

Sustain's commitment to tackling racial injustice in the food system

All of Sustain's work is guided by values and principles of achieving a healthy, fair, humane and sustainable food system. Our alliance also has shared concerns that are highly relevant to the food system, but go beyond just food, farming and fishing, such as tackling climate change, restoring biodiversity, upholding human rights, and promoting economic prosperity and sustainable development that benefit everyone, not just a privileged few – at home and around the world.

Sustain staff, colleagues, alliance members and many others in the food system have a profound commitment to promoting equality, meaning that we want to promote diversity and inclusion across a wide range of characteristics. The extent and depth of racial injustice and inequality in particular has always been evident and unacceptable, and has been made ever more vivid and moving in public consciousness by the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 coronavirus on Black people and People of Colour; and by the outpouring of pain and protest expressed during 2020, including as part of the Black Lives Matter demonstrations. Sustain wishes to express solidarity and allyship with people who experience racial injustice, and to take action to play our part in addressing racial injustice.

The team that coordinates the Sustain alliance, and which runs projects and campaigns with alliance members, is using this document to state clearly and unequivocally that we recognise that:

- The food system is rife with offensive and unacceptable structural racism and racial injustice.
- Sustain has a role to play in tackling racial injustice and its root causes, and in promoting racial justice.

At the time of writing, Sustain's staff and trustee team are diverse in many ways, but are predominantly White British. We acknowledge that we do not currently reflect the ethnic diversity of the country, nor the capital city in which our office is based. We also acknowledge our own racial and socio-economic privilege. We commit to address these disparities and this privilege and find decisive ways to influence change. In publishing this statement, we commit publicly to doing what we can, and we ask to be held to account for taking action. We also plan to publish a more detailed document shortly that:

1. Positions action on diversity and equality in the food system – including racial justice and equality – squarely as priorities in Sustain's new five-year strategy, to be published in 2020.
2. Shares practical actions that Sustain has begun, and what we want to do next within our own organisation, to address racial injustice.
3. Explores what influence Sustain could have in the spheres in which we operate, and what opportunities we could create or support, to help challenge racial injustice and to catalyse positive change.

This is a work in progress. Actions described in this document are a start, not an end, and we will review, update and publish our refreshed approach regularly.

We do not want to be held back by feelings of ignorance, inadequate progress or undue timidity. Hence, we want to publish our commitments as a 'work in progress', acknowledging there are many gaps. We commit to listening and learning, and whilst we will do all we can to get things right, we acknowledge that we are likely to get some things wrong and will be open to challenge.

This is a shared endeavour across the Sustain team. Ultimately, responsibility for Sustain taking action sits with Sustain's management team and trustees, led by Sustain's Chief Executive Kath Dalmeny and Programmes Director, Sarah Williams, working with Sustain trustees and staff. We will also recruit external specialist support on racism and equalities to challenge us out of habituated ways of thinking and doing.

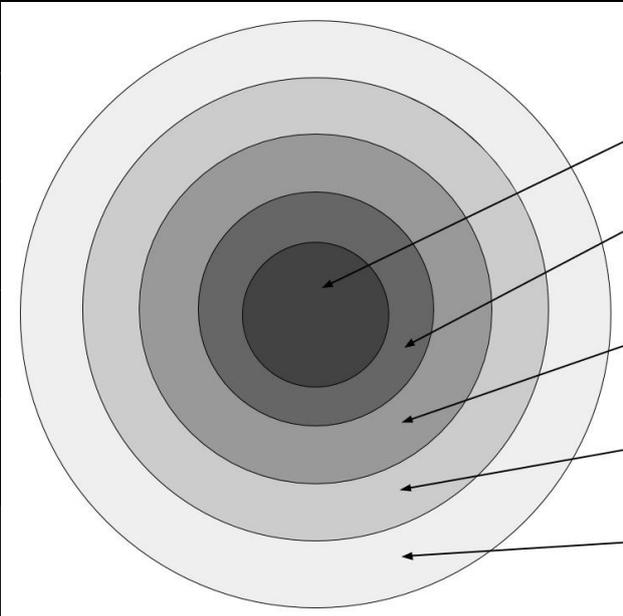
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Sustain’s spheres of influence

Sustain is an influential alliance of organisations interested in working together to reform our system of food, farming and fishing. We bring together over 100 organisations nationally – and hundreds more at local and regional level – cultivating the movement for change. The alliance is coordinated by a smaller team of around 25 employees (many part-time) that provide the alliance secretariat; about two-thirds of whom run projects and campaigns involving many other people and groups; and about one-third build and maintain the behind-the-scenes support structure to enable such work. We have up to 15 charity trustees, who are elected from Sustain’s alliance membership to oversee the work of the organisation; and alliance members and others are involved in our work via projects, campaigns and expert working parties.

This is what we plan to say about our work in the forthcoming Sustain strategy (subject to further consultation and edits), which will help set the priorities of our alliance for the next five years: *“Working together, we run highly effective and creative campaigns, advocacy and demonstration projects, aiming to catalyse permanent changes in policy and practice. We support decisive action to tackle climate change and restore nature. We support the growth, replication and acceleration of agro-ecological and high welfare farming practices. We promote sustainable fishing; good food jobs, enterprises and procurement; fair dealing; sustainable diets; healthy food environments; community food growing; good food education and skills; removal of the causes of food poverty and structural injustice; and the eradication of food waste. And we support solutions that are inclusive so that everyone can benefit, not just a privileged few – both at home and around the world.”*

Many aspects of this work – to a greater or lesser extent – are relevant to racial justice. This presents many opportunities for Sustain and our alliance to take action to promote justice and equality. How we can do so varies according the ‘sphere of influence’ in which we operate, illustrated below.



Sphere of influence	What we can take action on to promote racial justice
Ourselves:	Listening, learning Deep appreciation Taking personal action
Our organisation:	Diversity among staff, trustees and advisors Embedding action in our work
Networks we work with:	Cultivating local action Fair and diverse food trading Access to £££, premises, land
National policy:	Economic equality Better food jobs Food access and public health
International policy:	Fair trade and standards Climate change, biodiversity and the just transition

A note on language

In this document, we refer to Black people, People of Colour and White people (capitalised in this way). Elsewhere, we also use the descriptive term Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME). We are open to evolution of language and advice on the best terms. We also allow some editorial flexibility for staff to choose one or other of these terms to fit the particular document and intended audience.

1. Taking action: ourselves

As individuals and as a team, we need to be better informed about issues of racism and racial justice, and the colonial history of our food system. We need to know about the issues, to care about them and be motivated to take action. For those of us who are White people, we need to recognise and understand our own White privilege, and be prepared to step out of habituated ways of thinking and doing that can entrench structural racial injustice. We need to cultivate deep appreciation. We need to invite and hear more testimony; root out unconscious bias; consciously choose to overcome barriers and put in the personal effort to do so; examine possible solutions; and understand the steps needed to cultivate positive change.

Sustain staff have had access to 'unconscious bias' training, and in 2019, we held an externally facilitated workshop in 2020 with staff to explore becoming an anti-racist organisation and start challenging our habituated ways of thinking and doing. This has been followed up with establishment of a diversity group, who will continue to drive the agenda within Sustain, plus sharing of webinars, reading, articles and films.

Individuals who are part of the Sustain alliance staff team have participated in racial justice protests, including Black Lives Matter demonstrations; and have challenged our organisation and each other to take action and to show allyship. We have invited people of diverse ethnic heritages to take part in the activities that we run or support, starting to provide more platforms for diverse voices.

This is a start. We want to develop a deep appreciation of racial justice issues. We will listen, read, attend and absorb more expressions of injustice and structural racism, and also about approaches and ideas for action that embody racial justice – in the food system and beyond, and to share what we learn. This will influence our ideas and practice, as well as our mind-sets and the language we use. We will support each other in a courageous, challenging and non-judgemental way to improve how we approach these important matters, and support each other to have the courage, ideas and abilities to act.

2. Taking action: Our organisation

During 2019/20 Sustain has been in the process of refreshing our strategy for the next five years, to be published shortly. In this, we have identified diversity (in a broad sense) as one of five priorities in the organisational plan that will turn strategy into action. Within this, we will:

- Set diversity and racial justice as strategic priorities
- Embed diversity and racial justice into what we do
- Improve our staff recruitment practices and the diversity of our staff team
- Improve our trustee recruitment practices and the diversity of our Council of Trustees

Within our current means, we have allocated a ring-fenced diversity budget to enable greater participation and action on diversity across a range of activities, to help prevent cost being a barrier to action. Over the longer term, we aim to build such considerations into project budgets as a routine cost.

Strategy: On diversity, in our draft strategy and in the organisational plan that turns ambitions into action, we say that our ambition is to: *“Provide opportunities for a wide range of people to be involved in and have their voices heard through Sustain’s work.”* And as an organisation: *“Our projects and campaigns will involve people from a diverse range of backgrounds in order to create a balanced understanding of opportunities and challenges within the food system and how they intersect with issues related to diversity.”* Specifically, Sustain will work to:

- Increase involvement of diverse people in beneficiary groups; people with protected characteristics; people from diverse backgrounds in relation to their role in the food system, socio-economic status and political or cultural identity; people from across the English regions and devolved nations.
- Challenge ourselves and others, using our spheres of influence to actively promote racial justice.
- Identify priorities within our different projects and campaigns for promoting involvement, and identify specific and accountable actions to increase the participation of target groups.
- Offer a range of opportunities for people to have their voices heard, for diverse people to get involved, and to shape the direction of our work, including beneficiaries, leadership team, staff, trustees, supporters, working party members, advisors, contributors, paid interns and volunteers.

What we do: We are establishing an internal working group focusing on diversity, directly involving the Chief Executive and Sustain's Programmes Director. Action to promote racial justice will be a top priority for this group. The group's primary task will be to review and embed good practice on diversity into Sustain's policies, culture, communications and ways of working. It will also look at ways to embed this into our work and to promote this in our various spheres of influence.

Staff team: We are overhauling our staff recruitment processes, freelance contracts and other paid opportunities to get involved in Sustain's work, to ensure that these achieve greater diversity in applicants and ultimately greater recruitment and involvement of people from diverse backgrounds.

Council of Trustees: We are overhauling our trustee recruitment processes, to ensure that these achieve greater diversity in applicants for our annual trustee elections, and ultimately greater representation and influential involvement of people from diverse backgrounds.

3. Taking action: Networks we work with:

Sustain works closely with alliance members, with members of our local and regional networks, and with sister alliances. We are therefore in a strong position to integrate diversity and racial justice not only into our own work, but also to influence and support the work of others. We are aware that similar conversations about racial justice are happening across the food, farming, social justice and environmental movements and we want to help positive action to thrive and gain momentum.

This is very much an area of 'work in progress', so we will update this section shortly. However, some ways in which we think we could play a helpful role include sharing policies and practices; developing shared understandings, data and evidence; running training sessions; running events and investigations; supporting and amplifying the work of others who are champions and leaders on these issues.

4. Taking action: Local and national policy

All of Sustain's work is guided by values and principles of achieving a healthy, fair, humane and sustainable food system. We promote greater equality in income and access to food, better health outcomes for everybody, good jobs in healthy and sustainable food production, access to land and other resources and a universal Right to Food. We promote living wages, fair trade and sustainability in the commercial and public sectors. We run projects and campaigns that aim for equalities to be integrated into legislation, policy and practice.

We acknowledge that such work has rarely in the past been expressed by Sustain in terms of racial justice. This is partly due to the intersectionality of issues such as race, culture, religion, gender, age, disability, poverty, income and discrimination across a wide range of factors. We often campaign for universal rights and services that benefit everyone (for example nutrition standards for all food and

drink served in schools). Within this mix, we have occasionally focused on one particular characteristic (for example, when we campaign for meals on wheels services to benefit older and disabled people); however, we generally choose to promote equality of opportunity across a range of considerations.

We are now reconsidering this approach, and this is a work in progress. We recognise that whilst many factors are closely inter-related, there are particularities to structural racism and racial injustice that deserve special attention, prominence and action. The Covid-19 pandemic has also brought such concerns much more to the fore, especially in relation to the health inequalities experienced by Black people and People of Colour, and the disproportionate impact of poverty and disadvantage on people's household food insecurity, including children and people with no recourse to public funds.

5. Taking action: International policy

The focus of Sustain's project and campaign work is mainly on UK policy and practice, and the majority of Sustain alliance members and the groups we work with have a domestic UK focus. However, the impact of our food system on people and planetary ecosystems is not limited by political boundaries. A large proportion of the UK's food is imported, and a large proportion of our livestock eats imported animal feed. Hence, we recognise that our country's policies, practices and choices have a profound effect on people and their own local environments around the world, with a profound, disproportionate and unfair impact on Black people and People of Colour overseas, especially those who are already disadvantaged by poverty, environmental degradation and lack of voice or power in the decision-making, resource allocation and supply chain standards that affect them.

Internationally, Black people and People of Colour suffer profoundly, unfairly and disproportionately from the impacts of unfair production and trading practices, and from climate change and loss of biodiversity. These are major aspects of structural racial injustice in our food system. Sustain is committed to promoting policies on climate and biodiversity that recognise that the problems have been caused by wealthy and privileged nations, who now have a duty to prioritise restorative justice. We are committed to promote policies and practices that support a just transition.

Structural racial injustice is also evident in international supply chains and trading relationships. Black people and People of Colour in other countries are expected to produce our food and other goods for rock bottom prices and in conditions that people from the UK would not tolerate ourselves. Black people and People of Colour grow, process, pack and transport a large amount of the imported food that we eat and the imported feed consumed by livestock. Production standards for this food and feed have a major impact on people's rights, pay, livelihoods and opportunities, and also on the ecosystems that sustain essential environmental protection and biodiversity.

Sustain is also keenly aware of the role that action in the UK can have in influence on policy and commercial food strategies worldwide. We have very limited capacity to influence international policy, but do what we can to publish information widely and to participate in international research. This is important to do our bit to help combat the rise in non-communicable diseases associated with adoption of Western-style diets high in processed foods, sugar, salt and unhealthy levels of fat, and which undermine traditional and health-promoting habits such as breastfeeding and good food in childhood. We see ourselves as part of an international movement to win restrictions on – for example – junk food advertising; and also greater promotion – for example – of fruit and vegetable consumption, decent food education and standards for food served in schools and other public sector institutions.

Draft for further development. Lead author, Kath Dalmeny, chief executive of Sustain, August 2020.