

Local
Food



More than just the veg

Growing community capacity
through Local Food projects

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Executive summary

INTRODUCTION

Local Food is a £59.8 million funding programme that distributes money from the Big Lottery Fund (BIG) to a variety of food-related projects to help make locally grown food accessible and affordable to communities. Developed by a consortium of 17 national environmental organisations, the fund is managed by the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts (RSWT).

In 2009, Local Food commissioned the University of Gloucestershire's Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI), together with local food consultants f3, to undertake an evaluation of the Local Food programme, which runs from 2009 to 2014. This paper is an overview of the mid-term report of CCRI's findings, pending publication of the final report in 2014.¹

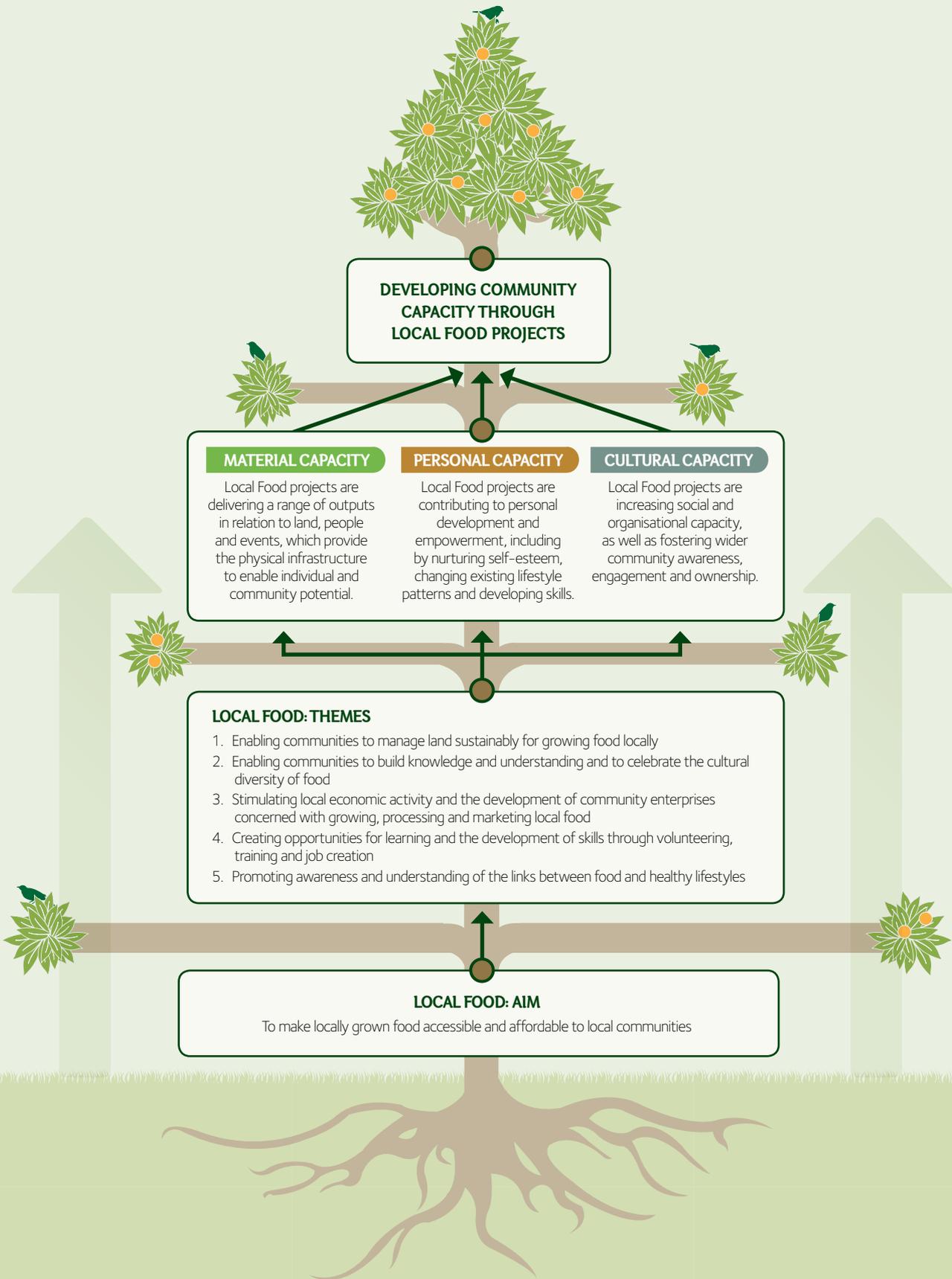
The evaluation so far has found that, as expected, the Local Food programme is bringing small, often neglected pieces of land into production, developing local infrastructure, and contributing to an increase in the physical quantity of food produced at a local level.

In addition, it is also clear that Local Food is a vehicle for a number of social benefits, including community cohesion, regeneration, healthy eating, educational enhancement, integrating disadvantaged groups into mainstream society, and developing people's skills so that they are better able to get into paid employment.

In summary, while delivering on the overall aim of making local food more accessible and affordable to communities, the programme is also helping to develop community capacity by building:

- 1 Material capacity:** Local Food projects are delivering a range of outputs in relation to land, people and events, which provide the physical infrastructure to enable individual and community potential.
- 2 Personal capacity:** Local Food projects are contributing to personal development and empowerment, including by nurturing self-esteem, changing existing lifestyle patterns and developing skills.
- 3 Cultural capacity:** Local Food projects are increasing social and organisational capacity, as well as fostering wider community awareness, engagement and ownership.

Delivering the overall aim and five themes of Local Food has resulted in building 'capacity' at three levels and, in the process, has helped develop the overall capacity and resilience of the communities involved.



The next section provides a brief summary of the context for CCRI's evaluation, as well as the methodology used, and the background to Local Food. Section 3 then explains the relevance of the notion of 'capacity' to an evaluation of Local Food, and reports the main trends and outputs that are emerging from this evaluation, structuring them on the basis of three forms of 'capacity' – material, personal and cultural – all of which are contributing to the overall development of community capacity. The findings are illustrated by a number of specific case study examples that help to demonstrate what Local Food is achieving. While each capacity is illustrated by one case study, all of the projects supported by Local Food exhibit all three capacities to a greater or lesser extent. Section 4 then briefly reflects on the achievements of Local Food to date, making a number of interim recommendations.

Local Food is a vehicle for community cohesion, regeneration, healthy eating, educational enhancement, integrating disadvantaged groups into mainstream society, and developing people's skills so that they are better able to get into paid employment.



Context and methodology

CONTEXT

CCRI's evaluation of the Local Food programme runs from 2009–2014, and the aim of this report is to present a mid-term overview of its key findings to date.

The overview comes at an important time for the local food sector. Within debates about food production and food security over the last five years or so in the UK, it is significant that at a governmental level local food has been largely side-lined. Instead, the focus has been on ensuring food supply chain resilience through 'sustainable intensification', with an emphasis on the quantity of food available at a national level².

However, there is an alternative perspective which argues that "definitions of food security should go beyond the quantity of food available to encompass the needs of communities, households and individuals"³. It then becomes possible to recognise those who might be facing food poverty at a local level⁴, and to develop policies that can help alleviate these problems and foster social inclusion and social justice⁵. This involves developing the social and cultural acceptability of food at a local level, educating people about the nutritional benefits of local food, and providing them with the necessary skills to both access and grow it for themselves.

While the Local Food programme was never intended to make a significant contribution to the overall quantity of food produced in the UK, it is evident from the findings in this report that it does play an important part in helping to ensure the resilience of the UK's food supply chains when resilience is couched in these broader terms.

BACKGROUND OF THE LOCAL FOOD PROGRAMME

Launched in November 2007, as part of the Big Lottery Fund's 'Changing Spaces' programme, Local Food is a £59.8 million programme that distributes grants to a variety of food-related projects.

It was developed by a consortium of organisations, meeting from July 2002 onwards, that included: the Black Environment Network; BTCV; Community Composting Network; FareShare; Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens; Garden Organic; GreenSpace; Groundwork; Learning Through Landscapes; National Allotment Gardens Trust; Permaculture Association (Britain); Soil Association; Sustain; Thrive; and the Women's Environmental Network. The Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts (RSWT) is the award partner for the Big Lottery Fund and is responsible for the programme delivery.

The programme was opened for applications in March 2008, with the overall aim of helping to make locally grown food accessible and affordable to local communities. It has encouraged the development of projects working towards five main themes:

- 1** To enable communities to manage land sustainably for growing food locally.
- 2** To enable communities to build knowledge and understanding and celebrate the cultural diversity of food.
- 3** To stimulate local economic activity and the development of community enterprises concerned with growing, processing and marketing local food.
- 4** To create opportunities for learning and the development of skills through volunteering, training and job creation.
- 5** To promote awareness and understanding of the links between local food and healthy lifestyles.

Consequently, local food, community enterprises, economic activity, health and education/learning are key elements of the Local Food programme. Projects are funded with the intention of improving local environments, developing a greater sense of community ownership and encouraging social, economic and environmental sustainability.

In this sense, Local Food projects are being used as a vehicle for enabling these wider societal changes to take place. By focusing on projects at the community level, the funding from Local Food is specifically working as a catalyst and enabler for positive change within communities.

Projects are funded with the intention of improving local environments, developing a greater sense of community ownership and encouraging social, economic and environmental sustainability.

Three sizes of grant have been available through Local Food, ranging from 'Small' grants (£2,000 to £10,000) to 'Main' grants (£10,001 to £300,000) and what are termed 'Beacon' grants (£300,001 to £500,000). Within these three overarching categories, there are 16 distinct project types, which have been reduced to three main groups for ease of analysis:

- **Enterprise**, including box schemes, farmers' markets, food cooperatives, Community Supported Agriculture, food redistribution and catering.
- **Community growing**, including composting, allotments, city farms, community food growing, community gardens and community land management.
- **Education and learning**, including celebrating food cultures, sharing good practice, education and learning, and school grounds.

These groupings are not mutually exclusive and it is recognised that specific project types can fall into more than one group. However, the division of project types into a small number of groups is useful when seeking to draw a representative sample of projects for detailed case study analysis.

At the time of publication of this mid-term overview, Local Food has supported more than 500 individual projects. These include 10 'Beacon' projects with a total value of £4.7 million; 308 'Main' projects with a total value of £42.1 million; and 194 'Small' projects with a total value of £1.6 million. 143 of these projects are now completed, with the remainder due to complete before the end of Local Food in March 2014.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY AND FRAMEWORK

Evaluating Local Food involves the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data is being collected across all the projects funded by Local Food, through 'end of grant' reports and project indicator forms, which will help provide the context, scale, scope, quantifiable outputs and initial understanding of the contribution that individual projects make to the overall success of Local Food.

To achieve a more 'human-centred' focus, data is also being collected through a detailed investigation of 50 projects – 40 of which will include project visits with the remainder involving telephone interviews. These have been selected to reflect the distribution of all 500 projects according to grant size, project theme, project type and location. Interviews have gathered information on the aims and scope of the project, their context, current state, current outputs and longer-term outcomes, as well as the legacy of the projects involved.

Emerging trends and outputs

Data collected shows that Local Food is undoubtedly about bringing small, often neglected pieces of land into production, developing local infrastructure and increasing the physical quantity of food produced at a local level.

However, it is also very much a vehicle for community cohesion, regeneration, healthy eating, educational enhancement, integrating disadvantaged groups into mainstream society, and developing people's skills so that they are better able to get into paid employment.

The diagram on page 4 shows how achieving the aim of Local Food can be conceptualised as building three forms of 'capacity' – material, personal and cultural – which, in turn, can be seen as developing community capacity through the medium of local food.

Underpinning the notion of capacity is the concept of 'social innovation', described as being "mould-breaking ways of confronting unmet social need by creating new and sustainable capabilities, assets or opportunities for change"⁶. This idea has been developed further by the introduction of the term 'grassroots innovations', used to describe "networks of activists

and organisations generating novel bottom-up solutions", which differ from top-down solutions in that they involve people at the community level "experimenting with social innovations" in order to satisfy human needs⁷.

Innovation within this context is not so much to do with technological or economic advances (although these are undoubtedly important); it is about encouraging changes in social practice.

This includes new forms of collaborative action, changes to attitudes, behaviour or perceptions, as well as developing new social structures and the capacity to build resilience at a community level. Inherent within this is the specific aim of increasing levels of participation, especially amongst those who had previously been excluded in some way; in so doing, those involved are empowered to take more control over their lives and to take a more active role in society.

As such, looking at the emerging trends and outputs of Local Food in terms of 'capacities' can aid understanding of their wider significance.



Local Food funding has helped set up food cooperatives, farmers' markets and the purchase of capital equipment such as poly-tunnels, thereby developing the infrastructural capacity of the communities involved.

MATERIAL CAPACITY

Material capacity involves the delivery of a range of direct outputs in relation to land, people, events and the physical production of food.

Land

In the case of 'land', many of the projects have brought previously cultivated or new land into food production, usually involving relatively small areas in the form of allotments, gardens, community farms and orchards (e.g. one of the larger 'Main' projects has developed over 600 growing spaces, totalling more than 15 ha across London).

Local Food funding has also helped set up food cooperatives, farmers' markets and the purchase of capital equipment such as poly-tunnels, thereby developing the infrastructural capacity of the communities involved. Linked with the development of land has been an increased production of food ranging from a few herbs grown in a window box to farm shops, box schemes and Community Supported Agriculture. While the quantities involved are comparatively small, it is clear they can make a significant difference at a local level.

People

In relation to 'people', most of the projects have involved quite large numbers of individuals, either directly or indirectly. This is

partly through the creation of a number of paid jobs, but perhaps more significantly the provision of a large number of volunteering opportunities. The latter have in many cases enabled people who in some way are unable to get a paid job to acquire skills and improve their levels of self-esteem, confidence and transferable skills, thereby putting themselves in a better position to enter the main job market in the future (echoing earlier work by City & Guilds, 2011⁸). In the case of one of the 'Main' projects, more than 500 volunteer days have been created, which has engaged over 40 people in the practical production of food.

Events

The third direct output relates to a wide range of 'events' that are organised by projects. These include training workshops, skill sharing and open days, involving adults, children, families with young children, young people, people with learning difficulties and people with mental health problems. Accredited food growing and cooking courses are also run by a number of projects. For example, one of the projects involves nine schools and over 260 children, with the aim of helping children understand the 'food journey' through visiting different stages of the food supply chain. These events are subsequently built upon in the schools themselves, with sessions run on food preparation, cookery and nutrition.



Case Study - Material Capacity

The direct outputs of land, people and events, which provide the infrastructure to enable individual and community potential.

From Plot to Pot, Co Durham

Run by Teesdale Conservation Volunteers (TCV) in Co Durham, the main aim of the 'From Plot to Pot' project has been to encourage more people to grow their own food, both for themselves and to share with neighbours. The project has focused on finding land for allotments, creating a network of food growers and providing training and skills sharing opportunities. TCV has negotiated the use of disused land, undertaken initial heavy tasks of land clearance and established new 'allotment style' plots. It has also provided the wherewithal for households all over Teesdale to grow food in their own 'instant' gardens, by selling knee-high raised beds filled with TCV's own peat-free compost. Some 700 new people now grow their own fruit and vegetables; 8 ha of new food growing allotment sites are available for local residents and 178 local households have raised beds. "People have learnt that it is easier than they thought to grow veg in raised beds". Four schools now have food growing areas as a result of the project. For example, Teesdale Secondary School has raised beds, a greenhouse and a herb wheel all of which produce food for the school kitchens as well as providing an educational resource for the children. Between 3000 and 4000 people have taken part in a range of events and training courses. The demand for bee and chicken keeping

courses has been particularly high. "As a result of our project, between 2009 and 2011 the area of land around us used for food production in some way increased by 14 acres (5.7 ha), 11 (4.5 ha) of which are farm land with some livestock and 3 (1.2 ha) for allotment plots. Here in Barnard Castle there's an allotment waiting list. People wanted to learn to grow their own, they wanted their own growing space. We've been lucky enough to get hold of an acre (0.4 ha) of land right in the town centre. We rent it on a yearly basis and have created new allotment-style growing spaces. We found that people wanted more training and 'how to garden' classes. The courses have been jam-packed." Skills sharing has been actively encouraged, facilitated by recruiting 'gardener mentors' and creating an active new 'plotters' network to provide support for those who are new to food growing. 60 fruit trees have been grown and grafted from local stock before being planted by local volunteers throughout Teesdale. First cropping is expected in the third year, with the eventual harvest being organised and distributed through TCV's Apple Day which is held in October each year. As one staff member suggested, "the most significant outcome of this project has been building a sense of community, which has resulted from the combination of people attending events and working on pieces of land together".

PERSONAL CAPACITY

Projects funded through Local Food have provided a range of personal development opportunities, including for disadvantaged groups of people such as those with mental health difficulties or those who are homeless. In particular, Local Food projects are offering people education and skills, leading to greater job prospects and even, in some cases, paid employment.

It is clear that engaging people in food growing projects can help them to develop a range of technical skills, as well as build communication and team-working skills. It can also help build a sense of satisfaction and mental well-being through achieving something that is demonstrably worthwhile. This can help those involved realise that they have something to offer others, and give them the confidence to go out and try and find employment and enter the paid job market.

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The development of personal capacity is evidenced in the case studies' longer-term outcomes, principally in relation to continued community food growing, but also increased education, skills development and learning about food. The result is that more people have been empowered to access (both physically and in terms of their abilities) and afford (through being involved in growing food in some way) the benefits of fresh, locally-produced food, thereby contributing to their health and wellbeing.

Projects have also raised awareness of what is involved in the production of food, particularly amongst children. In this way Local Food is nurturing a new generation of people who are interested in and knowledgeable about food and where it comes from.

The social interaction resulting from such projects is also important in terms of improving life skills, thereby helping to increase the confidence and self-esteem of those involved. Project examples include an unemployed chef who, having helped to set up a herb garden at a homeless shelter and shown guests how to cook food grown on the project's allotment, found gainful work again.

Other examples show how mental health clients living in long-term residential services are able to eat better and grow food for themselves in their own gardens, and that allowing homeless people to participate in gardening has been therapeutic, while at the same time raising awareness within the community about homelessness.



Case Study - Personal Capacity

Personal development and empowerment, including nurturing self-esteem and changing existing lifestyle patterns.

SE17 Community Food Co-op, London

The SE17 Community Food Co-op project is run by InSpire, a community arts and learning organisation based in London, which has three main aims. Firstly, to provide people with a wide range of life skills, practical experience, ideas and inspiration about food and healthy eating. This includes running a training course that culminates in a food hygiene certificate, equipping those involved to gain catering or food-related employment. *"I always wanted to have my own business. I'd done various training seminars, then I did a course here and started working one day a week in the café kitchen. This is a business trial opportunity for me."* However, participants on these courses also recognise that the benefits go far beyond the technical side of the training course, to include social interaction. *"Without this course, I would never have met such a group and never imagined that we could get on so well and become friends across all our cultural differences."* The second aim is to meet people on their own territory through volunteering and outreach activities, with the intention of encouraging gardening and

healthy eating. All volunteers are mentored and supported by people experienced in a number of different areas: gardening, whereby those involved gain knowledge and understanding of growing produce; workshop leader and assistance opportunities, whereby leadership and interpersonal skills are learned; and events, which provide the opportunity to gain teamwork experience. *"I have learnt so much – I've never done foraging or used things growing wild like rosehips. I didn't know you could use lavender in biscuits or as medicine. I enjoyed planting cabbages at the allotment; I've never seen such big cabbages growing before. We might try and set up a rooftop garden through my tenants association."* The third aim is to establish a locally owned and run community café in St Peter's Church crypt, which is now run by three members of the local community. All the food is cooked from scratch on the premises, and cooperative members are encouraged by InSpire to source their food locally. Food is seen as an important outreach tool within this project, drawing people to the organisation and enabling them to tap into other services and opportunities.



CULTURAL CAPACITY

Engaging with the local community and ensuring their buy-in is key to the success of Local Food funded projects, as is embedding the idea of locally produced food within a community's culture.

Project sites have become important social meeting places where people from different backgrounds can get to know and understand each other better by growing food together. Not only has this led to increased knowledge, skills and attitudes towards food at an individual level, it has also provided the context for wider cultural changes within the community, with food acting as a social agent that builds assets at a community level. As one project worker told us: "The project is about changing attitudes between people, food and culture... organising events, getting people together, cooking and eating together... It is about breaking down barriers. Food is functioning as a social communicator".

Empowering local people to take some kind of ownership of a project through developing their capacity and skills base is a common aim of projects, as is using existing assets such as school grounds as an allotment garden. A focus on 'learning by doing' underpins many projects and is seen to facilitate change at both a cultural and philosophical level. While the smaller projects are necessarily limited in their vision, some of the larger projects clearly have the potential to make wider organisational changes to the capacity of the communities in which they operate.

For example, one citywide project argues that an important outcome of their work is to enable "long-term change through painstaking lobbying, negotiating with the council and other landowners to actually change things in the long term", in relation to food policy in the city. In these larger projects, therefore, there is evidence that ideas developed at a localised project level have the potential to diffuse⁹ more widely into, and perhaps challenge, mainstream thinking.

Although some projects stand very much on their own, others are linked more intimately to a wider context and network of organisations; not surprisingly, the larger projects (in terms of funding) are more likely to be part of a bigger network of different bodies. Thus one Beacon project involves a multi-agency steering group, as well as a partnership board that brings together members of a health trust and a local authority.

In some cases, Local Food funding has facilitated bringing together what were disparate organisations in order to deliver something that would be difficult for individual organisations on their own. In other words, it has provided a necessary stimulus to encourage greater cooperation and coordination between organisations working within an area, thereby helping to build the overall cultural capacity of the communities involved.

A focus on ‘learning by doing’ underpins many projects and is seen to facilitate change at both a cultural and philosophical level.



Case Study - Cultural Capacity

Encompasses social and organisational capacity, fostering wider community awareness, engagement and ownership.

Bolton Kitchen, Lancashire

Bolton Kitchen is the City’s only vegetarian café, serving ‘cooked from scratch’ affordable vegan and organic multi-cultural dishes. As a social enterprise it provides training and volunteer opportunities, with a particular focus on asylum seekers and refugees, in order to encourage integration with the established local community. The Kitchen believes that by creating local jobs and stimulating demand for local products they can be part of and support the local economy as well as bringing a refreshing do-it-yourself attitude to local food in Bolton. In pursuit of this, the café aims to use as many locally produced ingredients as it can (approx. 50% currently) sourced from local farms, local wholesalers and allotment growers. Volunteers tend to be people who either have gone through the eight week café training course and wish to stay on, or have some spare time and want to work in the café. *“I did the training...It’s good for CVs and references. Now I am a regular volunteer. The café is a great meeting place, a community hub, an example of empowering*

the community. It is giving displaced people a sense of connection with Bolton. It’s opened up a network of people to me, given me ideas. I feel motivated; it’s inspirational. I feel happy to be a part of something like this.” The café menus reflect the nationalities of the co-op members, volunteers and trainees – including Turkish flat breads and vegetarian kofte, Iranian soups and curries, and Eastern European style fresh cucumber with dill – further encouraging integration and celebrating different cultures through food. As such, Bolton Kitchen is more than simply a vegetarian café, it has created a new physical space within central Bolton that acts as an information and social hub. This is reflected in customer comments: *“This place has a heartbeat; it’s opening things up, it’s a first step to greener things in Bolton”. “It is opening minds; there is nothing else like this in Bolton. It’s a social hub, a community hub. I love coming here”. “It’s a pity there aren’t more places like this”.* The café is also encouraging new groups to form, such as the raw food group which meets on Sundays and runs cooking demonstrations.

Interim conclusions and recommendations

By developing different types of capacity, Local Food projects have contributed to the resilience of the communities involved and thereby the overarching aim of Local Food, which is to make 'locally grown food accessible and affordable to local communities'. In the process:

- communities are better able to manage land sustainably for growing food locally;
- those involved have developed their knowledge and understanding of food, and have a better understanding of how other people relate to food;
- local economic activity in relation to community food enterprises has been stimulated through a combination of skills development, infrastructural improvements and a broader recognition of the benefits of local food at an organisational level;
- a wide range of opportunities for learning and the development of skills have been created, as well as some jobs; and
- awareness has been raised about the links between food and healthy lifestyles, through developing skills such as cooking and food growing and changing the culture of organisations such as schools and hospitals.

Nevertheless, the amount of food produced within Local Food projects is relatively small and certainly not enough to make a significant quantitative impact on the wider food supply chain.

This makes the ability of projects to change people's and communities' attitudes towards an understanding of food, and local food in particular, all the more important.

Crucially, the case study evidence reveals that Local Food projects enable individuals and communities to build capacity at a social level to access and afford local food, in addition to the more tangible outputs of physically producing more food. This necessitates an evaluative perspective that can recognise the importance of these social benefits, valuing them as significant outputs for the communities concerned alongside the more obvious quantifiable outputs.

In drawing on the concept of 'grassroots social innovations' and developing the notion of 'capacities', this evaluation has enabled a reinterpretation of what is meant by the terms 'accessibility' and 'affordability' to encompass these 'softer' outcomes, especially in relation to those who are often marginalised in discussions about food.

By developing different types of capacity, Local Food projects have contributed to the resilience of the communities involved.



The case study evidence reveals that Local Food projects enable individuals and communities to build capacity at a social level to access and afford local food.

Our recommendations

at this interim stage of the evaluation are as follows:

- Continued funding is needed to provide skilled teachers, trainers and people who can maintain sites and enable volunteers and trainees to develop skills in the future;
- The government should consider incorporating food growing and cooking into the national curriculum;
- Future research on local food funding initiatives should consider using a 'social return on investment' model. This would then allow for comparisons between what it costs to keep a child in care for a year, and the potential of keeping them out of care through providing opportunities on a community garden, for example;
- There is a need to identify replicable good practice in individual projects and facilitate its dissemination. This is currently being done through Local Food's 'Share, Learn, Improve' events, which have been very well received and consideration should be given to their continued funding;
- Evidence of increased participation, valuable impacts and ongoing demand for this type of community activity would indicate a strong case for continued national funding to support and encourage the future evolution of new and emerging local food initiatives and enterprises.
- Policymakers should give more recognition to the role that local food systems can play in helping to ensure food supply chain security and resilience, seeing them as complementary to national and international food systems.



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