McSparren: in the chat yes my chat just closed on me.

And the chat question is, in the light of the increasing refugee situation in the world should their assistance be carried out in line with the sustainable development agenda. How could this be achieved?

And again, this is from Colleen massif. Okay, as well.

So again, a really big issue.

Uzoma Asagwara: I think it's a really good question. I mean, I fundamentally. It's so important.

You know, I believe in I know for us to create safety and true inclusion for refugees, and to ensure that when refugees arrive and come to our province or city to our country, that they are met with the adequate resource and support to again

go from that, like potentially surviving survival mode to being able to thrive you want to close that gap, as quickly as possible.

A lot of folks, a lot of refugees are coming from an experience of trauma. A lot of refugees, and I've had the privilege of in my community work as an organizer before politics, doing a lot of work alongside refugee communities and newcomer communities and recognizing that we have to do a good job a better job of ensuring that there's enough resources in place for folks to like I said close that gap and allow folks the opportunity to thrive as quickly as possible.

And in that requires a lot of understanding and understanding what it means to be culturally appropriate and relevant. And I do believe that that can be carried out. Absolutely in line with the Sustainable Development Agenda refugees contribute immensely and measurably to our society, culturally, economically and otherwise, politically, and so the landscape that we have is better by adequately and appropriately serving refugee communities and absolutely I believe that the sustainable development project is better served, when we're doing that work concurrently in a meaningful way.

Jason McSparren: Fantastic. Okay.

Other questions. Let's see. Wait.

Okay, so I've got a question for you. Um, I saw that in 2014, you funded the queer people of color Winnipeg initiative, which create safe spaces and increases the visibility and representation of queer and transgender people of color.

I was wondering, how does this initiative, meet its goals. I'm really interested in how civil society works with government in its role and how they work together.

So I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about that initiative in how it accomplishes the goals that it's set up.

Uzoma Asagwara: Sure. So when we started that collective back in 2014, it came from a place of recognizing that you know we can either keep begging and pleading for broader society for non-black and indigenous and people of color who are on that LGBT spectrum to do the work of making spaces safer for those identified communities, being more inclusive, we can we can beg and plead and fight for that. Or, and we when we continue to do that work but we could also create those spaces ourselves. We can also create platforms and build awareness and create an inclusive and safer initiative ourselves. And so that's what we did.

And, you know, it's interesting because in the beginning, there was a ton of resistance, you know, people didn't want to talk about that racism existing within

communities that are already marginalized people didn't want to talk about the ways in which different kinds of discrimination manifest and how they function, tough conversations to have. But, you know, the inevitability of what we were doing was that we weren't the only ones a small little collective of a few people we weren't the only ones having those experiences and wanting and desiring those safe spaces and dialogue. And so, very quickly, it became something that resonated with people, very quickly, it became something that we were able to talk to business owners about, and organizations about, in schools about, and students about and families, you know, people in community, refugees who are looking for people and spaces to connect with and talk about these things.

And are you know ultimately what ends up happening is you've pushed this dialogue because you know it's important.

And it benefits the broader society, it just does you know you've got people who then have language for things you've got people who are now paying attention to issues that they weren't paying attention to before, or that they didn't feel they had the capacity to navigate respectfully or with awareness and understanding and maybe they had all the compassion in the world but they didn't have those other things to go hand in hand with it so they could, you know action their compassion responsibly.

And so, over the years, it's been incredible to see organizations and businesses and policies at different levels of government, start to reflect the values that we were advocating around those years ago, and to also see, other groups and other organizations and individuals pushing that dialogue and doing their own work. The most rewarding thing for me is seeing young people do it better than we ever did have these incredible ideas much cooler ideas and we ever had and putting that work, to good use in their communities as young folks and that's really for me at this stage. A big part of what I focus on doing is trying to support young folks who are doing that work, and who deserve to have that process much easier and barrier free than some of us who are no longer youth had it when we were doing that work.

Jason McSparren: Excellent. Right. Yes, I have to agree with that I think in a lot of cases across many issues. It's the ignorance or the lack of understanding that causes people to fear things or be in opposition, right, you by creating queer people of color when a pagan other such organizations are going to create that space to have these dialogues and like you mentioned I think it's really important. A lot of people don't have the language they don't have the words to use to describe particular things or particular feelings, and by creating these spaces by bringing people who are like minded but also people with disparate ideas together, we get to create that language, and really dissipate that fear in a lack of

understanding that really does bring communities together. So again I commend you on that work.

Yeah.

Uzoma Asagwara: Because what I've always tell people is because some folks it's interesting during the election. There were some people who were like you're only going to care about LGBT people you're only going to care about black people like, and I laughed because I'm like no I care about all people. It's because I care about all people that I do that work, right, because I know that foundationally, when we, when we lift the people up, who have the hardest time accessing the resources we all deserve. And when we ensure that there are no barriers in the way of anybody accessing the services that they need, when we take care of those in our communities who are most vulnerable, it benefits, absolutely, everybody.

And so, it's, and I know that people see that I know that people get that because when I have that conversation with folks who are learning and unlearning, and then putting that to work in their jobs, you know around their teaching, their dinner tables, at the holiday season with that one Uncle or grandparents who says that random awful thing but now you have the language to have that dialogue with them, and you know demand better of them in that way, it benefits everybody.

And so I encourage people to think about it that way, right like building a healthier and well society for everyone and it requires us finding out who doesn't have that experience and how we can how we can change that for them with them, alongside though.

Jason McSparren: Right, excellent again really good comments.

I would argue that you know you were talking about your experience on the campaign. And I think it's unfair for people to question whether you would represent the entire community or just particular groups of people identity groups, because those sort of questions wouldn't be asked of a candidate most likely right. So again, you know, we see these structural issues, all around sometimes it's intentional sometimes it isn't.

But again, I'm glad that you address that.

So as we're rounding we have about nine minutes left in the program. And again, I have to thank a Khalid for coming up with some really great questions.



This is a long type of question and so it might be the final question of our discussion today so I'm going to read this to you, so Khalid Naseef again asks the pandemic demonstrated the weakness of governments in the world and achieving justice and providing health services and social protections for people and this was accompanied by the tightening cleaning of the screws on civil society institutions and social movements as well.

In your opinion, what are the priorities for working on them in light of the post pandemic world?

Uzoma Asagwara: That's just an outstanding question. I think that actually what this does, it brings me back to my earlier point, the priorities have to be addressing.

I mean let's be honest right this pandemic has amplified existing issues.

It's certainly created COVID-19 is a novel virus, it's, it's new. We are still learning about it.

We've got bearings now we're dealing with right now while the pandemic is a new experience for many, for all of us here you know it's the first time in 100 years that we've experienced something like this.

While that is new, while the experience of being in quarantine and under these restrictions and talking about community transmission of this thing is new, the issues that we're seeing amplified are not new.

The issues we're seeing amplified are have been persistent.

And unfortunately, what we're being faced with, I don't even want to say, I say unfortunately because of the impact it's having on people. Sure. But, but I also recognize that there's an opportunity and a responsibility to recognize that we have to act quickly to address these disparities. We have to act quickly to address these inequalities and an inequities.

If we do not. And we're seeing that in this pandemic, it does affect everybody else. I'm not talking about the one percenter of people who are making billions upon billions.

I'm not talking about that category of people but I am talking about the fact that in a concrete example would be protecting essential workers right when we look at any here in Canada, any way we can look across jurisdictions and recognize that it is black communities indigenous communities and communities of color, low wage workers folks living in settings with increased numbers of people don't have the ability to physically distant people who don't have the luxury of being able to stay home they have to get on the bus and go to work every single day, and work

on the front lines without adequate access to PPE which we all know now is personal protective equipment, new language for all of us.

But these folks not being protected and prioritized will inevitably contribute to community transmission.

Right, you can't get a virus and community transmission under control. If some of the folks were most disproportionately impacted by the virus, don't have the opportunity to stay home and get well to stay home and stay safe.

So to me that's just one example of how we must address these inequities and protect vote more vulnerable people in order for our collective society, to have the opportunity at being as well as possible.

And it's a responsibility that the more people try to avoid it, the more we I say we, because I'm a legislator now, the more that we don't address it.

The longer and more drawn out these issues become right they, come up in times of crisis. Unfortunately you know people pay the price we've seen during this pandemic with their lives with their livelihood.

And that's unacceptable. And so, It is by way of policy and legislation that we have to do better. And we have to recognize that if we don't, we must address the root issues, if we're ever going to see the outcomes that we need to see all the time but especially during times of acute crisis.

Jason McSparren: Absolutely excellent. It's a good way to round out our discussion today Thanks so much, really fantastic.

Uzoma Asagwara: Thank you, Jason. Thanks you everybody for joining.

Jason McSparren: Certainly. So, our audience out there thank you very much for joining us today.

Please put your hands together, and thank the member of Manitoba Legislative Assembly Canada, Uzoma Azagwara for talking with us today about how self-actualization promotes sustainable development.

The green Institute, I don't know if you notice I just put a link in the.

I put a link in the chat. Okay, the green Institute is doing a fundraiser this month at the global giving website. So if you could share that with your networks, If you could possibly donate yourself, it'd be really nice. The program that we are trying to sponsor is a program that the director, Dr. Adenike Adesemolu has been working on since 2014 called the Girls Sustainability Prize.

And what this is what we're doing is we're paying for young girls to attend a private school, as well as be part of a monthly program that introduces them STEM curriculum, being science, technology, engineering and mathematics. So

this is a project that we're trying to expand through the green Institute. So if there's any chance that you could spare some of your hard earned money for that, find that fine charity that would be fantastic.

Please continue to follow the green room at the green HQ on Instagram, Twitter, and the YouTube, and also please check out our website at [www.greeninstitute.ng](http://www.greeninstitute.ng) for program book sales in other information about activities within the Green institute and as well as the green room in our other programs as well.

Again, thank you very much, everyone. Thank you Uzoma Asagwara for coming today and I really do wish you the best of luck with your endeavors, your professional endeavors going forward. Thanks so much for being here.

Uzoma Asagwara: Thank you. Take care.

Jason McSparren: Best wishes. Thank you. Take care.