Food Power
Final Evaluation Report
2021
Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

*Food Power* was a four-year programme led by Sustain and Church Action on Poverty, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF). It aimed to strengthen local communities’ ability to reduce food poverty through solutions developed locally with the support of their peers from across the UK, and a focus on tackling root causes. The approach centred on local alliances, giving voice to those experiencing food poverty, influencing practice on the ground and levering in additional resources.

This report presents findings of evaluation of the final year of Food Power, presenting insights from a survey of alliances and interviews with case study representatives. It also looks back over the whole programme to provide a picture of progress and cumulative impact of Food Power’s activity. All evaluation reports including the full Final Report are available at https://www.sustainweb.org/foodpower/resources/

What has *Food Power* delivered?

Food Power has delivered beyond initial expectations in terms of number of alliances supported and range of support engaged with.

- 85 alliances around the UK have registered with Food Power.
- 88% of alliances report having a food poverty action plan in place or in progress demonstrating that organisations are cooperating locally to develop collaborative activity.
- All activities delivered to share resources and facilitate learning continue to have high levels of participation, including 33 regional learning networks supported by peer mentors.
- 76% of alliances report they have been influenced to involve experts by experience in their work; experts have also been involved at a national strategic level via Food Power.

How has *Food Power* supported alliances?

Local alliances have consistently reported that Food Power has been of value in supporting their work. Across the programme, alliances have drawn on the support and resources provided by Food Power and reported that they find the activities they engage with to be valuable.

- 94% of alliances report that Food Power has impacted at least one of their activities, demonstrating that the approach and advice it has promoted is having local influence.
- 63% of alliances say Food Power has been ‘quite a lot’ or ‘a great deal’ valuable for them.

In a context where alliance members face constant pressures on their time and struggle with capacity it is significant that they continue to engage with Food Power activities – they would only opt to do so if judged worthwhile.

What has been learnt about core activities?

Each year the evaluation has looked in detail at experiences of engaging with support offered through Food Power. The most recent case studies considered three areas of activity.

**Experts by experience**

This has become one of the defining achievements of Food Power, with an impact more than the sum of its parts. It has helped shift ways of ‘thinking’ and ‘doing’ work on food and poverty among academics, policy makers and practitioners. The presence of experts by experience has led to greater reflection about whose voices are recognized as valuable in policy discussions. Key findings are:

- For those involved as experts by experience, participating in Food Power has been highly rewarding, particularly in terms of personal development and accessing new opportunities.
• Success has been driven by key individuals going ‘above and beyond’ and reliant on voluntary labour. Future projects involving experts by experience should be fully resourced and offer routes for payment-in-kind.

• As Food Power draws to a close, the relationship between local alliances and experts requires reflection, with support needed to realise longer term opportunities for collaboration in local and national networks.

**Peer Mentoring**

Peer mentoring offers a space for like-minded people to share alternative approaches to common challenges. It brings structure and greater visibility to existing networks, making them more accessible to newcomers. Key findings are:

• Learning through peer mentoring has value for project design and delivery and also for supporting organisations’ broader motivations for tackling food poverty.

• Alliances involved in mentoring were concerned about the programme ending and the network losing valuable experience, knowledge, and momentum.

**Local Evaluation Pilots**

Food Power supported 7 local alliances to pilot local monitoring and evaluation, with activity tailored to their level of progress and priorities. Resources and tools have been shared to enable other areas to apply similar approaches. Key findings are:

• The evaluation pilots demonstrate tangible impact on understanding and relieving food poverty in certain areas.

• Financial support for staff time to consider their approach to evaluation and develop skills was highly valued by alliances.

• Alliances gave very positive feedback about networking and learning opportunities.

Food Power supported alliances with provision of an Impact Tracker that can be easily implemented and learned from, which encouraged reflection on partnership working, in turn helping alliances progress local action on food poverty.

**What impacts have Food Power and alliances had locally?**

The model of local food poverty alliances has been adopted widely, with Food Power supporting local actors to collaborate effectively. Alliances have consistently reported that Food Power has influenced how they work to address food poverty, offering inspiration and learning for innovative solutions. Whilst it is difficult to trace the direct impact of Food Power’s influence on levels of food poverty, there are clear examples which suggest the benefits of more coordinated local action.

The impacts of Covid-19 pandemic created additional pressures on those working to address food poverty. Food Power funding enabled alliances to make a difference during the pandemic, particularly in cases where staff had dedicated time to develop a project or aspect of the partnership. Food Power supported alliances in developing alternative models for tackling food insecurity, a particular challenge within the emergency aid context of the pandemic. Reflecting on these experiences revealed particular lessons about the local alliance model:

• The nature and scale of the emergency response led to new alliances being formed and existing alliances being re-formed to best respond to changing local contexts and food poverty landscapes

• Food Power supported alliances with advice and best practice to navigate national guidance and a range of concerns around food provision and coordinating responses.
Local alliances can respond well in times of acute crisis; ongoing support will be needed to maintain the value and potency of this infrastructure.

**What impact has Food Power had nationally?**
Food Power’s national impact is perceived to relate to driving work on lived experience, creating a network which facilitated exchanges, being a collective voice for organisations, and awareness raising on food poverty. Food Power is considered to be central in the landscape of national action on food poverty, distinguished by the impact of its partnerships approach and work with people with lived experience. Food Power has created a specialist niche through its strength in combining grounded knowledge of local responses to food poverty and a broad perspective capable of influencing national action.

**How can Food Power support future action on food poverty?**
Local alliances and other actors agree a need for support akin to that offered by Food Power to continue in future. In particular, mechanisms are required to ensure that valuable learning built up across the network is retained and shared further.

- Future financial support is needed to enable alliances to continue to operate in alignment with their core values. Alliances would appreciate funding that allows for staff time for aspects of a project or partnership to reach greater levels of impact.
- Other activity aiming to tackle food poverty is ongoing across the UK but lacks the specific focus and strengths of Food Power. This leads stakeholders to perceive a need for continued activity of the type it has delivered.
- The exact nature of future delivery is to be decided; it could usefully focus on groups or locations under-represented to date, or take a more campaign oriented approach.

**Conclusions**
Findings reported here suggest good progress across all outcomes identified at the initiation of Food Power. Alliances give wide ranging examples of how Food Power has enabled more effective and coordinated activity in their areas. In particular, the programme has supported exchanges of learning and ideas between parts of the UK, and encouraged local actors to participate in this capacity building. Attention to engaging experts by experience and delivering evaluation has also influenced local action in many alliances.

It remains challenging to demonstrate impact on the most fundamental need - levels of food poverty in the UK. However, there is reason to be confident that Food Power has contributed positively to this. Food Power’s work at the national and local level demonstrates characteristics of an approach likely to generate collective impact on a complex systemic problem. Food Power has acted as a backbone organisation, coordinating action to tackle root causes of food poverty. A collective impact perspective highlights that to continue having an impact, the exchanges and coordination enabled by Food Power entails considerable work of coordination and communication which depends on an adequately resourced backbone organization.