



UK Food Group Closure Workshop

Report from a meeting to shape a possible network
'After the UK Food Group' and to celebrate the
UK Food Group's legacy

London, 22nd November 2018

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Executive Summary

For more than 30 years, the UK Food Group (UKFG) provided a unique platform for civil society organisations working on environmental, food and farming issues in the UK and in the global South to come together to articulate and promote more sustainable, just, equitable and localised food systems. However, changes in the management and focus of the international NGOs who formed the key drivers, coupled with the shifting international food and agricultural policy context, led to the decision by the UKFG Management Group to take stock and plan for a future beyond the current UKFG, based on a mapping exercise and transition workshop.

The mapping exercise took place in September/October 2018 and consulted 21 members and allies of the UKFG to elicit their views on the past achievements and strengths of the group, and potential for future action. The workshop, held on 22nd November 2018, with the aim *to discuss options for possible future networks/ collaboration as the UKFG winds down in its current form*, was attended by about 20 participants.

The findings of the mapping were presented, highlighting the achievements of the UKFG, notably the provision of a broad space to share information and lobby on key issues, in particular, bringing an international dimension to debates on food policy and related issues in the UK. Following a discussion and analysis of the mapping findings, the workshop participants identified 12 thematic areas/domains, which UKFG and its members had been active in, that could be built on in the future.

- 1. Solidarity Platform**
- 2. Eater Movement / CSAs / Food Citizenship / Slow Food**
- 3. Food Sovereignty, Nyéléni process, peasants' rights**
- 4. Localised food systems**
- 5. Lobby / influence UK Government, Donors and others**
- 6. Committee on World Food Security (CFS)**
- 7. Research and Development Policies**
- 8. Seeds, agricultural biodiversity and agroecology**
- 9. Using collective knowledge and experience globally**
- 10. Farmer to Farmer / knowledge sharing and decentralised education**
- 11. Connecting and movement building**
- 12. UKFG Website**

This process highlighted the need to increase the international dimension of these activities in the UK if the legacy of the UKFG is not to be lost.

The workshop ended with an evening celebration of the work of the UKFG.

1. Introduction

For more than 30 years, the UK Food Group (UKFG) has provided a unique platform for civil society organisations working on environmental, food and farming issues in the UK and in the global South to come together to articulate and promote more sustainable, just, equitable and localised food systems. During this time the UKFG has contributed to a number of important processes nationally, in Europe and internationally including the establishment of the UK Food Sovereignty Movement and the promotion of agroecological and biodiverse models of production and consumption in the framework of food sovereignty. The UKFG provided a platform for information sharing on food and farming internationally, especially as articulated by or affecting smaller-scale food providers (see Annex 1 for a brief overview of some of the UKFG's activities over the decades).

However, in 2018 the UKFG found itself at a crossroads in the face of increasing challenges.

- Following the UKFG's support in establishing the UK Food Sovereignty Movement, a number of members were quite rightly prioritising that over UKFG activities
- A number of individuals from member organisations were engaged in research with CAWR
- Brexit had established a very strong UK focused dialogue for many members

The Management Group decided to consult with members and allies to ensure the most effective repositioning of a network of organisations and social movements in the face of this rapidly shifting context. The Management Group therefore launched a process of 'taking stock and looking forward'.

The process involved a mapping exercise followed by an event to review the findings, celebrate the achievements of the UKFG, and discuss options for the future, to which UKFG current and former members and other allies were invited. This report presents a summary of the discussions and outcomes of this event.

The aim of the workshop was: *to discuss options for possible future networks/collaboration as the UKFG winds down in its current form*. It took place on 22nd November at The Engine Room, Tottenham Hale, London, attended by about 20 participants.

Following the welcome and background to the meeting, participants introduced themselves to each other and shared their interest in the purpose of the workshop. This was followed by a presentation of the findings from the mapping exercise. The participants then discussed the findings and issues arising from this. After lunch, these issues were clustered together into themes/domains, to which was added who is doing what in each of these areas. Finally, the participants brainstormed about how to take forward any gaps in these areas including how to maintain the international dimension which has been the UKFG's key strength, and how to wind up the UKFG.

2. The Mapping Exercise

The purpose of the mapping exercise was to map interests and perspectives of UKFG members, friends and others, as a basis for the workshop. It focused on four key questions:

1. What has been your experience of engaging with the UKFG in the past? If you are not currently active in the group, why is that?
2. In the context of this vision of a 'just' future food system, what unique role/unique function can a UK based network play?
3. What does working effectively with small-scale producers and other food system actors – both across the world and in its diaspora in the UK – look like?
4. How do you see yourself participating in such a network? What would your role be?

A total of 19 people were interviewed, with two additional responses via email. The key conclusions of the exercise were:

- The UKFG has provided an effective space and resource to bring together disparate groups and issues, and has made significant gains in advocacy and information sharing. Its focus on the international dimensions of localised food systems has been appreciated.
- Current challenges include financial constraints, the changing nature of NGOs (some becoming more 'corporate' to the extent that the UKFG is no longer part of their strategic agenda), the role of other civil society actors in the UKFG, and the need to be more diverse and inclusive.
- It was acknowledged that there remains a need for a strong civil society network in the UK looking at food systems from an international perspective.
- However, the challenge of resources (both human and financial) also remains.

The full slide presentation is attached in Annex 2.

3. Validation of Mapping Findings

The workshop participants then reviewed the mapping findings, focusing on three questions: what resonated; what didn't resonate/is missing and what should be continued/taken forward:

Question 1: What resonated from the mapping?

Importance of localised food systems

- Policy focus at CFS
- Keep debate live
- International solidarity campaigns, e-campaigns

Solidarity platform exchange

- Keeping 'space' open
- Diverse / fluid leadership
- Information exchange
- Diversity of voices – use tech, international dimension
- Decoloniality diaspora – new narratives
- Link groups in other regions
- Coordinator, resources, finances
- History, website, personal connections

Need for Big picture, meta-theme

- South / North driven

Question 2: What didn't resonate?

There is more happening than has come out through the mapping exercise

- Greater need for deeper stakeholder analysis on wider food justice systems (BREXIT gave a wakeup call and a time bound focus)
- Lack of Parliamentary 'other' voices in mapping process
- What has caused the breakdown of collaboration?
- International development resources headed to Brussels / Rome

Organisational / social dynamics change (NGO vs Social movement transition)

- UKFG served its time – came to a natural end
- Cultural resonance of food
- History of UKFG's achievements need further articulation
- Hostile funding environment creates competition between NGOs/less collaboration

Meta theme → FOOD = wellbeing, culture, class, race

- Clarity of meta-theme needs to come out today
- Food connects all people together, yet everyone comes to it from a different lens/focus/perspective
- Food is both a "Means" and an "End"

Question 3: Ways Forward

Filling the gap that the UKFG occupied... but how?

- Connecting other groups
- Who is seeing the whole field?
- What is the benefit the network can give?
- Not forgetting the historical perspective → Historical residue → Colonial formula
- What is the role of the NGOs given that change happens at movement level?

Need to rewrite the mandate (rebrand) → connecting good food / farming concerns Solidarity platform (shared values)

- Global (Right to Food /Food Sovereignty /Food Justice)
- Website docs – how to keep them?
- Seeds as a metaphor (info carrier). Seeds ADAPT – "we are the seeds"

Plenary discussion:

1. Members are working on some of these issues
 - The links between UK and international agricultural issues and it's crucial to keep the link between the two
 - LWA is a member of Via Campesina internationally and its European Coordination, which is active in the Nyéléni food sovereignty process and the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism (CSM) for interface with the Committee on World Food Security
 - Sustain and many others are working on some of these areas e.g. environmental, agroecology, biodiversity, seeds, trade issues)
 - There still remains, however, a gap / vacuum for another umbrella network on the international dimensions of food, trade, international relations, and environmental concerns that is prepared to challenge power holders and echo the voices of the less powerful
 - Diaspora populations within the UK have an innate lack of trust, lack of voice and connection with UK organisations but some NGOs and CBOs are connecting with or speaking to diaspora on food issues in UK
2. In every nation – powerful in centre, marginalised on fringes, less voice
3. Historically – UKFG brought together disparate NGOs working on different areas. It did not seek consensus, rather aimed for clarity – which was a useful function. UKFG also brought learning from the global South into the UK.
4. Food Sovereignty Lens – a useful way to view key food justice issues from land to seeds to the Right to Food to trade etc. Bring voices to every level. Class: voices of the working class, of the diaspora

5. The UK's agricultural development model has been exported globally - Plantation economy.
6. There is also food insecurity in the UK; access to food – a class issue

4. Domains for Current and Future Activity

The workshop participants then brainstormed and clustered the key domains for current and future activity, based on the earlier discussions. 12 domains were identified as follows, with the bullets below each one showing activities relating to it:

1. Solidarity Platform:

- “Global to Local” inclusion and diversity with diaspora communities in UK as link to communities abroad
- Reimagining and re-approaching development – grassroots voices and action in localised systems of change
- Global solidarity in sharing knowledge between North and South – not top down approach to knowledge (Western approach)
- Sharing knowledge and life experience from African farmers
- Support to social movements on food justice around the world
- > *Gap: global solidarity, linking global and local*

2. Eater Movement / CSA / Food Citizenship / Slow Food:

- Political food literacy education in communities
- Sustainable Food Cities
- Permaculture design courses and training

3. Food Sovereignty, Nyéléni Process, peasants’ rights:

- Peasants’ rights at UN – UNDROP
- Holding place for UK food sovereignty and links with Via Campesina and the Nyéléni food sovereignty process
- Using food sovereignty as a project design lens
- Land rights, rights of nature, sacred natural sites, earth jurisprudence (this links to peoples’/cultures’ connections with the land and how these impact on food systems)
- Seed and agricultural biodiversity networks in the UK and facilitating those in global South

4. Localised food systems:

- Many local food initiatives but few with global links and perspective

5. Lobby / influence UK Government (and other governments, and others); and influence donors on appropriate uses of funding:

- Tackling food poverty in the UK
- Advocacy on parliamentary bills; inequality in food supply chains
- People’s Food Policy: policy articulation with intentions for grassroots education and a variety of policy goals/campaigns
- European Healthy Cities
- Influencing funders on the focus and content of funding calls
- Helping lobby governments in global south, specifically sub-Saharan Africa
- People’s Land Policy; land reform; actions
- Access to good food, Right to Food
- Sustainable food cities, policy work with local authorities
- Food policy barometer

6. Committee on World Food Security (CFS)

- UK NGO coordinating function, through the CSM, that was held by UKFG is now lost – no network is calling UK government to account

7. Research and Development Policies:

- Dominant paradigms in international agriculture research including GMOs and new GM/GM2
- Work on research and innovation in food system
- Actionist agroecological research – including a decolonial/intersectional lens

8. Seeds, agricultural biodiversity and agroecology:

- Seedbank and Seed diversity programmes
- Info sharing: UN processes, seeds / agricultural biodiversity, food sovereignty
- Farmer to farmer links
- Some internationally focused UK NGOs (not present) also working on biodiversity, GM, new GM/GM2, and trade issues
- Agroecology support by some members

9. Using collective knowledge and experience globally:

- Open access resources maintained by NGOs
- Permaculture development course
- Support to shaping knowledge and research with communities in the global South and the UK
- Sharing knowledge and experience via blogs and twitter
- Food related education resources
- Social movement support
- Connecting to global permaculture and related networks
- Building academic resources

10. Farmer to Farmer / knowledge sharing and decentralised education:

- UK NGOs, farmers' movements and academics are working on some of these issues with organisations and networks in other regions

11. Connecting and movement building:

- There's a loss of a gathering place with the end of the UKFG

12. UKFG Website:

- UKFG website to be edited and archived
- UKFG Email to be closed down

5. Conclusions and next steps

5.1 Absorbing the international dimension into ongoing activities:

The workshop participants concluded that there are many actors engaged in key activities in the UK context, representing an ever-growing movement. However, there is a need to absorb or increase the international dimension (as previously held/promoted by the UKFG) into some of these activities.

5.2 UKFG Website

It was agreed:

- The website should be archived and the domain name retained
- Key resources from the website could be copied to other appropriate websites
- The home page should be edited with an update on the status of the UKFG, and this report added

The mapping process and this workshop highlighted the need to increase the international dimension of these activities in the UK if the legacy of the UKFG is not to be lost.

The workshop ended with an evening celebration of the work of the UKFG.

Annex 1: Brief Overview of the UK Food Group

The UK Food Group

The UK Food Group (UKFG) was a network of around 50 development, environment, farmer and academic organisations in the UK that has worked on global food and agriculture issues for more than 30 years, overseen by a Management Committee drawn from the membership.

The UKFG's vision is a world with a fair and sustainable food system that can end hunger, restore the environment and improve social justice. The UK Food Group works to strengthen advocacy in the UK, the EU, the UN and other international bodies for a global food system that can achieve our vision. It stands in solidarity with the networks of those most vulnerable to hunger, including movements of small-scale farmers, herders and fishers in the global South. The UKFG supports their right to be part of decision making in the global food system at all levels.

The UKFG aims to promote the many great examples of sustainable and fair approaches to agriculture and local food systems and speak out against unjust and environmentally reckless approaches to food and agriculture.

Origins

The UK Food Group was initiated in 1986 when Christian Aid, led by Clive Robinson, identified the need to bring together people working in three distinct sectors which rarely connected: overseas development, environment and farming, particularly in the context of the debate on the EU Common Agricultural Policy. The aim was to promote the issue of food and farming in a global context and build relationships with organisations in Europe and worldwide.

Over the years the UKFG has been hosted by Christian Aid, Sustain, Compassion in World Farming, and most recently by Send a Cow.

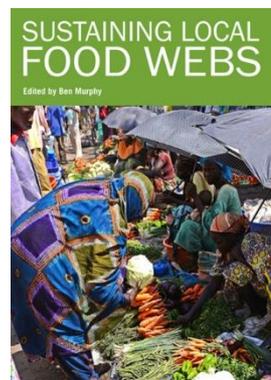
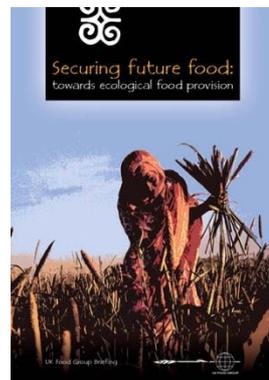
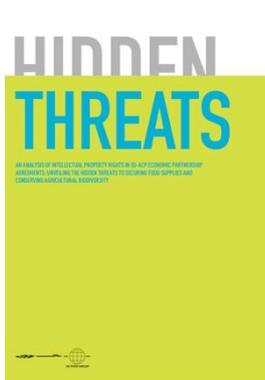
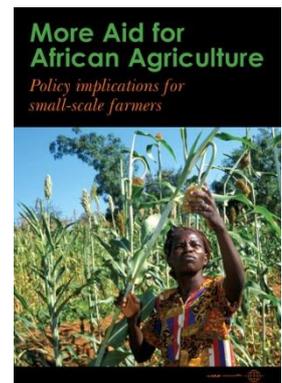
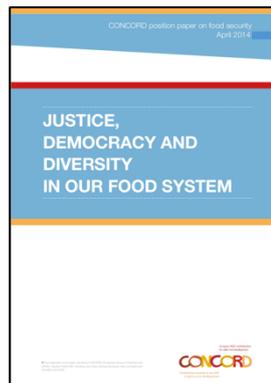
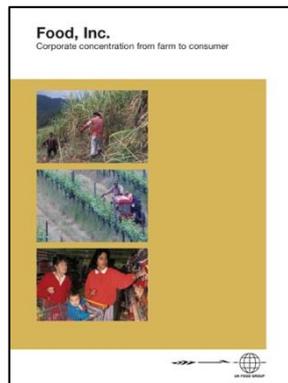
Selected Achievements and Events

- Key **issues** that the UKFG has worked on include the increased role of the WTO in agriculture, export dumping, the development, release and spread of GMOs in the food system, the emergence of speculation in commodities including food for the growing power centres within the world food system. A key example is the sudden rise in the price of food in 2008, when many UKFG members pooled their information and realised that the crisis was driven by speculation in food commodities which no other agencies or media had addressed. UKFG set up the UK Platform for Food Sovereignty in 2004, supporting the European food sovereignty platform in its campaign for a new Common Agricultural Policy, and subsequently helping organise Nyéléni 2007: forum for food sovereignty.
- The UKFG has commissioned many **reports and policy briefings** over the years. For example, *Mapping Government thinking about globalisation* highlights the many assumptions underlying UK government policy; *Food Inc* describes the concentrations of power within the world food system; while *Hidden Threats: An analysis of intellectual property rights in EU-ACP economic partnership agreements: unveiling the hidden threats to securing food supplies and conserving agricultural biodiversity* provides an overview of how international rules on intellectual property rights, as proposed to be included in the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) texts, add significant challenges and threats to securing food supplies, food sovereignty and the sustainable use and conservation of agricultural biodiversity, especially in African, Caribbean and Pacific countries.
- *Spotlight on the marginalised: strengthening the position of smallholders in European trade policy*, an **EC-funded project** in partnership with sustainable development organisations in Europe and a number of African organisations, focussed on highlighting the effects of European policies, particularly Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), on the livelihoods of smallholder farmers.
- A second EC-funded project **europAfrica: towards food sovereignty**, organised with Practical Action and Italian, Belgian and Hungarian NGOs and with the regional African farmers' networks ROPPA (the West African regional network of smallholder farmers), PROPAC (Central Africa) and EAFF (Eastern Africa) focused on agro-food policies, regional integration and Europe-Africa solidarity, and disseminated information about different models of agricultural production, as promoted by farmers' organisations, governments and aid agencies, through the lens of

food sovereignty. Among many reports produced the UKFG published *Securing Future Food: towards ecological food provision* that built on the Nyéléni food sovereignty process.

- The UKFG has represented the **British Overseas NGOs for Development (BOND)** on global food and farming issues and in this role has participated in many EU meetings and fora.
- The UKFG has worked with other bodies in Europe - including CONCORD - and elsewhere in pursuit of common goals such as influencing the **Committee on World Food Security (CFS)** and was instrumental in the renewal process of the CFS in 2009, the setting up of the CSM in 2010 and subsequently supporting this mechanism in its various processes.
- **Submissions** have been made to Government bodies on a range of policy issues, including: the All Party Parliamentary Group on Agriculture and Food for Development for their enquiry on Global Food Security; the UK White Paper Process "Securing our Common Future"; to DFID and DEFRA in the preparations for the World Food Summit in 1996 and again in 2002 and 2009; and the Commission on Intellectual Property Rights (CIPR), commissioned by DFID.
- **Advocacy** activities include the initiative in 2002 to encourage all the directors of the large NGOs to collectively pressure the UK government to stop promoting the acceptance of GMOs (in the UK) in the name of hunger eradication (overseas), which successfully stifled that government initiative for a decade.
- The UKFG has participated and organised key **meetings**. For example, in 2008 a UKFG delegation met with the Director General of FAO, and in 2010 the UKFG joined with hundreds of other organisations in launching a European Food Declaration, which outlines principles for a radically new Common Agriculture and Food Policy that would be fair, inclusive, transparent, sustainable and have the interests of people rather than corporations at its centre.

A Selection of UKFG Resources



Annex 2: Presentation of Findings from the Mapping Exercise



Methodology

- In discussion with the management group I outlined 4 questions to ask interviewees focused on **past, present, future**
- Sent to a selected list of UKFG members and allies

- 19 one-on-one interviews
- 2 email responses

- What has been your experience of engaging with the UKFG in the past? If you are not currently active in the group, why is that?
- In the context of this vision of a just future food system, what unique role/unique function can a UK based network play?
- What does working effectively with small-scale producers and other food system actors - both across the world and in its diaspora in the UK - look like?
- How do you see yourself participating in such a network? What would your role be?

Past & Present

- What has been your experience of engaging with the UKFG in the past?
- If you are not currently active in the group, why is that?

Key Perspectives

A Broad Church: UKFG was seen as space where many groups with their own expertise & priority issues could locate themselves since the UKFG was “**bringing all these points of view together into some coherent whole**”. *

It had historically been made up of NGOs (but with majority of funding coming from larger NGOs and EC grants) & enabled voices of small-scale farmers to be heard within the UK.

Because of **corporatisation** of the NGO space over several years, the larger development NGOs are no longer active and UKFG seen as ‘too radical’ by some. This has left **a resource vacuum**.

Also, the past administrator had been carrying so much of the work that **it was hard to keep momentum** going after she left.

People appreciate UKFG as a **resource space/email list** where they can find out important information as well as a space that would have meetings on issues that aren't being covered by other groups.

UKFG is also seen as London-centric: a few interviewees mentioned that it could make **better use of online communication** methods to do some of its work

It has focused on **the international dimensions of localised food systems as affecting and affected by the UK**, and not on issues happening in the UK.

Overall, the UKFG is seen as a brilliant **movement-building** and **information-sharing** space, especially its role internationally at the Committee on World Food Security*

Future

- In the context of this vision of a just future food system, what unique role/unique function can a UK based network play?
- What does working effectively with small-scale producers and other food system actors - both across the world and in its diaspora in the UK - look like?
- How do you see yourself participating in such a network? What would your role be?

Areas of energy

Direct policy work (apart from **People's Food Policy**) not widely thought to be the best use of resources going forward. If UK policy work continued all (bar one) thought DFID was not a useful target, but important to find more strategic leverage points, e.g Parliamentary ministers. If policy work did continue CFS seen as the most useful, although movement-building aspect of this was more important than direct lobbying.

Strong support for **cultivating a stronger civil society movement** in the UK oriented around food sovereignty and justice (although not necessarily framed in those terms as a few highlighted these be excluding narratives). *

Address **deeper justice issues that relate to patriarchy, racism and class**. Prioritising **leadership of diaspora groups** (and women in particular) who align with the above vision & speak to these issues

"Be a critical and forward-thinking solutionary voice as to what is happening around food here at all levels. Access to food, food waste, healthy food environments, culturally appropriate food, food history and heritage and politics."

(N.B these are more accessible ways of exploring food sovereignty)

"Then be looking out - how do we connect - how is that changing with Brexit, how do we do something that is better - how is that more just and equitable."

Gaps

There isn't a strong, coherent civil society network in the UK that speak to unjust dynamics within food systems across North-South geographies & within the UK & across issues of gender and race and other structural issues of social justice.

Aspects of this have been taken up by different groups. Several interviewees said that what should happen is that these groups should connect between themselves, and the UKFG should pass away, celebrating what it has contributed and letting the new come in.

Either way, there is a persistent gap in financial **resources**. However, funding applications have been happening and funding pots available. Potential diaspora leaders who would have more legitimacy as leaders, aren't able to put time towards making these applications happen, so others would need to do that.

In addition there are also issues of **trust** in terms of engaging with the UKFG as it currently is and has been historically. Which links to having new leaders who are more accessible in that respect.

"There is a space to look at the UKFG purpose and aim. There is a lack of collective spaces in the UK which are critical in decolonial ways, with a systemic challenging of patriarchy. The UKFG could give space to that. That's when we start getting into creating safer spaces. Currently it's a space that is dislocated from many realities – so that's not safe."

*"**Systems of accountability** have to be led on these [systemically transformative] principles with people who hold them who are not all white and not all men, and foregrounded by women from the diaspora in the majority.....In terms of governancethat's really important because it's all informal right now."*

"The food space is so removed and layered with whiteness, white privilege and power, so it's hard to say I'm part of the food space when my work has been in community work and they've not engaging in my realities, so it makes me hesitant to say I work in food/I'm a food expert because it doesn't fit my experience."

To Conclude:

There are a few clusters of opinion about next steps for this process, but no concrete offers to take on work other than to participate in each of the interviewees' area of interest. This speaks to the role the UKFG has always played in knitting together disparate interests to keep the big picture in the frame (although now, with the inclusion of new issues re: structural social justice issues and, related to that, relevant diaspora leadership, that big picture has changed).

Whilst there is a cluster of opinion among UKFG members that they have energy to address these issues, doing this work exacerbates the resourcing issue. And is impacted by a lack of trust by several key potential diaspora leaders in this space.

Selected quotes from participants

“There is a cycle within NGOs that they focus on something for a few years and then move on. Which is frustrating for groups whose focus is food and farming. Then when the interest comes back it comes with groups with huge resources who don't have the knowledge and then a few years later jump back out again. Which will always be an issue of trying to combine the international and the groups working on food, even on food in the UK. Because the international will always be dominated by those big NGOS.”

“Consumer issues & the food justice agenda is not the same thing as fighting for agroecology and sustainable models of food production....

...In an analysis, we can demonstrate these are sub-themes but we are finding it hard to find someone to be a **guardian of the meta-theme**. That is the role that UKFG used to have. In the absence of the meta-theme it becomes very difficult for people in sub-themes to take that step up and connect the dots.

Is that the role for individual volunteers? That won't be paid and then that will be disorganised...

It just takes a handful of committed individuals who are going to take that forward. That's what happened for food sovereignty, for Peoples Food Policy, why isn't it happening for that meta-theme...?”

“There is huge potential in there. Of bringing what remains of the UKFG and things like the People’s Food Policy into a broader alliance. To some extent we have engaged with that community, it’s not just about land it’s also about social justice, diversity and inclusion, based on understanding that that there is huge exploitation of people and planet.”

“There are different centres of expertise...when it comes to land, these three orgs lead, when it comes to organics, these, when it comes to GM, these. If there was a framework that honours where the leadership is in different areas so that they were talking more effectively we could still have a broad and effective potential civil society network. We of course need to make sure that that this network is promoting leadership from many different people within it....we are talking about an **ecosystem of change....**”