



# Understanding participation in community food activities

Report 2: An empirical study on motivations, barriers and enablers

November 2021

Coventry University 

Research Centre  
for Agroecology, Water  
and Resilience

## Acknowledgements

The research team would like to thank all those who facilitated and participated in the research. In particular, we extend our thanks to the Food for Life Get Togethers staff, community organisers, and focus group participants for generously giving their time to share their experiences and insights with us and for providing feedback on our interim results. A special thanks to Dale Cranshaw, Amanda Donnelly, both from the Soil Association, and Dr Mat Jones from UWE Bristol for many fruitful discussions and valuable feedback throughout this research project. We would like to thank Foleshill Community Centre in Coventry for hosting the focus group sessions. We would like to acknowledge Paul Wongsam at NetFly Design for the design and presentation of this report.



### Research Team

Dr Lopamudra Patnaik Saxena, Dr Jana Fried, Joshua Rees, Dr Jasber Singh

Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience (CAWR), Coventry University

### Citation

Saxena, L. P., Fried, J., and Rees, J. (2021). *Understanding participation in community food activities. Report 2: An empirical study on motivations, barriers, and enablers*. Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience: Coventry University.

ISBN: 978-1-84600-103-1

### For further information, please contact:

Dr Lopa Patnaik Saxena  
Research Fellow, CAWR, Coventry University  
lopa.saxena@coventry.ac.uk

Dale Cranshaw  
Head of Food for Life Get Togethers Programme  
dcranshaw@soilassociation.org

## About this report

This report is the second in a series of three reports commissioned by the Soil Association's Food for Life Get Togethers programme presenting our research findings on understanding the motivations, barriers and enablers for participation in community food activities. In this report (Report 2), we present the findings from our empirical study in the UK context. Report 1 (Saxena *et al.* 2021a) includes the findings from a systematic literature review, and Report 3 (Saxena *et al.* 2021b) presents a synthesis of the research findings.

The reports are available at <https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/research-directories/completed-projects/2021/understanding-motivations-barriers-and-enablers-for-participation-in-community-food-activities/>

Our research is primarily aimed at understanding how facilitating organisations, such as charities or anchor organisations, and community organisers or other practitioners active in community-based food activities can more effectively motivate and enable participation in these activities among diverse communities. We hope that the findings will also be relevant to local authorities, funders, policymakers, and generally those interested in enabling and supporting practical community action towards making a collective shift to food systems, which are good for all people and our planet, sustain cohesive and resilient communities, and enable food citizenship.

# Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>		
<b>2. Methodology</b>	<b>5</b>		
<b>3. Understanding of key concepts</b>	<b>6</b>		
3.1 Food citizenship	6		
3.2 Good food	8		
<b>4. Motivations for community food activities</b>	<b>10</b>		
4.1 Motivations of food activity participants	11		
4.1.1 Past experiences and food-related practices	11		
4.1.2 Change in circumstances for physical health, mental health, and wellbeing	11		
4.1.3 Celebratory aspect and making social connections	11		
4.1.4 Learning opportunity	12		
4.2 Motivations of community organisers	12		
4.2.1 Personal history, self-identity and positive feedback	12		
4.2.2 Responding to personal and community needs	12		
4.2.3 Environmental concerns	13		
4.2.4 Stronger intergenerational relationships	13		
4.3 Organisational motivations	14		
4.3.1 Organic food and sustainability	14		
4.3.2 Inequalities and failures of dominant food system	14		
4.3.3 Food-skills and food-education	14		
4.3.4 Healthy lifestyle	14		
4.4. Summary	15		
<b>5. Barriers for community food activities</b>	<b>16</b>		
5.1 Barriers for activity participants	16		
5.1.1 Lack of time and competing priorities	16		
5.1.2 Difficulty of access (location, costs, physical barrier)	17		
5.1.3 Health issues	17		
5.1.4 Lack of representation	17		
5.1.5 Experiences of racism	17		
5.1.6 Language and cultural barriers	18		
5.1.7 Differences in opinion and motivations	18		
5.1.8 Lack of confidence	18		
5.2 Barriers for community organisers	19		
5.2.1 Lack of facilities and resources	19		
5.2.2 Lack of practical skills and knowledge	20		
5.2.3 Lack of programme management skills or capacity	20		
5.2.4 Discrimination	21		
5.2.5 Lack of awareness and limited skills for inclusive community engagement	21		
5.2.6 Operating in a transient community	21		
5.2.7 Voluntary nature of community food activity	21		
5.3 Barriers for organisations	22		
5.3.1 Top-down approaches, limited local engagement, and lack of contextual understanding	22		
5.3.2 Balancing accessibility and effective evaluation of grants	22		
5.3.3 Funding challenges	22		
5.3.4 Lack of resources, skills and learning opportunities	23		
5.3.5 Lack of community concern and understanding of good food	23		
5.3.6 Withdrawal of support from local authorities	24		
5.3.7 Language and communication challenges	24		
5.3.8 Lack of community representation	24		
5.4 Summary	25		
<b>6. Enablers for community food activities</b>	<b>26</b>		
6.1 Enablers for individuals to participate	26		
6.1.1 Affordability and accessibility	26		
6.1.2 Effective communication	27		
6.1.3 Creating safe spaces and building trust	27		
6.1.4 Inclusive approach	27		
6.2 Enablers for community organisers	28		
6.2.1 Passionate, resourceful and open-minded individuals	28		
6.2.2 Organisational and institutional support	30		
6.2.3 Community support and networking	30		
6.2.4 Creating financially sustainable opportunities for community organisers	31		
6.3 Enablers for organisations	31		
6.3.1 Networking	31		
6.3.2 Funding	32		
6.3.3 Capacity building and knowledge sharing	34		
6.3.4 Build in reflective practice	35		
6.3.5 Co-design activities	35		
6.3.6 Recognise power relations	36		
6.3.7 Diversity within organisations	36		
6.3.8 Design and accessibility of resources	37		
6.3.9 More government-level support	37		
6.4 Summary	38		
<b>7. Discussion and Conclusion</b>	<b>39</b>		
7.1 Participation from the perspective of activity participants	40		
7.2 Participation from the perspective of community organisers	41		
7.3 Participation from the perspective of organisations	42		
7.4 Good practices	43		
<b>References</b>	<b>44</b>		

# 1. Introduction

Recent evidence from academic and practitioner research has shown positive social outcomes for individuals and communities engaging in food-related social activities through re-establishing connections with 'good food' (good for the people and good for the planet) and tackling issues such as social isolation and loneliness. These activities include community food growing, cooking and eating, and sharing of food, which are the focus of the Food for Life Get Togethers (FFLGT) programme delivered by the Soil Association. However, participation in community food activities can be uneven across geographical areas and diverse communities. The Soil Association has thus commissioned this research to investigate the following question:

***What motivates, supports or creates barriers to participation in social food citizenship activities, such as Food for Life Get Togethers activities, amongst diverse communities?***

Our research design included two components to address the gap in our current understanding of *participation* and *diversity* in community food activities. First, we conducted a systematic review of literature to identify the motivations and barriers to participation in *social food citizenship* activities. Second, we carried out an empirical study, which focused specifically on understanding the experiences of those organising and participating in the Food for Life Get Togethers (FFLGT) programme, as well as the experiences of a few other community organisers and organisations engaged in these activities elsewhere in the UK context.

The findings of our research are presented across three reports. In Report 1<sup>1</sup>, we present the findings from the systematic literature review. In this report (Report 2), we present the results of our empirical research. A synthesis of the findings from the review and empirical study is presented in Report 3.<sup>2</sup>

As discussed in detail in Report 1, we found that *social food citizenship* is not explicitly discussed in academic discourse, and it is rather loosely interpreted in practitioner circles. Therefore, for this research, we have interpreted *social food citizenship* as one of the three inter-connected dimensions of *food citizenship* that focuses on the social (including cultural and political) domain of food-related practices to distinguish it analytically from the other two domains -- the ecological and economic. On this basis, one of the social ways for re-establishing connections with good food is through participation in community food activities.

We define community food activities as those community-centred or community-based activities which lie outside the commercial and public sector and have a distinctly social element, *i.e.*, they bring people together for a shared food activity such as community food growing, (social) cooking and eating, and sharing of food (which are also the focus of FFLGT programme). Such community food activities can take place in various community settings (e.g., schools, community gardens, community kitchens, cooking clubs, housing associations, and community spaces). For this study, we have thus framed our research on social food citizenship around understanding the drivers and barriers to participation in community food activities.

We begin this report with describing the methodology adopted for the empirical study. Our findings are then presented across four main sections. First, we share findings on how the concepts of food citizenship, social food citizenship, and good food are understood and interpreted by practitioners, *i.e.*, by the community members, organisers and organisations we interviewed (section 3). Then, we present our findings related to motivations (section 4), barriers (section 5), and enablers (section 6) for participating in community food activities. Lastly, in section 7 we discuss and summarise the key findings including some good practices that can support effective participation in community food activities.

<sup>1</sup> See Saxena *et al.* 2021a   <sup>2</sup> See Saxena *et al.* 2021b

## 2. Methodology

The aim of the empirical study was to learn from practitioners and people involved in diverse capacities (as organisers, facilitators, activity participants) about their own experiences, insights and suggestions on how to achieve, organise and manage inclusive community food activities. Therefore, in consultation with the FFLGT team, we contacted their staff and activity organisers who had engaged with the programme and who were willing to participate in this research. We conducted in-depth interviews with nine FFLGT staff and with ten FFLGT activity organisers.

In order to expand our understanding of what might be FFLGT programme-specific and what might be more generic motivations, barriers and enablers for community food activities, we contacted other community organisations who are engaged in community food activities in the UK context but with a different organisational set-up. This resulted in five additional in-depth interviews.

All 24 interviews were semi-structured in nature, allowing us to explore similar themes across the interviews while also drawing on interviewees' specific, rich experiences and knowledge of organising community food activities. We explored their perceptions and insights on what motivates or hinders the involvement of diverse groups of people in the organisation, delivery, and participation in FFLGT activities.

The fifteen interviewees organising community food activities included a diverse mix from across the UK and ranged from schoolteachers to those working in community organisations, with charities or more loosely organised community groups. The community food activities included school gardening, school-based intergenerational cooking, community gardening, (social) cooking and eating, nutritional education, environmental

and sustainability education, community kitchens, and gleaning. The settings within which they were based ranged from rural, urban, to inner city areas and took place in schools, in community spaces, on public land, in care homes, on farms, in family hubs, and online.

In order to understand from community members' perspective, the reasons for joining community food activities, we held two focus group sessions comprising a total of fifteen participants. Eleven of them are members of a community centre in Coventry, which runs community food growing activities and hosts community meals on a regular basis. The focus group participants came from a diverse mix of backgrounds, including different countries of origin, ethnicity, age, gender and religious background. Some of them were also associated with other local community groups<sup>3</sup> which run community food-related activities.

Table 1 provides an overview of our research participants, the type of activities they were engaged in, and the different settings in which the activities were taking place.

The interview recordings were transcribed, coded and analysed using NVivo. In addition, we also examined relevant documents (e.g., FFLGT reports, reports on websites of community organisations) to understand the broader context within which community food activities were situated and organised.

Our research was conducted with ethical approval from Coventry University's Ethics Committee. The interview data has been anonymised. Hence, where we make references to an individual research participant, we only refer to them with a specifically assigned number (e.g., Participant 1, 2, and so on).

Interviews and Focus Groups <i>Distribution of participants</i>		Activities described by empirical study participants		
FFLGT Staff	9	• School gardening	• Nutrition education	
Activity organisers	10	• School intergenerational cooking	• Environmental and sustainability education	
Other organisations	5	• Community gardening	• Community kitchens	
<b>Total semi-structured interviews</b>	<b>24</b>	• Group cooking and eating	• Gleaning	
2 Focus group sessions	15	<b>Settings where community food activities were located</b>		
<b>Total interviewees</b>	<b>39</b>	• Rural, inner city, and urban schools	• Public land	• Family hubs
		• Community spaces	• Care homes	• Online sessions
			• Farms	

Table 1: Overview of research participants, activities, and settings

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Coventry Asylum and Refugee Action Group (CARAG), Carriers of Hope, Women's groups, Voluntary Action Coventry



### 3. Understanding of key concepts

The main research question of this study centred specifically on examining the factors affecting participation in *social food citizenship* activities. This prompted us to explore how key actors both within the FFLGT programme as well as outside interpret this concept and judge its effectiveness and relevance in shaping their activities. Similarly, the second term we focus on here, *good food*, is a key term used by FFLGT and other food initiatives and alliances<sup>4</sup>. For example, FFLGT aims “to make good food the easy choice for everyone<sup>5</sup>.” Due to its relevance, we also wanted to learn how this term ‘good food’

is understood by practitioners who participated in our research and how relevant it is to organising community food activities.

Understanding the perceived usefulness of such concepts can help to learn how they might or might not be beneficial for organisations (both community organisations and facilitating organisations) in developing their organisational and communication strategies for enabling effective participation in community food activities by diverse communities.

#### 3.1 Food citizenship

We put the question of what *food citizenship* and/or *social food citizenship* means to all our interviewees. The responses ranged from a lack of awareness of these concepts and their meaning, a limited understanding of what they meant, to questioning the usefulness of terms that are not fully defined or easily understood by practitioners.

On page 7, we present a selection of responses we received from FFLGT staff. Some interviewees who attempted to explain the terms focused on what is expected of a *food citizen* and defined them as one who is interested in the food system, more specifically, interested in learning about food and where it comes from, being actively engaged in shaping the food system, and taking deliberate actions. Most struggled with interpreting the terms and felt that – while *food citizenship* was frequently used – it is not sufficiently unpacked as a working term. Some even perceived it as unhelpful, considering it as

more academic than practical. Instead, other terms in use like *community resilience through food* and *My Food Community*<sup>6</sup> were seen as useful by some to capture a collective collaborative approach that focuses on building strong and resilient communities that are empowered to re-establish or strengthen peoples’ connections with food.

On page 8, we present a selection of findings from our interviews with community organisers, which reveal an equally wide range of understandings and a questioning of the usefulness of the term, *food citizenship*. At one end, there is an understanding which arises from an awareness of injustices linked to the dominant food system and the importance of people actively engaging in food production. At the other end, some interviewees disregarded the term as jargon and hence perceived it as not helpful for engaging at the community level.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., Sustainable Food Places ([https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/resources/local\\_good\\_food\\_movement](https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/resources/local_good_food_movement)); Sustain (<https://www.sustainweb.org/gffil>); Community Food & Health (Scotland) (<https://www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk/2021/good-food-nation-bill>)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.foodforlife.org.uk/get-togethers> <sup>6</sup> <https://www.fflgettogethers.org/about/my-food-community>

## FFLGT staff understanding of food citizenship

I see food citizenship as about people who have an interest in **supporting food, healthy food systems and networks, and promoting good food** ... in the sort of broadest sense for me.

I imagine **social food citizenship is really about that connection with other people through food**. And really, the amazing things that can come out of that, and food being this really universal unifier for communities. And I imagine that's what that's all about, and really promoting good food messages.

... very broadly, it is around drawing a very distinct difference between passive food consumerism and active development... Taking an **active role in the food system, giving power back to the communities**. Trying to get people from being passive to being active in terms of understanding the infrastructure...

... a food citizen to me is not...it's not everybody. Although we all eat food, we are not necessarily engaged in the process to the degree that makes us actively involved. So, we might just choose the same objects each week in our baskets, because that is the engagement. We do not know how far its travelled. We do not know if it is covered in pesticide or not. It is not easy. There's a lot more that you have to do to become **engaged in your food and in the food chain**, to enable you to be a food citizen.

... it's a big, it's a big word. It's a bit like the policy word. People on the ground wouldn't call themselves food citizens. You know, it's that kind of **statutory speak**, or whoever's designing programs... So, yes, it's terminology, but I think you have to break it down to get people engaged in it.

Basically, I see, **everyone as a food citizen** just like everyone's a citizen, but it's where I think you are an active food citizen, like how active you are in that... I wish we would think about that more. I find it a little bit difficult to know, **who decides what an active food citizen is, and a good food citizen is**.

My Food Community sounds better than food citizen or citizenship. I think it means people that are thinking about how the green spaces are used, you know, access to food, access to communal spaces to come together to cook, eat, share, having affordable places to purchase the foods and food that is sustainable thinking about the planet. I'm not saying everybody may understand the impact that the food they eat has on the planet, but that thing again, thinking about the education, you know, is important ... It's a **well-rounded approach. To be a food citizen**, which I probably am one, would **be an advocate** for ensuring that you know, everyone gets the good food they deserve, and they need.

I struggle with what we mean by food citizenship... sometimes I think we're just **talking about people taking action, but what does that mean?** ... I think it's how we want to be acting. But I **don't think it is anyone else's end goal**... I think it's quite difficult for people to connect with it...I've been pushing very hard... that we don't really explicitly talk certainly in the recruitment about food citizenship. I think it's something we use as a learning session... It's not kind of helpful language to necessarily lead with.

...food citizenship is **entirely complex**... in a program like get together, it's **quite unhelpful** language because I think it's not easy to define simply. And I think very few people identify with it ... I think it's probably quite academic...I think community resilience is broadly understood.

... in the UK, our food system is so broken. I think people don't often have that sort of awareness or understanding of where our food comes from, which makes it really, really hard to be deliberate about your food choices... I think food citizenship, at the moment, is seen as a bottom-up approach where community work together to help find good food, when actually it really needs to be as much top down with government working to support good food. I think we've, in the last 50 years, done everything we can to make it harder politically.

## Community organisers' understanding of food citizenship

If I tried to interpret that, I would say that it is about community supported agriculture schemes where people are expected to volunteer in exchange for a well-priced veg box. So, it's about being **a system within a system that supports food production...**

I've **never heard of the phrase before...** I mean, citizenship is about being responsible member of a community, or a society. I suppose, putting food in front of it just means... you are sourcing your food responsibly, you are thinking about the environment, and you are preparing and cooking responsibly, you are thinking about sort of the long-term health or of yourself or your family or of the environment. You are thinking about things like waste, maybe plastics would come into that. I have never heard of it. So, I think, the word **responsibility is key** for me. I don't know if that's right or wrong, or whether there are huge, huge areas that I have not even thought about, but come under that title.

I think it's about getting people, everybody as a citizen of their nation to **understand the food cycle**. And when I say food cycle, I'm talking about from the ground up, you know, from the soil from the seeds from people sharing... It's about **local food**, I mean you can't beat it. And also, you can't beat something that you grow yourself. So, it's about like generating that life cycle for the food to grow and respect that all the time ... "food citizenship is about knowing as much as you can hope to, like grow horticulturally or maybe what actually is really important foraging, right?"

... it is **difficult to engage people in food citizenship work...** ultimately, food citizenship needs to be locally directed and grown.

... it is about understanding the **whole process really of food growing**, to how it's sold, the nutritional value of it and, and how it's cooked. And for everybody to have, you know, good quality nutrients and enough food around... that stuff, I suppose and it's for the **food supply and consumption to be sustainable and to minimize waste**. That's what I assume about it is food citizenship...

I don't like to speak in binaries too often, but there's this idea of a consumer and a citizen, or passive and active, being sort of dictated to, and being an agent of change. I think **agency** is really an important aspect of this... I mean, people need to have an opportunity to grab their agency to take it by the horns and be able to act and to be able to make difference in their local context in their community... But for me, it's about this real belief in the viability of **grassroots community led change** ... this idea that like, something really powerful can happen when we come together and gather around food.

**I do not like jargon...**the grassroots might not understand big words.

I was going to ask you, how is social food citizenship different from food citizenship? ... food citizenship basically is about encouraging people to have **agency** and it doesn't matter if you are not a citizen per se, but it is about being **actively involved in the food system**.

... good food citizenship is about **organisations (community food hubs) offering fresh meat, fresh fish, fresh fruit and vegetables, and culturally appropriate food** that the "clients" can select for themselves (in contrast to handouts as in food banks).

## 3.2 Good food

We also asked interviewees about their perception of *good food*. There was a general acknowledgement that the term is relatively widely used but not often clearly defined. However, the responses varied greatly between interviewees, reflecting personal interpretations and experiences. For many, *good food* was an umbrella term used to capture a variety of meanings while others placed emphasis specifically on the quality of food. Amongst the ways in which *good food* was described are such diverse elements as: locally grown; pesticide free; freshly grown and cooked; nutritional; tasty; healthy; plant based; and organic. Attention was also paid to environmental aspects, with some referring to the links between *good food*

and climate change, surplus food and waste, sustainability and agroecology. Others described the social benefits of *good food* in terms of being culturally appropriate, bringing people together, the joy of sharing a meal, engaging with the wider community, and eating together as a family on a regular basis. To a lesser extent, links were drawn between *good food* and wider socio-political movements such as food sovereignty and workers' rights.

On page 9, we present a selection of quotes from our interviewees.



## Understanding of good food

... our good food messaging... is really the Soil Association definition of good food, ... good food is what people know about where good food comes from, more fresh fruit and vegetables, less meat, ... less fat, sugar, and salt. So that's generally the main message that we give around good food, but we talk about how it's a connector and really **connecting people** with where it comes from, is one of the most important things. And that's why the **growing element** is so important to us, to really engage children at a very young age. And that's what the other Food for Life program is all about.

... it is so important for going forward for our **environment**, the link between shopping, shopping locally, and eating seasonally. And that link to **climate change**, and how people can **support the environment** is a really important message that everybody needs to know. And that everybody needs to be doing, even if it's just like a tiny little thing that they consciously change. And one of the big things is food waste.

They [community members] understand good food as something that they've **grown fresh**... something that's **home cooked**, it is something that's fresh... homemade is something that I hear a lot about when you talk about good food... something that is comforting and that can be **misinterpreted** a lot.

I think that good food is food that is nourishing to the soul... that gives your body everything that it is going to need. And it's something that's going to **sustain you**. And I think good food has the ability to **bring people together**, it's really a great tool to **bring communities together** and help understand each other. And I think that good food to me is stuff that's not been messed with, so it's not had that too much processing.

That's a really, really complicated term. Good food, for me could be (...) **healthy food**, or it could be 'I've had a really hard day at work. And what I want to eat is macaroni and cheese that makes me **feel comforted**. Both are good food, by the same standard. And I think we haven't interrogated that, in terms of what seems quite simple enough, really understand it.

For some people, it's about **food that's good for them**... (She) has a lot of food allergies, she could have only certain things. So, for her good food is food that's good. I mean, healthy, but in a different way to how I might think of healthy, based on vitamins and minerals. ... then there's also the kind of **sustainability and environmental** side of it. I realized that I am just as guilty as anyone of just saying **good food as a shorthand** for so many different things that I mean and hoping that people kind of connect to it.

I think when we say good food, it is really, and we say it a lot and we have it as part of our kind of blurbs that we put out there. It is about food that's **good for the body, the planet, the environment, and good for us socially**.

Good food, for us, is **sustainable, agro-ecological**, rather than just organic, meaning that we could use any sort of method that is deemed agro-ecological. So, we also have the **food sovereignty** principles, which includes the **right to food and nutrition**, so ensuring that our food is **nutritious, culturally appropriate, and adequate**. And then (...) of course, it includes **workers' rights** as well, ensuring that people who produce that food are treated fairly, have **fair wages**, or preferably living wages, and good working conditions.

... there's the **nutritional** part that food is good for you. So, looking at food, you know, that's **healthy**. So, we're doing the 'Eat them to defeat them', vegetable campaign.

I think there's good food in terms of good, like the food that is healthy, but I think there's also the side of good food that is like food is **fun and social**. That's a big part of my relationship with food, **eating together** as a family. I think talking about food as well.

**No pesticides**, it's the way it's grown... but also because I'm vegetarian and concerned for the planet, I haven't really got much time for animal products.

...I really think, good food, you mustn't preach about it, it must be **accessible**... Good food to me is plant based, not adulterated.

The findings overall illustrate the diversity of interpretations of what constitutes *good food*. The concept is concerned with people and community, the quality of the food (e.g., fresh, healthy, culturally appropriate), the protection of the environment, and justice (e.g., just wages). A Word Cloud based on interviewees' responses (see Figure 1) highlights some key aspects associated with the concept and shared by the interviewees.



Figure 1: Good food word cloud<sup>7</sup>

## 4. Motivations for community food activities

Understanding what motivates people and organisations to engage in community food activities can clarify what they would perceive as beneficial, as worth investing their time and energy into. Ideally, participating in such activities helps fulfil some of their aspirations and achieve their goals and specific outcomes that they are interested in. We have divided the findings on motivations for engagement with community food activities into three types – motivations for activity participants, for community organisers, and for organisations. After presenting an overview of the identified motivations (Table 2), we elaborate on each of them further.

<b>Motivations for participation by ...</b>		
<b>Activity participants</b>	<b>Community organisers</b>	<b>Organisations</b>
Past experiences and food-related practices	Personal history, self-identity and positive feedback	Organic food and sustainability
Change in circumstances for physical health, mental health, and wellbeing	Responding to personal and community needs	Inequalities and failures of dominant food system
Celebratory aspect and making connections	Environmental concerns	Food-skills and food-education
Learning opportunity	Stronger intergenerational relationships	Healthy lifestyle

Table 2: Overview of motivations for participation in community food activities

<sup>7</sup> Word Cloud created on worditout.com

## 4.1 Motivations of food activity participants

For this section, we draw on findings from our in-depth interviews and on the focus group sessions, which, as described earlier (Section 2), included members of a local community centre in Coventry. The motivations were diverse, were mainly shaped by personal and community benefits, and were less a response to perceived problems with the dominant food system. The motivating factors include improvement of mental and physical health through physical activity and overcoming social isolation, sharing and acquiring knowledge and experiences, and growing and accessing affordable, fresh produce. The individuals' experience of 'everyday lives' and also from a 'collective intent' arising from being part of groups and communities.

### 4.1.1 Past experiences and food-related practices

Motivations to participate in community food activities were ascribed to past experiences and food-related practices. This was shared by many participants who came from ethnic minority backgrounds and who had moved to the UK in recent years. They related their motivations to connections with their cultural heritage and food-related practices in their countries of origin. As one participant described her motivation in relation to community gardening and social gatherings:

*I have grown up in that community from childhood which encourage people to do gardening... in my hometown, my father is a farmer. So, he encouraged us to do the seeding and everything, watering the plants. ... I love to be around with different types of people, because from childhood, I've seen lots of friends and family together in any festival.*

*(Focus group participant 1)*

A community organiser, while reflecting on her engagement with community members with the 'growing together' projects, described how members who were actively participating in community food growing had self-organised themselves into a WhatsApp group. This group included both men and women, a lot of them with a farming background in their countries of origin, who were enthusiastic about engaging with the 'growing together' projects and were actively sharing recipes and other useful information about food. The WhatsApp chat among the participants was centred on how they 'normally' cook from scratch every single day and how they frequently use freshly grown herbs like coriander, dill, and mint in their cooking. The organiser described these cultural practices as a huge motivation for members of this community to engage with food growing projects, which not only helped them carry on with their food-related practices but also ensured that herbs and vegetables specific to their diets were easily accessible and overall made food cheaper.

### 4.1.2 Change in circumstances for physical health, mental health, and wellbeing

Motivations arose from expectations and experiences related to changes in physical health, mental health, and general wellbeing. Participants described positive, motivating experiences that helped address social isolation, and served as a positive distraction to take participants' mind off difficult things going on in their lives.

*I was struggling before lockdown. When lockdown came, my mental health went through the roof. And I started coming to community food growing here and it helps with my anxiety.* *(Focus group participant 2)*

*It is therapeutic to be outdoors.*

*(Focus group participant 3)*

*About the coming together and sharing food, you know, most of the time people are lonely. At home, you don't have nobody. So, by coming together like that, it helps to do away with loneliness. And also, it helps to show people love. For people to feel that they are not alone, but that somebody cares about them.*

*(Focus group participant 4)*

It is worth noting that the Covid-19 pandemic also had a specific influence on the type of community food activities people were particularly motivated to join. The adverse impact in particular on mental health and the increased social isolation of people, was described as a key factor motivating many to join outdoor community gardening activities as well as other activities (e.g., cooking sessions) that were organised online.

### 4.1.3 Celebratory aspect and making social connections

Many participants described the social and celebratory aspects of food, which enables people to come together and share and enjoy food as a community as a motivation.

*... really enjoy celebrations, where there are different types of foods.* *(Focus group participant 2)*

*I like cooking. So instead of going to buy food from KFC and those things, I volunteer to cook meals from my country. People are happy to try different meals from different countries, so I cook meals from my country for everyone.* *(Focus group participant 5)*

Community food activities were also described as opportunities to have fun as a family, to socialise with others on a regular basis, and to establish social connections with others.

*... my elder son, he likes gardening. So, we went there [to the community allotment] and we had fun. So, with the children, especially to go out, especially in this country, we don't have other family members. So, with the kids if we go out, this kind of gathering, social gathering, has helped a lot. (Focus group participant 6)*

#### 4.1.4 Learning opportunity

For many, community food activities offered a learning opportunity, a chance to learn new skills (e.g., cooking, food growing). One male participant described how he did not like cooking earlier, but that being exposed to the sharing of recipes over Zoom sessions (held by one of the organisations he was a member of) made him interested in cooking and in joining the classes.

*...I didn't like to cook. ...I learned about cooking. (Focus group participant 7)*

Others gave similar reasons in relation to community food growing, where the motivation to 'learn' about it and to engage with it arose because of opportunities that became available or simply because they had friends or family members who introduced them to such activities.

There was a consensus in the focus groups that food sharing and food growing are 'safe' and 'friendly' options for people from diverse and often vulnerable backgrounds to get together. However, it was also discussed that these activities may not appeal to everybody. The main reason for this was ascribed to health disorders (e.g., food allergies, agoraphobia), which made the connections with food and being part of get-togethers with large numbers of people a very different and perhaps less positive experience for some.

## 4.2 Motivations of community organisers

In this section, we describe some of the reasons why individuals organise community food activities -- what motivates them to use their time and energy, often on a voluntary basis, to plan and mobilise resources necessary for organising. The motivating factors are equally as diverse as in the case of activity participants, but we found them broadly related to individuals' desire to be an agent for change, or - more simply put - to build on their own strengths, experiences and capacities to do something for their community. Areas of concern that organisers wanted to particularly contribute to include social isolation and improved intergenerational relationships, food insecurity, community revitalisation, and local environmental issues.

### 4.2.1 Personal history, self-identity and positive feedback

As in the case of activity participants' motivations discussed above, the personal history, self-identity and family backgrounds of individuals also influenced their motivation to organise community food activities.

A community organiser described her background in Physical Education and a long-held interest in health, physical activity and nutritional skills as motivation to organise a shared intergenerational cooking activity at her school. This involved bringing together children and parents from ten vulnerable households. She described it as:

*... one of the most rewarding things I've ever been involved in...it was something that we decided as a school that we would then roll out during every holiday, partly because of holiday hunger and poverty strategy, ... to combat some of those issues. (Participant 13)*

The positive feedback that she received from the children and the parents was a source of further motivation, as she intended to resume such activities in the post-pandemic period. Her motivation to organise the activity was also influenced by her school's participation in the 'grow your own potatoes' initiative which had been successfully led by a member of staff a few years earlier. Thus, past associations and experiences, and a shared history of engaging in community food activities with friends, neighbours, colleagues and community members were seen as a hugely motivating factor for continuing with the engagement.

### 4.2.2 Responding to personal and community needs

A community organiser was personally motivated to organise community food growing and a community kitchen so as not to rely on charity organisations but to use her food growing skills while working collectively with others in the community with similar experiences and interests. As she described,

*... part of it was personal in terms of experiencing food insecurity and not wanting to use a food bank because I*

*had skills in terms of organic food production. But also observing other families experiencing household food insecurity and wanting to come together collectively to address that at a community level. So that was the beginning of it... (Participant 7)*

For another organiser (Participant 15) running a community food growing activity in London, it was rooted in a desire to help and improve the local community. The gardening activity provided an opportunity to help neighbours and, as described, it soon became a 'social hub' for the local residents. Prior to the establishment of the community garden, the plot of land was a hotbed for "... illegal activities, drug runs, prostitution... the antisocial behaviours and the dark stuff that happens." Once she began with physically turning the soil, removing the litter and pulling out the weeds, which had accumulated over 15 years, neighbours noticed what she was doing, asked questions and then joined in the effort to clear the space and pick up the litter. In time, this developed into a community food growing activity. This example also illustrates how community activities can evolve over time, and how original intentions can morph into something new as additional community members begin to participate.

In another context, a community organiser (Participant 5) provided mentoring to community members who wanted to begin growing their own food during the COVID-19 lockdown. She offered her time and support with a series of emails, photographs, Facebook posts, etc. She described her experience of helping community members as "very stimulating." The activity allowed her to be able to share some of her own knowledge and skills with the wider community, at a time when face-to-face interaction was not possible.

#### **4.2.3 Environmental concerns**

More specifically, some community organisers emphasised environmental and sustainability concerns as a primary motivating factor. One organiser (Participant 16) had started a community project to address environmental pollution in his local area, and when he spotted an area of disused land, he entered "Britain in Bloom" - a national gardening competition - and began the process of growing food plants and flowers in the area. He was driven by a desire to utilise organic gardening principles and sustainable growing techniques and the activity provided an opportunity to him to improve the physical environment (see also sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2).

#### **4.2.4 Stronger intergenerational relationships**

Another motivational factor is related to an awareness about the 'social' disconnect within families and between households in communities. For a primary school teacher in Leicestershire (Participant 9), her motivation to organise a gardening and social eating activity at her school was to build intergenerational relationships. She felt that elderly people had a wealth of knowledge that they could share while enjoying the process of interacting and engaging with the schoolchildren.

For another teacher (Participant 21), the growing and cooking projects she organised at her primary school were motivated by her desire to help children and their parents realise the benefits of growing their own food. It was not just about the educational benefits, but the "...physical and mental health benefits and the intergenerational work that can happen." Reflecting on the positive impacts of intergenerational practices, she referred to an elder community member who regularly supported the school growing projects, and she added that there was an 'authenticity' about the way he listened and answered gardening related questions from the younger children. She described the intergenerational activities as also beneficial to children for developing food-related knowledge and skills. Some children, for example, struggled to use a knife and fork, and it was hoped that could be improved by having a grandparent that they could model and learn from. Organising shared eating activities, was thus one way to help children improve those skills.

## 4.3 Organisational motivations

The motivations for organisations to organise community food activities were mainly aligned with organisational goals, priorities and capacity. The goals are a mix of food system-specific concerns and broader societal concerns (e.g., social isolation, health and well-being) while priorities and capacity influence the specific order and scale in which organisations can get involved in organising community food activities.

### 4.3.1 Organic food and sustainability

According to one interviewee (Participant 17) from a not-for-profit organisation operating in deprived neighbourhoods in the West Yorkshire region, the activities they ran were motivated by the aim to raise awareness of the benefits of locally grown organic food in the wider context of sustainability. In order to provide informal education and training on resident-led regeneration projects, they delivered talks and workshops on concepts such as food miles, the benefits of eating local produce, and the health and environmental benefits of organic food. Furthermore, the organisation encouraged participants to turn ideas inspired by these sessions into initiatives they can trial in their communities, setting up new projects.

### 4.3.2 Inequalities and failures of dominant food system

Another organisation's motivation was to counter and challenge the inequalities in the dominant food system and the food waste generated by the system. It worked with volunteers and farmers to harvest surplus fruit and vegetable produce from farmers, which was then redistributed. Their ideological stance and connections with food producers and volunteers led them to effectively mobilise groups around surplus produce collection and redistribution.

Another community led organisation's motivation was linked to injustices in the dominant food system, such as the (food) poverty they observed around them, and by the hope that people who were struggling could perhaps be helped through their community project:

*... recognising that some people don't have access to cooking or refrigeration equipment, or not being able to afford to run it, the idea of having a community kitchen where people can share meals or use that kitchen as a resource, sort of emerged, and that's what we were doing. (Participant 7)*

Their motivation was driven by the idea of 'getting together' to overcome adverse circumstances, and in the process realising the significance of creating a social space in which a multitude of challenges could be talked about.

### 4.3.3 Food-skills and food-education

One of the community organisations that we interviewed coordinated food-related social enterprises in specific local contexts in Liverpool and Brighton. In Liverpool, they were motivated to train a variety of local people in food production skills, such as taking surplus food and transforming them into new products. Whereas in Brighton the social enterprise provides participants with internships and with training around cooking community meals, community outreach and food processing skills. Reflecting on this project, the interviewee (Participant 12) commented that one of the great things about the project was that young people end up having a well-rounded knowledge of social and environmental issues, valuable enterprising experience and collaborative working relationships.

### 4.3.4 Healthy lifestyle

For another community organisation, their motivation to organise group cooking and eating activities was based on their wider strategy to support 'healthy lifestyles'. Their activities were designed for particular participant groups, e.g., for the 55+ to help tackle social isolation and poor nutrition; for the 18+, for cooking skills and nutrition education; and for families from disadvantaged backgrounds or areas. They acknowledged that their programme content and delivery was also influenced by funding linked to public health priorities, either locally or nationally. Nonetheless, they focused on,

*... being able to go into communities and have a positive impact on the place, which then means that we're able to have a positive impact on people's lives. And we do everything for the better of the community. So, our ultimate aim is that - if we go into a local community - by the time that we've finished our interaction with them, we know that we can successively walk away and know that we've had a positive impact on how that local area is going to be able to move forward. And so, it is definitely about, you know, changing those places so that we can change people's lives. (Participant 11)*



## 4.4. Summary

Most food activity participants described their motivations as mainly based on personal and community benefits linked to taking part in community food activities. At a personal level, some were found to be motivated by past experiences and food-related practices linked to family and cultural backgrounds. Others were driven to improve their health and wellbeing, addressing challenges such as social isolation. Participation enabled them to experience the therapeutic benefits of community food activities and to engage with the wider community. For some, these activities also provided the opportunity to learn and develop new skills.

Similarly, community organisers also had diverse motivations, which often revolved around a desire to respond to personal and community needs. They were concerned with reducing social isolation, alleviating food insecurity, supporting community development, and sharing knowledge. As with activity participants, it is worth noting that motivations can evolve over time, changing with and through the engagement with community food activities and other people that are involved in them.

For organisations running or facilitating community food activities, motivations were found to revolve around the aspirations and capacity of the organisation. These range from activities that address specific community needs to broader societal concerns. They include the provision of education on organic food and sustainability; food skills; promoting healthy lifestyles at the community level; and structural level issues such as inequalities in the food system. Some also acknowledged that motivations were often guided by priorities set by funders.

## 5. Barriers for community food activities

We have divided the findings on barriers for community food activities into three groups: those barriers faced by activity participants, barriers encountered by community organisers, and those affecting organisations facilitating the activities. After an overview of the identified barriers (Table 3), we elaborate on each of them in the sections below.

<b>Barriers to participation for...</b>		
<b>Activity participants</b>	<b>Community organisers</b>	<b>Organisations</b>
Lack of time and competing priorities	Lack of facilities and resources	Top-down approaches, limited local engagement, and lack of contextual understanding
Difficulty of access (location, costs, physical barrier)	Lack of practical skills and knowledge	Balancing accessibility and effective evaluation of grants
Health issues	Lack of programme management skills or capacity	Funding challenges
Lack of representation	Discrimination	Lack of resources, skills and learning opportunities
Experiences of racism	Lack of awareness and limited skills for inclusive community engagement	Lack of community concern and understanding of good food
Language and cultural barriers	Operating in a transient community	Withdrawal of support from local authorities
Differences in opinion & motivations	Voluntary nature of community food activity	Language and communication challenges
Lack of confidence		Lack of community representation

**Table 3: Overview of barriers to participation in community food activities**

### 5.1 Barriers for activity participants

When looking at barriers that activity participants might be facing, it can be useful to make a distinction between the different times these might occur. There are barriers that people might need to overcome when engaging with a particular community-based activity for the first time (*i.e.*, when they know relatively little about the people and the content involved in a particular activity, and when no relationships have been built yet). Other barriers can emerge after individuals have become participants and have the potential to undermine a sustained engagement with a particular community food activity. Thinking about these distinctions between barriers can be helpful to develop appropriate enablers for achieving greater diversity in participation.

We describe below various examples of barriers identified by activity participants. Some of these barriers are linked to a lack of resources (time and money) or personal health constraints, while others can be described as social barriers. Here, (potential) participants' concerns about not feeling comfortable

or not fitting in with a particular group setting are important. These can be major obstacles both for initial engagement as well as for a sustained engagement with a particular community food activity: not feeling represented, racism, cultural differences, diverse languages, mental health, specific food needs, and a lack of confidence can all be barriers for participating in social activities around food. Challengingly, a lack of diversity within organisations and among activity participants can reinforce such social barriers, limiting the potential to increase diversity.

#### 5.1.1 Lack of time and competing priorities

A lack of time and competing priorities were often described as a barrier. Focus group participants highlighted this specifically as a barrier for individuals with young children as they might often encounter a clash of timings between the community food activity and other commitments (*e.g.*, having to collect children from school). As one participant described,



*... I need to pick my child from school, so at the time this thing is going on, and the time I have to do something else, they are clashing together. So, in that case, you choose which one will suit you. (Focus group participant 5)*

In the context of gleaning activities, some individuals were unable to attend due to competing demands on time. For example, if an activity was organised during the week, it automatically excluded participants who had to go to work. However, even when events were organised on the weekend, some interested individuals were still unable to participate due to childcare commitments.

### **5.1.2 Difficulty of access (location, costs, physical barrier)**

Difficult to reach venues can be a barrier for participating in community food activities, especially if participants need to incur travel costs for reaching those locations. As described by a community organiser who delivered group cooking activities, expecting participants to travel far to reach venues had turned out to be a major barrier:

*One thing we've learned over the years is that if it's not accessible, and it's not close, people aren't going to come along. (Participant 11)*

A similar finding came from another community organiser (Participant 12) who observed that, due to the nature of gleaning activities which were often organised in rural areas in "...the middle of nowhere, with no transport links...", difficulties in accessibility were often a barrier to participation. Further, the participants were expected to give up an entire day of their time. Those two factors (time and cost) had a significant impact on participation. Many potential participants did not have sufficient time nor capacity to engage with the activity, and when they did, a lack of affordable transport became an obstacle.

In the context of community gardening organised at a school, a community organiser observed that for those living in deprived neighbourhoods, costs were a bigger barrier for participation even if people wanted to join. This was simply because "... there was no way that some of the people in my local area can go out and buy a packet of seeds and a bag of compost." (Participant 5). The same community organiser also pointed to the potential barriers for physically disabled participants (e.g., wheelchair bound) when interested in community food growing.

### **5.1.3 Health issues**

For some participants, health needs can become a barrier unless their specific needs have been addressed. At a community garden in Leicestershire, although the growing space was generally accessible to everyone, a lack of car parking facilities limited the participation, especially for individuals who had physical disabilities.

In another example, the focus group participants emphasised how physical and mental disabilities can restrict some individuals from taking part in specific group activities, as in the case of those suffering from agoraphobia or from food allergies, making them disinclined to participate in food related activities.

### **5.1.4 Lack of representation**

A social barrier to participation can be a (perceived) lack of representation and diversity in community food activities. Discussing the experience of women engaging with community food growing, a community organiser (Participant 5) explained that there is a "...reticence for young women to actually go to something and [find] it [is] male dominated." Using the example of a local community gardening organisation that was staffed predominantly by men, she commented that for some women, this is a barrier as they have a feeling that the men would think they "... don't know anything about this..." She perceived that the lack of female representation in the organisation meant that potential female participants felt like they were not welcome.

In the focus group sessions, participants also highlighted those barriers that can emerge due to different perceptions, attitudes and values around food between groups and the extent to which food preferences and requirements are considered when creating a food related event. This was more broadly linked to a lack of cultural awareness on the part of community organisers (see also section 5.3.8). It was also indicated that this limited cultural awareness was linked to a perception among several interviewees that the food movement in the UK is middle-class and predominantly white.

*... across the whole food movement and community movement, there's an element of class, and it's more a middle class understanding, and that can be predominantly white. (Participant 8)*

The implications included a lack of knowledge of local realities such that people in certain community contexts do not feel represented. Things that matter to the communities (e.g., access to culturally appropriate food), and lived experiences of food poverty and food insecurity, are not necessarily perceived as significant enough to be considered.

### **5.1.5 Experiences of racism**

Describing the reluctance potential participants "from disadvantaged or marginalised communities" expressed about taking part in a community food activity in rural areas (gleaning), a community organiser illustrated reasons why this was the case. The organiser recalled past experiences individuals had described:

*(If a participant has) ... been treated, with hostility on a farm, or in a rural area before as a result of their sexuality, or the colour of their skin, or their body, or their body image, whatever it is, they're much less likely to see [gleaning] as a viable opportunity. (Participant 12)*

He drew on specific examples where some of the young people who participated in their programme spoke about their negative experiences while travelling through rural areas:

*Whether it's just somebody giving them a look as if they don't belong there or saying something openly racist, these are real reasons why people might not engage with the idea of going and working on a farm. (Participant 12)*

While the experienced racism was not directly linked to the community food activity itself, the location of the activity and its (perceived) link to racism created a barrier.

### 5.1.6 Language and cultural barriers

In the context of group cooking activities, a community organiser observed that participation from certain social groups was less than expected, "... one thing that we don't see a lot of is people from sort of like the Polish community or the Romanian community, or, you know, the Czech community or something like that." Commenting on the very small number of participants from these particular groups, the organiser discussed the possibility of language or broader cultural barriers as the underlying cause: "... maybe it's down to language barriers or not understanding the type of sessions that are available, and maybe it's not something that they do in their culture."

At an intergenerational school cooking activity organised by a school, not all the ethnic groups represented in this very multi-ethnic school (90-95% "ethnic minority" pupils) were represented in the activity, with an absence of certain groups like the Somali and Slovak Roma families. This, according to the schoolteacher (Participant 13) could have been due to language being a barrier for many of the parents as English was not their first language, potentially causing insufficient confidence to engage with the school cooking activity.

In contrast to the interpretation above where nonparticipation was indicated to be 'by choice' or beyond the influence of activity organisers, participants in the focus groups described how language and cultural barriers could be linked to the way in which activities were organised. Activity specific factors could thus create obstacles for people affecting their ability to connect outside of their own communities. For example, when information about the organisation of community food activities was provided only in English, it was not accessible to all. Linked to this, focus group participants described a lack of trust and a sense of anxiety about what to expect at some of the activities organised as barriers to participation. As described by one of the focus group participants,

*... we've gone through so much. So, it's like, no, I don't trust anybody. I don't want to, I just want to be on my own, especially when it's a new community they're coming to. They don't know who to trust, which work-related information will be asked. (Focus group participant 8)*

This quote also highlights a different barrier around communication, especially for the most vulnerable people including those without recourse to public funds. For such vulnerable individuals, a context in which (potentially) many personal questions are being asked can itself be perceived as problematic, inhibiting participation in community activities. This specific barrier was highlighted by an interviewee working for a community organisation supporting refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants. Reflecting on past experiences with participants, they discussed the importance of building trust, treating people with respect and recognising that some may not feel comfortable sharing "everything with us". Therefore, it was considered important to first build trust and only "ask the minimum of questions because often times our clients have come through hoops to get here and just having to answer questions can put them off having to ask for help." (Participant 20).

### 5.1.7 Differences in opinion and motivations

In the context of community food growing on an unused piece of public land, there were instances where the growers disagreed over aspects of food growing, which led to some discontinuing their engagement with the project. The growing space had become divided over what the individual growers chose to grow and their own personal preferences for growing techniques that they used. Different growers participated at different times of the day which led to, as the organiser (Participant 15) described, "... quite a bit of doing and undoing and redoing..." and led subsequently to disagreements. In contrast to the often-idealised portrayal of community food gardening, in this instance, "... growers fell out, and some of the growers have moved away..." and some did not come back because some people have "...antagonized each other...". The organiser reflected that there were quite a few strong personalities participating in the growing space, and with that came challenges and barriers to participation. For example, one grower had "... alienated so many volunteers..." that it required an intervention by the organiser. This highlights that maintaining consensus and agreement among participants and creating trusting and enabling environments can be a challenge even in activities that are, by nature, open and relaxed.

### 5.1.8 Lack of confidence

An organiser (Participant 5) of a community food growing project shared the observation that sometimes participants have an "insecurity", which can become a barrier to participation. For some, this was linked to not having enough confidence in their own abilities to be able to engage fully with an activity.

Similarly pointing to the importance of being sensitive to the circumstances of participants and the process of learning new skills, a community organiser drew on their experience of delivering group cooking sessions when describing how a sense of 'pride' can be a barrier:

*I think with a lot of people, if they are struggling, and they're not coping, then there's very much a pride thing in there as well. So, for us as an organisation, we have to be able to break down that barrier... So, pride is one of the biggest barriers that we face, because people don't like to admit that they've got a problem and they don't like to admit that something might be wrong. (Participant 11)*

A school teacher, who organised take-home growing kits for children and their families, reflected on the barriers to household participation with the activity. Although she felt the kits were simple to use, "...some people might lack a bit of confidence, maybe kind of knowing what to do with it, and where to put it and how to dig it in." (Participant 21)

Both the notions of 'missing confidence' or 'pride hindering asking for help' can be barriers stopping individuals from engaging with community food activities when they feel they might be currently less competent.

## 5.2 Barriers for community organisers

This section looks at barriers individuals have encountered when organising community food activities. Broadly speaking, the challenges can be put into four categories: resource constraints; lack of knowledge or lack of confidence in one's ability; discrimination; and challenges around engaging with the local community.

### 5.2.1 Lack of facilities and resources

In the case of a school cooking activity, a primary school teacher (Participant 13) discussed how in some schools, the students had to use the local pub to access any kitchen facilities. At her school, although equipped with a large kitchen space (which is not the case for every school), it was not sufficient since those managing the kitchen were reluctant to provide access due to health, safety, and hygiene concerns. Instead, she ended up using a small room with a cooker for her food education activity. Eventually it was a success and the children enjoyed the activity much more than she had expected. However, the organiser had to spend a lot of time and energy into negotiating access to the necessary facilities in the first place.

In a similar vein, other community organisers indicated barriers, which range from unaffordable costs of venues to a lack of suitable spaces. A community organiser (Participant 12) found that, despite their strong social food cultures, some communities (specifically from Bengali, Afro Caribbean, Indian or Middle Eastern backgrounds) had greater difficulties accessing community centres compared to other groups in the area. In addition, even if they were able to access a suitable social space within the community, they experienced difficulties accessing the necessary equipment.

In another example, community centres might have a kitchen space, but not one suitable or accessible enough to host

a social cooking activity. Due to a lack of other suitable infrastructure, often religious group spaces were used since they are usually rented out at affordable rates. However, as an interviewee (Participant 19) pointed out, this is not always comfortable and "cannot always feel like a place you want to go to."

In the context of a community food growing activity in London, the community organiser (Participant 5) made use of a small patch of land which had been lying unused in her neighbourhood until it became a growing space used by local residents. The group, however, did not own the patch of land and they were evicted by a developer. She described this experience as "... absolutely heart-breaking. We have not really recovered, because these are vulnerable people, they really felt it hit them hard." Other interviewees highlighted similar barriers to accessing and retaining land for community gardening activities. In the context of a community growing project in Leicestershire, the activity organiser (Participant 16) described how the project received permission to use the land by the local council, but that they were nonetheless worried that this would not continue indefinitely as a property developer "...has eyes on this land."

In addition to a lack of access to infrastructure resources, like a suitable and affordable space or necessary equipment, community organisers also described less tangible aspects as barriers to engagement. These included challenges around appropriate channels to communicate, or the capacity and time to engage with a larger funding organisation. As one interviewee pointed out,

*In terms of like really logistical issues in terms of barriers, I think there are - particularly through Covid - a lot of groups that don't have space, a lot of groups that don't have their own dedicated ways of communicating.*

*And I think they've probably found it hard to then not only engage with each other, but then to take that secondary step of engaging with [our facilitating organisation], which is a secondary step. (Participant 10)*

### 5.2.2 Lack of practical skills and knowledge

For individuals organising community food growing activities for the first time, they might lack some of the relevant skills, potentially undermining their confidence and ability to run the activities efficiently. In the case of a school food growing club, the organiser (Participant 21) felt that there was a pressure to get it right the first time. She commented that there is a need for "... confidence for the teachers in terms of how to manage sort of gardening lessons, and confidence in terms of their knowledge of gardening." She felt that it was difficult to decide to run an activity without professional training, without having a clear picture of what the aim is, and how to manage it.

In the context of community cooking, an interviewee (Participant 19) reflected on a conversation she had with a community organiser who observed that, "I've got this group of people, and I think they could need some support and nutrition advice, but I'm not a nutritionist, I'm not a cook."

A perceived lack of skills and confidence is often interlinked, as one interviewee described:

*This came up in a few (...) events (...): there's one passionate leader in an organisation who wants to do it. If you don't have that, if you don't feel you have that personal knowledge and confidence around growing, it's hard to throw your hat in the ring. So, if it's having that knowledge or, you know, we had a few growing partners who spent time supporting schoolteachers or community leaders to upskill. But I think that's just a general gap to stop people getting the confidence, that confidence that they can carry through, they can engage with people. (Participant 23)*

### 5.2.3 Lack of programme management skills or capacity

A related aspect to missing practical skills is the lack of professional skills, which can also be a barrier for individuals organising community food activities. During the initial stages of development, one of the community organisers (Participant 19) noted that many do not understand "... project management, legal, or how to apply for funding." The organiser also noted a disparity between established organisations and those in the initial stages of development. Whereas established organisations have access to connections and networks, in comparison newly established organisations struggle to access the "... right people..." To alleviate this barrier, she felt it would be useful if they had access to a platform where newly established organisations could collaborate and exchange. Such local connections can also be useful for practical

reasons, e.g., when trying to access financial resources. As one interviewee explained:

*... the account has to be an organisation's bank account that we put in place for financial safeguarding, but we have had instances where a passionate volunteer would come along, and we say 'Oh, there is this local church or community group, I'm planning on doing the event with them anyway, is it okay for the money to be paid into their account?' (Participant 23)*

In the context of a school organising food education classes and intergenerational cooking activities, the lack of funding was described as a major barrier. One interviewee (Participant 13) described that - although each school is unique - there was one thing they all had in common: a "... lack of money. So, this [food-related activities] is fairly low down in the priority list." This meant that the successful running of a community food activity was dependent on the resourcefulness of teachers and their success with funding bids.

The time and effort required to organise and manage community food activities can also become a capacity issue. This includes the engagement with funders which can be quite time demanding. As described by one interviewee:

*To me, the biggest barrier [we are creating for community organisers] is the way that we get people to register with us. (...) But at the moment, every time (...) a group that's registered with us holds an activity, every single activity has to be registered for us to count it. (...) And I imagine that there's a whole lot of people that are taking part in ... our activities that we don't know and see and recognise either: through whether they have access to the internet, or whether they have access to a physical space, or the time or commitment or the person that's taking the leadership part of communicating with us. And so, I think there's probably a lot of people that we don't see in here. And I think that's probably a massive barrier. (Participant 10)*

Difficulties in accessing funding have also been linked to the complexity of funding opportunities and the particular language that is being used to be successful, which then might limit access for specific groups. As one interviewee described,

*... I think there's awareness, there is funding that's cottoned on, you know, for particular groups, but it still remains a barrier if you don't have the capacity to fill in a funding form, if you don't have the speak. So, someone might be speaking about organic food, but they're not necessarily saying or using the word organics. Or they don't understand what certification means. And so, there's still quite a lot of barriers. (Participant 7)*

### 5.2.4 Discrimination

A community organiser highlighted that access to resources is made more difficult for some organisers due to discrimination:



*...I would say there's always been sort of that intersectionality, sort of discrimination. So that organisations that are women-led or queer-led, or are largely black and racialized minority, minority groups, tend to have a bigger battle, trying to access funding, trying to access space, trying to access capacity building training. And I think a lot of funders and other organisations, because of George Floyd, are finally recognising that. But, you know, it's been a battle from the very beginning.*  
(Participant 7)

This organiser added that such aspects of discrimination may not always be overt, but it is a barrier at the level of organisational culture: "... people might say 'Oh, well, we're not racist.' But actually, if you really examine your culture, there might be racism, ableism, you name it." Not fully understanding how to engage and reach out to (different) communities and the lack of an inclusive approach can create barriers for community organisers.

### **5.2.5 Lack of awareness and limited skills for inclusive community engagement**

One community organiser (Participant 2) described a situation where a community growing project, despite good intentions to reach out to the local community of a relatively deprived area, failed to achieve this goal and described a lack of take up in the local community. After some time, the project organisers realised that the team of newly trained volunteers supporting the project all lived on the edge of the target area and were therefore not located in the heart of the community. Similarly, the growing spaces were also located on the edge of the target area. As described by the organiser (Participant 2), "It was a bit of a shame, actually, it was a good project, and it had some good outcomes, but not the outcomes we wanted." To reach out and promote the project locally, the organisers held a community event in a local community space. However, they found the community treated them with some hostility. Our interviewee reflected on this and added that she felt some communities are "...fed up with having stuff done to them" by external organisers or organisations. In hindsight, she believed that if they had been able to find a community elder to support

the project, they might have been able to develop the activity.

In the context of a primary school in Leicestershire hosting intergenerational activities, the organiser (Participant 9) did not feel there were many barriers to organising activities for the schoolchildren. She did, however, struggle to reach out to the parents. Not residing locally in the community made it more difficult for her to forge the initial connections. For her, it was difficult to identify the right strategy and people to contact to identify who might be interested in engaging with the school and the intergenerational activities.

### **5.2.6 Operating in a transient community**

Reflecting on challenges faced in reaching participants and volunteers to help with a community food growing project, a community organiser (Participant 16) found the transient nature of the local community in the neighbourhood to be a barrier. He described the mobility of student residents as one of the reasons why he could not get enough local volunteers from the local community. Additionally, he found that there were many smaller, separate communities living within the same neighbourhood, which he found difficult to engage with.

### **5.2.7 Voluntary nature of community food activity**

At an intergenerational cooking activity organised at a school, many families were invited, but only a few turned up. Ultimately, it proved to be the right number of families given the facilities and resources that the school had, but the school teacher (Participant 13) who had organised the activity described the 'voluntary' nature of participation as a potential barrier to organising an activity successfully. "I bought all this stuff, and I've got organised all these people, but then we didn't know if anybody would actually turn up. We have no idea". This worried her, as she was afraid that all her efforts would be in vain. She also remarked that as the activity was organised during the school holidays, the participants were not obliged to attend.

## 5.3 Barriers for organisations

In this section, we describe the barriers faced by organisations engaged with running or facilitating community food activities. The barriers can be summarised as challenges around engagement and communication (internally and externally), organisational learning and knowledge, and lack of resources, particularly long-term funding.

### 5.3.1 Top-down approaches, limited local engagement, and lack of contextual understanding

Organisations developing programmes ‘for’ communities rather than ‘with’ them was identified as creating major barriers. As an example, one of the community organisers contrasted her local awareness and embeddedness, including her understanding of how her local community operates, with her own organisation’s top-down approach. For example, the organisation wanted to teach certain demographics how to cook while she questioned that decision,

*... what gives you the evidence that they don’t know how to cook? what gives you the evidence that they’re not eating vegetables? (Participant 2)*

She considered a top-down approach as a barrier to community food activities, as it “assumed” the needs of communities rather than “understanding” them in the first instance. Another interviewee (Participant 19) stressed that in order to build genuine connections with communities, it is imperative to avoid top-down approaches and be community-led.

A related barrier perceived by several interviewees was a limited understanding of specific local contexts by facilitating organisations, which made it challenging to engage with the communities they wanted to reach. Not having organisational expertise within facilitating organisations linked to specific geographical areas can become a potential barrier to reaching out and supporting individuals and community organisers effectively.

*... without a named contact, a face that you know, a person who you can call, people don’t engage as well... (Participant 24)*

Without context-specific engagement, interviewees perceived challenges around building relationships with community organisers and the local community more broadly.

*There is a huge risk that what you lose is all the nuance and understanding around every single person and community. (Participant 19)*

As community engagement requires understanding of local realities and their needs, it was felt that understanding local cultural dimensions around food was not possible when working from a distance (Participant 8).

### 5.3.2 Balancing accessibility and effective evaluation of grants

Facilitating and other funding organisations supporting community food activities identified as a challenge the need to balance the accessibility and easy implementation of grants with the organisations’ need to effectively evaluate the impact of such grants. Getting this balance wrong can create a barrier either for community organisers and organisations, or for the organisations providing funding for community food activities. For example, describing the success of a funding scheme, an interviewee nonetheless voiced concern,

*“they’re successful because everyone applies to them. They run stuff, and we get some case studies, we get some photos... [but we could be] a bit more scientific about it.” (Participant 1)*

From an organisational perspective, it was felt that gaining more insights about the impact of provided funding could help the organisation to both access further external funding themselves and to shape their future funding schemes more effectively.

*... I mean, it’s like you say, it’s necessary that we need to be able to ask them for the data. And if we don’t get it, it is really, really hard. And I have been trying to find ways to do more qualitative research... capacity is always a challenge. If money was no object ..., and obviously it is... (Participant 10)*

The complexity of finding the right balance between the need to evaluate programme outcomes versus alienating community organisers through additional demands was a concern raised by several participants who were concerned about the impact it can have on the capacity of organisers as well as on the relationship between community organisers and the funding organisation:

*I know we need to capture things. And I think that can put people off because ‘I’ve just arranged like a local walk and a picnic in my neighbourhood. (...) I’m just doing it because it might be a bit of a laugh in a way to meet new people.’ And I think that’s more natural for people. I think people are worried about being asked for too much. Or it’s taking on a lot of responsibility. So, taking away the red tape in whatever ways we can. (Participant)*

### 5.3.3 Funding challenges

A lack of funding or limited funding was described as a major barrier for most organisations. From the perspective of a non-profit organisation, heavily reliant on grants and donations, it was noted “... finances will always be an issue in order to sustain service.” Even when successful with a funding application, the grant often came with its limits, for e.g., “... ”

must be spent within that year, or it is funding for a role that's for a year only, or two years maximum." (Participant 20). Therefore, as a charity they had to be constantly on the lookout for funding and resources to sustain their activities.

*In the case of a relatively small national community organisation, whilst they had historically been able to access funding from private donations to conduct work and activities in various communities, they experienced a lack of funding for staffing costs. This meant that they did not have the resources required "in order to do the really, really deep community outreach." (Participant 12)*

In order to meet the demands of the community, and to engage with more people, another organisation required a larger staff team and a greater presence in the city, but it was not easy as "it all comes down to money" (Participant 11). The organisation was constantly looking at different ways to access funding that was available to them, and it was felt that in the current times, while funding pots were decreasing, the number of organisations applying for funding was increasing. This added to the financial constraints within which they operated. In addition to the overall lack of funding, the nature of short-term funding was also considered a barrier, as it has an impact on whom programmes and activities can reach, and it influenced the capacity to make significant change in peoples' lives.

*... earlier funding opportunities would come out and it would be for between 3 to 5 years. And for us, that is a period of time where you can really make a difference to a place, whereas now it's very much 12 months or 2 years which is still a great period of time, don't get me wrong. We can still have a really positive impact. But if you really want to see a period of change, you need that longer term funding. So, with ... (programme A), we managed to secure seven years' worth of funding through public health and that made a massive difference. The project was known in the city, talked about in the city, you would mention ('programme A') and people knew it was us and things like that. So, your funding does make a massive difference on where and how you can deliver your project. (Participant 11)*

In a similar vein, although the availability of small grants, as in the case of FFLGT programme, was generally considered as useful to organise activities, it was also felt that they were good for those organisers who already had an idea of what they were aiming to do. Although the small grants helped them to a certain extent, it was not sufficient in all cases.

### 5.3.4 Lack of resources, skills and learning opportunities

In addition to funding as a barrier that influenced the overall capacity of organisations, the lack of staff time, and lack of volunteers was considered a barrier to reaching out to people by many community organisers.

*...there's probably lots that we haven't been able to do just because of lack of resources, whether it's time or people or the money behind it. (Participant 18)*

The disconnect between what an organisation wants to do and what it can actually do given limited capacity and limited resources was seen as a major barrier.

Another barrier discussed was a lack of learning from experiences and sharing between various staff members within organisations. Although evaluations might take place, interviewees explained that those are not always used effectively to support organisational learning. Furthermore, the speed of changes (often triggered by external funding constraints) do not leave enough time for reflection and key lessons to be drawn from successes and failures. One interviewee explained that by the time it was possible to share feedback, the programme had moved on and the feedback had become "tokenistic". Another aspect related to limited opportunities for learning was linked to the lack of skills and competencies among organisers and within organisations for approaching diversity and inclusion issues. An interviewee (Participant 24) observed that the diversity and inclusion training offered to staff was often insufficient.

Similarly, another deficit identified by community organisers was a lack of training on asset-based approach

*One of the other things I would love to have done more training on... we never really got to it was the asset-based approach... You know, we're working with communities and building up communities like literally doing it, you know, what does your community look like? who's in it? ...who, you know, who lives here? And are they involved in your programmes, and it could be, you know, language, disability access, transport, all of those things... We assume that our communities are very self-aware, but they're not. (Participant)*

### 5.3.5 Lack of community concern and understanding of good food

From their experiences of engaging with 'deprived areas', one interviewee from a community organisation that delivered educational programmes on resident-led regeneration and sustainability projects described the reason behind why some individuals were unwilling to participate in community food activities as down to a lack of community awareness of good food.

*The main issue is that people do not often see food as a major concern. They do not appreciate that non-organic food isn't 'normal' as it has absorbed poisons whilst being grown. They do not understand the environmental impact of many fruits and vegetables being imported and being available out of season. Consequently, they see food as a minor topic and generating interest can be difficult. (Participant 17)*

They found that in the above context, encouraging people to change their diets was an “uphill struggle” and this was more so in deprived areas where unhealthy, processed foods are easily available.

### 5.3.6 Withdrawal of support from local authorities

The withdrawal of support from local authorities was described as a major barrier. Interviewees described instances when the support for developing local food growing strategies, including the availability of funding and other resources for organisations that ran community allotments, community orchards and other similar initiatives, was abruptly suspended by local Councils. This had undermined the capacity of community organisations to continue with their community food activities.

*... many of these organisations have been wound up. Given the climate emergency, this seems to be the opposite trajectory to where we should be going. (Participant 17)*

### 5.3.7 Language and communication challenges

Communication can become a barrier for organisations’ successful engagement around community food activities if the right communication strategies are not identified or impossible to implement. An example in point is the relatively centralised approach a facilitating organisation was utilising when aiming to approach individual organisers and small community groups. Given budget limitations, the centralised approach was ensuring the programme’s continuation while making it “wider but with a less targeted remit”. An interviewee was concerned about potentially adverse repercussions, specifically for the organisation’s engagement with the “most deprived areas” since it is “... hard to get around [...] when you’re working at a national level, [...] and the communications become more generic.” (Participant 24).

The importance of targeted and audience specific communication was also expressed by another interviewee:

*I just worry how much people will engage with central comms kind of contact and if they’re not engaged in that, how do you connect with some of those people. That’s probably my biggest concern. (Participant 14)*

In the case of a local community organisation supporting the needs of a diverse community comprising of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, language and communication was considered a major challenge on both sides. Individuals found it difficult to reach out to the organisation, and the organisation found it challenging to establish connections. By having a diverse volunteer base who spoke the different community

languages, the organisation had succeeded in breaking down language barriers, but the interviewee (Participant 20) emphasised the significance of acknowledging communication barriers. Similarly, in the context of an ethnically diverse area of Cardiff (with 70% ethnic minority households who came from various countries), a community organisation found language was potentially a barrier. To address this barrier, the interviewee (Participant 22) described how they worked with interpreters and utilised the “informal translation” skills of volunteers who spoke the local languages.

A related challenge were “digital barriers” (or the ‘digital divide’) that came to the fore during the pandemic.

*The other challenge is these days we communicate on zoom, yeah? A lot of clients haven’t got laptops, they haven’t got funding for internet, they haven’t got money on their phones to be phoning us, things like that. (Participant 20)*

The assumption that everybody has equal access to communication facilities or resources made by some organisations was described as unfounded and a major barrier for participation for specific communities.

### 5.3.8 Lack of community representation

Lack of local community representation within organisations was described as a barrier to participation (see also section 5.1.4). As one facilitating organisation described it,

*... they (the local community) don’t see themselves represented... If I’m the representative of that organisation, I, in the eyes of the person I’m speaking to, I represent that organisation. And if they don’t feel that chimes with their lived experience, yeah, there’s an opportunity there for a likelihood that our approaches may be kind of ignored or not be as powerful as they could be. (Participant 12)*

The development of trust and the type of relationships that are essential to making connections between facilitating organisations and the communities were considered essential but less likely to happen in the absence of community representation.





## 5.4 Summary

The barriers to participation in community food activities can be summarised into two broad categories: those arising due to resource constraints and those challenges arising around engagement. For activity participants, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, taking part in community activities can be difficult due to constraints linked to the time or financial resources that participation requires. Difficulties in participating can also be related to individuals' mental and/or physical health, especially if specific needs have not been accommodated. Participation is also made more challenging by a variety of social barriers. These include concerns about not feeling comfortable or not fitting in with a particular group setting, not feeling represented, experiences of discrimination, racism, cultural differences, language barriers and other communication challenges, and lack of confidence.

The challenges, which have emerged for community organisers trying to increase diversity in participation, include barriers due to limited resource capacities (including space and equipment), lack of knowledge or lack of confidence in one's ability (e.g., around activity specific knowledge, organisational capacities, fundraising), and challenges around engaging with the local

community (communication, time, languages, understanding local context). For some organisers, these challenges are further compounded by discrimination, including racism.

On an organisational level, several barriers have been identified for both community organisations and facilitating organisations with the most important one highlighting the difficulties for organisations in 'reaching out' effectively to communities. Besides these challenges around organisational engagement and communication (internally and externally), organisational learning and knowledge (adaptive learning, about communities, about project success, within organisations), and a lack of resources, particularly long-term funding, have been identified as elements that can hinder facilitating and other organisations to better support participation in diverse communities.

## 6. Enablers for community food activities

As in the earlier sections, we have organised the findings on enablers for community food activities into three parts – those factors that enable individuals to participate and those that support community organisers, followed by those that can make organisations more effective in supporting diverse participation. After an overview of the identified enablers (Table 4), we elaborate on these three in the sections below.

<b>Enablers for participation by...</b>		
<b>Activity participants</b>	<b>Community organisers</b>	<b>Organisations</b>
Affordability and accessibility	Passionate, resourceful and open-minded individuals	Networking
Effective communication	Organisational and institutional support	Funding
Creating safe spaces and building trust	Community support and networking	Capacity building and knowledge sharing
Inclusive approach	Creating financially sustainable opportunities for community organisers	Build in reflective practice
		Co-design activities
		Recognise power relations
		Diversity within organisations
		Design and accessibility of resources
		More government-level support

Table 4: Overview of enablers for participation in community food activities

### 6.1 Enablers for individuals to participate

#### 6.1.1 Affordability and accessibility

In relation to ‘costs’ of participation, which was identified as a barrier for many, it was found that making the ‘activity’ more affordable to participate was key to its success. In an example described by a school teacher, the provision of packs for growing pea shoots to school children, who were then able to take them home and grow with their families, the interviewee (Participant 21) found that the easy accessibility of the growing packs led to a high level of engagement. Parents and children shared information and discussed how the growing process was going. The successful engagement by students and parents with this family activity had been enabled by making the necessary resources easily available.

In the context of gleaning activities, the community organiser made sure that participants were able to join activities that were often held in rural locations.

*As much as possible, we used to make kind of lift share arrangements and kind of coordinated. So, if one person isn't able to get there, they might be able to get picked*

*up on the way, or something like that. Or, if we were specifically working in areas where we knew there was high deprivation, where we knew we wanted to work with a specific community, we might hire a minibus, or arrange for transport to be made. But of course, that ends up being costly and time consuming... (Participant 12)*

In the focus groups, participants also emphasised the need to improve accessibility of organised activities. Linking this to sometimes prohibitive travel costs to get to specific venues, the participants suggested, as one possible solution, the provision of bus fares to help with transport costs. To address the timing of events as a barrier, focus group members suggested that communication about one-off events needs to be shared well in advance to allow potential participants to schedule accordingly, and that the timing of regular activities is better decided in consultation with participants. Choosing a suitable timing of activities was considered critical for avoiding possible clashes that participants may have with other family commitments.

In the case of a community food growing project, a community organiser (Participant 5) described how building raised beds

in the growing space enabled wheelchair bound disabled participants to take part in community food growing. The raised beds had been designed by a participant with a physical disability and were built with recycled wood and help from a local wood yard.

### 6.1.2 Effective communication

Another aspect of making community food activities accessible is linked to effective communication. One of the community organisers who ran cooking activities made it apparent that simple messaging and using accessible language was often considered useful in motivating individuals to take part in community food activities:

*You just have to keep it simple and ask people what they like to eat and use that as your starting point for any conversation, and kind of developing anything.*  
(Participant 19)

She also highlighted how the content of messaging needs to be more relatable to everyday experiences, as illustrated in the quote below,

*I have heard time and time again, that one of the barriers to eating good healthy food is that we should not be talking about health. We should be talking about how actually it is cheaper to make something yourself and that it does not necessarily take more time.* (Participant 19)

### 6.1.3 Creating safe spaces and building trust

While describing the experiences of running the Family Hub (a community organisation where children, young people and their families can go when in need of help and support), one interviewee (Participant 6) described how creating such a safe and welcoming space for vulnerable families in the local community had led to the development of new social connections between the organisation and the families. This had further led to the development of new community initiatives around food.

Key aspects of enabling participation relate to the building of trust between organisations and the communities they work with, and the level of confidence essential both for reaching out and for enabling participation in the activities. In the case of a community organisation that organises community meal activities, the organiser reflected on their success:

*... I think we've always been community-led and -responsive. So, even though we've had certain ideas, everything we discuss with the local community. And we've tried to deliver everything that the community asked for that's within our remit. So, we're in constant engagement, which is what the community meals provided... (Participant 7)*

The importance of creating a friendly and welcoming environment, especially for the most vulnerable people, was also emphasised by members of the focus groups. They described how a friendly environment could be created by giving participants the opportunity to volunteer in the activities, as by doing so, new connections can be forged, thus contributing to a welcoming and more familiar environment. This can also have the advantage of participant-volunteers serving as informal conduits for the spread of information and encouraging participation in the activities by other people within their networks.

### 6.1.4 Inclusive approach

An inclusive approach was considered a key enabler for increasing participation. Focus group participants emphasised the need to be culturally sensitive and to be aware that different cultures might have different ways of doing things. This then requires a willingness to choose options which suit all (e.g., choosing to have vegetarian or vegan food at community gatherings which people are less likely to object based on cultural, religious or other dietary needs).

A community organisation based in Coventry that works with culturally diverse groups (comprising of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants from different cultural backgrounds), identified key elements that made them successful in reaching out to those communities, often the most vulnerable. These included networking (with churches and other local organisations); ensuring the cultural diversity of their volunteer base (which removed language and cultural barriers); having a diverse mix on their Trustees board; and committees to which all their "clients" are invited to join. The interviewee (Participant 20) described her organisation's "inclusive" approach along two dimensions: its organisational structure as well as the mechanisms they have in place for reaching out to the communities that need their support. This has led them to establish a "very good reputation" for over 10 years across the city, which continues to bring further successes by being widely recognised even among newcomers. She described inclusivity as underpinned by a sense of respect:

*... it's about respect, it's about recognising that the way we do things, you know, my way is not necessarily the right way, what might seem perfectly normal to me, maybe a cultural thing. So, it's understanding different cultures. Now, that's a challenge because we deal with many different cultures and trying to understand every one of those is a challenge.* (Participant 20)

Explaining how to be inclusive and accessible for diverse and potentially vulnerable community members, another community organiser described the aspect of informality and longer time period that is required:

*... I think, first, we were being really informal. How we're working has always been sort of light-touch, very informal. And we allow people to come to us, and when they're ready to open up about issues. More importantly, we meet people where they are. So, not having any expectations or anything like that. It literally is about making a connection and building a relationship from that, and that sometimes takes years. (Participant 7)*

Adaptability and “listening” to participants were highlighted by another community organiser as an essential element of being inclusive. This was considered fundamental to changing services/programme design in response to feedback from participants in order to ensure achieving the project aims. As described,

*... we listen to our participants. So pre-COVID, we used to hold regular focus groups, where we would invite past participants to come along, and just tell us what they thought. You know, to be open, be honest, if they thought it went well, if they didn't, and things like that. So, you know, we're always sort of trying to listen to the people that are taking part in the projects and the activities. (Participant 11)*

## 6.2 Enablers for community organisers

The findings presented here include those enabling factors that make it easier for individuals to organise effective and inclusive community food activities. These individuals could be acting in their independent capacity or working in different settings such as schools and community centres and organisations.

### 6.2.1 Passionate, resourceful and open-minded individuals

The key role played by motivated and resourceful individuals behind successfully organised community food activities was demonstrated clearly in different contexts. In the context of organising a community food growing activity for the first time, one interviewee (Participant 15) reflected on the challenges faced as, “... didn't know that I had this character in me until I was pushed to express it.” Recollecting the threats of being taken to court over the narrow strip of public land that she had started using as a community growing space, the unfairness of the dispute had motivated her to continue what she was doing, “... knowing where I stand, knowing my principles and values, that's really important.” This also applied to the wider group dynamic as she was driven to negotiate and reach consensus between the different users of the growing space, especially when it came to settling disagreements. As described by her, “... there are different and diverse views, and everybody needs to come together and talk about those differences” and it takes a certain type of individual who can address the challenges that come with diversity.

In another context, a schoolteacher (Participant 9) demonstrated her passion and resourcefulness by organising the sale of plants, hanging baskets, and other items to the wider community in order to fund the resources required for running a gardening activity in the school. She organised the

sale at the start and at the end of the school for parents and other members of the local community. She also held “tasting sessions after school” for parents where they could also buy ingredients for the items they had tasted (such as rhubarb for making crumble). Through these creative ways of fundraising, she succeeded in buying the materials needed to “keep the garden going.”

In another instance, the organiser (Participant 16) of a community gardening project, who did not have the facilities to cook and distribute food, collaborated with a local vegan café to access their cooking facilities. Although he was aware that their group could be evicted at any point from the public land that they were using for community food growing, he described the positive outcomes from the activity to the group as having outweighed the costs, which made him committed to carrying on the activity as long as they could.

When discussing potential ‘top tips’ for setting up a community food activity, the importance of individuals keeping an ‘open’ mind and organising an activity which is “located within the community” was considered an enabling factor, although it was acknowledged that for some, this experience could be uncomfortable.

*I think it's got to be near where you are, and you've got to be prepared to open up and let the community use you ... You have got to be a generous nature... generous with your time, generous with your personality, in terms of wanting to help somebody else. (Participant 5)*

Many of the community organisers used ‘thinking outside the box’ to resolve the constraints they faced. An example of such creativity was given by one interviewee, where the community organisation she was associated with moved away from the



traditional notion that one needs a single large piece of land for community food growing, and instead opted for many smaller plots, wherever they were available. This resulted in "... effectively, what we have is a patchwork farm in [the area], growing on the front plots, small plots of land. So, we're working with a local school. And we've been approached by a couple of the churches as well to produce food on the land." (Participant 7)

These various examples illustrate that passionate, resourceful and open-minded individuals are the key enabling factors for successful community food activities.

### 6.2.2 Organisational and institutional support

Faced with competing priorities and resource constraints, having a supportive leadership team was identified as a key enabler in the interviews. In the context of a school gardening activity, the teacher (Participant 21) described the support received from her school leadership team as having enabled her to organise and run the activity successfully. She noted, however, that while it took time for the leadership time to get on board and accept the activity, once they did, they became willing to contribute to the project. Over time, this led other colleagues to contribute to the gardening project. To cite an instance, when she took some time off on maternity leave, a colleague stepped in and took over the organising of the garden, "It was really nice to have another colleague who just got it, and she just knew, and she would just push to do as much outside learning as possible in the same way I did."

The importance of a supportive leadership team was also evidenced in a school food sharing activity in which pupils shared food and recipes with a local alms house. The activity organiser (Participant 9) benefited from a flexible work schedule; she could reduce her hours, if necessary, which enabled her to spend more time planning for the food sharing activity. It was also useful for her to have a helper to support her with the preparation for the after-school cooking sessions: "... if you have support like that, within school, it makes things so much easier." Hence, while preparing the ingredients and equipment for the class over the lunch break was a considerable challenge, other teachers were "on board straightaway" and were willing to work with her as it also helped to meet some of their teaching criteria.

In the case of food growing activities within a school environment, setting a realistic growing plan enables activities to continue with lower maintenance. This was emphasised by interviewees as it ensures that even when school commitments reduce the amount of time spent at the garden, or when there is nobody to look after the plants as during the school holidays, the plants continue to grow. As one interviewee (Participant 9) described, "we try to grow things that... will be in season when we come back."

The school teachers amongst our interviewees described the introduction of food education in the new national school curriculum as an institutional factor that created a wider enabling environment for food-related activities across the country. It made it mandatory for schools to "do something" about food education (whether it is to do with food preparation, cooking skills or understanding nutrition). This made it easier for the teachers to ask for and get the support necessary from senior leadership - in terms of access to kitchen space, cooking equipment, and allocated time for food-related activities.

### 6.2.3 Community support and networking

Support from the local community is a key enabler. During the initial stages of using a piece of unused land for community food growing, a community organiser (Participant 15) faced threats from the local Council that she would be taken to court over the use of the land. However, with support from the local community, and the strong relationships she built with both the police and some local councillors, she was able to overcome the challenges and the community project continued to grow. Another key enabler for running the activity was the support extended by a national alliance of community food initiatives, in the form of grant funding, free learning resources, videography and mentorship. Reflecting on her experience of using these resources, she found them highly valuable and appreciated the approach taken by the food alliance to "empower" individuals to organise community activities. She was also able to utilise a variety of informative resources provided by different organisations and networks, "... it is wonderful, they give you these free resources... they have even got free marketing logos and everything". By participating in wider events such as Mental Health Week and Earth Walks, she was also able to tap into wider networks and channels to gain exposure for her own activity. For her, it was "... amazing to join those bigger umbrella campaigns..."

In the case of a community organisation running a gardening project with disadvantaged communities, they found it useful to engage with housing associations. As described by the organiser (Participant 5), this not only provided them with access to land in suitable locations for the activity participants, but also benefitted the associations through enhancing the estates.

Similarly, in the case of school cooking activities in Leicestershire, support from a large food retailer and from Food for Life was considered key to running the activities. The retailer ran a scheme where they provided funding each school term to supply ingredients and equipment for running cooking activities. This alleviated the resource constraints that schools face for running such activities. Similarly, the knowledge and resources from Food for Life was described

by the activity organiser as useful, “you could contact them and, you know, they would give you support and suggestions” (Participant 9) and found their ‘idea factory’ meetings helpful where:

*... schools get together and discuss how things have worked for them at their school and that’s given other people ideas ... you’re constantly being fed ideas and suggestions. And everything that they’ve had on offer for us or suggested has been very motivational and, on the whole, benefitted our school. (Participant 9)*

#### 6.2.4 Creating financially sustainable opportunities for community organisers

In the case of an informal community group running a community food growing activity in a deprived area, they faced barriers engaging with the local “transient” community. As described by the interviewee (Participant 16) having a paid “community organiser” was considered an enabler as that “... would help enormously any kind of group” by alleviating the burden on volunteers. As the volunteers and activity participants came with different levels of motivation

and different amounts of time that they could give, having a community member in a ‘paid’ position was seen to be helpful to be able to go out and engage with the community on a regular basis.

Another community organiser also echoed the importance of not depending on volunteers, focusing instead on building a local economy and the economic capacity of local people and communities:

*... our aim is to build community food resilience. And we see that as us taking as much control as possible of the food supply chain, and also creating sort of work for people because for anything to be viable, it needs to be economically viable. And we’re not about the big sort of volunteer culture that exists around a lot of community food projects. So, we’re starting community farm, we’re looking at processing...supporting micro food businesses ... We would like to establish community bakery, and possibly a micro dairy as well and a good food cooperative... So that we’re providing everything that people need, and hopefully it becomes less of a food aid project, and more the community food hub (Participant 7)*

## 6.3 Enablers for organisations

In our interviews with FFLGT staff, and members of other community organisations, interviewees reflected both on those factors that allow organisations to enable and support the inclusive work of others (organisations and individuals) and on those factors that make the organisations themselves more effective, *i.e.*, that enables their own activities. However, some of these inward- and outward-facing enablers are closely linked, including the importance of building strong networks, reflective and adaptive practices and the enabling of diversity by being diverse and inclusive.

### 6.3.1 Networking

Similar to the emphasis placed on networking made by individual organisers, organisations acknowledged its significance in various ways. For example, in the context of a ‘family hub’ which supports the needs of vulnerable families, networking with other community organisations and partners was considered critical to helping them successfully organise food-related activities (e.g., a community café and community garden) although their primary services were non-food related support (employment, domestic violence, substance misuse, mental health and children’s disability). For example, their networking with the local police led them to get financial

support for purchase of kitchen equipment and café furniture; their connections with a national food redistributor to access fresh produce; and collaborating with a local charity to deliver food to vulnerable families during Covid-19 lockdown. As the interviewee from the family hub reflected:

*...definitely, everything we’ve done, we’ve not done on our own. We’ve had partners helping us... like for the community garden, Centre A (another local partner) is helping us and equally we help them. It’s partnership working. So, I like it, because it’s not them and us. And if you get away from ‘them and us,’ then you’re likely to create a much cohesive partnership where your families know you’re all working together...There was no competition. There was no kind of anybody’s better than anybody. We were just like, yeah, just see how it works and get on with it really. I’m just going to say, I think families like it if you’re just open and honest, you know, say that we haven’t got a clue what we’re doing, but let’s just see if it works out. (Participant 6)*

Another interviewee emphasised the advantage of identifying and closely collaborating with existing local organisations, public authorities and networks for strengthening the effectiveness and reach of an envisioned programme:

*We are really embedded with what already exists within the [region]... So, we've also got support from public health, dieticians in the areas we work with. And we work with other existing programmes such as the school holiday enrichment programme, which is a food and fun kind of activity across [the region]. And trying to get it linked in with the other programmes, things like Sustainable Food Places, Food Power campaigns. And just the general policy context in [the region] as well: how can we take what's happening in communities up to [regional] government through things like the Food Poverty Alliances ... I attend a cross party food group at the [regional] government. So, it's great to have that buy in from all parts of the system in [the region]. (Participant)*

Joining pre-existing networks, as the same interviewee explained, can enable organisations to connect with a large number of people and other like-minded organisations effectively:

*... using those [existing] networks that I've already mentioned, we can get information out to all schools, and through public health colleagues and the Healthy Schools network. You know, we've got those strategic links. We're very lucky to have and they've been really crucial. (Participant)*

In another context, an independent community centre found that networking with local and citywide networks, along with support from the local Council was key to the success of food growing projects. As described by the interviewee, "... when I first joined the project, I of course benefited from the networking that had previously gone on and the volunteers that were already linked in with the community centre" (Participant 22). This networking had become stronger during the COVID-19 lockdown. As described below,

*...[networking] most definitely blossomed in lockdown because all the community growers had come together... And we've really benefited from the local authority as nurseries, which instead of churning out loads of annual flower plants have then turned their considerable skill and resources to producing edible plants, mini plants, for all these projects. So, we've had really high quality, quite a wide range of plants for our giveaways. (Participant 22)*

In the case of a community organisation targeting a specific group (people with accidental brain injuries), networking with other organisations in the sector was described as equally critical to reaching out to individuals whom they can support. Without their relationships with hospitals, health and social care partnerships, with social work department, with allied health professionals, including physios, speech and language therapists and with GPs, the interviewee (Participant 18) asserted that they would not be able to deliver their service.

Discussing the recruitment of participants for a food-related programme, another facilitating organisation found it useful to utilise existing local networks: instead of advertising on their organisation's website (which they observed had attracted mainly "white middle class" applicants), they decided to go through local networks in order to attract a more diverse group. This was thought of as a way to reach out to individuals that may have been engaged with food-related activities at a local level, but perhaps had not necessarily engaged with the facilitating organisation itself.

Another interviewee emphasised how networking not just within the food sector but also beyond has underpinned their organisation's approach:

*So, we've always been networkers and apart from networking locally, we have been networking, nationally, internationally, with community food growers' network, Land Workers Alliance, the food sovereignty movement, Global Network for Food and Nutrition, the Global Solidarity Alliance... So, we've always been networked. We're also networked into allied struggles like housing, land justice. I think those are the two main ones, increasingly more into climate justice networks. (Participant 7)*

Networking or partnership working more broadly, as with Local Commissioned Partners (LCPs), was also considered as an enabler. In the context of the FFLGT programme, networking with LCPs, who are well-connected and effective at promoting the activities among their networks on the ground, was described as important to have a greater reach and increased participation by diverse communities:

*...it is not just about the network connection. There are other things that the LCPs can give us... their networks of contacts and how they will share and promote what they're doing and shout about how well it's working in their communities and encourage others to take it up. (Participant 24)*

### 6.3.2 Funding

As discussed under barriers, funding was a major challenge for all community organisations, hence learning about different sources of funding and successfully applying for them to organise community food activities was considered vital. Two aspects of funding were highlighted in our interviews - one related to small grants and the other to longer-term funding.

Many of the interviewees from organisations described the availability of small grants (in the specific context of FFLGT programme) useful as a quick and simple way to co-design solutions with community organisers. There was an acknowledgement that when trying out something new for the first time, there are specific costs involved; these grants allowed





organisers and small community groups to organise community food activities. This process was described as “seeding funding, a little kick-starter to get things moving” (Participant 1). For example, a teacher organising an intergenerational cooking activity in a school setting found a small grant very helpful as it allowed her “to buy all the ingredients for the activity, and that’s what facilitated it. I didn’t have the money otherwise to do it” (Participant 13). Particularly, in the case of ‘new’ organisers who had never applied for funding before, the small grants were found useful, enabling them to cover necessary costs and establish connections. This in turn was hoped to lead to further funding sources to expand the scale or reach of planned activities.

Further, the ‘openness’ of the small grants, which lent itself to being used in various ways by the communities, was considered an advantage:

*...it’s one of the most open grants that I’ve ever seen, which was fantastic. So, we could fund grants for somebody to cook ... you know, buy the slow cookers, get compost, seeds, anything that will enable people to come together. Also, hire if people needed to pay for venue... so, anything at all. It was really open and really broad.* (Participant 3)

The small grants were considered “manageable” to allow individuals and small groups and organisations to initiate an activity and set up the necessary connections, as one interviewee described,

*... this (small grant) is just like a little injection and a little bit of support. But they must tell us how they’re going to continue their growing activity, their cooking activity... who’s going to be looking after this garden beyond school time, you know, different things like that. And, you know, they get the seeds and materials and equipment, a lot of people will have what they need. Seeds are not expensive. And, you know, they’ll have had their soil, and they’ll have their trowels and bits and pieces and whatever equipment. So very often, you know, we hope that they will be sustained.* (Participant 3)

In contrast to the advantages of shorter-term funding, which were mainly applicable to individual organisers, some interviewees found small grants or shorter-term grants to be inadequate, limiting projects’ reach and impact. As described by one interviewee,

*... if you’re delivering a project that’s 6 to 12 months long, you’re really limited on who you’re going to be able to work with. You know ... when you have a limited amount of funding for a limited period of time, you try to squeeze in as much as you can. But realistically, there’s only a set amount of people that you’re going to be able to work with in that period of time.* (Participant 11)

Instead, longer-term funding was described as critical to carrying out community food activities since it allows for more effective planning, responding and adapting to changes. As one interviewee put it,

*... if you have prolonged funding, you know, ... you can say that you’re going to work with A, B and C for so long, you can then move on to D and F for so long. And it enables you to be able to plan for the future. Whereas with shorter funding, it’s very much here’s the project, this is what we need to do, let’s go and do it. And it doesn’t give us time to learn or adapt or change. When you first look at how X (programme) was ran at the beginning of the funding to how it was run at the end of the funding, the fundamentals were still the same, but there was a lot of changes made over the seven years, made it relevant and kept relevant as well.* (Participant 11)

### 6.3.3 Capacity building and knowledge sharing

A facilitating organisation, which coordinated a national food activity programme, reached out and consulted with community organisers to understand what could be done to improve engagement. From their consultation, they found that there was an awareness, amongst community organisers they were engaged with, “that there was a need for leadership” (Participant 1). To facilitate engagement, it was considered important “to deepen and strengthen relationships of those that do engage” while creating an awareness and “understanding that you can’t reach everyone” but working to identify the “right people in communities” and upskill those people and organisations to build their capacity.

Another interviewee observed that an effective way for organisations to provide leadership support was through learning and development programmes where they “support people who are working with communities to bring people together around food” (Participant 19). In this process, they...

*...build leadership in lots of different aspects around food... around skills and confidence and knowledge... skills to take action in their community around good food, whether that is organising an activity that brings people together or doing somethings [such as] influencing local policy or advocacy.* (Participant 19)

Further, in order to facilitate leadership building, it was necessary for the organisation,

*... to build knowledge and skills and competence... to connect with other people... both within the people in the community, and also the wider, pre-established network of people who are already doing this work, and to also support them financially and with resources to take some kind of action as well within their community.* (Participant 23)

In response to the initial lack of engagement with gleaning activities that a national organisation was running, the organiser acknowledged that they had to revamp their “national model to a variety of specific local contexts” in order to meet the needs of local communities and to improve engagement.

*... we switched up our model to be one where... we're running a series of training webinars and advertising trying to find community organisations that might be interested in embedding kind of gleaning activities within their work. (Participant 12)*

Rather than imposing ideas on communities, the creation of an open platform for the mutual engagement of communities proved successful in improving knowledge sharing and capacity building among participating community organisations. It was also considered important that organisations train communities so that they are less reliant on external support. It is necessary to ensure that by the time external funding has ceased, there is a “...collective energy, there is a network, there's a logical infrastructure, there is a desire to continue within that community in a way that works for them” (Participant 12).

The positive impacts of effective networking, capacity building and knowledge sharing, as illustrated in the specific context of FFLGT programme:

*We get our partners and event leads to share that good practice. So, if people are doing something that other people could learn from, we tend to highlight that in a case study in an article, which then naturally you see in taking other people then doing it. A good example of that is in (...), during the first lockdown. I had applications from four different organisations that wanted to do some kind of plant sharing thing to encourage people to grow food at home. Because they're all similar. I said to my colleague from [a different food network], should we connect them? And then other organisations (...) got funding from elsewhere. So, actually, it went from four separate Getting Togethers to actually ten organisations working in partnership. (Participant 23)*

### 6.3.4 Build in reflective practice

Our interviewees identified a need for reflective practice within organisations as that is valuable to community development work. It allows for key learnings to be made and shared before changes are introduced. It allows organisations to remain open to new ideas, learn from what works and does not and adapt as necessary. Key aspect of reflective practice, as described by one interviewee includes:

*... testing out new ideas and innovative ideas that we have with our end users to make sure they feel fit for purpose, to make sure that they meet the needs of people and*

*that they're not already in existence, that they offered something new and exciting. And testing those out. And then bringing that insight back into the team and making sure that those recommendations are basically heard and then acted on... (Participant 10)*

### 6.3.5 Co-design activities

There was a consensus among the interviewees, that it is important to co-design activities with the community. They emphasised that the role of community organisers/ organisations should be to “facilitate” rather than have a “hero mentality where you might come in and kind of serve a need” (Participant 12). This required building confidence and empowering the people. As described by one interviewee,

*...if the skills, knowledge and lived experiences, and the information that the people within that community hold is actually centred, then for someone like me, my role would be to really just facilitate bringing that out and a lot of it is about building confidence in people to actually be able to do that. (Participant 12)*

While acknowledging that the co-design approach is relatively time consuming and requires more resources than the top-down approach, the benefits are considered to outweigh the costs. It enables organisations to understand the dynamics of the local context, which in turn assists with the designing and development of activities that communities are keen to participate in.

...it's really about asking communities, what is it they want to happen in that area, and then providing those services... Some things can be very prescriptive, it's very specific, but that's come from needs from the community. And other things are designed to be, you know, ... open to anybody, but it may only have come from a small group people... (Participant 8)

Co-design therefore requires exploring approaches that are context specific. While designing its strategy for participation by diverse groups, a regional organisation, for example, found that the dynamics of the local community context required organising activities either as ‘open groups’ or ‘closed groups’. This was described by the interviewee,

*A closed group would be where someone like X (local organisation), for example, would come to us and say, 'We want you to come on a Wednesday afternoon and deliver a session to all of the ladies that come along'. And we are like 'that's absolutely fine'. We would then have an 'open group' that could be run from a community centre, from a library or somewhere like that, where everybody can come along to. We tend to have these two different types of sessions. (Participant 11)*

Through the concept of 'participatory evaluation', the idea of 'co-design' can even become part of an alternative way of evaluating ongoing (funded) activities, as was suggested by another interviewee:

*Asking for data from people who are really time-stretched is challenging and can undermine a more caring relationship. What could strengthen community food activities locally is by asking instead 'How can I make this easier for you? And what can I do for you that supports your work? And would you mind if I use a case study?' which then feels like a pat on the back, and the balance feels a bit different? And my ideal would be that we get to that point where our impact is supportive, and our dialogue is more equal. (Participant 10)*

In general, organisations start recognising the significance of better understanding what motivates, hinders or enables individuals to take part in community food activities, either as participants or as volunteers. Having mechanisms that enable to gain this type of understanding allows organisational learning and adaptation. Describing how one organisation aims to achieve this through some co-design activities, one interviewee explained:

*So, it might be about understanding their motivations to engage with us or their expectations of us. It might be them talking to their neighbours or their peers about how (the project) resonates with people that haven't heard about it. So, just gathering insights through them and seeing sort of, well, through their eyes. But then also we quite often (...) test an idea with them. (...) So, we're just seeing whether that's something they want, whether it's something they'd like to take part in again, and then how they would improve it to make it work for people that feel more like them or sort of others within the (project)... (Participant 10)*

### 6.3.6 Recognise power relations

Describing the tensions that can arise from perceptions within diverse communities, sometimes caused by conflicting ideas and behaviours, a community organiser emphasised the importance of organisations acknowledging the power dynamics that exist within communities.

*...there are conflicts within the community sometimes, and there are people who aren't very nice. And some of my volunteers have been on the receiving end of an unpleasant behaviour from some of our customers. And quite often people are terribly nice to my face, but then are rude to the volunteers, you know, because I have a bit more power. And I think recognising that difference in power relationships is really important, rather than pretending that we're all on one level. Yeah, and so there are some customers that come to our shop that I make*

*sure I take around so that I monitor what's said, because there was unpleasantness previously. Yeah, but you know, this is people. (Participant 22)*

The importance of recognising where power, influence and agency lies was also emphasised by another interviewee:

*... look at it [community food activities] through the lens of the principles of equity, the advantages, and power influence that is available to organisations out there that only becomes truly visible and understandable in the context of the disadvantages that other communities might face. I think, if we look at it in that context, then we can understand what our role as an organisation can be, in attempting to kind of lift those communities or amplify the already existing skills, knowledge and lived experience that they have. (Participant 12)*

Gaining a deeper understanding of communities, paying attention to the process of initial engagement, and the key role played by gatekeepers are important enablers to participation, as illustrated in the following quote:

*... understand more deeply how some communities might work. And, of course, there are people in positions of influence within those communities, the word gatekeeper is used to describe them. Those are people that are often, especially if you're looking at areas with high proportions of youth violence, might play the role of a mentor to young people, somebody who is really concerned with ensuring that those young boys don't get involved in violence or whatever it is, and building relationships with those people can still be challenging but essential. (Participant 12)*

Given the context specificity of power and agency relations, the use of co-designed activities (see 6.3.5) tailored to specific local contexts can be an essential approach to enabling participation in community food activities by diverse communities.

### 6.3.7 Diversity within organisations

While discussing how to increase participation amongst diverse communities, many of the interviewees discussed the need for organisations to recognise their own internal structures, including the diversity of people at various levels in their organisation, and how communities might perceive them. In several instances, increasing the diversity in community organisations itself was identified as an enabling factor to better reach diverse communities.

In the context of an organisation running social cooking activities in a culturally diverse region, the majority of their programme delivery staff has been white and British. But when they recruited individuals from other ethnic backgrounds, they noticed a huge difference in the uptake of their activities. They were able to reach out to communities and areas they

had been unable to reach earlier. Also, they acknowledged the significance of being gender sensitive as illustrated in the quote below:

*... if we put a male member of staff in a female dominated group, then that sometimes can create a barrier straight away. We've in the past worked with agencies that have been working with female victims of domestic abuse and things like that. So, if a male walks into the room, they're probably not going to engage. Whereas if we put a female into that group, then they're more likely to engage.* (Participant 11)

A similar observation of the way in which the image of an organisation, of perceptions who a particular organisation was representing, was made. An interviewee highlighted that an organisation's image can undermine its messaging, e.g., about good food and its ability to achieve diverse participation. Hence, diversity within an organisation might need to be addressed:

*I think the image of X (organisation) is very white, very middle class...of organic being the preserve of that class and the upper classes. I think, for itself, X needs to do a major overhaul in terms of its own messaging.* (Participant 7)

In another context, the importance of working with key individuals able to make those connections with people who are not currently participating in the activities was emphasised:

*I think you look at it from who is in your community that you're not reaching? Who are the people that are out there that you haven't got represented? And where are they? And who is there locally that you can contact? I think it's all about local connections.* (Participant 18)

Equally, diversity in an organisation (e.g., the Board of Trustees and volunteer base) was highlighted for creating an organisational environment which enables reaching out to diverse communities. The need to explicitly consider diversity in the external communications of community organisations is emphasised in the quote below:

*I would say that there needs to be more diversity... I would like to see the website and messages to be more representative of the communities that they want to reach. If you want to reach these communities, then you need to present something that you can relate to and if people don't see themselves and what they are doing, then I think it's a lot harder for them to buy into your programme.* (Participant 8)

### 6.3.8 Design and accessibility of resources

As noted earlier from the perspective of community organisers, accessible and consistent messaging from organisations was

identified as useful to organise and for participants to engage with community food activities. Further, for diversity and inclusion purposes, it requires paying attention to the specific needs of certain groups that may require access to information in multiple languages, or in different forms (e.g., in large print). One interviewee (Participant 24) emphasised how important it is to ensure that "resources, materials, images" used on their printed/written material and their website "supported accessibility and diversity and reflected the kind of broad communities that we want to work with". This required paying attention to making their documents, presentations, etc. accessible to all (e.g., with the use of plain English, a suitable font size, and the right colours).

### 6.3.9 More government-level support

Changes in wider policy level and more support from the local, regional or national governments were described as key to creating an enabling environment for community food activities more widely. As described by a community organisation engaged in neighbourhood re-development,

*I think that every neighbourhood needs some sort of initiative to encourage more food to be grown locally, whether that is allotments, land sharing scheme or something else. In the short-term, the government should offer a large funding programme to encourage more of this activity. In the longer-term, the law should be changed so local authorities and parish councils have a legal duty to promote this kind of work as it is essential for our communities if they are to transition to sustainability.* (Participant 17)

Another interviewee who emphasised the challenges faced by organisations trying to achieve wider food system change while focusing only on local community development work further highlighted the need for government support.

*I think food citizenship, at the moment, is seen as a bottom-up approach where community work together to help find good food, when actually it really needs to be as much top down with government working to support good food. I think we've, in the last 50 years, done everything we can to make it harder politically.* (Participant 10)

This emphasises the perceived need to not just solely focus on community-level transformations, but especially for larger organisations capable of facilitating wider policy engagement, to address wider policy issues that need to be addressed for a more holistic food system change capable to 'Make Good Food the Easy Choice'.



## 6.4 Summary

Several factors were identified that could enable individual participation in community food activities. As identified earlier, the cost of participating was a key barrier for individuals. To enable participation, interviewees recommended that activities should be designed to be affordable and accessible. If activities required resources, for example cooking and eating events, then special attention should be paid to ensure cooking equipment and ingredients are provided or subsidised for participants. If events, such as gleaning, were located outside of the community, then effort should be made to ensure that participants have access to affordable transport.

In terms of general engagement, it was suggested that to enable participation messaging should be appropriate and that it should avoid language that could be potentially overwhelming for participants. For some individuals who may be apprehensive about participating, it was noted that creating a safe space and building trust was critical for community engagement. This assists in the creation of a welcoming and friendly environment, which with time builds genuine connections. In addition to this, participants discussed how ensuring cultural sensitivity and adapting services to meet the needs of the community could help to develop inclusive approaches.

In the case of community organisers, they tended to be driven and willing to dedicate the time and effort needed to develop community food activities. They were passionate, resourceful and open-minded. They experienced barriers and capacity constraints, but they were often able to develop resourceful practices to ensure the activity was able to succeed. Particularly in a school, setting, receiving organisational support from the senior leadership team and colleagues was a key enabler for organisers of community food activities. In all the settings, community support and networking were considered critical. The organisers were able to utilise a wide variety of communicative material from third sector organisations, which helped them to reach a diverse group of participants. Networking enabled a variety of stakeholders to work together, share resources and increase participation in community food

activities. Interviewees also discussed the need for financial support, such as diverse and accessible funding streams, and salaried positions for community organisers.

For organisations facilitating community food activities, several enablers were identified. Interviewees discussed the factors that enabled them to support the work of community organisers, and the enablers that made their own organisations more effective. To support community organisers, interviewees discussed the importance of network building and facilitating engagement between organisers. This enables organisers to work together, build capacity, understand community dynamics and engage with diverse groups. It was also recognised that organisations facilitating could provide leadership and training for organisers and organisations. However, rather than imposing ideas it was important for this to be an open platform. Interviewees reflected on the need for support in the form of secure funding. For community organisers, small grants were helpful for the initial development of a project; in contrast, larger organisations found longer-term funding to be more significant.

Internally, it was noted that both community and facilitating organisations should build in reflective practices. This allowed for key learnings to be made and shared both internally, and externally. Similarly, facilitators should understand participant and volunteer motivations as that enables organisational learning and adaptation. This could then feed into co-design and co-production practices, assisting in the development of activities that communities are willing to participate in. Part of the process is truly understanding how communities operate and recognising the power relations within them. Interviewees discussed that power and agency relations are context specific, and participatory methods were identified as a method to enable this. It is important for organisations to look at their internal structures and ensure diversity at various levels, seen as important in improving community perceptions of organisations facilitating and improving engagement.

## 7. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this research was to identify existing and possible approaches to increase the reach of community food activities and support participation that is more diverse. Interestingly, achieving diversity emerged in our analysis in very context- and goal-specific terms. From the perspective of practitioners, achieving diversity in participation could mean that participants come from a heterogeneous background (e.g., older and younger people from different ethnic backgrounds), or sometimes 'just' from one particular demographic sub-group who could particularly benefit from a specific community food activity (e.g., female refugees). However, there seems to be consensus that the aim of achieving greater diversity is at two levels. One, at the level of the food citizenship movement – to make these activities more relevant for a wider cross-section of the UK's population (rather than a white, middle-class concern). Two, at the level of specific community food activities, to make them as inclusive and open as possible for the appropriate target community.

In thinking about enabling participation, it is useful to better understand what, in the first place, motivates individual activity participants, community organisers and organisations (both local community organisations and bigger facilitating organisations) to engage with community food activities and

what keeps them motivated over a longer period. Barriers faced can play a negative role, undermining motivation and/or hindering participation. Understanding the different barriers better can in turn help to develop strategies that enable minimising them or their effects. These enablers then can positively influence the motivations of people from diverse communities to take part in community food activities, and to minimise the barriers people (activity participants and community organisers) are experiencing. Here, facilitating organisations can play an important role to create a positive and enabling context for community organisers.

At a practical level, motivations, barriers and enablers can all interact constantly over time, requiring a holistic view to develop strategies for increasing overall diversity in participation.

In Figure 2, we present a heuristic framework to visualise the relationships described above between the motivations, barriers, and enablers at the community level, and the role played by facilitating organisations (through programmes like FLLGT) and community organisations in influencing participation in community food activities.

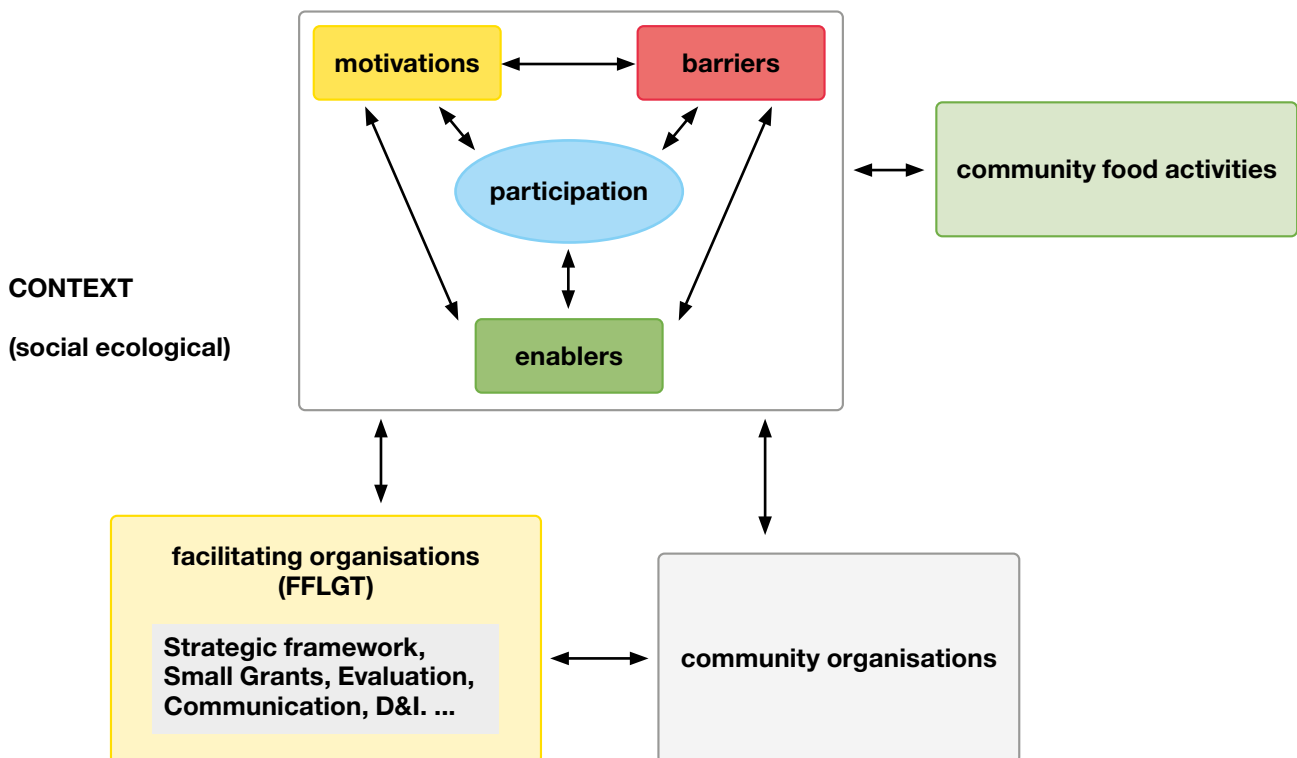


Figure 2: A heuristic framework

Our empirical study has further confirmed the importance of understanding the context-specificity of participation as a social practice, which is also one of the key findings from our systematic literature review (Report 1). Context matters, hence, we have drawn attention to this in the figure and the use of the social-ecological perspective that acknowledges the significance of multiple factors affecting participation (which we develop further in Report 3).

In the sections below, we will review the factors that are affecting engagement with community food activities from the perspectives of activity participants, community organisers and organisations, looking at their motivations, barriers and the enabling factors. Here, one of the key motivating factors could be the shared goal of working towards food citizenship. However, our research found that most interviewees (activity participants and volunteers, community organisers, staff of community organisations and facilitating organisations) were either not familiar with the term 'food citizenship' and uncertain

of its meaning or felt that it was not a particularly helpful term for engagement. While two of the community organisers used the term and described their engagement with community food activities as part of a wider movement to address failures of the dominant food system, for most interviewees their focus was essentially on the 'social' dimension of food as an effective way to bring people together. Here, 'good food' was perceived as a possible enabler for social interaction, while greater access to 'good food' was considered a desirable outcome. However, interviewees acknowledged that while 'good food' was useful as a 'shorthand', what was actually meant by the term and hence what was specifically desirable and motivating about 'good food' was equally interpreted differently. Some participants were concerned that these various interpretations revealed differing motivations and goals, and hence could undermine programme effectiveness, while others thought this was acceptable as part of being community-driven and adaptable to local needs.

## 7.1 Participation from the perspective of activity participants

Although their reasons were varied, community food activity participants generally joined activities because it benefitted them personally -- in concrete ways such as access to freshly grown vegetables, joining others in cooking and shared eating, opportunities to socialise and overcoming social isolation, learning new skills; and less tangible ways such as "feeling good" or "doing something for the community". Their motivations were mainly shaped by an interest in personal and local community benefits. When considering non-participation, it was suggested that sometimes the specific nature of an activity (e.g., community food growing) was a motivating or de-motivating factor, since various activities do not necessarily appeal to everybody. Frequently mentioned barriers to participation for individuals - other than a lack of interest in a particular activity - include a lack of resources (overall time, financial costs), physical or mental health issues, and a range of social barriers that can make individual participants approach community activities with caution. The latter can be due to concerns about not being able to socialise comfortably in specific community settings due to racism, cultural differences, or language barriers. Sometimes individuals do not feel they are represented in the community organisation or the facilitating organisation and resist those activities that they feel were designed "for" them rather than "with" them.

In order to overcome many of these barriers, it is important for community organisers and facilitating organisations to address them through measures that can improve the inclusiveness of activities by creating safe spaces and building trust. Establishment of good relationships and trust were found to be important for initiating participation by individuals and equally for sustaining the depth or level of participation, which was helped by building a 'sense of ownership' in the participants. Here, building a diverse group of people engaged in organising the activities can support efforts to be inclusive. Listening, responding, and co-creating activities can also help to find solutions for some of the other barriers, including affordability and accessibility challenges. Possible solutions always need to be context-specific but might include for example, the provision of bus fares, selecting easily accessible locations, and considering the most suitable time for activities from participants' perspectives.





## 7.2 Participation from the perspective of community organisers

As with the activity participants, community organisers' motivations varied but often centred around their strong desire to contribute to the overall well-being of their own community, by organising food-related activities to build better relationships, better health and food security, and better local environments. For organisers, the personal sense of achievement and the sense of pleasure from the positive feedback by participants of community food activities came across clearly in our interviews as strong motivations for organisers to continue with such activities in the future. Many of the organisers described the engagement process as both exciting and challenging, with the latter usually linked to particular barriers.

For those organising their first activities, a lack of knowledge or lack of confidence was a common barrier, both in terms of specific organisational knowledge (e.g., managing a project, accessing funding and resources) and practical, activity-specific knowledge and skills (cooking, growing, etc.). Some organisers also found limited resources and their own and others' lack of time as challenging, particularly when this was compounded by experiences of discrimination when trying to access support. Much like the activity participants, some organisers struggled to engage with communities due to language barriers. The voluntary nature of activities also served as a potential barrier.

Reflecting on those factors that enable community organisers to be effective, a key aspect is linked to the organisers' ability to motivate, organise and mobilise and, importantly, to build a social support network, either within a specific organisational or wider community setting. Here, becoming part of a learning community can be beneficial since it allows exchanging experiences and adopting and adapting ideas. Although it was not as evident from FFLGT activities (due to the one-off

nature of many activities), community organisers highlighted their engagement with activities as continually evolving and changing, either because they were adapting to meet changing needs and interests of their community, or because they were chasing funding earmarked for specific purposes and changed their activity accordingly. For many interviewees, the process of organising community activities, though enjoyable, is not simple and straightforward; rather it can be complex and challenging since many influencing factors need to be considered and some are outside of their control.

This reaffirms the complexity of working in a community setting and the multi-layered connections that exist and develop between the individual, community and the wider environment, when organising community food activities. A strong social support network can support and multiply a project's effectiveness by linking to other existing activities while helping to increase the access to necessary resources (finances, time, equipment, space) and increasing community awareness and support, ideally becoming community led. However, it is important to emphasise the 'unevenness' in the distribution of such networks, and the time it can take for building effective social connections and linking to or creating strong networks. Here, for some organisers in some regions, the role of the FFLGT programme was vital in providing access to key resources (funding), and in sharing information and knowledge, and in establishing connections, where required, with other networks and community organisations. Similarly, other community organisations were playing a key role in supporting community organisers with building their capacity to organise community food activities.

## 7.3 Participation from the perspective of organisations

Motivations among organisations running or facilitating community food activities are dependent on their specific priorities, which range from specific community needs (including accessibility and affordability of food, social isolation, health and wellbeing, poverty, and local environmental problems) to concerns with the failures of the dominant food system (in terms of creating sustainable food systems, reducing food waste, etc.). Facilitating organisations (through programmes such as FFLGT), aim to initiate and support - either at a local, regional or national level - the community uptake of specific social activities that are linked to food, with varying emphasis on food system change and transformation.

In the case of organisations facilitating community food activities, a key challenge was 'reaching out' to communities. Some organisations employed elements of both top-down and bottom-up strategies by proposing the adoption of specific activities but allowing for local adaptations. However, interviewees described that this can be challenging and that there is no clear agreement on the best way to remain adaptable and flexible while meeting organisational priorities and aims. Here, particularly the organisations' need for evidencing effectiveness can become problematic, when the demand for capturing results is time-consuming and, when following a generic approach, cannot always do justice to the specific successes of uniquely adapted projects.

Furthermore, we found there was often a lack of or limited awareness at the community level of the larger regional or national organisations and the process of engagement. Some community organisations had limited capacities, and were stretched for resources and time, such that they could not engage sufficiently in relationship building. Funding was a barrier, both in terms of its absolute amount as well as the often short-time nature of funds. Lack of effective evaluation processes that are not too burdensome and the limited sharing of learnings between organisations were also perceived as barriers. This restricted the ability for identifying good practices. In short, the main barriers identified can be summarised as challenges around organisational engagement and communication (internally and externally), organisational learning and knowledge, and lack of resources, particularly long-term funding.

For organisations facilitating community food activities, our interviewees identified many ways in which their organisations could become more effective in enabling diversity in participation and achieve a greater reach within local communities. Some of these enablers are more outward facing, *i.e.*, they related to the way the organisation is interacting with others. These include providing effective leadership, making connections with organisations sharing similar missions, networking, providing funding, co-designing approaches, effective communication, and the creation of safe spaces (and sufficient time) for building trust and relationships.

Another set of suggested enablers were internally directed, focusing within organisations themselves. These suggestions include recommendations to make organisations themselves more inclusive and more diverse, to build in reflective practices, and to reflect consciously on the diversity of the communities that they (want to) work with. As activity participants and community organisers can be apprehensive about engaging with larger organisations, developing approaches that will make them feel welcome and represented in the facilitating organisations is important. Here, smaller technical adaptations (e.g., project reporting software that supports community building, context-specific public communications) as well as broader reflections within an organisation can be helpful. Part of this might include acknowledging unequal power relationships between different actors. For a facilitating organisation, the control over resources, information, and knowledge might give them substantial power. It is important to acknowledge this and, where possible, to share power with the community rather than impose. It is worth noting that some of the above described inward and outward-facing enablers are closely linked, including the importance of building strong networks, reflective and adaptive practices and the enabling of diversity by consciously being diverse and inclusive.

Taking a further step back and considering what might enable facilitating organisations to be more effective, they might benefit from greater governmental (local authorities, national level) support in the form of specific financial resources or food-related policies, supportive regulations and strategies. For larger organisations, some of their focus could be on engaging with local and national authorities to develop strategies for making food-related interventions successful. A key point for consideration is that organising community food activities at the community level is closely linked with organising at other levels and turning motivations into action requires a recognition that people and place connections are operating at multiple scales.

## 7.4 Good practices

The above summary of key factors influencing participation in community food activities demonstrates the diversity of motivations, barriers and enablers that our research participants have identified. It points to the significance of acknowledging the diversity of contexts within which different community food activities are carried out and the diversity of backgrounds of activity participants, community organisers and organisations that are engaged in these activities. Given this diversity of contexts, there is no single approach to increasing participation amongst diverse communities easily applicable to all contexts. While there is great potential for community food activities to bring people together over food, they cannot be imposed from outside as they must respond and adapt to the needs and concerns of a specific area or community. Nonetheless, some overarching key factors are fundamental to making community food activities more effective. These include social networking, long-term thinking, community participation, and newer forms of food governance.

Drawing on our research findings, it is possible to identify some good practices (which, together with findings from the systematic literature review, form the basis of recommendations presented in Report 3) that can support an increase in diversity of participation in community food activities:

- involvement of local communities (responsiveness to needs of groups/communities) not as passive beneficiaries, but more actively engaged, acknowledging the significance of their lived experiences and diverse knowledge that resides amongst diverse communities [*involve them right from the planning stages*]
  - diverse voices are listened and responded to [*develop open channels of communication and exchange; build in flexibility to adapt goals and actions*]
  - diverse funding streams which support allocation of sufficient time and other necessary resources [*funding for separate phases of setting up, running, consolidating, and sustaining of activity*]
  - effective networking or a more joined up approach by different stakeholder groups (enabling access to services, support, information, funding, skills training, mentoring) [*connect with organisations and build relationships; create a shared long-term vision for specific local communities, across the sector*]
  - development of a facilitative institutional environment that recognises the potential of community food activities for positive social outcomes at individual and community levels [*work with local authorities and advocacy at higher policy level*]
- a learning environment where reflective practice, constructive feedback, and adaptation to new knowledge and circumstances become part of the organisational culture [*schedule regular reflections, foster a change-positive culture*]
  - capacity building of organisation staff and community organisers for necessary skills for an inclusive approach (building of trust and good relationships, intercultural competencies, awareness of power relations) [*training, mentoring and use of participatory methods*]

Finally, it is important that we put our findings into perspective. While we have been able to get a good understanding of the motivations, barriers and enablers for community food activities, this is based on a particular sub-sample of activity participants, community organisers and community organisations and hence mainly reflects the particular contexts in which their activities are embedded. Our study has focused on the organisational perspective, in response to the research question on what community and facilitating organisations (including the FFLGT programme) could do better to increase participation. Given our research focus, the majority of the interviewees comprise those associated with the FFLGT programme. By including additional community organisations engaged in community food activities outside of the FFLGT programme, we have attempted to broaden our understanding. Furthermore, by analysing two focus groups comprising activity participants from diverse backgrounds, we have also included their insights on what organisations could do better to increase diversity in participation. However, this was also limited to a sample from a specific local context.

Nonetheless, it has become amply clear from this research (and from our systematic literature review findings detailed in Report 1) that context matters in understanding participation in community food activities. There is no 'one-size fits all' solution to increasing diversity in participation. However, further empirical research from a wider variety of contexts needs to focus specifically on organisational engagement processes designed explicitly for ensuring diversity and inclusion in participation. This is necessary to develop key learnings, which will support the aims of food citizenship and lead to transformative pathways for achieving sustainable, equitable and resilient food systems.

# References

Community Food and Health (Scotland) (2009). Minding their own business too. <https://www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk/publications/minding-their-own-business-too>

Saxena, L. P., Fried, J., Rees, J. and Singh, J. (2021a). Understanding participation in community food activities. Report 1: A systematic literature review of motivations, barriers and enablers. Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience: Coventry University.

Saxena, L. P., Fried, J., Rees, J. and Singh, J. (2021b). Understanding participation in community food activities. Report 3: A synthesis report on motivations, barriers and enablers. Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience: Coventry University.

Sustain 2011. Good Food for London 2011: How London Boroughs can help secure a healthy and sustainable food future for everyone. [https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/good\\_food\\_for\\_london\\_2011](https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/good_food_for_london_2011)



