

Understanding Equality in Food Systems: Applying Inclusive Practices

The following reflection and recommendations are taken from the Understanding Equality in Food Systems: Applying Inclusive Practices workshop on 2nd April 2025. The workshop was commissioned and hosted by Food Sense Wales and facilitated by Be The Riot.

Reflection & Discussion Summary

Several themes stood out from our group discussions: Expanding our view of diversity, using our position to effect change, recognising the impact of bias, understanding communities and diverse lived experiences and barriers to participation.

Expanding our view of diversity: There are many ways to explore diversity, considering the protected characteristics as a starting point and being aware of other characteristics and circumstances that impact a person's experiences of the food system. Aspects of diversity that were discussed included language, mental health and neurodivergence while being highlighted as areas that aren't as commonly considered within project work as socio-economic status and geographic location, for example.

This highlights the importance of thinking beyond what's visible, such as ethnicity, gender and visible disabilities, to identify how other non-visible characteristics impact lived experience. We discussed intersectionality, the effects of multiple forms of discrimination or disadvantage combining or overlapping and how different layers of a person's identity and background intersect to create a unique lived experience. This is critical to understanding the individual and the many factors affecting food access.

Using our position to effect change: We all hold privilege in relation to the unique set of characteristics that make us who we are and our current and past circumstances. We also potentially experience disprivilege in many ways, too - it's relative. This presents an opportunity to platform those who don't hold privilege in the ways we do, bringing them to the decision-making table.

Authenticity brings credibility and relatability, it also brings awareness to where our knowledge gaps are and the lived experiences that are different to our own. We can then proactively seek learning to address those gaps and improve our understanding. It's helpful to tell our own stories alongside the stories of others and use the lessons to inspire our approach.

Recognising the impact of bias: Unconscious and conscious biases are present and can lead to unequal outcomes if not addressed in decision-making. There are interventions we can apply as individuals to counter our own biases and also apply to policies and systems for wider impact.

Marketing and communications can be used as tools to challenge stereotypes or, indeed reinforce them. It's crucial to dispel myths, incomplete, one-dimensional narratives about groups within society and instead do the work to explore diverse lived experiences. An example of this was highlighted in discussions about bias in healthcare leading to people of African, Caribbean and Asian descent experiencing differential treatment for food-related illnesses.

Understanding communities and diverse lived experiences: The work of learning about the needs and wants of various communities is ongoing. We explored the importance of cultural relevance and accessibility when designing campaigns, programmes and policy.

Meaningful engagement rests on understanding the diverse needs within communities and diverse perspectives feeding into the work from conception through to implementation. Many people don't engage if they feel something "isn't for them", such as a diet plan that doesn't reflect the food they cook and eat at home. At worst, a person can be excluded due to an unmet accessibility need, for example, diet plans that aren't tailored to people with learning disabilities.

Communities are often labelled as "hard to reach", which points the finger at them. If we use terms such as "underserved" or "under-accessed" instead, we're taking ownership of the challenge, which prompts us to think more creatively about how we can better serve those communities and increase access.

Barriers to participation: People experience many practical limitations that could benefit from simple and effective solutions.

Transportation - For those who don't drive, especially those living in urban areas, growing their own food and accessing rural areas is challenging. Farming requires transporting tools and produce. Helpful transport ideas include car sharing and renting local bus services to transport people to farms and electric bikes for transport on and between farms. Aside from this, urban farming solutions such as community farms, allotments and home growing kits are valuable initiatives.

Finance - Healthier food options can be more expensive than less nutritious alternatives and ultra-processed foods, which acts as a deciding factor for people on lower incomes. There are significant financial barriers to owning land, and where supportive initiatives do exist, general awareness of such avenues is low.

Time and energy - People working long hours and those who have caring responsibilities may struggle to find the time to seek out and cook nutritious meals. They may rely on fast and convenient food which is often less nutritious and if it's take-away, it can work out to be expensive. Raising awareness about how to prepare nutritious meals that are quick to cook and can be stored as future meals could be helpful.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on key principles or pillars that can be applied to all projects. The aim is to embed these principles into ways of working rather than focusing on “quick-win” outputs. This ensures that EDI is interwoven, establishing a foundation for the long term that will have a lasting impact.

	Theme	Recommendation
1	Governance & Accountability	Establish clear EDI aims to govern ways of working internally and across all projects. ▪ This can be based on the Equality Act’s protected characteristics and go further to encompass the needs of underserved communities to address inequity. ▪ The aims should reflect data findings about community needs and inequalities and evolve with time. For example: ▪ <i>We aim to increase the participation of people with disabilities.</i> ▪ <i>We aim to practice language-based inclusion, centring the needs of our Welsh-speaking communities and people who don’t have Welsh or English as a first language.</i> ▪ A best practice is to embed EDI aims into overall project goals and desired outcomes. Establish structures to ensure EDI principles are interwoven into all projects and decision-makers are held accountable for achieving EDI aims. ▪ This can be achieved through EDI committees, advisory boards, champions, etc. Such groups/representatives should be given leadership and decision-making authority. This can be tied into policy, e.g. all projects must be approved by the EDI Advisory Board.
2	Policy & Procedure	Embed EDI principles into policies and procedures. ▪ Update policies to reflect the Equality Act, your EDI aims and EDI best practices. ▪ Review the various procedures in place to identify where EDI practices can be introduced. <i>E.g. introducing lived experience as criteria for organisations seeking grants.</i> ▪ Embed EDI as a standing item on meeting agendas to check progress towards EDI aims with time to discuss data findings and feedback. ▪ Develop public and internal EDI statements outlining how EDI applies to the project. These can be used and referenced at pivotal moments, e.g. <i>at the start of meetings where big decisions will be made.</i>

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	Theme	Recommendation
3	Data	Collect EDI data to assess representation and understand lived experiences. ▪ The data can include diversity monitoring (within organisations, project teams and participants), capturing lived experiences, perspectives, feedback and ideas. ▪ The findings may reveal underrepresentation of certain groups participating in and benefiting from projects. Consider representation and the lived experiences of the people on boards, in teams, volunteering, accessing services, and suppliers. ▪ The findings may also highlight specific barriers impacting certain groups, presenting new opportunities to address inequality.
4	Representation & Inclusion	Establish best practices to ensure diverse lived experiences feed into the work at all stages. ▪ A best practice is to include those who will be most impacted by a project in its design. ▪ Consider the Equality Act’s protected characteristics and other pertinent aspects of diversity. <i>Ask who’s in the room and who else should be there.</i> From conceptualisation to planning and research, to implementation, to evaluation. ▪ This can be achieved through partnering with organisations that add a new dimension of lived experience and value while also representing the communities you are under-accessing/underserving, or by establishing lived experience advisory boards.
5	Influence	Establish ways to raise awareness, educate and support other organisations to embed EDI principles into their work. ▪ This can be achieved through sharing data findings, research and other resources, connecting organisations that could benefit from collaborating. ▪ Develop EDI frameworks and best practice tools that other organisations can adopt. ▪ Presenting diverse lived experiences across all communications, marketing, research and projects. ▪ Holding other organisations to account where EDI principles have been ignored or certain groups have been excluded. “Calling in” and “calling out” as appropriate.

Participant Reflections

Participants were asked to share their reflections after our *Exploring EDI Within Our Food Systems - The Lived Experience panel* and reading various statistics relating to food inequity. Here are the comments we captured:

"Bias in the health service when it comes to different cultures and associated diet related illnesses."

"It is easier to connect and break down a bias when it relates to a person rather than a stereotype"

"Without making things conscious we can be guided by unexamined assumptions and beliefs about others."

"How personal lived experience impacts my work now. I didn't know that BMI was set differently for different groups. Hearing about how identities have had to adapt to fit when people come here"

"Thinking about the experiences that neurodiverse people have with food and how to consciously include them at food events stuck out for me. Its not just about the fourteen food allergens, its much more"

"How we should never make assumptions about people. Always be open."

"Individual experiences are unique, as well as shared. Barriers created in society are often as a result of dominant group holding their own space. Dominant groups are not always majority..."

"How inequitable the food system is around the world, between farmers producing food and multinational companies that sell it. Everyone's experience of food is different."

"Do not hide behind privilege but instead use that awareness to highlight the situations/sectors of those suffering from inequality and try to do something to improve it"

"Just the many many ways in which inequality in a huge variety of factors can lead to further inequality when it comes to food"

"How much optimism, courage and action there is from the panel to create change and how as food partnerships we can enable this if we create inclusive spaces and support it"

"Lack of diversity in some parts of food industry"

"How something as fundamental as food is used as a tool to divide people and generate poverty and suffering for many, and wealth and power for a few."

"There are more barriers to accessing food than I had first considered, and it's been eye opening to hear about these and to consider how they are at play in the County that I live/work in"

"I found the term 'affinity bias' helpful as it resonated with this idea that we surround ourselves with people that look/behave/are from similar backgrounds as us."

"Privilege consciousness eliciting sadness or grief as it highlights the systemic inequalities of our society."

“The statement from the African Cocoa farmer really stood out to me, as the workers are being paid less for a whole days work than what an actual bar of chocolate costs”

“Working in the food system is not seen as a glamorous job. Hospitality jobs, factory operators, farmers and retail assistants are undervalued. Why do we undervalue the people who fuel the nation?”

“Work like this allows us to zoom out and see how food can connect us and exclude us. Its all relative to if we were able and willing to see the bigger picture.”

“Connections- people globally are experiencing pressures from the system which can pitch people against each other. The work we are doing today can identify commonalities across groups to work together.”

Resources

EDI tools and further learning resources

[Be The Riot online EDI glossary](#)

[Cultivating Justice podcast series](#)

[Equality Act & 9 Protected Characteristics](#)

[Good Food Movement Guide](#)

[REDI for Change Review Tool](#)

[Representation and Justice \(Anti-racism, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion\)](#)

[Welsh National Equality Objectives \(NEOs\)](#)

Organisations/collectives working in or adjacent to the food justice space

[Agricology](#)

[Cultivating Justice](#)

[Diverse Nutrition Association](#)

[Ecological Land Cooperative](#)

[Farmerama Radio](#)

[Folx Farm](#)

[Food for Purpose](#)

[Food Foundation](#)

[Food Matters](#)

[Food Sense Wales](#)

[Landworkers' Alliance](#)

[LION \(Land in Our Names\)](#)

[Nourish Scotland](#)

[Out on the Land \(OOTL\)](#)

[Roots to Work](#)

[SALT Union \(Solidarity Across Land Trades\)](#)

[Soul Fire Farm](#)

[Stir to Action](#)

[Sustain](#)

[Sustainable Food Places](#)

[The Race Report](#)

[WEN \(Women's Environmental Network\)](#)

Research reports & articles

1. [*Food at Home: A knowledge exchange project exploring disabled and older people's access to food in their own homes, 2024*](#)
2. [*Hostile Environments: Immigration and Food Poverty in the UK, 2022*](#)
3. [*The State of the Nation's Food Industry Report, 2024*](#)
4. [*The Sankofa Report: British Colonialism and the UK food system, 2023*](#)
5. [*Facts & Figures: Rural Women and the Millennium Development Goals, UN 2012*](#)
6. [*Food Policy Alliance Cymru: Food Bill Briefing Paper, 2023*](#)
7. [*What are the barriers to eating healthily in the UK?, Social Market Foundation, 2018*](#)
8. [*Food and You 2, Food Standards Agency, 2025*](#)
9. [*Burnt Out Overworked and Underpaid: A workers' inquiry into labour conditions in agroecology, Salt Union, 2025*](#)
10. [*The Race Report, 2024*](#)
11. [*RACE Report reveals racial diversity in the environment sector is still worryingly low, Roots to Work, 2025*](#)
12. [*New report highlights challenges faced by older and disabled people accessing food in their homes, Sustain, 2024*](#)
13. [*Embracing Rural Diversity: Genders and sexualities in the peasant movement, European Coordination Via Campesina, 2021*](#)
14. [*Coming Out! Gender Diversity in the Food System, Paula Gioia, 2019*](#)
15. [*Migrant labour in the UK's post-Brexit agri-food system: Ambiguities, contradictions and precarities, P Milbourne, 2021*](#)
16. [*Rootz into Food Growing: Knowledge and Experiences of Social Enterprise Food Growers from Black / Communities of Colour, Land In Our Names, 2021*](#)
17. [*Jumping Fences: Land, food and racial justice in British farming, N Terry, 2023*](#)
18. [*Pathways to Land for BPOC, J Kamal, N Scott, & P Shakespeare, 2024*](#)

Further Learning Resources

Books on Implicit Bias:

- *The Hidden Brain by Shankar Vedantam*
- *Rebel Ideas by Matthew Syed*
- *Blind Spot by Mahzarin Banaji*

Books on diversity (including ethnicity & race, gender, social mobility, neurodiversity, disability and LGBTQ+ identities):

- *Invisible Women by Caroline Criado Perez*
- *The Neurodiverse Workplace by Victoria Honeybourne*
- *Pride: The Story of the LGBTQ Equality Movement by Matthew Todd*
- *Disabled Futures: A Framework for Radical Inclusion by Milo Obourn*
- *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race by Reni Eddo-Lodge*
- *The Transgender Issue: An Argument for Justice by Shon Faye*
- *The Class Ceiling: Why it Pays to be Privileged by Sam Friedman*
- *The Divide by Jason Hickel*
- *Superior by Angela Saini*

TV/Film/YouTube:

- [*The Urgency of Intersectionality - \(US/Global - TED\)*](#)
- [*How to Share Gender Pronouns at Work \(YouTube\)*](#)

Podcasts:

- [Surviving Society](#) (UK/Global)
- [The Disability Download](#) (UK/Global)
- [The Social Mobility Podcast](#) (UK/Global)
- [Race Reflections At Work](#) (UK/Global)
- [The Guilty Feminist](#) (UK/Global)
- [Queer Talk](#) (UK/Global)

Implicit Association Test:

- [Harvard Implicit Association Test - Project Implicit](#)

Contact

If you'd like more information or have any questions, please contact us at info@betheriot.com or visit www.betheriot.com

