

Lambeth Knowledge Exchange Report: Advancing Community Food Networks and Partnerships

This report summarises discussions from two knowledge exchange sessions involving organisations in Tower Hamlets and Lambeth. It focuses on food sustainability, land access, and community engagement, highlighting challenges, opportunities, and shared aspirations for building inclusive, sustainable food systems.

Why Tower Hamlets and Lambeth boroughs?

These exchanges were initiated by Hussina Raja (Just FACT) and Tori Sherwin (Incredible Edible Lambeth/Myatt's Fields/Food Five Ways), who met on the 17 July at Wolves Lane Centre in Haringey during a workshop on 'Imagining a New Food System in London', led by Soraya Clarke, as part of the Open Food Network. Recognising the crossover of work, it was obvious that making the connection between our organisations would be an invaluable source of knowledge, learning and networking.

Tower Hamlets is home to a large Bangladeshi community, whereas Lambeth is home to large Afro-Caribbean and Latin American communities. There was room for us to learn from one another based on the strengths and needs of the individual communities we work with. The Just FACT programme is a recipient of a 2.1 million grant from the National Lottery's Climate Action Fund and has been in operation since 2020, whereas the work of Food Five Ways is being done on a much more limited budget. Being able to draw comparisons between the two programmes helped identify ways of working that were community-led and sustainable but also explored how to unlock funds and resources through collaboration.



Purpose and Context

A number of knowledge exchange sessions have been held in 2024 as part of the Just FACT (Just Food and Climate Transition) programme, aiming to encourage collaboration, share learning, and explore innovative solutions to systemic challenges. These events, instigated by the Women's Environmental Network (Wen), brought together grassroots organisations, policymakers, and community leaders to build networks and inspire action.

Event Summaries

Tower Hamlets (23rd October 2024)

- Site tours of the Teviot Centre, R-Urban and Limborough Hub, showcasing community kitchens and urban growing spaces.
- Presentations from Wen's [Just FACT programme](#), with [Just FACT](#) and [Blueprint Architect](#) films documenting the initiative's impact.
- Facilitated discussions on collaboration and funding challenges.

Attendees

Becky Steele - Officer at [Impact on Urban Health](#)'s Children's Health and Food programme

Charlotte Gordon - Healthy Living Platform

Victoria 'Tori' Sherwin - Fundraising officer [Myatt's Fields Park Project](#), Director [Incredible Edible Lambeth](#) Coordinator [Food Five Ways](#)

Soraya Clarke - [Open Food Network](#)

Obie Campbell - [Black Farmers Market](#)

Charlotte O'Connor - Platform Cafe and Loughborough Junction

Remotely:

Victoria Williams - Director of [Food Matters](#) (Brighton and Hove), a consultant supporting the development of Lambeth Food Partnership

Mala Naicker - Chair, [Max Roach](#) at Loughborough Community Centre



Lambeth (11th December 2024)

- Tours of Myatt's Fields Park, Healthy Living Platform, Platform Cafe and community hubs.
- Sharing back session focused on social enterprise and collaborative funding opportunities.

Attendees

Hussina Raja – Just FACT Mobiliser, Women's Environmental Network (Wen.)

Bethan Mobey - Just FACT Manager, Wen.

Zarina Ahmad – Co-Director, Wen.

Michelle - Somos Semillas

Roshini Thamootheram - Climate Sisters Programme Manager, Wen.

Food Partnership Officer, Kingston

Summary

Key challenges discussed include:

- Funding models that lead to projects with short term impact rather than long term transformative work, encourage competitiveness over collaboration, and lead to unequal resource distribution.
- Structural barriers to improving the food system, particularly difficulty accessing land to grow and organise on
- Representation issues, with marginalised groups, especially Black farmers and women of colour, struggling for visibility and resources.

Opportunities lie in:

- Collaborative funding and partnership models including exploring the potential of social enterprises.



- Skill-building initiatives and sustainable practices that empower local communities.
- Advocacy for urban agriculture strategies and equitable land access.
- Resourcing partnerships and finding ways to collaborate for greater impact.

Participants collectively identified pathways for change, including forums to share knowledge, grassroots mobilisation, partnership strengthening and stronger policy advocacy.

Key Themes and Insights

Funding Challenges

Many organisations face limited resources and fragmented funding streams, made worse by reduced public health funding.

Competitive funding models often draw energy and resources towards developing grant applications over project delivery.

In response to these issues, organisations could advocate collectively for more inclusive funding processes and explore collaborative grant applications to reduce competition and increase impact.

Partnership Models and Collaboration

Attendees discussed successful models to address food injustice such as Land Workers Alliance and Kindling Trust, which demonstrate the potential of hubs and skill-building initiatives. Organisations like Roots Allotments repurpose underutilised land for community growing, enabling 500–800 participants to engage in sustainable food practices.

Networking and Visibility

Discussions strongly emphasised the need to build networks to support marginalised groups, especially Black farmers and women of colour.



Storytelling, documentation, and relational networking were identified as critical tools for improving recognition and engagement.

Skill-Building and Employability

Initiatives like the Storbelle Classroom and Global Generation focus on training and employability in areas such as natural building techniques and green woodworking.

Agroecology and sustainable practices are increasingly integrated into training programmes, enhancing community empowerment.

Skill-building initiatives connect food sustainability with career pathways and community empowerment.

Access to Land and Resources

Structural inequalities, restrictive policies, and gentrification limit land access for communities.

Roots Allotments provide affordable growing spaces, though concerns around affordability compared to council allotments persist.

Advocacy efforts such as the "Right to Grow" campaign could support land justice and urban agriculture strategies.

Sustainable and Inclusive Food Systems

Participants envision equitable food systems that empower communities through entrepreneurship, and local trading opportunities.

There is a need to bridge systemic gaps between grassroots initiatives and government-level change through coordinated advocacy and resource sharing.

Representation, Worker Rights, and Leadership



Advocacy for marginalised workers, especially women of colour, emerged as a priority.

Develop campaigns promoting visibility, fair representation, and leadership opportunities for underrepresented groups.

Actionable Recommendations

Collaborative Platforms

- Create shared platforms to map resources, connect initiatives, and avoid duplication.
- Establish a regular stakeholder group for updates and joint action.

Policy Advocacy

- Push for urban agriculture strategies and equitable funding distribution.
- Partner with councils and private entities to support sustainable practices.

Resource Sharing

- Leverage existing networks like Capital Growth to enhance visibility and access to resources.
- Use workshops and events to exchange knowledge and strengthen community networks.

Community-Led Initiatives

- Prioritise the voices of local community members in shaping and leading projects.
- Build inclusive, non-hierarchical structures to mobilise grassroots organisations effectively.

Future Events



- Upcoming events, such as the funders' meeting on 8th November, offer opportunities to challenge competitive funding models and promote community-centred solutions.

Conclusion

The knowledge exchange emphasised the importance of collaboration, inclusivity, and innovation in building sustainable food systems. By addressing systemic challenges—such as funding inequities, land inaccessibility, and lack of representation—organisations can collectively foster resilient and empowered communities.

The next phase involves strengthening partnerships, advocating for policy change, and amplifying marginalised voices to ensure equitable access to food and resources for all.

