



FEASIBILITY REPORT

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This report focuses on the lessons learned of a city partnership on nutrition, linking to the smart city agenda.



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The first report summarising the lessons learned from this partnership was submitted in 2020. This follow-up report follows the partnership through 2021 and the COVID-19 Pandemic.



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INTRODUCTION

The Birmingham India Nutrition Initiative (BINDI) is a 'Nutrition Smart City' initiative which involves the development of policies and practices through a learning partnership between Birmingham City Council (BCC), UK and Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC), India. The first report focusing on the lessons learned of a city partnership on nutrition, linking to the Smart City agenda, was submitted in 2020. This report follows the progress made by both cities during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PARTNERSHIP



LESSON 1:

PARTICIPATION IN CITY NETWORKS IS KEY TO SECURING FUNDING FOR AND PROGRESSING FOOD SYSTEM WORK

BCC signed the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact (MUFPP) in 2015 and also joined EUROCITIES WG food group at this time. Since then, it has secured participation in multiple programmes including the UK Government's national 'Childhood Obesity Trailblazer' project, a Horizon 2020 urban food system project and is also the focus of a UKRI food system transformation programme. BCC is now participating in 'Sustainable Food Places' network. This brings together pioneering food partnerships to drive innovation and best practice on all aspects of healthy and sustainable food.

Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) mentioned being a signatory to the MUFPP and participating in BINDI to secure World Bank funding for a pilot programme on urban food systems. The experience of Pune has informed the development of a national initiative and challenge targeting India's Smart Cities. The Eat Smart Challenge led by Food Standards and Safety Authority of India (FSSAI) and the Smart Cities Division of the Ministry of Urban Affairs, is due to launch a competition inviting all 100 + Smart Cities to submit a food vision and food plan that aligns with the India's Eat Right campaign. Winning cities will learn together and share best practice.



LESSON 2:

CITIES CAN HAVE AN IMPACT ON NATIONAL FOOD POLICY AND STRATEGY

The City of Birmingham was involved in the launch of the 'National Food Conversation' to inform the development of National Food Strategy for England. A video was produced to encourage citizens to participate in dialogue about food systems and the national team visited the city to listen to citizens ahead of the launch of the first part of National Food Strategy. In India, the Smart Cities Mission and FSSAI agreed to launch a national challenge based on the BINDI partnership to encourage more Smart Cities to integrate food system thinking into urban planning. The Food Foundation is the knowledge partner for this challenge. Embedding food systems thinking into the Smart City Mission was an original aim of the BINDI partnership. The previous CEO of PMC is now the Mission Director and proposed the challenge which has been approved. The national lead for India's engagement in the UNFSS is also supportive of this programme of work.



LESSON 3:

ENGAGING CITIZENS IS RECOGNISED AS KEY TO DEVELOPING HEALTHIER, SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

During Phase 1, both cities participated in engagement activities to understand the food policy priorities of their citizens. A sample survey was conducted with over 3,000 adult citizens in Pune by PMC Auxiliary Nurses which was led by the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics. A policy brief was produced and showed the main findings from the survey which explores eating habits, understanding of healthy food and policy changes that citizens want to see made to help them to secure healthier diets.

BCC produced an online survey (based on the Pune survey) to understand the needs of their citizens. This was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic but follow-up surveys were produced to assess health and wellbeing needs during 'lockdown'. BCC also commissioned 'Seldom Heard Voices' to take into consideration the opinions of those who are not typical respondents to council consultations. The policy recommendations have since been incorporated into an 'Emergency Food Plan'.

Leaders from both cities have shared the findings of their engagement activities with international audiences. We are yet to learn if cities will be effective at incorporating policy recommendations from these engagement activities into their food policies, plans and strategies. This will be a focus of the Food Cities 2022 partnership.



LESSON 4:

COMMITMENT TO FOOD SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION IN BOTH CITIES INCREASED DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS BUT OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING TOGETHER HAVE DECREASED

Meetings between Pune and Birmingham were cancelled as staff were asked to step-back and focus on essential work only in order to respond to the crisis. At the time of writing, Pune is beginning to experience a second peak as the UK begins to emerge from lockdown. However, both cities continue to show commitment to this work and to the partnership. City leaders and senior officers made time to participate in two webinars. Focal points in both cities continue to liaise with the Food Foundation which has also been commissioned by BCC to support delivery of food strategy.

Although BCC postponed the launch of their city food strategy they are currently working on an 'Emergency Food Plan' (as mentioned in Lesson 3) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic as a stepping stone towards a longer term food strategy. The actual food strategy is due to go out to consultation in the Summer of 2021. Despite lack of capacity amongst staff (most have been asked to focus on core duties), BCC continues to make applications for innovative food projects. The city has also submitted candidature for the MUFPP Steering Group. PMC also secured World Bank funding as highlighted in Lesson 1. The project objectives are to build safe food systems, improve the nutritional status of Pune citizens and forge strong rural-urban linkages.



LESSON 5:

REACHING THE MOST VULNERABLE CITIZENS DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS REQUIRED A PARTNERSHIP WITH ESTABLISHED VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

In May 2020, the Food Foundation prepared case studies of Birmingham and Pune's response to the COVID-19 crisis. Both cities mobilised to provide food for communities by commissioning the voluntary sector. The approach reflected an acknowledgement by both city authorities that there were vulnerable citizens with restricted access to food as well as their limitations in reaching these citizens despite a national response in both countries.

In the case of Birmingham, a third sector organisation that usually re-distributes surplus food to communities was commissioned to purchase food to deliver to those in need. In the case of Pune, a third sector organisation, established in 'slum communities' was commissioned to survey and organise food deliveries. The organisations commissioned were trusted and known. In both cases, the organisations that participated in the response were skilled at assessing and responding to the growing need for food.



LESSON 6:

SECURING COMMITMENT FROM CITIES DURING A PANDEMIC REQUIRES CONSTANT COMMUNICATION, KNOWLEDGE OF LOCAL AND GEOPOLITICAL ISSUES, NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS AND DEVELOPING FRIENDSHIPS.

The relationship with PMC was established by national contacts (DFID, Tata Trusts) and maintained through regular communication, online meetings and exchange visits. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Pune (in Maharashtra State which is experiencing 50% of India's recorded COVID-19 cases) has been unable to participate in meetings but communication has been maintained via WhatsApp with the an appointed officer and the city responded to initiatives such as producing a case study detailing their response to the COVID-19 pandemic, participating in the launch of Food Cities 2022, producing a video for Milan Pact Talks and taking part in the Milan Steering Group elections.

The approach of engaging cities via consul representatives worked well for Malawi. The consul engaged a British businessman who advises the Malawi government. A government based focal point engaged Mayors of two secondary cities. We are in weekly communication with all three. As a result of this engagement, a National Convenor for the Food System Summit Dialogues and task force has been appointed. A delegation is due to visit the UK to learn about sustainable food systems.

Other consuls have been slow to identify cities as attention has been diverted to deal with the pandemic. Despite this we have maintained communication and started establishing networks within cities to support engagement when city focal points are identified. For example, Birmingham is already in a twinning relationship with Johannesburg who have expressed interest in the partnership.



LESSON 7:

AN INTERNATIONAL FOOD SYSTEM PARTNERSHIP IS OF INTEREST TO OTHER COUNTRIES AND CITIES ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH

In 2020, The Food Foundation launched 'Food Cities 2022' as part of the Global Food Systems project funded by FCDO. The purpose of this project is to attract more cities from across the Commonwealth to the partnership. Birmingham Commonwealth Association (BCA) secured interest from countries with a significant consular base in Birmingham, namely: India, Bangladesh, Uganda, Malawi, South Africa and Jamaica as well as Botswana. The UK's Sustainable Food Places movement also expressed interest in learning from BINDI to encourage more partnerships between UK cities and global cities. A partnership document has been drafted for High Commission and city signatories. This is less complicated than the process of writing and signing an MOU or a legally binding document whilst ensuring that decision makers are committed to the partnership. Benefits of engaging in a peer learning partnership

THE BENEFITS OF ENGAGING IN A PEER LEARNING PARTNERSHIP FOR CITIES:

- Secure senior political support for a city-wide food policy.
- Organise stakeholder and citizen engagement activities to consult on food policy options. In this partnership, stakeholders included business networks, large public sector organisations, voluntary sector organisations and partners working on the Smart City agenda.
- Secure funding to stimulate healthier, more sustainable food environments.
- Participate in high-level national and international events to secure political buy-in and galvanise local efforts.

NEXT STEPS

Despite COVID-19, the cities continue to make progress and have attracted other cities to the partnership. The Food Cities 2022 partnership was launched by DG FCDO, Vjijay Rangarajan and Dr David Nabarro in January 2021. City leads from Birmingham and Pune shared their experience of participating in a learning partnership on Food Systems. Speakers from across the commonwealth (India, South Africa, Malawi and Jamaica) also expressed their interest in participating in this partnership.

2021 is a seminal year for leadership on Food Systems and the aim of the learning partnership is to encourage and empower Commonwealth cities in low and middle income countries to participate in this and other partnerships and to share learning on the international stage.



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