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Co-creation with Disadvantaged Communities: A participatory "shopping basket" method exploring what people eat and potential for change

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Title: Co-creation with Disadvantaged Communities: A participatory “shopping basket” method exploring what people eat and potential for change

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Abstract (max 300 words):

Diets considered poor for human and planetary health can result from lack of finance, resources, skills or knowledge. Disadvantaged communities often face unique barriers to involvement in food development, which may exacerbate divide rather than “levelling up”. A participatory visual method was developed to explore commonly consumed foods alongside aspirations and barriers to change.

Each workshop included up to 6 citizens alongside community and university researchers. Citizens represented sub-groups; people caring for children, living alone, and with special dietary requirements. Firstly, a diverse range of food images were displayed. Foods commonly consumed were recalled individually, and then as a group, considering (i) Foods eaten frequently with a desire for change, (ii) Foods eaten infrequently with a desire to eat/try more, and (iii) Foods eaten frequently with no desire for change. Secondly, national purchase and intake data across socio-economic groups were presented as food images under the headings “I/we eat less of/more of”. Participants were asked to move images to represent their group. Finally, participants summarised aspirational changes.

From 5 workshops within one disadvantaged community, we recognise food choices are often made within the context of stress, uncertainty, stretched resources and catering for multiple demands. Awareness of “healthy foods” was apparent, but cost-effectiveness, ready-access and taste (especially child preferences) took priority. In-line with national quantitative data; potatoes were a key staple, the top three meats were chicken, sausages and mince; snacking was widespread (chocolate, biscuits and crisps) and fresh fruits (particularly berries) were eaten less due to cost. However, the groups indicated (frozen) vegetables may be consumed more than data suggest.

Environmental and animal welfare considerations had relatively little influence on what respondents bought. Output from further communities, and opportunities for food development and policy that arose from this participatory method will be discussed.