

Empowering local action on food poverty

Key lessons from Food Power



Further information

Toolkits, case studies, webinars and more:

www.sustainweb.org/foodpower

Contact details

Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming

foodpoverty@sustainweb.org

Church Action on Poverty

info@church-poverty.org.uk

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About Food Power

Food Power aimed to strengthen the ability of local communities to reduce food poverty through developing solutions in partnership and with the support of peers from across the UK.

Recognising that food poverty has a disproportionate impact on certain communities, the programme supported a wide range of actors such as community organisations, local leaders, housing associations, local authorities, public health officials, faith groups, and others from across the UK to come together as 'food poverty alliances' to:

- Create food poverty action plans
- Empower people with lived experience
- Evaluate their local impact
- Create innovative projects that aimed to transform the way people experiencing food poverty accessed support.

Through creating long-term, sustainable responses with dignity and lived experience at their core, communities helped move from food bank to food power.

Funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, Food Power was led by Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming and Church Action on Poverty between 2017 and 2021, along with a team of peer mentors and independent evaluators. Together, they helped alliances achieve ambitious goals by offering financial support, peer mentoring, a series of webinars, workshops, learning networks and conferences and written guides, case studies, toolkits, and briefings.

Food Power was also developed within the context of wider policy and advocacy work being delivered by the alliances as well as other organisations focused on poverty and food poverty. As a movement, we have

What is a food poverty alliance?

By 'food poverty alliance' we mean a partnership or consortium of organisations, ideally drawn from across the public, voluntary, faith and community sectors, who commit to working together to tackle food poverty in a given geographical area. Alliances have chosen a range of names for their collaborative network reflecting their local vision and priorities. By working together, coordinating our efforts and sharing practice we can make a significant difference to the lives of those in food poverty.

called for systemic change to shift the focus away from emergency food aid and towards addressing the root causes of food poverty, be that through cash-first approaches or the realisation of the Right to Food. The work of this movement has not been undertaken under the banner of Food Power, but it has been informed by Food Power and by people with lived experience. This broader movement has provided vital strategic context and tangible shifts in structural support, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

What did Food Power achieve?

Food Power began with big ambitions to work with 32 food poverty alliances around the UK, create 32 food poverty action plans and support alliances to build innovative responses to food poverty.

These ambitions were bold, but the end results were even bolder.

- **85 food poverty alliances** across the UK from Moray in the Highlands to Medway in the South East joined the Food Power network.
- **45 food poverty action plans** were created to identify major local issues and the actions communities will take to tackle them.
- **120 activities** involving experts by experience within Food Power and beyond, including in the Children's Right2Food Campaign.
- **85 projects** secured financial support to build their partnerships, develop action plans, evaluate their impact, maximise family income and explore local food resilience.
- **28 alliances** supported to ensure children and families had access to nutritious food during the pandemic through the Food Power for Generation Covid initiative.
- **28 webinars, 8 national workshops, 33 regional learning networks** convened, as well as **4 national conferences** in Cardiff, Newcastle and two online.
- **10 peer mentors** supported to convene learning networks and offer 1-1 support to nurture alliances.

These figures show the reach of Food Power and the [independent evaluation](#) demonstrates Food Power's impact. Through the evaluation, alliances reported that Food Power had been of great value to their work, both in promoting partnership working and evolving their approaches to addressing food poverty. Financial support had been of specific benefit, but also the opportunities to make contacts, share good practice, learn from others and be inspired, whether through resources and tools available online, or through face-to-face peer support.

Many participants felt that the Food Power network had also created a stronger voice for change, by combining action on the ground with national influence.

Through Food Power, alliances, local authorities, businesses, and many more have learnt what is needed to effectively tackle food poverty at a local level. This report shares these lessons and outlines a series of recommendations that will address the local and national barriers to further action. Our shared aim is to end hunger once and for all.



What next?

Sustain will continue to host the Food Power map of UK food poverty alliances and new alliances will be invited to sign up to the map. The learning and resources from Food Power will remain available on the [Sustain website](#). Church Action on Poverty continues to run a programme working with individuals with lived experience of poverty to [speak truth to power](#) locally and nationally.

Key lessons from Food Power

1. Food poverty alliances and food poverty action plans can play a key role in reducing food poverty in a local area.

Food poverty alliances and food poverty action plans have shown the power of collaboration at both the local and national levels. Through bringing people together, establishing roles and responsibilities, mapping and assessing need and developing a shared action plan, alliances and action plans connect the dots in delivery and support. Not only is this a more efficient use of resource and capacity, but it can avoid certain groups or communities being missed or under-served through uncoordinated action.

Alliances and action plans were [vital tools](#) in the response to food vulnerability during the Covid-19 pandemic. Communities that had alliances in place were able to deliver an emergency response at speed. Some other areas without an alliance at the time, or where local authorities had not engaged with the local alliance, reported a lack of coordination and duplication of effort. As a result, alliances are continuing to form and develop as the country looks towards recovery from Covid-19 because communities are recognising the collective impact that is possible when working collaboratively.

Recommendation: Communities should develop food poverty alliances and action plans to ensure a sustainable response to household food insecurity.

2. Local councils can increase impact by taking an active role in food poverty alliances.

Councils and regional authorities should be part of collaboration to tackle food poverty, whether at the regional, county, borough, district or town levels. Especially when many councils already play a key role in shaping responses to food security, through coordinating free school meal provision or cash-first approaches during the Covid-19 lockdowns. They must do more than respond to food poverty though. To have real impact they must also play a key role in tackling its root causes, especially as part of the Covid-19 recovery.

Many alliances have had the support of their council and this has made their work all the more powerful. For example, Haringey Council has funded a new position to help develop and coordinate the Haringey Food Network and Blackburn with Darwen Food Resilience Alliance is chaired by a local councillor which helps both raise the profile of the alliance in the local community and embed it in the council's agenda. There are a host of [other ways councils can support food poverty alliances](#) including using internal resource to map local food provision; working with local retailers to increase access to healthy food; offering council space for projects; and building the alliance through engaging other organisations in their networks.

Through being involved councils are better placed to address particular challenges faced by certain groups or communities. They can also avoid the institutionalisation of emergency food aid in their area because they know more sustainable approaches are possible and can help make that a reality for local residents.

Recommendation: Local councils should get involved with and support the development of food poverty alliances and actions plans in their local areas.

Case study

Lancaster Food Poverty Alliance



Developing an action plan doesn't happen overnight, as Lancaster Food Poverty Alliance found out. Their journey began in July 2018 when four organisations came together and began working through the [Food Power guide](#) to developing a food poverty action plan. Through using the guide and with financial support from Food Power they were able to:

- Seek advice from other food poverty alliances in the area to understand their journey and share learning.
- Secure an alliance coordinator for one day a week, courtesy of support from the Lancaster City Council.
- Develop a local poverty profile at ward and district level. This built their understanding of the issues on the ground and where there were areas of deprivation that could then inform the food poverty action plan.
- Use the [Leapfrog Tools for Food Stories](#) to involve experts by experience and ensure their views and solutions were fed into the action plan.
- Host a series of food poverty action plan prioritisation workshops to gather insight and ideas from the alliance and wider community, including experts by experience, on how to tackle food poverty in the area.



Though Covid-19 delayed progress, it brought food poverty and health inequalities to the forefront of the public and political agenda which saw the alliance grow from 4 to 16 members. Together, they launched the [Lancaster District Food Poverty Five-Year Action Plan](#) in February 2021 and worked to connect this with other food-focused work taking place through the [North Lancashire Sustainable Food Partnership](#).

[Read more here.](#)

Lancaster Food Poverty Alliance Action Plan

3. There are multiple ways to ensure people with lived experience shape decision-making about the response to food poverty.

No one knows more about food poverty than those who have experienced it. Designing and delivering projects without their voices can lead to ineffective projects that do not tackle the root causes of food poverty, nor provide adequately for the communities they intend to reach. Therefore, all action to tackle food poverty should be developed with the input of experts by experience.

As alliances work with local people who have experienced household food insecurity, they are well placed to engage these experts and ensure they have a seat at the table. Alliances have used a range of creative tools to understand their situations, explore their experiences and work with them to design effective responses to local food poverty.

Blackburn with Darwen Food Resilience Alliance used the [Leapfrog Tools for Food Stories](#) to understand the experiences of the local community. These tools helped to support youth activists within the alliance who went on to develop the '[Darwen gets Hungry](#)' campaign. They organised a demonstration in their town and have gone on to get involved in the [Children's Right2Food Campaign](#) where they have worked with footballer Marcus Rashford and actress Emma Thompson to campaign for change.

[Luton's food poverty alliance](#) created a lived experience group. Members of the group were invited to speak at the End Hunger UK conference in Westminster, where they shared their experiences with MPs, local authorities, researchers, faith leaders and more.

With many people experiencing food poverty for the first time during the Covid-19 pandemic, this work is more important than ever. So, when planning their next steps after the pandemic, [Feeding Liverpool](#) and the [Plymouth Food Equality Project](#) chose to focus on listening to local experts by experience. Through forums and people's

assemblies they brought experts together to hear what they thought would help move the community from short-term provision to long-term resilience.

Any work involving experts by experience should consider the barriers to participation experts often face. This includes the loss of earnings to attend, childcare, travel costs and digital access. To meaningfully engage with experts by experience, dignified forms of compensation should be provided where possible, engagements should be organised at convenient times, meals should be provided, and transport costs paid.

Where alliances have meaningfully involved experts by experience, their impact has been greater and better targeted, their influence wider and their story richer for it. Local authorities and policy makers should follow suit and make genuine attempts to involve experts by experience throughout their work to address food poverty.

Recommendation: Experts by experience should be involved in work to reduce food poverty, enabled through appropriate compensation and creative methods that fairly represent their views and amplify their voices.



Members of Luton food poverty alliance's lived experience group attending Parliament



Young campaigners from Blackburn with Darwen Food Resilience Alliance

4. Maximising family incomes through cash-first approaches and affordable food schemes is an effective response to food inequalities.

Wages and social security, such as Universal Credit, need to provide families with sufficient income to cover the real costs of living. These require changes at institutional, local authority and national levels to address the structural drivers of food insecurity. Local action to maximise incomes can also help to bridge the gap, as alliances and local authorities have demonstrated.

Some local authorities, for example, are accredited for paying the Living Wage and require others to do so too through their contracts and services. By doing so they are

playing their part in preventing poverty and the knock-on effects for household food security.

Focusing on adequate income prioritises cash-first approaches, which a number of local authorities, including [Moray Council](#), used throughout the pandemic to ensure residents can pay for the food they want and need, and can buy it conveniently from where they choose. Moray Council's flexible food fund was developed to support residents experiencing food insecurity during the Covid-19 pandemic, as part of a 'whole household, whole needs' response.

Alliances have also worked hard to promote the Healthy Start (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) or Best Start (Scotland) government schemes that provide pregnant women and children under the age of four on low incomes with £4.25 a week of vouchers to

spend on fruit, vegetables, pulses and milk. [Food Poverty Action Aberdeen created the Smile Pantry](#) to provide the community with a dignified route to access food. The pantry accepts Best Start vouchers and promotes the scheme within the community. [Cambridge](#) and [Leeds](#) food poverty alliances have also developed Healthy Start veg boxes to provide healthy, local produce to low-income families using the vouchers, alongside other customers receiving the boxes.

Through their focus on Healthy Start, alliances and others in the wider movement, highlighted a need for the value of the voucher to be increased. Following coordinated pressure through Food Power and the wider movement, Government increased the value from £3.10 to £4.25 in April 2021.

[Oxford's food poverty alliance](#) assessed the impact of the Living Wage in Oxford and identified that a real living wage (calculated in relation to the cost of living, as opposed to the government's national living wage, which is not) would help reduce food poverty in the city. This has helped lead to the establishment of an Oxford Living Wage.

Maximising family income is the most effective way to provide dignified, culturally appropriate and connected support for those who need it. Food poverty alliances can play a role in delivering these approaches, but leadership is needed from councils and national governments to embed this connectivity and avoid other, less dignified and often less healthy forms of food aid becoming institutionalised.

Recommendation: Sustainable responses to food poverty should include efforts to maximise people's household income and take a cash-first approach.



Cambridge Food Hub Healthy Start veg box, credit: Larkrise Pictures



Southwark Food Action Alliance, credit: Alexandra Rose Charity



Good Food Oxford meal delivery scheme

5. Local action can ensure all children have access to food 365 days a year.

Every child has a right to food and should be able to access a healthy meal every day of the year. Whilst this is not the reality for many, schemes such as free school meals, Healthy Start or Best Start vouchers and holiday activity programmes with food can help to fill the gap.

These schemes are nationally run and locally delivered, yet frontline service providers often seem uninformed of the causes of food poverty and the range of support available to

children living in food insecure households. This means children can miss out on the help they are entitled to.

Alliances are well placed to unite local actors and highlight the problems of child poverty as well as the schemes available to ensure no child goes hungry in their community. [Belfast's food poverty alliance](#) delivered trainings and workshops with local community organisations and health professionals to create Healthy Start advocates that can promote the scheme and support eligible families through the process.

Alliances have also ensured that holiday activity programmes delivered by local authorities provide a healthy meal for every

Case study

A city-wide Healthy Start campaign in Brighton & Hove



Across Brighton & Hove, 35% of eligible households have been missing out on Healthy Start vouchers. Brighton & Hove Food Partnership aimed to change that with a city-wide Healthy Start campaign. With Food Power financial support, they were able to deliver over 1,500 posters through partner organisations and displayed these on buses, at libraries, and in food banks, community centres and GP centres.

In addition to this promotion, they delivered 23 Healthy Start training sessions for front line workers and volunteers in organisations such as food banks, domestic violence, poverty and drug and alcohol charities, midwives and hospital dieticians.

During the pandemic the alliance also included Healthy Start leaflets in all food parcels for families with young children.

When measuring the impact of their work they noticed that one local postcode area had an 80% uptake of the scheme, much higher than the city average. This was because a receptionist at a children's centre was [proactively promoting the scheme](#) in displays and conversations at the centre.

This campaign showed the need for better and more targeted outreach to both eligible families and practitioners that work in the community. Local practitioners in the trainings also stressed the need for national level improvements to the scheme, including extending eligibility to all families in receipt of Universal Credit and more accessible means of registering for the scheme that don't exacerbate digital exclusion of low-income families.

[Read more here.](#)

child that attends and are applicable to both rural and urban environments. Zest Leeds developed [a range of guides](#) for providers of the City's 'Healthy Holiday' programme including a guide on good practice and a food standards checklist. This has helped to ensure all food in the scheme is providing children with the food quality and nutrition they need.

Such efforts have helped increase the uptake of Healthy Start and free school meals, as well as put food firmly on the menu of holiday activity programmes. These efforts have also highlighted the uneven burden of responsibility that falls on community groups, health practitioners and charities to promote schemes and the limitations of such work given the changes needed at a national policy level. As government schemes, they require government action to ensure they are as effective as possible.

Recommendation: Local alliances can play a role in ensuring children's access to food 365 days a year. But local and national level change is also needed to remove barriers and prevent the burden falling on overstretched voluntary organisations.

6. Community food projects can play an important role in ensuring access to nutritious food for all.

In the current system, food banks offer crisis support to people but this model can be disempowering by providing limited choice or ownership for users. Community food retail projects can offer an alternative retail model that bridges the gap between financial security and food banks.

Alliances and their members have developed and utilised a range of innovative community retail models to serve their communities' needs. For example, Food Cardiff helped establish the [Dusty Forge Pantry based in the ACE community centre](#). The pantry offers local residents the chance to buy a range of healthy, fresh, frozen and tinned food at a reduced cost, as well as volunteering opportunities for customers to take ownership of the pantry.

During the pandemic, Greenwich's food poverty alliance increased their community meals service in which they made frozen, healthy ready meals for local families and distributed these to families through local organisations including children's centres and migrant hubs.

Other models include social supermarkets, food cooperatives, community pantries, food clubs, meal kits, and fruit and vegetable schemes. With Covid-19 pushing more people into food poverty these models have been a lifeline for many, including those who have found themselves on low incomes for the first time.

However, these outlets are operating in an imperfect food system. One where people are unable to afford food, whilst the production and distribution of food creates huge amounts of waste. This waste, sometimes called surplus, is then used to feed people living in food poverty, often through these community models.

These outlets have proven themselves to play a key role in building local food resilience and providing dignified access to food support. However, they must not mask the structural

drivers of food insecurity and the broken food system they are built upon. Instead, they should be used to ensure everyone has access to healthy, sustainably produced food by connecting with local producers, traders and businesses, shortening supply chains and building community wealth. Food Power has shared the experiences of alliances trialling and delivering alternative retail models [in a report](#) outlining the different options alongside a set of guidelines for delivering such projects.

Recommendation: Community food retail initiatives should be developed to support local producers and retailers where possible and avoid further entrenching the current flawed food system.



Middlesbrough's food poverty alliance Eco-shop model

7. Language can have a tangible impact on the type of interventions put in place and how they are experienced by individuals.

Different terms can be used to describe the symptoms and nuances of food and poverty. Be it food poverty, household food insecurity, hunger, malnutrition, food access, food justice, food equality, poverty or others, each term has a different angle on a complex, nuanced, structural problem. Ultimately, all terms intend to describe the fact that millions of people across the UK are unable to afford or access adequate food to meet their needs.

Alliances have shown that terms can be interpreted differently – some subtly put the onus on the individual whilst others encapsulate the need for systemic change. For example, the food poverty alliance in Plymouth chose to call themselves the [Plymouth Food Equality Project](#) to highlight the injustices within the system and the need for equal access to good food for all.

Such words and [language can have a tangible impact](#) on the type of interventions put in place, the support for such measures and relevant national or local policies as well as how they are experienced by individuals. As a result, all actors have a responsibility to think about the language they use when communicating about household food insecurity, hunger, poverty and health inequalities.

Recommendation: Consider the language being used to ensure it fairly reflects and seeks to address the injustices within the system and the voices of experts by experiences.

8. Building local food resilience can integrate reducing food poverty with wider efforts to improve our food system and ensure good food for all.

The pandemic has shone a light on some of the major cracks damaging our food system. From rising food poverty, growing food waste, supply chain challenges, over-reliance on transient and underpaid staff, and leaders often out of touch with the realities of everyday life for many people, alliances have had to tackle it all whilst providing an emergency food response during the pandemic. They know that the funding boost seen during the pandemic is not going to last. This is why alliances are calling for a move from reliance to resilience as part of efforts to build back better from the pandemic.

Recognising local food resilience will vary according to each area's needs, alliances have identified [key principles](#) that can help steer this work, including connection and collaboration; integrating with other types of support; measuring what matters, and normalising resilience approaches.

Alliances are already putting this into action across the UK. Leeds Food Aid Network worked with local food aid providers to develop a [Food Resilience Toolkit](#) that outlines a shared vision for local food resilience in the city and agreed pathways to help achieve this. Southwark Food Action Alliance is developing a [neighbourhood food model](#) that will incorporate a local market, host cooking projects in the community kitchen and create a new café and bar. This aims to create local jobs, support local businesses and provide access to healthy, affordable food for even more residents.

Tackling food poverty cannot be done in a silo. Moving towards resilience and away from reliance can deliver an integrated approach that ensures good food for all, as well as sustainable production and a strong economy.

Recommendation: Efforts to reduce food poverty locally should build towards local food resilience.



Leeds Food Aid Networks' Building Food Resilience Toolkit

9. Monitoring local efforts is necessary to truly understand their collective impact.

Food poverty alliances deliver a wide range of projects to achieve the outcomes identified in their food poverty action plans. Evaluation of these initiatives is vital to understand their collective impact, yet evaluation is often undertaken on a project-by-project basis by individual organisations.

Though understanding the impact of specific projects is useful, it will not show the collective progress being made on achieving the agreed objectives of a food poverty action plan. This requires collective evaluation that measures all projects and programmes.

The [Food Power collective impact tracker](#) was designed with network members to support alliances measuring their work collectively at all stages of development. This includes setting up an alliance; their, structures and systems to deliver joint work; impacts and

outcomes of this work; and one significant change they have been able to achieve collectively to help provide a case study and inspiration for further collaboration.

Collective evaluation is necessary to identify strengths, challenges, and opportunities of collaborative working. To ensure food poverty policies are not considered in silo to other policies and programmes, collective evaluation should also be used by local and national governments to identify where policies or programmes are helping or hindering progress to tackle food poverty.

Recommendation: Efforts to tackle the root causes of food poverty should be evaluated collectively to effectively measure impact, galvanise collaboration, and understand areas for improvement.

Case study

Collective impact in Middlesbrough



Middlesbrough's food poverty alliance gathered a comprehensive report of all the strengths, challenges and opportunities posed by the running of their alliance as well as their direct delivery. This evaluation identified a number of areas to work on, including improving access to good quality food; increasing engagement in the alliance; looking for support where knowledge is weak; providing support and funding services through grassroots approaches; and growing advocacy as a core element.

As part of efforts to provide support and funding services through a grassroots approach, they combined the evaluation results with earlier food poverty mapping to identify areas where support had been scarce to date due to a lack of a hub or centres in the area. They then worked together to step in and deliver grassroots support and hosted an unclaimed benefits check in a local school. In three days, the benefits check identified £250,000 that was being unclaimed within the community and supported residents to access this support.

10. Targeted action can reduce food poverty's disproportionate impact on specific groups and communities.

Food poverty has a disproportionate impact on certain communities and the Covid-19 pandemic has only exacerbated this inequality. For example, two in three households referred to a Trussell Trust food bank in 2020 included one or more disabled people. People with the immigration condition 'No recourse to public funds' as well as those in the asylum system are excluded from most welfare support so are therefore more likely to experience household food insecurity. However, standard food provision does not always reach these communities. This is due in part to limited connections with trusted groups at the centre of these communities, a lack of culturally appropriate food provision, and language and cultural barriers preventing access to support.

Food poverty alliances have proven they can overcome these challenges to provide targeted support. Through working in collaboration alliances can connect with organisations at the centre of these groups and work together to create projects that provide for their needs. They can also play a role in ensuring culturally appropriate food is more readily available and that materials are translated into different languages to overcome language barriers. For example, Shah Jalal Islamic Centre joined the Cambridge Food Poverty Alliance during the pandemic and was then supported by the alliance to run a weekly food hub at their mosque.

Stockton-on-Tees Food Power Network also partnered with The Amal Project Teesside, who support minority ethnic groups in the area, to design and deliver a culturally appropriate food pantry.

The Interfaith Food Justice Network in Glasgow brings together people from different faith and belief backgrounds who are either volunteering or working on projects supporting people facing food insecurity. The network organised 'One Big Picnic' which saw 2,000 people from diverse backgrounds share

a meal in Glasgow, served up by a range of food initiatives from across the city. They also worked together to respond to the Scottish Government's Good Food Nation consultation, using their shared skills, knowledge and experiences to advocate for the Right to Food to be enshrined in Scottish law.

Targeted support and collaboration can lead to creative ideas, inspiring activities and better provision. Such approaches are vital to ensure every member of the community, no matter their background, is able to access dignified, culturally appropriate support.

Recommendation: Alliances and local actors should collaborate with diverse organisations to ensure everyone in the community is able to access the good food they need.



Cambridge Food Poverty Alliance and Shah Jalal Islamic Centre food hub; credit: Larkrise Pictures

Lessons for national action

These local lessons have a common theme. They all identify that in addition to local action, change is needed at a national level to address the structural drivers of food poverty. The recommendations below aim to translate local lessons into national actions for governments of the UK nations, public sector organisations, businesses, and funders.

National governments should ensure everyone has an adequate income to afford food and other living costs, through living wages calculated in relation to the cost of living and an adequate social security safety net.

Food poverty alliances have highlighted that low wages, social security and food poverty are intrinsically linked and they have worked hard to develop responses that address these realities. However, their impacts will always be limited if national governments fail to ensure adequate incomes for all. With food prices on the rise, it is more important than ever that living wages and social security provide a real safety net so people can afford food and all other living costs, and that we systematically move away from the institutionalisation of emergency food banks.

National government should provide policy and funding to support local areas to tackle food poverty.

Food poverty alliances have helped to keep the nation fed during the pandemic, but they do not have the resources or capacity to continue supplying the increased demand in perpetuity. National action is needed to ensure the burden of responsibility does not continue to fall on local communities and frontline charities. Action should include a comprehensive review of what policies can be delivered in districts, cities, counties and at a national level. This should include delivering the National Food Strategy's recommendation of local food strategies as well as support for a food partnership in every area. This is the sort

of knowledge, policy and action infrastructure that will be needed to ensure that there is a thriving and resilient food system everywhere, with the benefits enjoyed by everyone.

Funders, including governments, should ensure local responses to food poverty work towards long-term strategic responses, rather than only addressing immediate or emergency needs.

To assist with recovery, it is important to look beyond the immediate threat to long-term, sustainable changes. Building a path away from emergency food aid towards food resilience in the long-term will take time to develop. It is important that funders, including national, regional and local governments, support tried and tested responses to food poverty alongside new models and ideas steered by alliances. This should include:

- Cash-first approaches to building household food security
- Plans that explicitly move away from reliance on food aid
- Support for policy and services that help people when they need it most, and in a dignified and inclusive way, relieving pressure on over-stretched community responses, such as universal free school meals, holiday activities with food, and meals on wheels for older and disabled people
- Core funding to integrate food poverty alliances within wider sustainable food partnerships.

The pandemic's impact on household income and poverty will last for many years, so such approaches are vital to avoid burnout of alliances and organisations in the difficult funding environment ahead.

Governments should measure the collective impact of their policies across departments and work streams.

Food poverty alliances achieve the greatest impact when they work collaboratively and measure their collective progress. National governments should do the same to ensure their policies and programmes are meeting their intended purposes and not undermining each other. For example, government should measure the impact of Universal Credit cuts, changing eligibility criteria for free school meals, and the digitisation of the Healthy Start programme on household food insecurity in the UK. This would help ensure policies are mutually reinforcing across governmental departments.

Governments and councils should support a right to food to eliminate the disproportionate impact of food poverty on, for example, minority ethnic communities, disabled people and older people.

Food poverty alliances have seen first-hand the rise in demand for food aid and food support and the disproportionate impact this has on minority ethnic communities, disabled people and older people. One way to balance this inequality would be for governments to adopt legislation that upholds the Right to Food in UK law. Some local councils are already adopting a right to food approach and there are a number of meaningful actions that can be part of ensuring a local right to food. Adopting this approach nationally would go one step further and place a legally binding responsibility on all public institutions to help people when they are struggling to meet basic needs and to fix barriers to the enjoyment of that right. This right would ensure that no one is left to go hungry, no matter their background, race, age or gender, and that people in the asylum system and with the immigration condition 'No recourse to public funds' are included.

Action to tackle food poverty should not be siloed but integrated within wider action to improve the food system as a whole.

Food poverty cannot be tackled without addressing the systemic problems in our wider food system. To do this nationally, and locally, we need a whole systems approach

that supports local producers, shortens supply chains, pays at least a real living wage, and opens up new opportunities for communities to access healthy, affordable and sustainably produced food. This requires both a visionary and a practical approach to transforming the way places provision themselves and the models of food production, distribution, processing, catering and retail that are prioritised for support. There are now many examples of initiatives that do so, and which build community wealth in the process. There is also a growing good food movement – evident in initiatives such as Sustainable Food Places– that is keen to put these principles into practice. Such initiatives need to be accelerated, replicated and supported across the country to build a diverse, fair and resilient food system that supports everyone to eat well.



Sam Dyer from the Cambridge Food Poverty Alliance; credit: Larkrise pictures

Conclusion

Food poverty alliances, experts by experience, local authorities, businesses, faith groups, community centres, individuals and others across the UK have gone above and beyond to support their communities to access the food they need, both before the pandemic, during and as we begin to recover. This work has been highlighted more than ever since March 2020, particularly the growing inequality communities face and the severe problem of food poverty becoming increasingly entrenched in our country. Food poverty alliances and people with lived experience can play a vital role in ensuring that we learn the lessons from the pandemic, and the structural issues that existed prior to this, so we can genuinely 'build back better' and work towards food justice for all.

Alliances must be supported to deliver this work, by local authorities, national governments and others in their community, because they cannot do it alone. Nor can they fix endemic food poverty simply by pouring in more surplus food. As the Covid-19 recovery begins, support should include working with local areas to develop and advocate for sustainable ways to radically reduce the need for emergency food banks and build local food resilience. This should be done by working with communities to create a greater sense of control over the response to food poverty in their area and ensuring they are active participants in the national recovery from the pandemic.



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About Sustain

Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming, advocates food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, tackle climate change and restore nature, improve the living and working environment, enrich society and culture, and promote greater equality. It represents around 100 national public interest organisations, and cultivates the movement for change, working with many others at local, regional, national and international level.

Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming

sustain@sustainweb.org
www.sustainweb.org

Sustain, The Green House
244-254 Cambridge Heath Road
London E2 9DA

About Church Action on Poverty

Church Action on Poverty aims to build a movement that can loosen the grip of poverty in the UK. Our projects are hugely diverse and cover a wide area but have one thing in common: they all tackle the root causes of poverty. We campaign for change, amplify the voices of people who have experience of poverty, and work directly alongside communities.

info@church-poverty.org.uk
www.church-poverty.org.uk

Church Action on Poverty
Unit 28 Sandpiper Court, Water's Edge Business Park
Modwen Road
Salford M5 3EZ



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