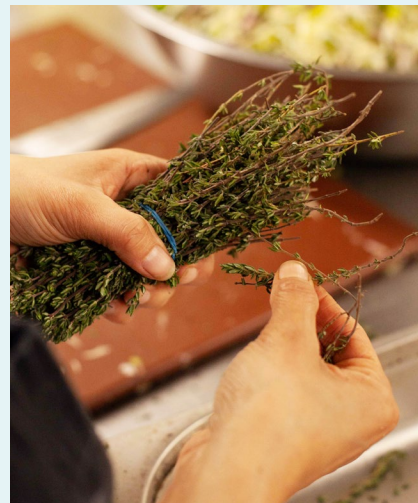




RECIPES FOR A REVOLUTION



**Reclaiming our Food System
For a Just Food And Climate Transition
in Tower Hamlets and Beyond**



This publication was created through research from the Blueprint Architect group in collaboration with local projects including community gardens, food co-ops and businesses as part of the Just FACT programme.¹

Published by Platform London in collaboration with Women's Environmental Network, drawing on wisdom from all members of the Blueprint Architect Group. For a full list of group members, see p.44.

Original Authorship and Research

— Sumayyah Zannath, member of the Blueprint Architect Group

Graphic Design
— Karishma Puri

Design Insights
— Radhika Jani

Additional Data Collection, Writing and Editing

— Radhika Jani
— Laurie Mompelat (aka Lauriem)

Illustrations
— Ellis Lewis-Dragstra

Proof-reading

— Mayya Hussein
— Dallas O'Dell
— Elle McAll
— James Marriott

Photos
— Saima Khalid (aka @angryjalebi)
— Hussina Raja and others

Food Policy Insights

— Zarina Ahmad
— Pedro Costa

Research Management
— Laurie Mompelat with support from Radhika Jani

1. For more information about the programme, see 'Introduction'

Contents



06 Introduction

- 06 — Context behind this work: who are we?
- 08 — Organising for a better food system: how and why?
- 12 — Surfacing community wisdom:
our research methodology, approach and values

16 What's up with our food system?

- 17 — Where does it all come from?
- 21 — Food, Race and Housing: intertwined legacies of harm and resistance
- 25 — Inadequate and insufficient policy in the face of food and climate crisis

28 How can we begin to repair?

30 — Food Insecurity

- 30 — The issue at a glance
- 31 — Our recommendations

33 — Advocacy and Agency

- 33 — The issue at a glance
- 33 — Our recommendations

35 — Resources and Funding

- 35 — The issue at a glance
- 36 — Our recommendations

38 — Knowledge and Training

- 38 — The issue at a glance
- 39 — Our recommendations

40 — Land Use

- 40 — The issue at a glance
- 41 — Our recommendations

43 Conclusion

43 Acknowledgements

43 Glossary

47 Bibliography



INTRODUCTION

Context behind this work: who are we?

The Blueprint Architect group is composed of an evolving 20-30 people representing community leaders, organisations, activists and residents who are engaged in the food system² of Tower Hamlets. Their involvement is to research and co-design a blueprint for a climate friendly³ and socially just⁴ food system, tackling the issues specific to an urban area such as that of the borough of Tower Hamlets in London. This group's work and involvement links across themes of food production, distribution, consumption and waste. They, themselves, embody the blueprint of the food system being created through the 'Just FACT' programme as a whole.

To watch a video introducing the Blueprint Architect Group, you can scan this QR code



To learn more about Just FACT's local projects, you can scan this QR code



Just FACT (for a Just Food And Climate Transition) is a 5-year funded programme⁵ which aims to effect change by amplifying and centering the voices of those hit hardest by injustices in our food system. It stems from partnership between the lead organisations WEN (Women's Environmental Network) and Platform along with a range of local community partners to build a blueprint for a community-led food system that is both environmentally sustainable and socially just. These partners are called Just FACT 'hubs' and 'labs'. Whilst hubs focus on bringing together local residents in Tower Hamlets to share ideas, learn together and feel empowered to take action on food and climate issues, the labs tend to focus on larger scale, community-led initiatives that help reduce carbon emissions from our food system.

To list just a few, Just FACT brings together initiatives from organisations and groups such as St Hilda's East Community Centre, Limborough Hub Community Garden and Kitchen, Leaders in Community, House of Annetta, Misery, OITIJ-JO Collective, Stepney City Farm and many more. Whilst each partner has a different focus and method, our overall approach is to co-design solutions that create a 'blueprint' for a food system which works better for the happiness, health and well-being of communities as well as the environment, with the understanding that these goals are intrinsically connected.



2. See our glossary at the end of this publication for a definition of 'food system'
3. See our glossary at the end of this publication for a definition of 'climate friendly'
4. See our glossary at the end of this publication for a definition of 'socially just'
5. This programme of work is resourced mostly through the Big Lottery's Climate Action Fund. For more information on our funding, see the 'Acknowledgments' section p.44

INTRODUCTION

Organising for a better food system: how and why?

Food is universal in bringing people together across differences and has the power to create positive collective change towards a socially just and environmentally sustainable world.

In order to live within our planetary boundaries, global and local changes are required, including across our food system. Food is universal in bringing people together across differences and has the power to create positive collective change towards a socially just and environmentally sustainable world. In order to live within our planetary boundaries, global and local changes are required, including across our food system. It is recognised that the high reliance on food imports, and dependence on carbon intensive practices, is not sustainable and has had a significant negative impact on the resilience and equity of both the British and the global food system - which are ultimately intertwined. Yet communities - especially those historically least responsible for climate change - should not be expected to repay the debts of any environmental and social injustices in our food system.

In Tower Hamlets, many people, communities and organisations are responding to local issues in a food system which is in crisis. Whether it's providing a soup kitchen, establishing a food bank or a co-op, setting up growing spaces or campaigning for plastic free businesses, commitment, energy, passion and a fundamental sense of justice is seen in each one of these

actions. Amongst those taking action on food justice,⁶ food growing, and food solidarity in Tower Hamlets are members of the Blueprint Architect group: a collective of over 30 local people who are all deeply committed to exploring, building and manifesting a community-led food system. Their knowledge and experience are at the heart of creating the principles and building blocks for an alternative food system that is democratic, environmentally sustainable, and people-driven.

In February 2023, we came together to release the first part of our trilogy of publications: [‘Seeds for a Revolution: Reclaiming our Food System’](#). This first publication served as a public introduction to the Blueprint Architect group and an open invitation for community members, policymakers and other key stakeholders to begin working with us in the transition towards a just food system. It featured some of the key findings from our two years of action research, as well as some initial policy recommendations and food stories from members and organisations of the Blueprint Architect group.



IN TOWER HAMLETS, MANY PEOPLE, COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONS ARE RESPONDING TO LOCAL ISSUES IN A FOOD SYSTEM WHICH IS IN CRISIS

#EcoFest in July 2023 at [Leaders in Community](#). Young people, part of the [‘Be Green’](#) cohort, run a workshop on growing your own plants using recycled newspaper.

More information

To access our first publication and our group video introducing the Blueprint Architect group, you can scan this QR code



In this second publication, we hope that the seeds that we laid can begin to bloom, providing us with a clearer path forward: a recipe for change. We build upon our initial findings to expand our policy recommendations, whilst also creating a wider picture of the historic and current landscape of food injustice in Tower Hamlets and beyond. We honour the organising work that is already happening and that has been for centuries, whilst also looking forward to the changes that must be made for the future our communities deserve.

Produced in conversation with the Blueprint Architect group and integrating learnings from various community projects as part of the Just FACT programme⁷, this publication aims to address policymakers, funders, local councils, organisations and businesses directly with concrete steps that can be taken to truly commit to a sustainable and community-led food system. We provide analysis into why current policy measures fall short when it comes to addressing the realities of food injustice and suggest collective recommendations for alternative measures that can be taken instead. By focusing on five key themes - food insecurity, advocacy and agency, resources and funding, knowledge and training, and land use - we hope that every stakeholder in Tower Hamlets and beyond can find inspiration on how to contribute towards a just, community-led and sustainable food system.

6. See our glossary at the end of this publication for a definition of ‘food justice’

7. For more information about the Just FACT programme, see p. 7

Beyond this publication, we will continue our participatory research to keep documenting what a blueprint for an alternative food system could look like in Tower Hamlets, in a way that could be replicated elsewhere in London, the UK and beyond. A lesson we have learnt on our journey so far is that the blueprint is already alive and constantly expanding. It is made up of all the people already embodying alternatives to a profit-centred food system in their day to day lives. May it be those growing fresh herbs and vegetables on their balcony instead of buying from highly-polluting supermarkets, those who share meals and food supplies with neighbours in need, or those organising to protect historical South Asian food shops and restaurants in the face of gentrification. Therefore our ongoing research efforts will not only aim to document and uplift what's already happening, but also ensure that we support movement building for more and more people active on these issues to connect, learn and build with each other something greater than the sum of its parts.

Another thing that has been crucial for us to acknowledge is how inequalities (e.g. race and/or class and socio-economic status) shape who has access not only to food, but also to the infrastructures designed to bring about a better food system. Despite their progressive aims, many environment-focused spaces, city farms, businesses and institutions in Tower Hamlets and beyond still overrepresent and over-visibility the experiences and needs of white and/or middle-class, wealthier residents. When it comes to food justice in a borough like Tower Hamlets, this shows up in who gets to find employment in managing sustainable food shops, food co-ops, or even community gardens. We believe there are many reasons why the residents who most need a better food



Gathering of Just FACT partners at [Limborough Community Food Hub](#), July 2023

IT HAS BEEN CRUCIAL FOR US TO ACKNOWLEDGE HOW INEQUALITIES SHAPE WHO HAS ACCESS NOT ONLY TO FOOD, BUT ALSO TO THE INFRASTRUCTURES DESIGNED TO BRING ABOUT A BETTER FOOD SYSTEM.

system are not always the most visible in the spaces and projects designed to reach those aims. One reason is that those spaces have often fallen short on being truly accessible. Building on Platform's 40 years of designing climate justice⁸ projects and conversations at the intersection of arts, pedagogy and local organising, we are deeply motivated in ensuring our project challenges these dynamics. That is why we have chosen to centre culture and story-telling in our ongoing effort to support the development of a fairer, more accessible and more sustainable food system in the borough - one that gives local people a true sense of ownership over how they nourish themselves and their loved ones. By the end of our project in September 2025, we aim not only to have published publications like this one, but to have produced actual arts installations that can tell the story of what our kitchen, corner shops and local food joints could look like by 2050 if we had a community-led food system. We want these installations to be accessible to all, co-created by community members and spaces where people can feel inspired and motivated to participate in bringing those alternatives to life.

Moving forward from this publication, we will therefore be working on our very first community arts installation, to be launched in Spring 2024, alongside a community zine that will contain tools and tips for local people and organisations to join the movement towards a better food system in the borough and beyond. Our priority for this third publication will be to expand the accessibility of our findings in order to include as many community members as possible in Tower Hamlets, through the use of multiple languages and mediums (including recipes, poetry, photos, images, etc.).

Get involved!

We invite all members of the Tower Hamlets community - from artists to food organisations, from councillors to residents - to join this local food justice movement. We look forward to hearing from you!

For more information on how to get involved, you can contact:

Radhika (she/ her)
Arts & Food Justice
Group Coordinator
Radhika@platformlondon.org

Lauriem (they/ them)
Research Coordinator
Laurie@platformlondon.org

Hussina (she/ her)
Just FACT Programme Mobiliser
Hussina@wen.org.uk

Elle (she/ her)
Just Fact Programme Manager
Elle@wen.org.uk

8. See our glossary at the end of this publication for a definition of 'climate justice'



Surfacing community wisdom: our methodology, research approach and values

The possibility of reimagining a food system not rooted in extractivism⁹ and competition, but instead based on cooperation, redistribution and care is at the heart of how we approach this work.

Our blueprint for a community-led food system will emerge progressively over time as our group collectively reflects and co-creates. People in the group are already a living, breathing embodiment of that blueprint across the many projects which they, themselves are part of.¹⁰ Many of the group members are either individuals, part of a wider community or work for a local community organisation. Their passion and drive is bringing about change by working on food justice, food growing, and food solidarity initiatives in Tower Hamlets.

The work that the Blueprint Architect members are involved in covers the breadth of the food system, from seed to plate and beyond. There is therefore a wealth of local and cultural knowledge and expertise in the group, which includes (but not exclusively) food growers, experts in composting, knowledgeable food preservers and fermenters, chefs, and many other food experts. In addition, there are those that day-in-day-out provide much needed nourishment, warmth and kindness, and those that tirelessly advocate and campaign on food poverty¹¹ and for food justice. All group members are passionate about bringing cultural knowledge and lived experience to the fore through their food initiatives, as people who have been navi-

gating various forms of injustice and marginalisation throughout their lives. This has facilitated the emergence of a holistic understanding of the steps necessary to transition towards a more just and sustainable food system. To organise this research process in direct collaboration with local people, we have built the Blueprint Architect group centering the following organising principles:

Co-creation: In the process of creating a collective vision, demands and policies to be advocated for, we will make space for meaningful collaborations with group members to ensure a broad range of voices and perspectives have informed what we create (at the intersection of race, class, culture, gender, etc.).

9. See our glossary at the end of this publication for a definition of 'extractivism'
10. For various stories and examples of local projects, see '[Seeds for a Revolution: Reclaiming our Food System](#)'
11. See our glossary at the end of this publication for a definition of 'food poverty'
12. See our glossary at the end of this publication for a definition of 'just transition'

Long-term commitment: When we look to build relationships with local groups and people we do this with the intention of the relationship being longer term, and this should always be reflected in our capacity to support their work.

Organise on people's terms: We work around the schedules of group members to ensure they can engage. We ensure the way we work is accessible from the time we hold events to the tools we use to run workshops. We recognise that the work group members do is already valuable and so it's important we support their work and not the other way around (when engaging with grassroots organisers for instance).

Exchange not extract: In designing our research project, we think very intentionally about what could be of practical benefit to the participants and what we can offer to them within the process and beyond. We seek to give credit where it's due and honour the work that has come before us.

The work is already being done: We recognise that a lot of the work for a just transition¹² is already being done. So instead of trying to start something new, we aim to support what's already there, while also being aware of the gaps that need to be plugged and focusing our capacity on those.

Reflection: We ensure that we embed reflection into our planning for the project, making space for key moments where we simply take stock, and critically reflect on what we've done and how we can absorb learnings before moving forward.

Generous, inclusive leadership: We actively support and provide guidance and training to group members through an intentional investment of time and energy that aims to empower everyone involved as much as possible.

Over the last two years the group has convened at least a dozen times, sharing their food stories, thinking about what leverage their knowledge and experience has for policy change, and exploring what is

working well on the ground. Group members have also been building mutual trust and friendships, as well as partnerships between their respective initiatives. For instance, a local farm began supplying food to a local community food pantry through establishing contact at a Blueprint Architect group convening. We believe these relationships are just as important within the research process as other forms of wisdom and data gathering. That's because our research process aims to support actual change on the ground, and cannot be detached from our intentional process of supporting movement building across members of the group and their wider community.

ALL GROUP MEMBERS ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT BRINGING CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE AND LIVED EXPERIENCE TO THE FORE THROUGH THEIR FOOD INITIATIVES

Members of the Blueprint Architect group cook a meal at the launch event of our first publication, [Seeds for a Revolution](#)



In more official terms, the research process was carried out through a cycle of action and critical reflection, known as **Action Research**. This means that this research has been responsive to group members' needs and the direction they wanted the research to take. In line with Platform's values of self-determination and collective power, the Blueprint Architect group aims to ensure that everyone is able to build ownership and control over their own lives and work, by providing collective power over this space and any solutions that it generates.¹³ In doing so, this research de-centres any single individual involved in the project and instead aims to produce a collaborative publication that reflects the communal organising towards food justice that is occurring across Tower Hamlets.

This research aims to honour and acknowledge communities' agency to meaningfully shape their own lives, neighbourhoods and city. This objective can be achieved best by working in meaningful collaboration with individuals and groups who are at the forefront of meeting the needs of their communities every day. Last but not least, this research takes a decolonial¹⁴ approach, thus giving a greater voice to the stories of people who have been historically underrepresented in the context and aftermath of Western colonialism. We use this approach with the hope of shifting power, enabling these stories from the grassroots to shape the world around us, in order to meet the needs of our communities without exploiting and damaging the planet.

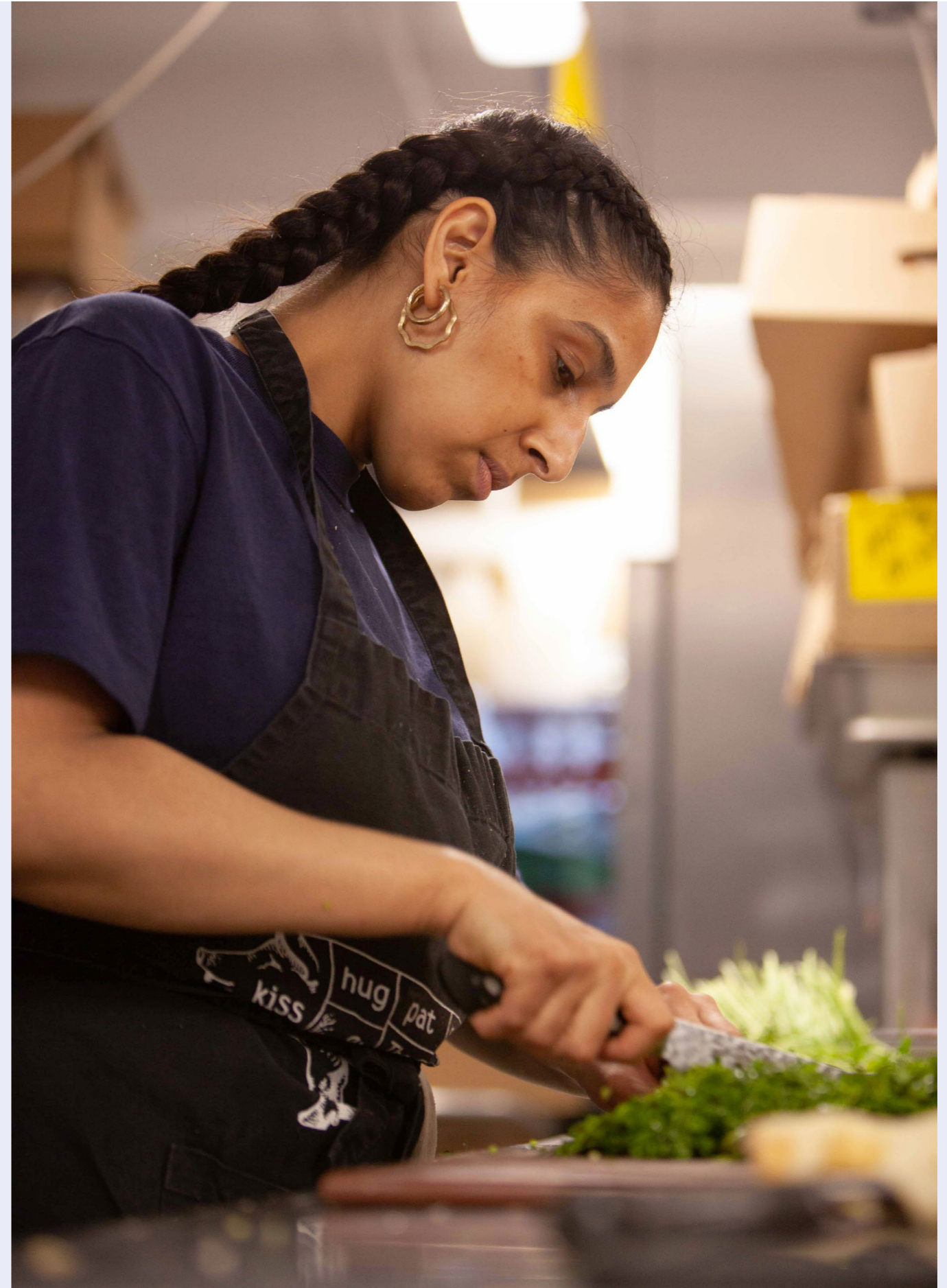
Last but not least, the Blueprint Architect Group's research is at the centre of the Just FACT programme.¹⁵ On top of our participatory action research with community members who are part of the group, we aim to draw direct learnings from Just FACT hubs and labs' practice. For the purpose of this specific publication, we have therefore held 1-1 interviews with R-Urban (community garden, kitchen and collective waste recycling facility), Mad LEAP (closed loop recycling company working with R-Urban and developing a local mushroom farm), House of Annetta (social justice and arts centre), and the food co-ops based at St Hilda's East Community Centre, Limehouse Town Hall and Leaders in Community. We discussed with each of these projects the most urgent learnings stemming from their work that they feel need to be communicated to the wider public when it comes to co-creating a community-led food system in Tower Hamlets. We have ensured that interviewees' responses are integrated into this publication's recommendations.

**THIS RESEARCH TAKES A
DECOLONIAL APPROACH,
THUS GIVING A GREATER
VOICE TO THE STORIES
OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE
BEEN HISTORICALLY
UNDERREPRESENTED IN THE
CONTEXT AND AFTERMATH
OF WESTERN COLONIALISM**

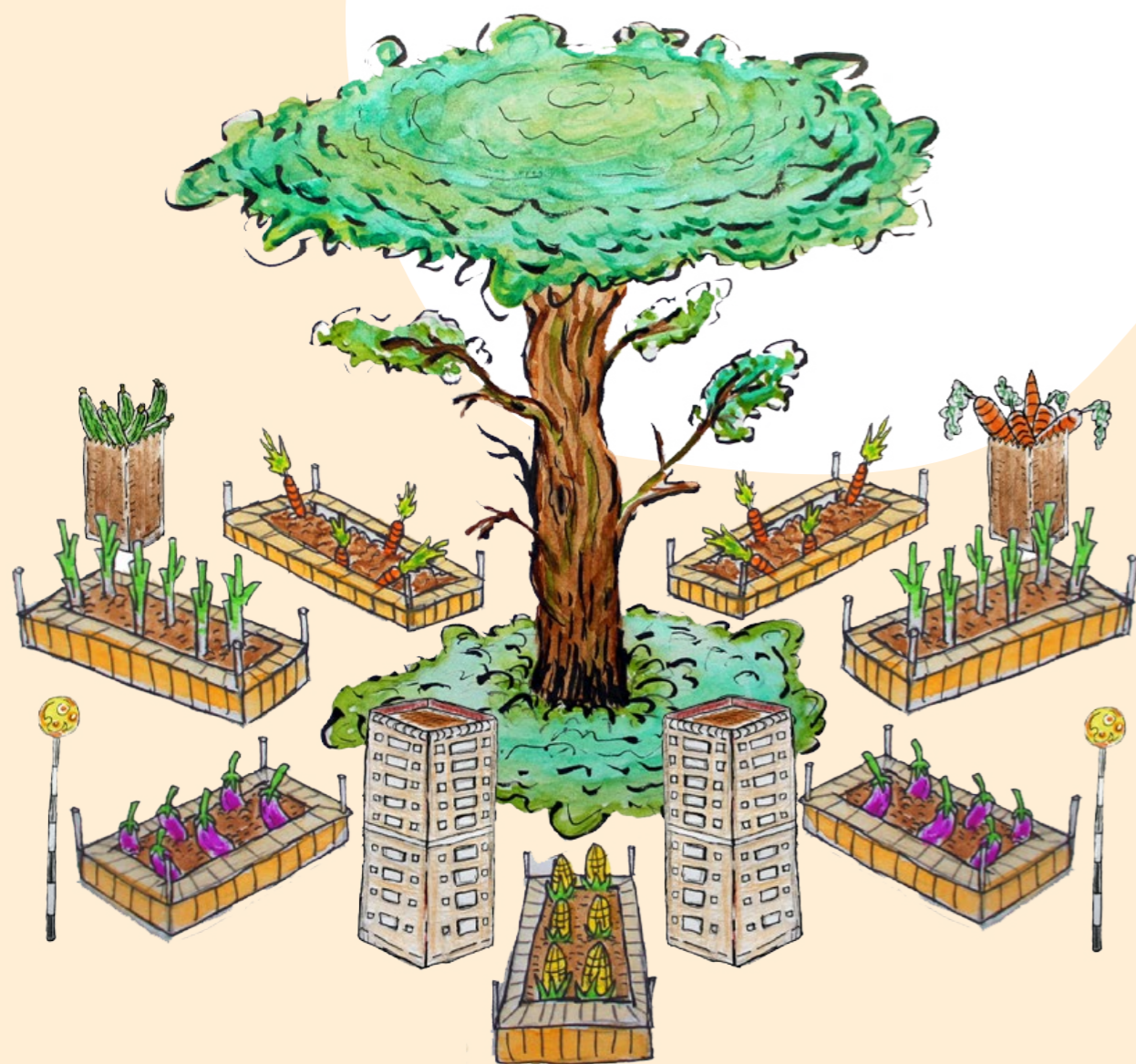
13. Walker, K., Sheikh, S. (2020). ['London Leap: Just Transition Values.'](#) Platform London.

14. See our glossary at the end of this publication for a definition of 'decolonial'

15. For more detail about the Just FACT programme, please refer to the text on p.7



What's up with our food system?



State of affairs

Where does it all come from?

Intuitively, we understand that the food we purchase and consume from urban shops derives from the Earth's many offerings. However, most of us aren't clear about where our food comes from, and how it is processed and transported to our supermarket shelves.

What goes into the process of making food available to us in Western neighbourhoods such as Tower Hamlets? What history lies behind our food system? And who are the workers, places and communities most impacted in the process? Extensive research documents how Britain's food system as we know it today has been shaped irreversibly through the British Empire's colonial regime, which was built on extracting resources from the colonies (now Global South countries), often using the labour of enslaved Africans or forced indentured labourers to meet the demand for foods within mainland Britain.¹⁶

As highlighted by the '[Sankofa Report](#)' from Food Matters, the pre-existing food systems of 'native and colonised peoples' (that came to be through their own geographical and cultural systems of knowledge around land, food and people) were violently disrupted or destroyed, as part of Britain's wealth and empire building. By the middle of the nineteenth century, as steam shipping and railways compressed space and time, vast stretches of the world were turned into monocultures for feeding Britain's growing population.¹⁷ This is how the British Empire created the first global capitalist market for food, leaving behind a lasting imprint of environmental destruction which today haunts our rapidly warming planet.¹⁸

Chattel slavery was one of the key tools of this transition towards globalised food systems. If they survived the middle passage, enslaved Africans suffered short fragile lives in poverty, brutalised by British and European colonists to extract and produce sugar.¹⁹ As highlighted by urban historian Sam Wetherell, consumption of sugar tripled in Britain between 1750 and 1900. This provided a cheap and efficient source of energy for an increasingly urban working class. Sugar was a crucial historical link connecting extreme forms of racialised violence in the empire with the industrial revolution at home.²⁰

Unfortunately, slavery is far from being the only example of such interconnectedness between Britain's colonial history and our current food system. Within India (and modern-day Pakistan, Bangladesh and Burma) the East India Company (EIC) defeated the Mughal Empire with its own private military 'twice the size of the British army,' and established a monopoly on the agricultural economy. The EIC was the 'world's first aggressive multinational corporation'²¹ forging the way for today's neo-colonial powers.²² Raw materials such as cotton, tea, sugar and spices were transported from India to Britain.

16. [The Sankofa Report: British Colonialism and the UK Food System](#). (2023). Food Matters.

17. Wetherell, S. (2021). '[How the British Empire Built the Food System that Is Destroying the Planet](#)'. Tribune.

18. See our glossary at the end of this publication for a definition of 'capitalism'

19. [The Sankofa Report](#), p.4

20. '[How the British Empire Built the Food System that Is Destroying the Planet](#)'.

21. Dalrymple, W. (2015). '[The East India Company: The original corporate raiders](#)'. The Guardian.

22. Robins, N. (2006). 'The Corporation That Changed the World: How the East India Company Shaped the Modern Multinational'. Pluto Press. Platform London projects on the EIC fed into this work.

Local farmers had to depend on the whims of the British market. They lost land, access to their own agriculture and ownership of public infrastructure. By the end of the 19th century, large scale famines were frequent across India, causing millions of deaths. In addition to that, the official abolition of slavery in 1833 was followed by the mass exit of enslaved Africans from plantations, with plantation owners looking to a new labour source – India. Over 2 million Indians were thus transported to work the plantations in the West Indies as indentured servants, allowing the colonial food system to continue. Through this history of extraction, Britain excluded South Asian populations from the fruits of their labour whilst draining the land of its wealth.²³

How does this relate to Tower Hamlets as we know it today? On a geographical level, the presence of the docks in East London has made the borough one of the many epicentres of the British colonial economy. Bulk imports of key food items such as sugar, tea, spices and cocoa – often grown through forced labour and slavery – were unloaded at the East India and West India docks in Tower Hamlets for processing and onward distribution within the UK.

On an ancestral level, with so called ‘minority ethnic groups’ making up a majority of the borough’s population, many of our Afro-Caribbean and Asian residents carry in their own family lineages the trauma of this violent history. Through colonial conquest, indigenous lands around the world were wounded and violated alongside the bodies of Black and Brown people to ensure the supply of goods, and in particular food, towards British shores. This system has mostly benefited a ruling class of white British elites, with UK-based working classes in mainland Britain exploited alongside colonised working-classes to produce capital for a minority of shareholder’s profits.

As we face global warming today and look to address the issue of an environmentally devastating food system, we must reckon with the origins of such a system so we know how to repair it most effectively.



EXTENSIVE RESEARCH DOCUMENTS HOW BRITAIN'S FOOD SYSTEM AS WE KNOW IT TODAY HAS BEEN SHAPED IRREVERSIBLY THROUGH THE BRITISH EMPIRE'S COLONIAL REGIME

Tea plantation workers, late 19th century – early 20th century

Whilst official colonial regimes may have ended, the lasting impacts of forced displacement and the traumatic loss of indigenous lands across the Caribbean, Africa or South Asia remain. In present day UK society, communities of colour remain those most impacted by a lack of access to food and green spaces. Structural racism²⁴ and the climate crisis, when looked at through the prism of colonial history, are two sides of the same coin. They are two deeply intertwined consequences of Britain's past.

Our modern and highly industrialised food system – which has emerged through Western colonial plunder – is a leading driver of the climate crisis and its damage is undeniable. Food bears the responsibility for almost a quarter of the greenhouse gases²⁵ that humans generate each year. Meat and dairy alone are responsible for 14.5%, which is approximately the same as the combined emissions from all of the world's cars, trucks, planes, and ships.²⁶ The current food system is also massively reliant on toxic pesticides and chemicals that degrade soil, pollute water and reduce biodiversity whilst also endangering the health of local people wherever such products are in use. Unfortunately, the impacts of environmental damage and climate change disproportionately impact Black and Brown people and those in the Global South.

Environmental damage caused directly by our current food system is no exception, as exemplified by countless environmental scandals. A University of North Carolina report, for instance, found in 2014 that pollution from industrial pig farms disproportionately impacts Black, Latinx, and Native American communities.²⁷ In the French West Indies, the local population – most of which descends from enslaved Africans and South Asian indentured labourers – suffer world records of specific cancers and other long term illnesses due to mass pesticide use on banana plantations. Whilst Western markets enjoy fresh bananas with no consequences on consumers' health, 90% of Martinique and Guadeloupe's populations are now enduring life-long contamination by the pesticide, with irreversible impacts on both people and the land.²⁸

23. This paragraph is derived directly from [The Sankofa Report](#), p.4
24. See our glossary at the end of this publication for a definition of 'structural racism'.
25. See our glossary at the end of this publication for a definition of 'greenhouse gases'
26. ['How the British Empire Built the Food System that Is Destroying the Planet'](#).
27. Piñon, N. (2020). ['There's racism in our food system, too. Here's how to combat it'](#). Mashable.
28. Resiere, D. (2023). ['Chlordecone \(Kepone\) poisoning in the French Territories in the Americas'](#). The Lancet.

TODAY, UNCONSCIOUS PREJUDICE ABOUT GLOBAL SOUTH COUNTRIES AND POPULATIONS, SHAPED BY BOTH RACE AND CLASS POWER DYNAMICS, KEEP ON PLAYING A KEY ROLE IN NORMALISING A DEEPLY UNEQUAL GLOBAL FOOD SYSTEM.

As was first established with the East India Company, multinational organisations with complex and overlapping interests with state governments are now the dominant force in global trade, influencing policy and wielding monopolies. That is how Britain and other Western countries perpetuate the colonial relationship with former colonies through economies that cater to the Western market at the Global South's expense. Therefore, despite an official end to colonial regimes, multinational corporations - many of which have direct colonial roots - still use Global South nations as a supply bank of cheap labour, land and resources. One example is the economic connection between the UK and Nigeria through the ongoing violent extraction of palm oil, crude oil and many other substances. With governmental complicity, global corporations keep causing 'irreparable harm'²⁹ to the environment and local communities across the world. Grassroots campaigns in the UK and beyond, including '[Stop the Maangamizi](#)', the [Marikana Support Campaign](#) and the work of the '[Climate Reparations Network](#)', are doing vital work to resist this harm.

29. [The Sankofa Report](#), p.5

30. '[How the British Empire Built the Food System that is Destroying the Planet](#)'.

31. [The Sankofa Report](#), p.5

32. Cradle Community. (2021). 'Brick by Brick: How We Build a World Without Prisons'. London: Hajar Press.

Prejudice is another part of the long lasting legacy of colonialism. At the core of Britain's colonial expansion and industrial revolution was the idea that a healthy and varied diet was for the global elite, excluding local working-classes and colonised people. Winston Churchill, whose government's policies massively exacerbated an avoidable famine in Bengal in 1943, complained that 'yellow men, brown men, and black men' had not yet 'learned to demand and purchase a diet superior to rice'.³⁰ The same disdain was at the core of the British government's rhetoric and approach to Irish famines during the previous century.

Today, unconscious prejudice about Global South countries and populations, shaped by both race and class power dynamics, keep on playing a key role in normalising a deeply unequal global food system. Colonialism has left the populations of former colonies poorer, with less agency and sovereignty in food systems. Despite this, there has yet to be any meaningful action taken to rectify the harm caused. In fact, as the authors of the Sankofa Report highlight, 'the inequitable power dynamics of the colonial era have only compounded and manifested in newer, more nefarious forms'.³¹

As of today, many communities across the world still remain dependent on Britain for the sale of their locally-produced sugar, cocoa, tea and spices. Originating from the extractive relationships of colonialism, these exports continue to be central to the economies of countries across Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. Britain, for example, continues to import 40% of the tea we drink from Kenya, where tea exports contribute to 33% of their GDP. With exports to Britain and the Global North being key to functioning economies in the Global South, food that is grown locally becomes expensive for people living in those regions whilst remaining relatively cheap in the UK.³² The impacts of food and environmental injustice extend beyond national borders and across the planet. This is why our community of organisers in the present-day UK must always include our siblings in the Global South in our thinking and organising for a better food system.

Food, Race and Housing: intertwined legacies of harm and resistance

'Here to stay. Here to fight.'

Anti-racist slogan chanted by a crowd behind Altab Ali's hearse in 1978, from Whitechapel to Hyde Park

Migration has shaped Tower Hamlets for centuries, with the expansion of the local docks facilitating the arrival of communities and products from across the globe. The borough became a home for many diaspora communities, including French Huguenot, Jewish, Irish, African and Caribbean, and South and East Asian peoples. From the promise of a better future to the search for a safe haven away from persecution, communities have arrived with their own dreams for what Tower Hamlets can be for them. Each brought with them their own unique cultures, histories and experiences, leading to Tower Hamlets becoming a melting pot of all those who have ever called it home.

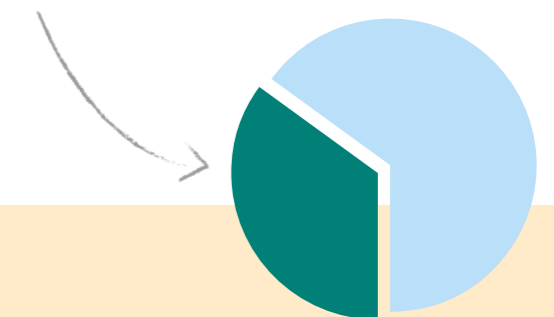
The local Bangladeshi community make up 35% of the population of Tower Hamlets.³³ The first wave of Bangladeshi migration in the 1950s was directly related to the British Empire's intervention, as the UK's postwar government encouraged migration from Commonwealth countries to help rebuild the country after the second world war. East London was heavily-bombed during the Blitz and thus many Bangladeshis settled in Whitechapel, Spitalfields and Bethnal Green to work on the docks and in key industries such as furniture-making and textiles.

33. Nash, P. (2023). '[A home away from home: Bangladesh independence and migration to the East End](#)'. Whitechapel LDN.



#SaveBrickLane demo by Nijjor Manush, Brick Lane, London E1, July 2021

THE LOCAL BANGLADESHI COMMUNITY MAKE UP 35% OF THE POPULATION OF TOWER HAMLETS.



The Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, where the country fought for independence from East Pakistan and endured nine months of intense violence, was another major catalyst for migration. The colonial violence, environmental extraction and economic destabilisation South Asia experienced under imperial rule also set the conditions for migration to the West.³⁴

Unfortunately, the large numbers of Bangladeshi immigrants settling in the Brick Lane area from the 1960s faced extremely poor housing and unrelenting hostility through brutal over-policing and continuous racism.³⁵ British powers plundered their colonies and were happy to use Commonwealth labour for the rebuild of the colonial centre, but these communities were shunned, neglected and discriminated against once here. In 1978, Brick Lane was the most heavily policed area in mainland Britain. Post-war racist hatred fuelled by Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech saw the National Front target the Bengali populations of Spitalfields and Brick Lane, smashing up shop windows, assaulting community members and tragically leading to the racially-motivated murder of Altab Ali, a 24-year-old Bengali leather garments worker killed in Whitechapel on May 4th 1978, the day of local elections in Tower Hamlets.

Bursts of grief and outrage propelled the Bengali community to organise a summer of direct action in 1978 against racist violence and police brutality.³⁶ Young Bengalis put together community defence squads and set up the Anti-Racist Committee of Asians in East London, with support from Race Today, the Hackney and Tower Hamlets Defence Committee and the Anti-Nazi League. They organised mass sit-down protests, a 'Black Solidarity Day' with 8,000 striking local workers, a Tower Hamlets Squatters' Union and a Bengali Housing Action Group. Through their organising, they made links with local trade unions and built alliances with other movements to strengthen their anti-facist campaign beyond Tower Hamlets.³⁷

The constant presence of new migrant communities in Tower Hamlets has propelled the borough to be at the forefront of change, from grassroots organising against anti-racism³⁸ to the fight against Section 28, a series of laws designed to limit the activities of LGBT+ communities.

From mobilising on the streets to pushing for policy change, communities from Tower Hamlets have been tackling injustice throughout history.

This entrenched spirit of resistance has laid the pathways for community organising in Tower Hamlets today. [Nijjor Manush](#) is a British-Bangladeshi collective continuing this legacy as they fight their [#SaveBrick-Lane campaign](#) to protect the street from gentrifying forces. Gentrification is the process by which new middle-class occupants trigger a 'socio-economic uplift' of a poor neighbourhood, leading to working class communities being priced out and pushed out of their own neighbourhoods.³⁹ A five-story shopping mall in the heart of Brick Lane proposed by the owners of the Old Truman Brewery is set to exacerbate the ongoing 'social cleansing'⁴⁰ of local communities. It also threatens the iconic food history of Banglatown with rent hikes set to demolish South Asian food businesses and historic curry houses.⁴¹ In July 2021, Nijjor Manush's now famous #SaveBrickLane protest began with a gathering at Altab Ali Park - a direct homage to those who came and fought before.

Trendy food halls popping up around the city have been described as 'engines of gentrification', and are a 'dream for landlords like Truman Estates Ltd as they have the potential to increase the value of both their property and surrounding rents.'⁴² From 2017-2023, a proposal from Time Out to build one of the largest eating and drinking establishments in London on Brick Lane was met by staunch opposition from the local community. Guljar Kahn, chair of the Banglatown Restaurant Association, argued the development would 'destroy Brick Lane' and 'hasten the demise of Bangla culture that makes Tower Hamlets so distinctive.' He also argued that trade had already fallen by 30-40% for Brick Lane's curry houses since 'the redeveloped Spitalfields market opened with high-end branded restaurants.'



THE PRIORITY DRIVING COMMERCIAL AND HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IN THE BOROUGH IS PROFIT OVER COMMUNITY.

Sit down protest outside of a police station, Bethnal Green Road, London E2, 17 July 1978
Photo credit: Paul Trevor

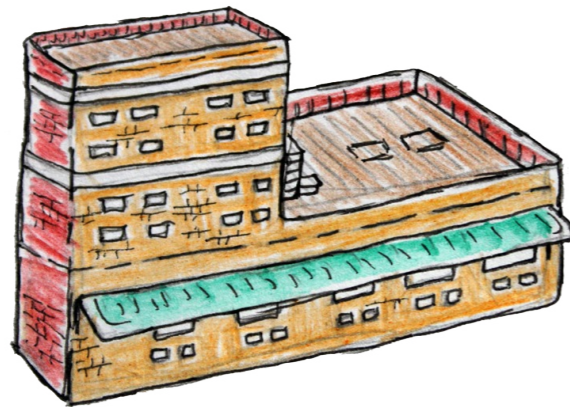
34. [The Sankofa Report](#)
35. Trevor, P. (2021). 'Brick Lane 1978: The Turning Point'. [Exhibition]. Shown at Brady Arts and Community Centre, May 2023.
36. Sheera, S. (2022). [The summer of rebellion: remembering Brick Lane's Bengalis and their fight against fascism](#). gal-dem.com.
37. Mureithi, A. (2022). [How Brick Lane Fought Back Against Racism](#). Open Democracy.
38. See our glossary at the end of this publication for a definition of 'anti-racism'.
39. Almeida, A. (2021). [Pushed to the Margins: A Quantitative Analysis of Gentrification in London in the 2010s](#). Runnymede Trust and Centre for Labour and Social Studies.
40. Taylor, D. (2017). [It's social cleansing: the 93-year-old fighting East London demolitions](#). The Guardian.
41. Uddin, T. (2020). [#SaveBrickLane: Why East London's historic Bangladeshi communities are under attack](#). gal-dem.com.
42. Hancox, D. (2020). [The 'street food' swindle: fake diversity, privatised space - and such small portions!](#). The Guardian.
43. Kehoe, C. (2023). [Empire builders: The Brick Lane property portfolio of Truman Estates Ltd and its power to alter the fabric of the East End](#). Whitechapel LDN.
44. Snoussi, D., and Mompelat, L. (2019). [We are Ghosts: Race, Class and Institutional Prejudice](#). Runnymede Trust and Centre for Labour and Social Studies.
45. [UK Poverty 2022: The Essential Guide to Understanding Poverty in the UK](#). (2022). Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
46. After housing costs means after deductions for housing costs such as rent and/or mortgage interest payments.
47. BBC Local Democracy Reporter. (2023). [Bangladeshi and Pakistani workers in London three times less likely to earn a real living wage, report finds](#). Whitechapel LDN.

Located at the intersection of racist and class-based systems of power which were cornerstones of the colonial regimes, residents of Tower Hamlets continue to experience the hyper surveillance and violence of the state whilst simultaneously their needs are made invisible.⁴⁴ According to research carried out by Loughborough University in 2019/20, after housing costs, Tower Hamlets was estimated to be number 1 in the top 20 local authorities with the highest levels of child poverty across the UK.⁴⁵ Once housing costs⁴⁶ were taken into account, 56% of children in Tower Hamlets were living in a low-income family. A report by the Living Wage Foundation found that Bangladeshi and Pakistani workers in London are three times less likely to earn a real living wage than others.⁴⁷

The current period of rapid gentrification of Tower Hamlets has inflicted new forms of capitalist violence upon its most vulnerable residents.⁴⁸ According to a study by the Runnymede Trust, Brick Lane faced the highest level of gentrification in London from 2010 to 2016.⁴⁹ Tower Hamlets simultaneously ranks amongst the highest of boroughs in regards to the percentage of its population who live in social housing and in its house price and deprivation index changes, which is a significant marker of gentrification.⁵⁰ Organisations like [Land in Our Names \(LION\)](#) do vital work to connect land and climate justice with racial justice.⁵¹ Housing justice theory interrogates who has access to land as power, and how this concentration of resources enacts scarcity on working-class and communities of colour.⁵² One of the ways in which the violence of gentrification manifests in Tower Hamlets is through the eviction of these communities from the borough, as they slowly get priced out in ways that create space for an incoming class of mostly white and middle-class consumers. The priority driving commercial and housing development in the borough is profit over community.

Even as local residents increasingly struggle to access affordable food during a cost of living crisis, we witness the endless launch of new food markets and restaurants that are almost entirely unaffordable to those who live nearby and have been here for decades. In 2021, there were around 5,000 house-

holds in Tower Hamlets experiencing some form of food poverty.⁵³ Many residents do not have easy and affordable access to healthy food, or the agency to manage decisions regarding their diet. The Blueprint Architect group stands in solidarity with all those struggling with food, race and housing injustice in Tower Hamlets and beyond. We hope to stand on the shoulders of a trailblazing history of local resistance to state violence, as we come together and organise to demonstrate what a successful, just and community-led food and climate transition could look like in Tower Hamlets. Central to this goal has been ensuring that local communities and individuals - especially those with lived experience of historical oppression - provide a wide range of much needed perspectives and experiences to keep equity and justice at the heart of our action research process.



48. ['Pushed to the Margins: A Quantitative Analysis of Gentrification in London in the 2010s'](#).
49. Kehoe, C. (2022). ['Bengali Squatters movement: Can the lessons of the past help 'Save Brick Lane' today?'](#) Whitechapel LDN.
50. Office for National Statistics. (2011). ['2011 Census: Tenure - households, local authorities in England and Wales'](#).
51. Terry, N. (2023). ['Jumping Fences: Land, Food and Racial Justice in British Farming'](#). Land in Our Names, Ecological Land Cooperative, Landworkers' Alliance.
52. Calliste, J. (2021). ['This Land is Our Land'](#). New Economics Foundation.
53. Radley, D. (2021). ['Food Poverty in older people and low-income families'](#). Tower Hamlets Council.

Inadequate and insufficient policy interventions in the face of food and climate crisis

The evidence that our current food system is harming people, nature and the climate is stark and compelling. In 2022, 345 million people around the world were experiencing hunger crises.⁵⁴ Nationally, the UK is struggling with the highest rates of food poverty in the Global North with over 5 million people struggling to get enough to eat.⁵⁵ In 2021, 8.8% of the UK population was food insecure and this was even higher, at 16.3%, in the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is the most marginalised⁵⁶ members of our local and global communities, including those who are racially marginalised, disabled and/or working-class, who continue to be the most impacted by food injustice.⁵⁷

Food commodity prices at the start of 2022 were at a 10-year high, and fuel prices at a seven-year high⁵⁸ worsening the challenges for those already barely able to put food on the table. We also know this picture has only gone worse throughout 2023 and is not set to get any better.⁵⁹ As food prices increase here in the UK, they also increase exponentially for those who are growing and producing food across the world. The food crisis impacting residents of Tower Hamlets is therefore tied inextricably to the climate and food injustice that is being experienced globally by friends, families and wider communities across various diasporas.



WHILST THE GOVERNMENT HAS PROVIDED LIMITED AMOUNTS OF ADDITIONAL FINANCIAL SUPPORT IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS CRISIS, THESE PROVISIONS ARE RESTRICTED IN BOTH THEIR ACCESSIBILITY AND THEIR LONG-TERM USEFULNESS.

54. Benton, T. G., Bieg, C., Harwatt, H., Pudasaini, R., Wellesley, L. (2021). 'Food system impacts on biodiversity loss'. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Chatham House, Compassion in World Farming.
55. Loopstra, R., Gordon, K., Okell, A., Hill, J. and Lambie-Mumford, H. (2022). ['Mapping and monitoring responses to the risk of rising food insecurity during the COVID-19 crisis across the UK, autumn 2020 to summer 2021'](#). Sustain.
56. See our glossary at the end of this publication for a definition of 'marginalised communities'
57. ['Good Food for all Londoners: Taking council action on food'](#). (2022). Sustain, London Food Link.
58. 'Food system impacts on biodiversity loss'.
59. Lawford, M. (2023). ['Inflation jumps unexpectedly as food shortages bite'](#). The Telegraph.

However, both local and national policy are currently insufficient to adequately address the challenges posed by our current context. In regards to food poverty, whilst the government has provided limited amounts of additional financial support in the context of this crisis, these provisions are restricted in both their accessibility and their long-term usefulness. Access to these provisions often requires subjecting vulnerable members of our communities who deserve support, to a dehumanising and invasive process of assessment in order to prove a 'genuine' need. Decades of cuts to public services and welfare 'reforms' such as the introduction of Universal Credit have already led to precarity and uncertainty becoming a permanent fixture in people's lives, as they are left reliant on bureaucratic services that are not fit for purpose.

The Good Food for All Londoners 2022 report also noted a reduction in active food poverty alliances and up-to-date food poverty action plans at the borough level across London, including the number of cash-first actions undertaken by councils. And even for those able to access such provisions, without addressing the wider systemic causes of food poverty, sporadic financial support is unsustainable as it limits people's abilities to imagine and plan options for the future: payments can be delayed or cancelled due to administrative errors and the introduction of new eligibility requirements. The many discussions held within the Blueprint Architect Group in the last three years testify of how trust in powerful institutions has been eroded, in part through the failures of existing systems, with local residents well aware that policy-making is too often driven by ideology rather than their human experience and needs.⁶⁰

When it comes to policy interventions targeting food-related impacts on the climate, the UK Government's 2022 Food Strategy also falls well short of what is required. According to the Climate Change Committee (CCC) - an independent, statutory body aimed at advising our government on reducing, preparing for and adapting to the impacts of climate change - current government plans largely fail to deliver action to drive down emissions at the scale or

pace required to achieve carbon emission reductions in line with the UK's declared Net Zero pathway. The experts also highlighted that the government's strategy has too little mention of the adaptations needed in the food system to build resilience to the climate and weather extremes expected in the future. Instead, the strategy relies almost entirely on innovation and technology to drive forward low-carbon agriculture and productivity improvements, many of which are untested and unproven.⁶¹ All in all, the government's approach focuses more on promoting the economic viability of food consumption rather than recognising that a robust food system is an integral aspect of the wellbeing of individuals and communities.

Recognising the influential role that cities can play in achieving a sustainable future, the Mayor of London has set ambitious targets for London to become a leading net zero-carbon city by 2030 and zero-waste city by 2050. Alongside this, three-quarters of London's boroughs have set targets to reach net zero by 2030. Such commitments are important steps in the transition towards a more sustainable future, with the city's zero-carbon ambition exceeding the UK's national targets.⁶² Most recently, Sadiq Khan has announced a £130 million emergency fund to ensure all primary school children in the capital can receive free school meals for the 2023/ 2024 academic year. And at the borough level, some councils are also prioritising children's access to healthy food through universal free school meals, including Tower Hamlets.⁶³

However, we know that a more holistic approach to the food and climate crisis is needed to move towards a truly reparative and sustainable food system. What we want is a food system that acknowledges its roots in colonial, capitalist extraction, so that whatever we build to replace it is centred in a totally different set of values: care, dignity, and deep respect for all living beings and the land that sustains us. We ask for policy-making that puts these values at the heart of the policy-making process, every step of the way.



THE FOOD CRISIS IMPACTING RESIDENTS OF TOWER HAMLETS IS THEREFORE TIED INEXTRICABLY TO THE CLIMATE AND FOOD INJUSTICE THAT IS BEING EXPERIENCED GLOBALLY

'Food Histories of Tower Hamlets', a map of local food history, produced through the 'Food Lives' project by WEN and University of Sussex

The equity framework that is at the heart of Platform's work to transition towards a fairer and greener London requires all policies ensure that traditionally marginalised groups benefit first (whether on account of geography, ability, economic status, gender, age, sexuality, residency or other status), and that new and adequate policies repair underlying causes of inequity to promote universal well-being.⁶⁴ It locates communities at the centre of all policy decision-making and implementation, and ensures that they have the agency and support to hold representatives accountable. We believe that good policy-making starts with listening, and empowering the people who have been most affected by the issues at stake to design and drive the solutions to their own challenges.



60. 'London Leap: Just Transition Values'

61. 'Government's Food Strategy 'a missed opportunity' for the climate'. (2022). Climate Change Committee.

62. 'London's Food Footprint'. (2021). ReLondon, Circle Economy. p.12

63. 'Good Food for all Londoners: Taking council action on food'.

64. Kaur Paul, H., Walker, K., Sheikh, S., (2021). 'London Leap: Participatory policies for a fairer and greener London'. Platform London.

How can we begin to repair?



Learnings and recommendations

With the awareness of the deep and pervasive root causes of inequality within our current food system, as outlined in the previous chapters, we know the task of repair is going to be no small order. As a community-led research initiative, we are not mainstream policy experts, but our recommendations have the benefit of being rooted in what local residents and organisers felt was most pressing from their perspective as people with first-hand experience of food injustice. We appreciate the list below is non-exhaustive but we hope it sets the right level of ambition for a just food and climate transition that empowers and resources communities to repair the violence they have endured under the current food system.

What are the steps needed for local communities to not just survive the food and climate crisis, but to be at the forefront of designing a new system that provides nourishment and sustenance for all?

Our recommendations have emerged from a process that is built on the same equity framework that we desire from our policy-makers. They are products of collective thinking and reflect the needs and desires of our communities for a more just and fair food system. Shifting narratives should not be tokenistic and surface-level, but instead enable meaningful commitment to lasting change. Our recommendations therefore focus not only on problems, but also on pointing towards what we believe to be transformative solutions. In this section we have included, where possible, case studies and examples from projects and people in Tower Hamlets already leading the way.

Food Insecurity



The issue at a glance

With the current cost of living crisis, prices of necessities including food and energy bills are soaring ever higher, whilst incomes are either stagnating or disappearing altogether due to unemployment and cuts to social provisions and benefits. **The socio-economic crisis is of immediate concern as it has resulted in people struggling to meet their basic needs, making it difficult to find the time and energy to focus on anything beyond survival.** More and more people are being pushed deeper into food insecurity, resulting in people limiting their diets, relying on food banks or being pushed to consider cost over nutritional value when shopping. [Trussell Trust](#) (food bank) usage, which is often used as a measure of acute food poverty, is up 284% since 2012.⁶⁵ Health issues are on the rise as a direct result of poor quality diets that are perceived as the only economically viable option ([Global Nutrition Report, 2021](#)).⁶⁶ **Rather than creating infrastructure to promote agency and interdependence within the food system, food bank usage has instead become an accepted part of the government's response to food poverty.**

This approach is not fit for purpose. Proper food provision should be the norm within our communities, without relying upon donations. Shortages of food are now being reported by many food banks around the country as a result of donations falling, given that those who once supported such facilities are no longer financially able to do so. For the first time, the need for emergency food provisions is outstripping donations.⁶⁷ [House of Annetta](#), a Just FACT partner and social centre organising for systems change through architecture and art, emphasises the need for radically reorienting the food system rather than building up exceptions until they become the rule.

Emergency food provisions will never be adequate compensation for a lack of structural change.

For people seeking asylum living in government hotels, the situation is even more dire. Given a complete lack of autonomy over food choices and a limited weekly allowance (just £9.58 in catered accommodation),⁶⁸ people are struggling to get the food they need. This has resulted in significant health and wellbeing concerns, as well as reports of children suffering from malnutrition.⁶⁹ People seeking asylum have found the food provided in hotels 'intolerable, inappropriate for certain dietary requirements and consisting mostly of processed or canned food and pasta, with a lack of fresh fruit and vegetables'.⁷⁰ They are not allowed to cook for themselves in hotels and are not made aware of community hubs with working kitchens, nor do they have the money for travel or ingredients. Culturally appropriate food is vital to a sense of cultural identity, connecting with others, and for familiarity and comfort for migrants. **Being able to cook and eat food that is enjoyable should be a human right.** At [Limborough Hub](#)⁷¹ (a Just FACT community kitchen and food hub), Quaker Social Action (QSA) use the space to invite people seeking asylum to be able to cook their own food and use fresh produce from the garden. QSA has had a total of 31 participants over 14 sessions since May 2022, through collaboration with various migrant support groups and organisations.

Addressing food insecurity is at the heart of our recommendations. We need a food system that is just and fair, addressing issues of access, affordability and ownership. One that is rooted in care and deep recognition of everyone's dignity, and which builds community wealth rather than focusing on systematic commodification and profit.

65. 'Tackling the True Cost of Living by Strengthening our Social Security System'. (2022). The Trussell Trust.

66. Springmann, M., Mozaffarian, D., Rozenweig, C., and Micha, R., (2021). 'What we eat matters: Health and environmental impacts of diets worldwide' in 'Global Nutrition Report 2021'.

67. 'Mid-Year Stats'. (2022). The Trussell Trust.

68. 'Asylum support'. gov.uk.

69. Taylor, D. (2023). 'Children in England's asylum hotels suffering from malnutrition'. The Guardian.

70. Pettitt, J., Tsangarides, N. (2022). 'Research Study on the Needs, Experiences & Capacities of People Seeking Asylum in London'. Greater London Authority.

71. 'Limborough Food Hub'. Women's Environmental Network.

Our recommendations

1. Support the development of local and affordable networks for food distribution

Connecting residents to local food growers and distributors can provide access to fresh and affordable food, whilst also supporting local businesses. **The Architects ask** that councils promote and look for opportunities to support existing affordable and community-led food initiatives rather than supermarkets or large corporations. A great example is [St Hilda's Food Co-op](#), which is part of a growing network of co-ops across Tower Hamlets. The Food Co-op serves around 80 customers a week, and supplies healthy, affordable culturally appropriate food to local communities, including fresh and nutritious fruit and vegetables. It also increases access to produce that is organic, locally sourced and packaging free. The Co-op is a place to shop, chat and meet. It is a space where people can access other projects and services, including initiatives designed to improve wellbeing, increase social networks and tackle isolation. It provides work experience, as well as training and mentoring for volunteers – the majority of whom are local women. Limborough Hub's collaboration with QSA (as mentioned on p.30) is another example of a community-led initiative that provides access to culturally appropriate food in a way that centres the agency and dignity of local people. These kinds of initiatives deserve our attention and support.

The Architects also ask for local councils to consider allocating funds towards improving the efficiency of local food distribution systems improving links between local producers and traders, so the journey from farm to fork can be as short and local as possible. Alongside this people want to see more transparency of where food has come from and how far it has travelled. In interviews, the Food Co-op co-ordinators from [Limehouse Town Hall](#) and [Leaders in Community](#), as well as urban designers from [R-Urban](#) all expressed a desire to demystify the process behind the UK's food supply, including transparency around the power of supermarkets, which our future work as the Blueprint Architect Group will focus more on going forward.

2. Integrate food policies into wider cross-sector policies

Food justice is a cross-sector concern and should be considered in every aspect of local policy. **The Architects ask** that policy around food justice be integrated with existing policies on climate, health and wellbeing as well as housing – given the extent to which these areas are interlinked. Food could also be better integrated to existing green space and climate resilient funds such as 'Grow Back Greener' and the 'Green Resilience Fund' where currently the focus is on planting trees, but could be complemented with food growing objectives. **The Architects also ask** that food infrastructure be a central aspect of any local green space strategies that are developed. [R-Urban Poplar](#) is a great example of a civic hub embedded in a housing estate that provides opportunities for both [food growing and waste management](#), which holistic food policy-marking could [draw and learn from](#).



More information

Check out a video about Limborough Community Food Hub



Check out a short video on Instagram about the food co-op at Leaders in Community and some of their new initiatives for the local community





ADDRESSING FOOD INSECURITY IS AT THE HEART OF OUR RECOMMENDATIONS. WE NEED A FOOD SYSTEM THAT IS JUST AND FAIR, ADDRESSING ISSUES OF ACCESS, AFFORDABILITY AND OWNERSHIP.

also support renewable energy production and help create local green training and employment opportunities, alongside offering further support to existing, thriving food growing cultures. **The Architects therefore ask** for the introduction of new policies, designed in collaboration with the community and existing local projects (such as those mentioned above), that explicitly target composting and waste management in relation to the food system. **The Architects also ask** for local councils to commit to providing resources and funding towards research targeting the repurposing of waste materials within urban communities. Just FACT partner **MAD LEAP**⁷² have built an urban composting project and use waste management to grow food and power their mushroom farm. They advocate for an efficient model of food waste collection from housing estates that can be used to grow food, whilst creating local jobs in the process.

72. 'Home'. MAD LEAP.

3. Repurpose waste materials and reintroduce them into the food system

As demonstrated by the work of local initiatives such as **R-Urban Poplar**, 'waste' can often be repurposed into new and useful materials. This enables the reuse of resources, whilst reducing the impacts of traditional waste management and disposal methods. A key aim of the project is to build a localised circular food system. This involves working with **MAD LEAP** to develop anaerobic digestion (AD) and composting systems to deal with local food waste on the Teviot Estate. The digestate (fertiliser) from the AD, and compost from the composting units, is used to grow food in the allotment spaces, and the gas produced powers the community kitchen. Currently organic waste is transported 10-50 miles to landfill sites or processing facilities. Local waste management through AD and growing food using the by-products for local consumption has the potential to save over 73 tonnes carbon emissions per year (per system, processing 1 tonne of food waste per day), compared with business as usual. On site waste management can

Advocacy and Agency

The issue at a glance

For a community-driven food system to be possible, local communities and organisations must be involved at every stage of the policy-making process; from suggestion to creation to implementation. **Local residents, if empowered to do so, can and should be actively involved in the decision making process regarding the future of their boroughs, and their food system should be shaped by their own experience and knowledge.** There is currently no existing process or planned infrastructure that adequately promotes the inclusion of marginalised and community-informed voices in policy-making in regards to the food system, either at a local or national level. Without this, policies that are created will fail to fully reflect the wisdom held by those on the frontline of food injustice.

From our own research and discussions within the Blueprint Architect group, we know that many community members feel that they are not being heard by council representatives, and that the issues they face are not considered priorities. This has inhibited their sense of agency over the future of the spaces in which they live and work. The current power structures and inaccessible language often used in political spaces limit the potential impact of the ideas and work being done at a grassroots level towards a more just and fair food system. An overall recommendation would be for the council to create accessible and inclusive spaces for conversations (as in not laden with policy and bureaucratic jargon) with constituents, allowing them to participate fully in a democratic process. **This should go hand in hand with supporting and amplifying the work of existing community-led food projects.**

Our Recommendations

1. Prioritise transparency of all council operations including the policy-making process

Feedback from members of the community demonstrated that a vast majority found it hard to find information on how policies are created as well as who to speak to for support in engaging with local food growing projects. **The Architects ask** for more clarity around which specific areas each council member is responsible for, when it comes to issues related to food. For instance, having clear pathways on who to contact for joining an existing community garden or starting a new one, including getting advice on land ownership and soil quality. This could also look like having more clarity on which council representatives to come to for issues specifically related to food justice as the borough has a growing web of grassroots projects actively working towards building alternative food systems. Last but not least, intentional outreach to improve local people's understanding of how food policies and action plans are designed, carried out, and especially how they are to be navigated by residents is key to ensuring that the benefits of such plans are accessible to residents.



2. Community involvement throughout the process of policy making

Many residents perceive the council's engagement with local communities as disingenuous and that communities are often disregarded. Often the opportunities to express concerns can often only be voiced at the implementation stage of a consultation. **The Architects ask** for the development of authentic pathways towards participatory-led local planning, with councils being able to demonstrate that they have worked alongside local communities and organisations in every step of their policy-making process. This includes involvement in the planning, shaping and implementation of all policies. One way in which this can be done is through Citizens Assemblies. At the national level, the 'Climate Assembly UK'⁷³ is a good example of how a diverse and representative group of citizens can be brought together to learn about, discuss climate change, and reach conclusions about what they think should happen. To avoid being tokenistic⁷⁴ or extractive of the energy and resources of local residents, especially those already struggling in the face of the food crisis, any similar process at the borough-level should ensure that local residents are given the support and resources they need to actively participate. A great starting point would be to look at how to uplift and collaborate with existing initiatives working with similar intentions in Tower Hamlets - including all [Just FACT](#) partners and those listed in the '[Tower Hamlets Food Support directory](#)'⁷⁵ - to avoid replicating labour and building from what already exists.

3. Distribute power from local authorities into community-led projects, particularly over green and food growing spaces of all kinds

Local councils need to trust and ramp up involvement of local community growing projects in the planning and management of their green spaces. **The Architects ask** for the implementation of 'public stewardship' opportunities, where communities have increased ownership and responsibility over the green spaces around them. For example, in Hackney Council, residents were asked to form a residents group so people could apply for funding for a food growing space within a council park.⁷⁶ There is an opportunity to involve community members more in decision-making on how best to use available land to meet local needs, rather than outsourcing this to people who live and work outside the community. **Community wealth building is a key method to push back against the privatisation and commodification of our community spaces.** A great case study in this regard is Newham, where the council launched its Community Wealth Building Strategy in 2020, with the aim of using its purchasing power and influence to keep wealth in the local economy. The council procures food and catering from local small and medium enterprises, co-ops and CICs and is actively helping these food providers get onto council supplier lists, as well as integrating them into contracts for healthy and sustainable food in council-run settings, such as nurseries and care settings.⁷⁷

73. '[About](#)'. Climate Assembly UK.

74. See our glossary at the end of this publication for a definition of 'tokenism'

75. Wilson, J. (2022). [Tower Hamlets Food Support](#). Women's Environmental Network.

76. [Allotments and Growing Food](#). Hackney Council.

77. Sustain, London Food Link. (2022). '[Good Food for all Londoners: Taking council action on food](#)' p.21

Resources and Funding

The issue at a glance

Financial policy relating to food in the UK positions food as an industry rather than the foundation of a good life, focusing on increasing profits over access to affordable and high-quality food. Besides, funding allocated to local councils from central government has been critically low. Many local authorities are increasingly stretched with their resources and having to focus on the meeting most basic requirements only because their funding has been so slashed. By focusing primarily on exports, international trade agreements and market access, **the UK financial response to the food crisis continues to circulate money between multinational corporations⁷⁸ instead of directing funding opportunities towards local and community-led solutions to food injustice.** In doing so, it prioritises the desires of banks and businesses over the needs of communities across the country. Ironically, many of such banks, corporations and commodity trading companies are based in Tower Hamlets' very own hub of global finance: Canary Wharf. This highlights the immense inequalities in the borough, with resources lacking for those who are working to fight against food injustice on the ground right beside the headquarters of some of the world's wealthiest, most powerful corporations. **What is needed on the ground includes funds but also time, people and spaces to organise in.**

The Blueprint Architects ask that councils meaningfully recognise and commit to prioritising resources and funding towards local initiatives taking a bottom-up approach to tackling food injustice in the borough and beyond. Food injustice is inextricable from labour rights, and a just and socially equitable food system requires that everyone, and in particular those working within the food system, be given a livable wage that reflects their importance to our communities. Councils can set the example by ensuring that this is the case for any workers they employ themselves whilst also exploring ways of supporting trade union organising for most affected workers in Tower Hamlets at large.

"Imagine if institutional philanthropy was accountable to communities and genuinely willing to sacrifice. Imagine if it understood the joy that leaps through the cracks of oppression or had enough faith in communities to determine their destinies and win. Philanthropy should be a tool that rebalances power, supports communities to grow theirs, and moves away from an institutional practice to a cultural one, where risk and reward are shared."

— Derek A Bardowell, 'What if, Reimagining Philanthropy'⁷⁹

78. '[Food insecurity: Government response to the Committee's Second Report](#)'. (2022). House of Commons International Development Committee.

79. Bardowell, D. A., (2022). '[Philanthropy is a model of preservation, not transformation. Here's how to change that](#)'. Alliance.

Our Recommendations

1. Fairer wages for those working in the food system which reflect their value in society, particularly food growers

Food growers and other workers within the food system play a vital role in maintaining the health and wellbeing of our communities. Yet, they are often underpaid and forced into precarious working conditions. **The Architects ask** that food growers are recognised as key, essential workers due to their service to the community, and for them to be remunerated accordingly. **The Architects also ask** that all food industry workers – from delivery drivers to food distributors and from food shops service workers to warehouse workers – also be recognised as key workers due to their contribution to the food system and to be waged accordingly, with a salary equal or superior to a London Living Wage for all those working in the capital. Everyone involved in the food system should be provided with adequate living wages and secure contracts, and local councils should aim to provide local food growing projects with the funds necessary to recruit fairly paid staff.

FINANCIAL POLICY
RELATING TO FOOD IN THE
UK POSITIONS FOOD AS AN
INDUSTRY RATHER THAN
THE FOUNDATION OF A
GOOD LIFE, FOCUSING ON
INCREASING PROFITS OVER
ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE
AND HIGH-QUALITY FOOD.

2. Fund local initiatives that are working towards a more just and fair food system

Currently, many local initiatives working on food injustice lack the funding necessary to engage in long-term projects. **The Architects ask** that local authorities commit to ensuring that more long-term and sustainable funding is available for community-led food projects wherever possible, to address issues such as long-term staffing and training costs, so that skills do not constantly leave organisations because of an overreliance on volunteer labour. During our interviews with Just FACT partners, many raised frustrations with scarce funding. **St. Hilda's Food Co-op** has struggled with staff capacity and volunteer dependence, unable to dedicate time to set up more co-ops to ensure long-term sustainability in the way they had planned to. Without securing more funding, they fear closure. Local community farmers at **MAD LEAP** emphasise the need for projects to be funded well, so that farmers can focus on growing and research, rather than skills they are unfamiliar with like marketing or sales. Food co-op managers from **Limehouse Town Hall** and **Leaders in Community** express the frustration at only being resourced enough hours to deliver the service, but for no time to trial new creative ideas or make the co-op feel alive and more welcoming to residents. Expert input could also be properly resourced by councils in order to avoid the persistence of unsustainable growing techniques. Councils should be able to subsidise soil sampling and necessary training to ensure local food growers employ more sustainable methods. In addition, **the Architects ask** that supermarket subsidies from the government at all levels be reduced in favour of subsidising food growing at peri-urban and rural levels to support affordability for urban demand. Last but not least, **as BPoC⁸⁰ residents are those both historically and currently most impacted by food injustice, we urge councils to prioritise support for BPoC-led community food projects** e.g. through targeted grants. Councils should also play a role by making targeted efforts in supporting BPoC residents to access community food growing spaces or allotments, including (but not limited to) language specific outreach.



The food co-op at St. Hilda's East Community Centre, Shoreditch, E2

3. Incentivise businesses to engage more meaningfully in our local food system

There is currently a disconnect between the corporate sector and local communities of Tower Hamlets, despite both inhabiting the same space. By leveraging the social responsibility obligations of large companies that work within the borough and pushing them to support sustainable and local food growing projects, we can integrate these two worlds to create more united and just boroughs. For example, to combat rising food prices, **St Hilda's Food Co-op** is considering a redistribution model for high-income residents to pay a membership fee, or to secure corporate sponsorship from local companies. For smaller local businesses, **the Architects ask** for the development of grants to encourage innovative and sustained engagement with community-led growing spaces, as well as setting up business awards for good alternative and sustainable growing practices. This includes supporting small food businesses in transitioning towards more sustainable options through funding and training. In doing so, we will then be able to engage a wide variety of actors to facilitate the transition towards a more just food system. A local example of this being done is through **Plastic Free Poplar**, a community-led project which is all about supporting local market traders to transition away from plastic in a way that centres their needs and minimises negative impact on their business practice.⁸¹

—● **More information**
Find out more about
Plastic Free Poplar



80. See our glossary at the end of this publication for a definition of 'BPoC'

81. '[Plastic Free Poplar](#)'. Sunny Jar Eco Hub.

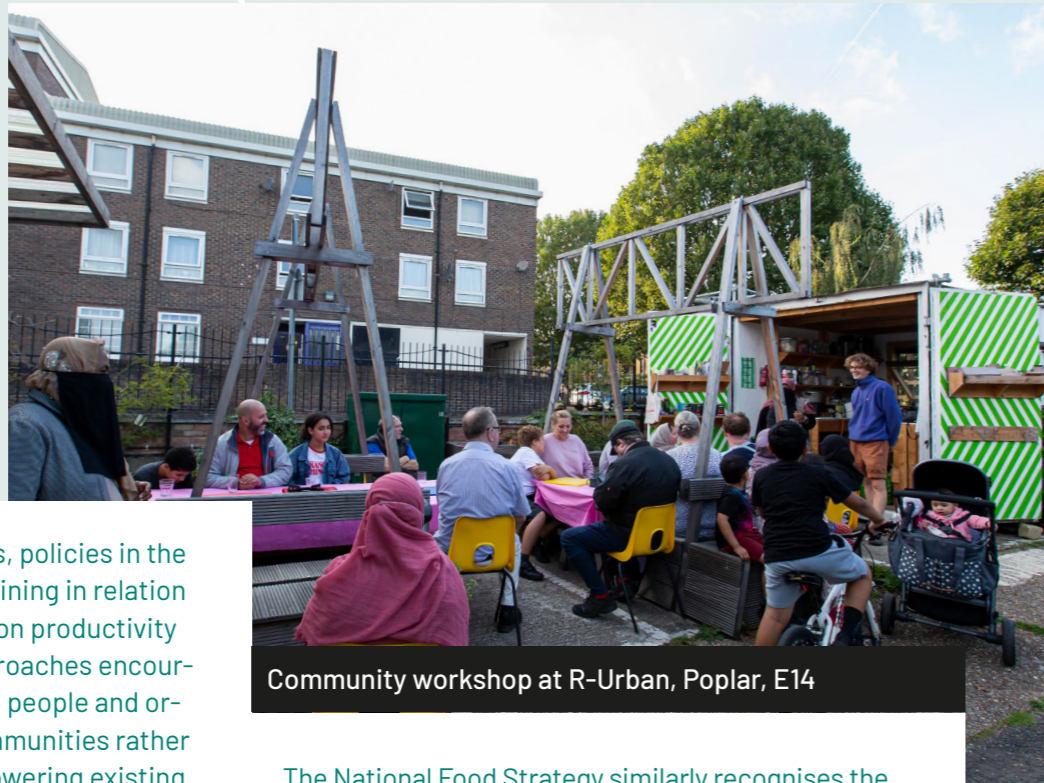
Knowledge and Training

The issue at a glance

Much like national financial policies, policies in the UK that address knowledge and training in relation to the food system focus primarily on productivity and output.⁸² In doing so, such approaches encourage the outsourcing of solutions to people and organisations from outside local communities rather than properly resourcing and empowering existing pools of knowledge and labour. It is important that training be centred on principles of food justice and empower community-led wisdom. Organisers at **House of Annetta** point out the issues with agroecology and the limitations inherent to how urban green spaces are typically advocated for. Often, agroecology courses do not stress the need for community ownership. As **House of Annetta** put it, mainstream agroecology 'starts on the assumption you are a wealthy landowner, and you are designing something to be your little slice of paradise. But it shouldn't be about private land ownership, it should be about building a community resource'.⁸³



Outreach stall at Limbrough Community Food Hub, Poplar, E14



Community workshop at R-Urban, Poplar, E14

The National Food Strategy similarly recognises the significance of incorporating well-informed knowledge about food into school curriculums but overlooks the importance of localised knowledge and of relationship building with local food growers and distributors. The food crisis has impacted communities in complex ways and constructing a single, simplified national curriculum could undermine the unique challenges each community is experiencing. The food crisis in Tower Hamlets is, for example, shaped by the ongoing gentrification of the borough, and a localised curriculum would allow this discussion to be incorporated into lessons about the food system.

Better ways of sharing knowledge and information are needed to ensure individuals are increasingly aware of what is happening locally and how to connect to each other. Cultural and local skills must be enhanced and platformed, firstly by recognising and valuing them as meaningful sources of knowledge. Secondly, by providing the resources necessary to share these skills, experience and knowledge with others in the community and beyond.

Our Recommendations

1. Provide paid opportunities and training for people to work within the food system, particularly in food growing

Throughout this research process, we have met many community members who have expressed interest in working within the food system, particularly in food growing, but have felt they lacked the necessary knowledge to do so. **The Architects ask** that local councils commit to developing paid training opportunities to increase access into a sustainable food sector. In particular, **the Architects ask** for the development of schemes that retrain people on how to transfer their existing skills into sustainable food growing practices that can benefit their communities. We believe that such schemes should focus on youth, but also on people who have worked in ecologically damaging industries, e.g. those driven by fossil fuels, as a viable means of promoting access to green jobs. This is critical for a just and sustainable transition more generally, as it would facilitate the downscaling of these harmful industries without leaving workers unemployed. An example of this being done with a focus on youth is through [Feedback's 'Green Futures'](#) project, a Buckinghamshire based initiative aimed at supporting the local green economy and addressing youth unemployment through reconnecting young people to food, land and nature.⁸⁴

— **More information**
Find out more about
Misery here



82. 'Government Food Strategy'. (2022). Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.
83. House of Annetta. Interview. Conducted by Platform London. 26th July 2023.
84. 'Green Futures'. Feedback.
85. 'Tower Hamlets Food Growing Network'. Women's Environmental Network.
86. 'R-URBAN London'. R-URBAN.
87. 'Instagram'. @miseryparty.

2. Integrate knowledge about food systems into local schools and curriculums

Children are central to the present and future of all parts of our society, including our food system. **The Architects ask** that just and fair methods of food growing and food consumption be integrated into the curriculum to support long-term cultural shifts towards sustainability and fairness. **The Architects also ask** that produce for school meals be procured from local food growing initiatives to develop relationships between schools and community organisations, to enhance children's awareness of local food projects and to ensure that children are being given fresh, healthy food as often as possible.

3. Recognise, resource and connect local sources of knowledge of food and food growing

There is a wealth of knowledge that exists within communities, but there is no infrastructure in place to properly compensate and connect community members who hold such knowledge. **The Architects ask** that local councils recognise the value of local knowledge of the land, of food growing, and of community needs by properly resourcing people with the relevant expertise to advise and provide support to new and ongoing projects. **The Architects also ask** for local authorities to support the development of an accessible network of local food growers and of other local individuals and organisations working within the food system, so that people in need are aware of where to look for support. One example of this being done is through the [Tower Hamlets Food Growing Network](#), currently run by WEN. The network runs seasonal gatherings and provides direct practical support and training to local groups wanting to set up gardens.⁸⁵ Another example is how the team running [R-Urban Poplar community garden](#) has collaborated with local community members on workshops, where they have shared food growing and cooking knowledge with others within the community.⁸⁶ Another great example is [Misery](#)⁸⁷ - a mental health collective for queer, trans and non-binary people of colour to come together and exchange knowledge about the land and growing. They hold monthly gatherings at Bethnal Green Nature Reserve and are a new partner in the wider Just FACT programme.

Land Use

The issue at a glance

The global food system continues to be the biggest contributor to biodiversity loss, deforestation, drought, freshwater pollution and the collapse of aquatic wildlife.⁸⁸ Industrial agriculture is the second-biggest contributor to climate change, after the energy industry.⁸⁹ Climate justice is tied inextricably to the sustainable and fair use of land for the food system. However, whilst climate concerns are increasingly central to policy planning for the future, there is little consideration of this overlap between the climate and our food.

For example, [Tower Hamlets Council](#) has introduced strategies to encourage tree planting in the borough to reduce carbon emissions and improve air quality.⁹⁰ However, current strategies do not explore the potential of similar initiatives for food production, including by planting fruit trees in low pollution areas and introducing their use into local food systems. Whether positive or negative, **the use of land impacts both our climate and our food system, and policies relating to one must always address the other.**

“The whole regeneration and built environment agendas – house building, placemaking and more – are all about communities. If they’re not about people, then what are they about?”

— Palma Black

More generally, despite living and working in the borough, **local communities continue to be deprived of the agency to make decisions on how to best use the land that they live on.** There is currently little transparency over land ownership in each borough, and this inherently limits the possibilities for long-term, borough-wide food growing. Despite registries of land ownership being accessible online for Tower Hamlets, the information is published in such an inaccessible format that it seriously hinders ordinary citizens’ ability to effectively understand which bit of land is owned by whom, and which could be used for community-led purposes.

Food justice is inextricably linked to land justice as food growing, particularly through a borough-wide lens, requires access to usable land. The system of land ownership that we experience today in the UK has been built on colonial structures that need to be dismantled to give fairer and more equitable access to land for growing. In a nutshell, we need local authorities to explore and strengthen pathways set out to enable more and more residents to access land for food growing, proactively seek land to increase access, and ensure this is available to diverse communities.⁹¹



Our Recommendations

1. Implementing policies that encourage and promote more communal access to land

As new residential and commercial sites are built throughout the borough, local residents feel as though there is increasingly less space being allocated for the community. **The Architects ask** that the council commit to developing more public spaces with dedicated food growing areas, including more parks, community gardens and allotments. Policies should ensure that accessible green and food growing spaces are proportional to expanding neighbourhoods and housing developments to have the necessary capacity to provide for their needs. The council’s urban planning should prioritise the need for food growing spaces, developing planning policies in collaboration with local community partners already doing this work using a bottom-up approach (both indoors and outdoors). This is relevant especially in the context of new housing developments. A best practice case study is **MAD LEAP’s** mushroom farm, based in Poplar as part of a wider civic hub owned by Public Works. The initiative is embedded within a housing estate and has a number of climate justice projects sharing space. The mushroom farmers speak about a sense of pride and ownership in having a permanent space to grow and experiment, and how different things happening in one spot creates a hub that draws local people in.

88. ‘Annual Report 2021’. (2021). United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

89. ‘Global Greenhouse Gas Emissions Data’. (2022). United States Environmental Protection Agency.

90. ‘Climate Emergency’. (2021). Tower Hamlets Council.

91. Sustain, London Food Link. (2022). ‘Good Food for all Londoners: Taking council action on food’.

— **More information**
Check out MAD
LEAP’s work here



Alani Shafiq - Mushroom Farmer, Amateur Mycologist and Regenerative Activist at MAD LEAP



2. Better use of existing public spaces

Within the borough, Blueprint Architects noted that there are already numerous underused public spaces that could be better utilised to meet the needs of the community. Dependent on soil quality, parks can also be used as public growing spaces for vegetables or fruit trees, which are more resilient to poor soil quality than other kinds of food. This, however, requires improved legislation, research and transparency regarding both land quality and land ownership of public green spaces in order to allow local communities to make informed decisions. We also recommend the introduction of policies that prevent existing gardens from being concreted over, and recognise their importance to both our food system and the local environment. A best practice example here is **Waltham Forest Council** who has long supported and promoted community food growing gardens and small plots in the borough. In the last year, the council has doubled the offer to residents by reducing the maximum size of an allotment from 10 rods (traditional full-size allotment) to 5 rods, getting more newcomers to grow their own. The council ensures allotments are used at their full capacity, keeps allotment lists active and diverse, and encourages allotment plot holders to grow organic. Further work is now taking place across council services to encourage the use of public realm land for greening and food growing.⁹²

“A simple street tree could have the same cooling effect of 5 medium air conditioners – it’s almost like nature provides the best solutions”

— Greenpeace UK

3. Incentivise the use of private space for public good

To maximise land potential in the borough, **the Architects ask** that the council provide incentives to encourage individuals to use their private spaces to benefit the wider community. This could include providing financial incentives to people with gardens to use them for food growing, and/or offering a council tax reduction to incentivise local people or businesses to offer their private green spaces and gardens for community food growing. This can also look like actively supporting local farms and food growing businesses to develop their assets in a way that is accessible to, and benefits the local community. A great example of this being done is through the work of **folx farm**, a five acre farm located between Hastings and Rye, where a team of women and non-binary growers lovingly cultivate organically raised, hand tended salad, herbs and vegetables which can then be delivered directly to Tower Hamlets. Folx farm use a sliding scale payment system where customers can select the pricing that is most appropriate for their current personal circumstances. This is made possible thanks to donations from high-earning East London restaurants and other veg box customers who choose to pay more. They call this the ‘Food Access Fund’.⁹³



92. Sustain, London Food Link. (2022). ‘Good Food for all Londoners: Taking council action on food’. p.22

93. ‘Food Access Fund’. folx farm.

Conclusion

‘Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.’

— Arundhati Roy

The seeds have been sown and the recipe written: the transition towards a just food system is underway.

This publication aims to present our collective recommendations for the next steps necessary to transition towards a socially and environmentally just food system. Throughout the document, we have platformed democratic and community driven approaches, as they are more likely to centre collective benefit, embed sustainability, improve well-being, restore the environment and promote thriving sustainable neighbourhoods for the benefit of current and future generations.

Unfortunately, the reality is that the current structure of funding within the charity and organising sector forces community groups to replicate existing power dynamics and systemic inequities to continue to exist. Those who hold financial and socio-political power can influence which organisations have access to resources and support, and thus limit the potential for organisations to have the agency to push for radical change. For a socially just food system, policymakers, funders and local authorities must meaningfully commit not only to the principles of food justice, but also to supporting the creation of transparent and non-hierarchical forms of decision-making and governance. We invite action that stands firmly within Tower Hamlets’ trailblazing history of political progressivism – to grasp issues at their root and embrace bold solutions.



From policy-makers, funders, local authorities and all those with the socio-political power to shape our systems of governance, we ask that you meaningfully engage with and enact our recommendations. From our community members and neighbours in Tower Hamlets and beyond, we invite you to continue working with us on creating community-led solutions to food injustice.

The work of the Blueprint Architects offers an insight into the radical potential of investing time, resources and faith in local communities. By shifting power from bureaucratic institutions into the hands of the communities at the forefront of food injustice, the group has produced policy recommendations and a vision for the future that truly reflects the needs and desires of Tower Hamlets communities. This publication, along with the participatory research method employed in its creation, is itself a testament to the wisdom and capacity of community members to engage with the policymaking process when given the space and resources to do so.

Local communities are where imaginative and ambitious ideas converge with practical knowledge, generating truly meaningful and effective solutions. Together, we can dream of a better world and usher in a fairer food system that provides nourishment and sustenance for all.

Acknowledgements

A huge thank you to all those who facilitated and participated in the research. In particular, thanks are extended to the Blueprint Architect group members, community organisers, and focus group participants for generously giving their time to share their experiences and insights with us and for providing feedback on the draft publication. Also, thanks to the entire community of Tower Hamlets, past and present, who - whether explicitly or implicitly, knowingly or unknowingly - have each contributed towards the collective imagining and work that has made this publication possible.



Thank you to the Big Lottery Climate Action Fund, Lankelly Chase, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Network for Social Change for making this work possible.

For more about us, check out [Platform](#) and [WEN](#). For project updates and content about food justice, follow our Instagram [@foodjusticeldn](#).



People who contributed to this research / members of the Blueprint Architect group:

Alani Shafiq
Ameen Kamlana
Andy Philpot
Aneita Lewis
Aqeelah Malek
Aska Welford
Cameron Bray
Chrissy Harrison
Dallas O'Dell
Didem Snaith
Dunia Tigris Gensler
Ella Frost
Farha Bi
Fatima Musa
Fran Edgerley
Honufa Islam
Juliana Kuperman
Kadeza Begum
Kamrul Islam
Kerran Kaur (aka Keke)
Liam Williams
Linda Tai
Lizzy Mace
Maymana Arefin
Melanie Salisbury
Nambi Kiyira
Nicola Power
Rachel Hippolyte
Rebecca Evans-Merritt
Rokiah Yaman
Romana Gill
Shaheda Aziz
Sonja Dunser
Sumayyah Zannath
Tom Estioko Blunt
Yolande Barnesly
Zana Millen
Zinebe Maach

Glossary

We acknowledge the limitations of the written word in trying to convey the essence of the human struggle for justice, equity, dignity and respect. The best that we can do is to let go of what language 'should' be used in this publication and speak as directly, honestly and openly as we can. However, there are words and terminology used in this publication that may not be familiar to all, and therefore this glossary has been put together.

Anti-racism - the policy or practice of opposing racism and promoting racial equality within relationships, institutions and society at large. 'Antiracism cannot be reduced to opposition to acts of racist violence, but must strive for a transformation of the conditions that enable and authorise racism in all its forms.'⁹⁴

BPoC - Black people and Person of Colour. A self-determined term for people who are not considered as 'white' within Western societies impacted by legacies of colonialism and racial capitalism.

Capitalism - capitalism is often thought of as an economic system in which private actors own and control property in accord with their interests, and demand and supply freely set prices in markets in a way that can serve the best interests of society. The essential feature of capitalism is the motive to make a profit, in order to continue expanding, and this manifests through new and renewed methods of exploitation and extraction.⁹⁵ "Capitalism requires inequality and racism enshrines it,"⁹⁶ with all mutations of capitalism thus being inherently reliant upon systems of historical and contemporary oppression rooted in racial, gendered and other forms of inequality.



Climate friendly - not harmful to the environment, especially because of not making climate change worse by producing carbon dioxide.

Climate justice - climate justice recognises the climate crisis as a social and political problem, as well as an environmental one. It acknowledges that different communities feel the effects of the climate crisis differently, and that the responsibility for the crisis rests with some countries and companies more than others. Central to climate justice is an understanding that those who've done the least to cause climate breakdown are the ones who suffer the worst of its effects, like flooding, drought, rising sea levels and heatwaves.

Colonialism - political and economic domination involving the control of a country and its people by settlers from a foreign power. In most cases, the goal of the colonising countries is to profit by exploiting the human and economic resources of the countries that are being colonised. In Western Europe, colonialism was justified by and rooted in a belief in the racial superiority of white Europeans over colonised people not considered as 'white'.

Decolonial - the unlearning of colonial methods of thinking, learning and organising, and the active creation of a new sense of humanity and interrelationality in its place.⁹⁷

94. Shafi, A. and Nagdee, I. (2022). 'Race to the Bottom: Reclaiming Antiracism'. London: Pluto Press.

95. Hickel, J. (2020). 'Less is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World'. London: Random House.

96. Card, K. 'Geographies of Racial Capitalism'. 2020. Gilmore, R. W., Antipode Foundation Films.

97. Torres, N. M. (2017). 'Fanon and Decolonial Thought', in Peters, M. A. (ed.), 'Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory'. Singapore: Springer, pp. 799-803.

Extractivism – a belief system that has been at the core of our economy for centuries – assuming that certain humans, along dividing lines of race, class, gender, geography, etc., are to be considered separate and superior to the rest of the living world. This ideology has informed European societies’ colonial conquests and parallel economic development. Today it is visible in rising levels of inequalities along similar dividing lines. Extractivism has been a mechanism of colonial and neocolonial⁹⁸ plunder, including within our food systems as it forged in the exploitation of the raw materials (sugar, tea, coffee, etc.) essential for the industrial development of the Global North.⁹⁹

Food justice – food justice has been defined as a movement to dismantle social inequalities to create access to healthy, available, nutritious and culturally relevant food. The food justice movement is inherently a social justice movement with the aim of eradicating any form of oppression that may restrain a person’s ability to access and participate in the food system.¹⁰⁰

Food system – this term includes all processes and infrastructure involved in feeding a population: growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, transporting, marketing, consumption, distribution, and waste management of food and food-related items. All parts of the food system are interconnected. Therefore, it can be difficult to just focus on one area as some organisations/ people are working across different parts of the system at the same time.

Food poverty – “the inability to acquire or consume an adequate or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so.”¹⁰¹

Greenhouse gases / GHG emissions – greenhouse gases (also known as GHGs) are gases in the earth’s atmosphere that trap heat and are changing the earth’s core temperature, hence the cause of global warming and climate change.

Just transition – a ‘just transition’ means moving to a more sustainable economy in a way that’s fair to everyone – and centring those who have been most impacted by polluting industries. This includes both workers and most affected communities.

Neocolonialism – political control by a rich country of a poorer country that should be independent and free to govern itself.¹⁰²

Marginalised communities – groups and communities that experience discrimination and exclusion (social, political and economic) because of unequal power relationships across economic, political, social and cultural dimensions.

Socially just – the objective of creating a fair and equal society in which each individual matters, their rights are recognised and protected, and decisions are made in ways that are fair and honest.

Structural racism/ racialisation and systemic racism – emphasises the role of societal structures (laws, policies, institutional practices and entrenched norms) in creating inequality of opportunity and outcome for black, indigenous and people of colour at large. It refers to the system’s scaffolding that upholds, produces, condones, and perpetuates widespread unfair treatment of people of colour. Because systemic racism includes structural racism, for brevity we often use systemic racism to refer to both.

Tokenism – people with power and racial privilege recruiting, hiring or platforming racially marginalised individuals in order to give the appearance of being anti-racist or anti-oppressive, but without redistributing or challenging their own power and privilege, and thus supporting ongoing systems of oppression.

98. See our glossary at the end of this publication for a definition of ‘neocolonialism’

99. Petras, J. Veltmeyer, H. (2014). ‘Extractive Imperialism in the Americas: Capitalism’s New Frontier’. Leiden: Brill.

100. This definition was drawn from [The Sankofa Report](#), p.3

101. Dowler, E., Turner, S., Dobson, B. (2001). ‘Poverty Bites: Food, Health and Poor Families’. London: Child Poverty Action Group.

102. Definition drawn from the online Cambridge dictionary.

Bibliography

[‘About’](#). Climate Assembly UK.

Acosta, A. (2013). [‘Extractivism and neoextractivism: two sides of the same curse’](#) in Lang, M., Mokrani, D. ‘Beyond Development: Alternative Visions from Latin America’. Amsterdam: Transnational Institute.

Almeida, A. (2021). [‘Pushed to the Margins: A Quantitative Analysis of Gentrification in London in the 2010s’](#). Runnymede Trust and Centre for Labour and Social Studies.

[‘Asylum support’](#). gov.uk.

Bardowell, D. A., (2022). [‘Philanthropy is a model of preservation, not transformation. Here’s how to change that’](#). Alliance.

BBC Local Democracy Reporter. (2023). [‘Bangladeshi and Pakistani workers in London three times less likely to earn a real living wage, report finds’](#). Whitechapel LDN.

Benton, T. G., Bieg, C., Harwatt, H., Pudasaini, R., Wellesley, L. (2021). [‘Food system impacts on biodiversity loss’](#). United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Chatham House, Compassion in World Farming.

Calliste, J. (2021). [‘This Land is Our Land’](#). New Economics Foundation.

Card, K. [‘Geographies of Racial Capitalism’](#). 2020. Gilmore, R. W., Antipode Foundation Films.

Climate Change Committee. (2022). [‘Government’s Food Strategy ‘a missed opportunity’ for the climate’](#).

Cradle Community. (2021). ‘Brick by Brick: How We Build a World Without Prisons’. London: Hajar Press.

Dalrymple, W. (2015). [‘The East India Company: The original corporate raiders’](#). The Guardian.

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. (2022). [‘Government Food Strategy’](#).

Dimbleby, H. (2021). [‘The National Food Strategy: The Plan’](#). National Food Strategy.

Dowler, E., Turner, S., Dobson, B. (2001). ‘Poverty Bites: Food, Health and Poor Families’. London: Child Poverty Action Group.

Feedback. [‘Green Futures’](#).

folx farm. [‘Food Access Fund’](#).

Food Matters. (2023). [‘The Sankofa Report: British Colonialism and the UK Food System’](#).

Hackney Council. [Allotments and Growing Food](#).

Hancox, D. (2020). [‘The ‘street food’ swindle: fake diversity, privatised space – and such small portions!’](#). The Guardian.

Hickel, J. (2020). ‘Less is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World’. London: Random House.

House of Annetta. Interview. Conducted by Platform London. 26th July 2023.

House of Commons International Development Committee. (2022). [‘Food insecurity: Government response to the Committee’s Second Report’](#).

Joseph Rowntree Foundation. (2022). [‘UK Poverty 2022: The Essential Guide to Understanding Poverty in the UK’](#).

Kaur Paul, H., Walker, K., Sheikh, S., (2021). [‘London Leap: Participatory policies for a fairer and greener London’](#). Platform London.

Kaur Paul, H. (2020). [‘Climate change affects rich and poor unequally. Climate justice redresses the balance’](#). Greenpeace.

Kehoe, C. (2022). [‘Bengali Squatters movement: Can the lessons of the past help ‘Save Brick Lane’ today?’](#). Whitechapel LDN.

Kehoe, C. (2023). [‘Empire builders: The Brick Lane property portfolio of Truman Estates Ltd and its power to alter the fabric of the East End’](#). Whitechapel LDN.

Lawford, M. (2023). [‘Inflation jumps unexpectedly as food shortages bite’](#). The Telegraph.

Loopstra, R., Gordon, K., Okell, A., Hill, J. and Lambie-Mumford, H. (2022). [‘Mapping and monitoring responses to the risk of rising food insecurity during the COVID-19 crisis across the UK, autumn 2020 to summer 2021’](#). Sustain.

MAD LEAP. [‘Home’](#).

Misery. [‘Instagram’](#). @miseryparty.

Mureithi, A. (2022). [‘How Brick Lane Fought Back Against Racism’](#). Open Democracy.

Nash, P. (2023). [‘A home away from home: Bangladesh independence and migration to the East End’](#). Whitechapel LDN.

Office for National Statistics. (2011). [‘2011 Census: Tenure - households, local authorities in England and Wales’](#).

Petras, J. Veltmeyer, H. (2014). [‘Extractive Imperialism in the Americas: Capitalism’s New Frontier’](#). Leiden: Brill.

Pettitt, J., Tsangarides, N. (2022). [‘Research Study on the Needs, Experiences & Capacities of People Seeking Asylum in London’](#). Greater London Authority.

Piñon, N. (2020). [‘There’s racism in our food system, too. Here’s how to combat it’](#). Mashable. [‘Plastic Free Poplar’](#). Sunny Jar Eco Hub.

Radley, D. (2021). [‘Food Poverty in older people and low-income families’](#). Tower Hamlets Council.

ReLondon, Circle Economy. (2021). [‘London’s Food Footprint’](#).

Resiere, D. (2023). [‘Chlordecone \(Kepone\) poisoning in the French Territories in the Americas’](#). The Lancet.

Robins, N. (2006). [‘The Corporation That Changed the World: How the East India Company Shaped the Modern Multinational’](#). Pluto Press.

R-URBAN. [‘R-URBAN London’](#).

Shafi, A. and Nagdee, I. (2022). [‘Race to the Bottom: Reclaiming Antiracism’](#). London: Pluto Press.

Sheera, S. (2022). [‘The summer of rebellion: remembering Brick Lane’s Bengalis and their fight against fascism’](#). gal-dem.com.

Snoussi, D., and Mompelat, L. (2019). [‘We are Ghosts’: Race, Class and Institutional Prejudice’](#). Runnymede Trust and Centre for Labour and Social Studies.

Springmann, M., Mozaffarian, D., Rozenweig, C., and Micha, R., (2021). [‘What we eat matters: Health and environmental impacts of diets worldwide’](#) in [‘Global Nutrition Report 2021’](#).

Sustain, London Food Link. (2022). [‘Good Food for all Londoners: Taking council action on food’](#).

Taylor, D. (2017). [‘It’s social cleansing: the 93-year-old fighting East London demolitions’](#). The Guardian.

Taylor, D. (2023). [‘Children in England’s asylum hotels suffering from malnutrition’](#). The Guardian.

Terry, N. (2023). [‘Jumping Fences: Land, Food and Racial Justice in British Farming’](#). Land in Our Names, Ecological Land Cooperative, Landworkers’ Alliance.

The Trussell Trust. (2022). [‘Mid-Year Stats’](#).

The Trussell Trust. (2022). [‘Tackling the True Cost of Living by Strengthening our Social Security System’](#).

Torres, N. M. (2017). [‘Fanon and Decolonial Thought’](#), in Peters, M. A. (ed.), [‘Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory’](#). Singapore: Springer.

Tower Hamlets Council. (2021). [‘Climate Emergency’](#).

Trevor, P. (2021). [‘Brick Lane 1978: The Turning Point’](#). {Exhibition}. Shown at Brady Arts and Community Centre, May 2023.

Uddin, T. (2020). [‘#SaveBrickLane: Why East London’s historic Bangladeshi communities are under attack’](#). gal-dem.com.

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). (2021). [‘Annual Report 2021’](#).

United States Environmental Protection Agency. (2022). [‘Global Greenhouse Gas Emissions Data’](#).

Walker, K., Sheikh, S. (2020). [‘London Leap: Just Transition Values’](#). Platform London.

Wetherell, S. (2021). [‘How the British Empire Built the Food System that Is Destroying the Planet’](#). Tribune.

Wilson, J. (2022). [‘Tower Hamlets Food Support’](#). Women’s Environmental Network.

Women’s Environmental Network. [‘Limborough Food Hub’](#).

Women’s Environmental Network. [‘Tower Hamlets Food Growing Network’](#).

Get involved!

We invite all members of the Tower Hamlets community - from artists to food organisations, from councillors to residents - to join this local food justice movement. We look forward to hearing from you!

For more information on how to get involved, you can contact:



Radhika (she/ her)
Arts & Food Justice
Group Coordinator
Radhika@platformlondon.org



Lauriem (they/ them)
Research Coordinator
Laurie@platformlondon.org



Hussina (she/ her)
Just FACT Programme Mobiliser
Hussina@wen.org.uk



Elle (she/ her)
Just Fact Programme Manager
Elle@wen.org.uk



Published in September 2023
By Platform London
c/o Oxford House, Bethnal Green, London, UK, E2 6HG
Platform is a company limited by guarantee no. 2658515
and a registered charity no. 1044485



Wen.

