Protocol Development of the Racial Equity Awareness Database (READ) to Combat Systemic Racism on a Global Scale

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Abstract

The Racial Equity Consciousness Database (RECD) initiative aims to address systemic racism by providing a comprehensive platform for accessing resources dedicated to advancing racial equity. In response to the pervasive nature of systemic racism across various sectors, RECD collaborates with institutions such as the United Nations Permanent Forum on People of African Descent (UNPFPAD) to establish a centralized database. This initiative recognizes the need to address racial disparities across social systems including education, healthcare, housing, and criminal justice. Systemic racism, defined as the institutionalization of inequity within society's fundamental structures, underscores the necessity of a collective effort to combat it. The goal of this paper is to outline the methodology employed in creating RECD and aligning its resources with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By systematically categorizing and organizing racial equity resources, RECD seeks to empower communities to confront systemic racism effectively. The objectives of this database planning process include efficiently identifying and assessing racial equity resources available in Pittsburgh and beyond, to create a solution-based approach for achieving racial equity. Additionally, this paper aims to highlight the significance of representation at the United Nations Permanent Forum for People of African Descent and articulate the intended impact of aligning resources with United Nations goals. Through this initiative, RECD endeavors to foster collaboration, raise awareness, and facilitate meaningful social change towards achieving racial equity globally.

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Introduction

The disproportionate effects systemic racism has had and continues to have on people of African descent, both in the United States and the world at large are alarming. In an article investigating the pervading gap racism has created, particularly under the scope of the criminal justice system Executive Director of UNA-USA Rachel Bowen Pittman quantifies this persistent issue: "Systemic racism against people of African descent pervades America's police forces and criminal justice system. [...] This is not new, and it is unacceptable. This is a systemic issue that calls for a systemic response"[1]. Though, as mentioned, the issue of focus in Pittman's article was the criminal justice system, these sentiments of deep-rooted inequity are woven throughout every facet of society spanning from healthcare to housing to environmental studies. Upon evaluating central causes to this phenomenon, one key role is accessibility, and lack thereof to certain communities. 63 percent of individuals of African Descent in the United States attribute less access to quality medical care where they live as the reason Black people in the U.S. have worse health outcomes than other adults[2]. 45 percent of African Americans report experiencing discrimination when trying to rent or buy housing[3]. This is just a fraction of the effects systemic racism has caused within our institutions. To further examine these disparities, one must first understand the notion of systemic racism. Defined broadly, systemic racism is when manifestations of inequity are built into the fundamental structure of society and the function of its institutions. As demonstrated through the various statistics above, these manifestations invade every facet of life, limiting the ability for those affected to overcome these obstacles and advance their livelihood.

As stated by the UN, this systemic issue requires a systemic response. To address this, a collaboration was formed between the United Nations Permanent Forum on People of African Descent (UNPFPAD), The Center on Civil Rights and Racial Justice (CCRJ), the Center on Race and Social Problems (CRSP), and the Social Change Research Hub (SCRH) of the David C. Frederick Honors College (FHC) aimed at establishing a comprehensive racial equity database, titled RECD (Racial Equity Consciousness Database). This database supports the development of a vision-rich, globally comprehensive, process-oriented, accessible approach to advancing racial equity internationally. The team's goal, promoting racial equity, can be defined as a process of eliminating racial disparities and improving outcomes for everyone and is an intentional and continual practice of changing policies, practices, systems, and structures by prioritizing measurable change in the lives of people of color[4]. The overarching goal of the RECD Database is to provide communities with the resources necessary, i.e., research making significant strides towards dismantling systemic racism, as well as community programs

[1] Buggs, *Systemic Anti-Black Racism Must Be Dismantled,* 289-291.
[2] Funk, *Black Americans' Views About Health Disparities*
[3] Solomon, *Systemic Inequality*
[4] Hecht, *Moving Beyond Diversity*

provided by grassroots organizations to provide direct support to disadvantaged communities, to empower them to realize a racially inclusive and equitable society is achievable.

One critical influence in the mapping and execution of this collaborative is the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action[5], which highlights the importance of validating and uplifting victims of racism, xenophobia, and other forms of discrimination. The vision set forth by the Durban Declaration was the acknowledgment of a global need to combat racism, recognizing it manifests in every facet of daily life. Considering this, we are confident the RECD database will serve as the manual to encourage communities to do so, regardless of geographic or socioeconomic status. Our vision is an accessible, digestible database that is not only navigable, but interactive, igniting the conversation of racial equity on a universal scale.

To do so, our vision of RECD consists of a digital database, organized through the United Nation Sustainable Development Goals, with guided imagery to overcome the risk of language barriers.

This organization is guided by the aims and definitions provided by the United Nations for each of its 17 sustainable development goals. As described by the United Nations, these 'goals' serve as part of a collective blueprint, known as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to improve the prosperity of the planet and people globally. The Sustainable Development Goals aid this blueprint, serving as a call to action: "They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests." Acknowledging the careful consideration that went into defining each of these categories and their aims, our primary goal was to ensure that the resources we were collecting were carefully categorized in the same manner, ensuring consistency across our work and the objectives of the United Nations.

This database serves as a cultivation of 'resources,' which qualify as anything from scholastic journals, multimedia displays, community organization programs, legislative assistance programs, and much more. Our team's aim was to ensure a wide diversity of resources both in terms of level of scholarity and discipline. This was primarily to attain our goal of separating our database from others by enhancing accessibility and offering user-friendly, easily digestible resources.

Furthermore, these resources were broken down into subcategories in accordance with the Racial Equity Consciousness Institute (RECI) framework, crafted with the intent of cultivating racial equity through the dismantling of racism. This further organization of resources will allow those working to confront their biases and enrich themselves in the areas of racial equity consciousness they may feel they lack adequate knowledge in.

Database Development

Data Collection

[5] Ruteere, *Combating Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance*

The Social Change Research Hub Team utilized the Qualtrics Software program to collect data and channel community engagement. Qualtrics is a surveyal software system used in both corporate and academic settings. The decision to use Qualtrics emphasized accessibility and efficiency in the data collection process. Data collection through Qualtrics has significant academic precedent in equity and intersectionality research. In 2021, the Duke University Office of Institutional Equity's Educational Subcommittee employed Qualtrics to collect and map equity-focused educational resources on campus. New York University's School of Global Public Health and Rivier University used Qualtrics to collect strategic information on the intersectional identities of select populations for the purpose of analysis and subsequent anti-racist action[6].

The Qualtrics survey form was designed to reflect the aims of the RECD database, both in form and content. In form, Qualtrics was utilized to achieve two specific aims: accessibility and efficiency. RECD, within the intervention mapping framework, will be expanded to different regions within the United States and internationally. The scale of this project demands that the submission format avoids language and format that alienates demographics in their ease of access. Concise language and clear instructions reinforce the human-centered design of the RECD system. Efficiency was prioritized to limit and reduce lack-of-follow-through in data submission. The Qualtrics form will be utilized as an open-submission form for resource designers. This facet of the database necessitates a quick submission process to minimize lack of follow-through and submission attrition.

The Qualtrics form was categorically organized by question type into two primary systems: logistical and content-based questions. There are six questions that could be defined in their logistical utility (with the potential for a seventh depending on an answer), and six that reference the submission's content.

The questions that could be considered logistically based are:

- Resource Contact Name
- Resource Contact Title
- Resource Contact Organization/Department/Division
- Resource Contact Email
- Year Resource was Initiated
- Resource Status

Resource Contact Name, Contact Title, Contact Organization, Email

These questions were designed specifically to connect the organizer of the resource to the database. One of the project's chief aims was to interconnect efforts in racial equity. So, while the project itself is of importance, the opportunity to connect the drivers of these projects was critical.

[6] Hewitt, *Implementation of Equity-Oriented Strategies*

The question regarding *Contact Organization* can also be used to filter and categorize efforts within that department. For example, one could see all resources submitted through a specific university, government organization, or company.

Year Resources Were Initiated, Resource Status

These questions were chosen to gauge relevance. Given the scope and aim of the database, it seemed clear that only resources of a given recency should be admitted. While there is a clear and notable benefit from inputting the maximum amount of data into it, the team decided that such a path would flood the system with less relevant data. Given this, it was decided that if the project/initiative had concluded beyond five years prior, it would not be submitted to the database. If, however, a resource had begun earlier than five years ago but had continued past the benchmark, it would be considered. These questions are meant to gauge and determine this relevance.

Content Based Questions:

- Resource Title
- Resource Description
- Resource Type
- Which Identity Groups does this project support?
- Which UN Sustainable Development goals does this resource impact?
- Resource Weblink

Resource Title, Resource Description

These questions are the basis for the main "page" of our database. The resource description is an open-input question, where the submitter can detail the specific aims and workings of the resource. The general guidelines when submitting resources within the research team was to 1. keep the description between 3-5 sentences long, and 2. use approachable language. This process highlights the accessibility and efficiency emphasized prior.

Resource Type

Considering scalability in the methodology, the survey was first deployed to collect resources from the University of Pittsburgh. After having successfully built a substantial pool of resources, the SCRH team reassessed the survey, what worked and what hadn't before revision of the survey and further utilization to collect resources from institutions and organizations in Pittsburgh. The universality of the core tenets and the Qualtrics platform allowed for a near-seamless transition for data collection outside of academia.

The database that housed these resources is being designed similarly, with accessibility and scalability in mind, to act as an engine for meaningful social change. The SCRH looked towards similar, successful endeavors like the National Equity Atlas to better understand how to make data and information readily accessible for community leaders and researchers. More locally, the SCRH considered the

University of Pittsburgh Engagement and Outreach Map. This platform for social change similarly made use of Qualtrics and categorical tagging to collect and organize data but also employs a map-based user interface to make it clearer. A map interface not only allows for a unique visual representation of data but also leverages community positioning to encourage engagement and contribution with local groups working towards racial equity.

Intervention Mapping Framework

To efficiently address the inclusivity needs of the database, RECD was crafted with the constraints of a concept closely mirroring the Intervention Mapping Framework utilized in myriad studies within interdisciplinary fields[7]. For example, Gullett et. al used community-based system dynamics in local health improvement planning that involved stakeholders using systems thinking to map out structural racism based on their lived experiences. They also were able to identify key leverage points and solutions that can be formalized into computer simulations to drive actions toward health equity[8]. Within the planning of the RECD database, it was decided that this framework would be most useful: Due to the declaration of systemic racism as a public health crisis, utilizing theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence, alongside active engagement of key stakeholders and community members or patients, was the most effective strategy for addressing racial inequities within RECD. More specifically, this framework is an excellent foundation for future work within the scope of this long-term project, where the database will eventually be evaluated for efficacy in relaying information to the various target demographics.

Utilizing Pittsburgh as the initial data point, we established the initial foundation of the database with the ultimate goal of expanding its scope internationally. Due to our team being affiliated with the University of Pittsburgh Frederick's Honors College (FHC), the University of Pittsburgh was utilized as a major center for resource collection. Our integration process began by dividing into teams and categorizing our university's data. This facilitated efficient data analysis, allowing us to observe how each category aligned with predefined criteria. As the scope of the project expanded, we began to include resources from the community.

The inclusion criteria for RECD revolved around two key principles: advancing racial equity and utilizing innovative methods to promote anti-racism in broad fields. The interventions, initiatives, educational opportunities, research, and other resources included in the database directly addressed disparities, discrimination, or systemic issues that disproportionately affect racial and ethnic minority groups. Whether through policy advocacy, community programs, healthcare initiatives, or educational campaigns, RECD was developed to highlight and celebrate initiatives that actively contribute to promoting equity among diverse racial groups.

In addition to promoting racial equity, RECD prioritizes projects that employ innovative or unconventional approaches to furthering diversity. This criterion ensures that the database not only

[7] Batholomew, *Intervention Mapping*, 545-53
[8] Gullett, *Using Community-Based System Dynamics*, 130-137

captures well-established strategies but also showcases emerging techniques, methodologies, or technologies that have the potential to disrupt existing paradigms and generate significant impact in the field of racial equity. By seeking out interventions that push boundaries and challenge conventional thinking, we will provide a comprehensive and easily accessible resource for individuals and organizations seeking effective strategies to address racial disparities.

While data collection and analysis were completed nearly in full by the research team, we attempted to find ways to include community members in the collection. After submitting a resource to the form, we often followed up with an email to the individual who had their source submitted. If the submission was a more collaborative project, then the leader or one individual from the resource was emailed. By providing an email to someone who worked directly on the resource, it allowed us to receive feedback on the submissions and possibly receive more submissions from those who were aware of or completing other work in racial equity. Collaborations were established with the Center for Race and Social Problems (CRSP) and the Frederick Honors College (FHC) at the University of Pittsburgh. These collaborations gave backing and support to the resource collection and guidance to us. Working with these two institutions allowed for a starting point for data collection that evolved into the entire University of Pittsburgh community, and eventually the greater Pittsburgh area.

Criteria for aligning resources with UN goals came in the form of the UN sustainable development goals (SDGs). There are 17 SDGs: no poverty; zero hunger; good health and well-being; quality education; gender equality; clean water and sanitation; affordable and clean energy; decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation, and infrastructure; reduced inequalities; sustainable cities and communities; responsible consumption and production; climate action; life below water; life on land; peace, justice, and strong institutions; and partnerships for the goals[9]. The criteria for selecting resources for these goals was subjective and done by the individual submitting the resource, but these goals have clear criteria which acted as a guiding framework for us.

Challenges for selecting resources for these goals include the lack of resources within some of the goals. Not every area will be represented by Pittsburgh and some of the development goals would only apply to other areas of the world. For example, the 15th goal, Life Below Water, was not represented by any resources in the greater Pittsburgh area, due to factors such as a lack of fishing and focus on marine wildlife. Another issue came in due to the need to relate these goals to racial equity. This allowed for some goals to be overrepresented, such as reduced inequalities, while others were more neglected like climate action. These goals provided a guiding framework for us while we were collecting data, but there were still challenges presented with the goals.

Alignment with UN Goals

[9] Allen, *Initial Progress in Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals*, 1453-1467

With the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to keep in mind while searching for resources to fit into R.E.A.D., the research team set certain standards and conditions to ensure the alignment with the United Nations Permanent Forum on People of African Descent (UNPFPAD). The research team split the shared workload amongst the seven team members by assigning each member two different areas of focus that they were specifically interested in engaging with over the duration of the project. For example, one area of focus would be the education system, and the direct impact systemic racism has on every party involved within this system. Splitting the focus areas gave the research team the opportunity to engage with many different resources like affinity groups/organizations, policies/forums, curriculum, certificates, and more. After finding a resource, the team would align it with the SDG that it represents, which ranges from No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and Wellbeing, Quality Education, Gender Equality, Clean Water and Sanitation, Affordable and Clean Energy, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, Reduced Inequalities, Sustainable Cities and Communities, Responsible Consumption and Production, Climate Action, Life Below Water, Life on Land, Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, and Partnerships for the Goals. The SDGs address various global challenges that recognize the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental issues.

The research team felt that the SDG's were an appropriate model for our project because they emphasize the need for collaboration and partnership among governments, businesses, civil society, and citizens to make an equitable and sustainable world for all moving forward. Some of these SDGs were more prominent than others when analyzing our data, yet we are driven to searching for and incorporating resources that represent all 17 SDGs. Before matching a resource up with its respective SGD(s), we evaluated by asking ourselves what the purpose of said resource was and how others could leverage it moving forward. For instance, if a specific organization/club is working to ensure that African Americans are registered to vote within their communities across the greater Pittsburgh area, then this would fall under the SDG Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, as it aligns with the United Nations definition of this goal, to: "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels". Most resources will fall under multiple SDGs because their efforts represent those put out in the 2030 Agenda committed to fostering a sustainable and equitable world, therefore some resources will be assigned to multiple SDGs in the database.

In line with the transformative vision of the 2030 Agenda for a more sustainable and equitable world, the RECD database utilizes the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a framework to analyze our data. Our initial process involved team formation and categorizing university data to assess alignment with specific SDGs. Utilizing Pittsburgh as a pilot, we plan to leverage this approach internationally. We prioritized SDGs addressing social and equity issues, particularly racial challenges. RECD integrates findings resonate deeply with aspirations for racial equality. By reviewing local Pittsburgh research, we crafted a Qualtrics survey instrument housing our data. This serves as the foundation for our future website, envisioned as a global platform to share knowledge about systemic racism and inspire action towards achieving SDGs. RECD exemplifies the potential to drive social change and empower individuals to understand systemic racism. Researchers are the backbone of progress towards the Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs). They generate vital knowledge, advocate for evidence-based policies, and monitor progress across crucial areas like poverty, hunger, health, and education – all areas deeply affected by racial inequity. The platform will act as a central hub, housing a wealth of resources on racial equity as it relates to the SDGs. These resources will encompass publications, presentations, articles, and even awards highlighting the work of professors and researchers dedicated to dismantling racial disparities. Through the database we also aim to foster collaboration. We aim to connect researchers, activists, and community leaders within the platform, fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange on critical racial equity issues. We also aim to raise awareness, so the public will have access to this valuable resource, educating them on the interconnectedness of racial justice and sustainable development.

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a powerful framework for achieving a more just and equitable world by 2030. Their core principle, "leave no one behind," aligns with our purpose to advance racial equality. However, integrating these goals into our work presented some unexpected challenges. Initially, we embraced the SDGs and their targets as indicators to track progress on racial equity. A crucial hurdle emerged – the metrics often lack disaggregation by race and ethnicity. This means data isn't broken down to show how different racial groups are faring. Without such data, it's impossible to truly assess if progress is being made for everyone. Similarly, relying on broad SDG metrics can mask disparities faced by specific racial communities. The good thing about the SDGs themselves is that they offer a strong foundation. They provide a comprehensive framework for tackling major issues like poverty, education, and health – all areas where racial disparities are significant. We can leverage this structure while finding innovative ways to integrate racial data into our research and how they affect the different areas. In recognition of the limitations in some SDG metrics regarding racial disaggregation, our database will incorporate a two-pronged strategy. Firstly, we will actively seek out research that bridges this gap and integrates racial data points into relevant SDGs. Secondly, the platform will offer a user-driven feedback mechanism. Researchers and stakeholders can identify areas where data on racial equity within specific SDGs is scarce. This will allow us to gauge community interest and potential areas for collaborative research efforts to address these knowledge gaps. By fostering this two-way communication, the database can not only house existing resources but also become a catalyst for future research focused on racial equity within the SDGs framework. The SDGs are a powerful tool, but like any tool, they require some adjustments to address specific needs.

Conclusion

In summary, the methodology employed in creating the Racial Equity Consciousness Database (RECD) involved a comprehensive intervention mapping process. Our team identified racial equity resources in Pittsburgh, our team utilized a collaborative approach to collect, organize, and categorize data. Leveraging the Intervention Mapping Framework, we engaged key stakeholders, developed inclusion criteria, and mapped resources to UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to ensure alignment with broader global objectives. The data collection process was facilitated through a user-friendly Qualtrics form, prioritizing accessibility, and efficiency.

Throughout the development and alignment phases, several key findings emerged. We observed the importance of community engagement and collaboration in resource gathering, which enhanced the comprehensiveness of the database. Challenges were encountered in aligning resources with specific UN goals, particularly regarding the lack of disaggregated racial data within existing metrics. However, these challenges prompted innovative approaches, such as user-driven feedback mechanisms, to address data gaps and foster future research efforts. RECD holds significant potential in promoting racial equity on both local and global scales. By centralizing and disseminating resources aimed at addressing systemic racism, RECD serves as a valuable tool for advocacy, education, and policy development. Its ability to amplify marginalized voices, raise awareness, and facilitate collaboration underscores its importance in advancing social justice.

Looking ahead, there are numerous opportunities for expanding and enhancing the RECD database. Future directions may include scaling the initiative to encompass additional geographic regions, diversifying resource types, and refining the categorization process to improve usability. Moreover, ongoing efforts to address data limitations and incorporate user feedback will be essential for ensuring the database remains relevant and impactful in the pursuit of racial equity.

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