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IFAN supports and connects a range of independent frontline food aid organizations while advocating on their behalf at a national level. Its vision is of a country that does not need emergency food aid, and in which good food is accessible to all.
“The rekindling of Black feminism and Black women organizing in the UK offers new hope in all areas of life – from food security, community and health, to academia, politics and policy.”

The United Kingdom (UK) is in the midst of a crisis: a widening gap between the haves and have-nots, austerity, a deepening of racism, islamophobia, homophobia and xenophobia, increasing far right extremism, entrenchment of corporate power, and neoliberal politics are an everyday reality. Brexit has plunged the UK into a crisis of uncertainty. The UK is mired in a poverty crisis, a welfare crisis, a housing crisis, a hunger crisis, and a human rights crisis. Amid these multiple crises, the impact on women of color remains invisible.

The government is legally required under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 11) to secure the human right to adequate food and nutrition for everyone in the UK. But in recent years the country has seen large increases in the levels of malnutrition, hunger, food bank usage and food aid, all of which are indicative of the UK’s regression in complying with its obligations to respect, protect, and fulfill international human rights, including the right to food and nutrition.

Social inequity, discrimination and state violence underlies this food crisis in the fifth richest economy in the world.

INEQUALITIES & DISCRIMINATION
In May 2019, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Professor Philip Alston, released his report on his visit to the UK in November 2018.
The report condemned the UK government for its program of austerity policies, and the deliberate cuts to public services and the social welfare security net, implemented since 2010. This has driven 14 million people, a fifth of the population, into poverty. More people are forced to choose between heating or eating, growing numbers of children are arriving at school hungry, and there is an increased use of food banks.  

The report is damning of the systemic inequalities and the disadvantages that women, children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and ethnic minorities face. Alston states that:

*ethnic minorities are at a higher risk of becoming homeless, have poorer access to health care and experience higher rates of infant mortality. Black people and people from a South Asian background are the most likely to live in poverty and deprivation, yet as a result of changes to taxes, benefits and public spending from 2010 to 2020, Black and Asian households in the lowest fifth of incomes will experience the largest average drop in living standards, about 20%. In England and Scotland, changes to public spending from 2010–2011 to 2021–2022 will fall the hardest on Black households.*

For women in these communities, the situation is even more acute. Changes in benefits and social policies have reduced support for women far more than for men. Reductions in social care also means that there is a heavier burden on primary caregivers, who are usually women. The report also shares that life expectancy of women in disadvantaged communities has stalled, and for the poorest 20%, it has actually fallen.

Alongside austerity, the UK has seen the development of a hostile political environment since 2012, where policy and legislation are designed to make it difficult for undocumented migrants to remain in the UK. This has had devastating impacts on asylum seekers and refugees, and diaspora communities from former colonies. Asylum seekers are denied their basic human rights to shelter, healthcare, work and food, and rely on charity to survive. The so-called ‘Windrush generation’ – British subjects arriving in the UK between 1948 and 1971 from Caribbean countries, and their children, many of whom were born in the UK, have had their British citizenship questioned. Without documentary proof, they have had their basic human rights withdrawn in recent years. These persons arrived under immigration policies linked to British colonies which allowed them the legal right to settle in the UK as British citizens. They neither needed nor were given any documents upon entry to the UK. A series of discriminatory acts by successive governments saw changes to immigration laws beginning as early as 1965, and landing cards later destroyed in 2010. Recently, many persons have been denied entry back into the UK, lost benefits, or have been deported back to countries that they have no connection to, having spent all or most of their lives in the UK.

These measures can only be seen as modern British imperialism, where the overarching political, social and economic systems of domination are white, normative and/or supremacist. Race, ethnicity, gender and ‘othering’ are the tools of colonizing bodies, and ways of being and knowing. Black women, other women of color, migrant and refugee women – combined an estimated 6.5% of the UK population are marginalized, excluded and underrepresented. The voices of Black women are too often silenced, subjected to state, domestic and public violence.
In this scenario, access to food, health, housing, education, decent work, and other economic, social, and cultural rights are deeply compromised for women of color. These women are invisible in policies, data, and research, contributing to further marginalization.

ERASEMENT AND BLINDNESS IN DATA COLLECTION ANALYSIS

The UK government is turning a blind eye to the scale of national poverty and its impacts, particularly as it relates to hunger and marginalized groups, and the specific impacts on women. Such invisibility and erasure have been described as “everyday mechanisms of white ignorance” — in other words, a world view of white normativity. Additionally, “[a] very basic reality is that the forces of structural racism and sexism are always shifting, creating new forms of othering.” Such attitudes and practices, and in particular color blindness, are also reproduced and reinforced in academia. There is a huge gap in analysis and research on intersectional dimensions of gender, class, race and discrimination within the study of food insecurity, landlessness, or development globally (across the Global South and Global North).

A study on the impact of austerity on Black and minority ethnic women in the UK, led by women from communities in Coventry and Manchester, showed that women of color were more likely to live in poor households – amounting to 40% of African/Caribbean, 46% of Pakistani and 50% of Bangladeshi women. It is clear that women of color face higher levels of discrimination, but the analysis, including from within our own organizations, fails to address it.

Other economic analyses have also missed an opportunity to measure the percentage of women of color using food aid, and to provide an intersectional analysis on household food insecurity.

The author of this article found only two studies that address food insecurity, race and gender in the UK. One was limited to food bank users in inner London. That particular study showed that about 55.9% of food bank users in the UK are women, with the majority being Black and Asian women. It failed, however, to explore the relationship between race, gender and reliance on welfare. The second study, carried out by Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) Co-Chair Dr Madeleine Power, looked at experiences of Asian and White women with food banks in North East England. It was the first of its kind but still did not explore structural racism and gender, and instead it looked at cultural difference.

There is also no research about women of color who are food producers or food workers, or of Black queer women and non-binary people, and their right to food and nutrition in the UK.

In addition to the lack of data and analysis on the impacts of food insecurity and poverty on women of color, there is no research on these issues led by women of color themselves. Less than 1% of university professors are Black women; there are only 25 Black women professors in the UK, and they have had “to overcome bullying, stereotyping and institutional neglect in order to win promotion.” This institutionalized patriarchy, violence and racism further marginalizes and oppresses Black women, and suppresses and devalues the production of knowledge.

These gaps in research, analysis, and representation reduce the capacity to advocate not only by mainstream organizations, but also by policy makers and politicians,
Black women and Black-led organizations. Promoting an intersectional analysis for the right to food and other human rights issues faced by communities of color in the UK, and ensuring space for advocacy led by women of color, are fundamental to developing public policies and programs that can actually address the multiple forms of discrimination and rights violations they face.

**BLACK FEMINIST ADVOCACY: INTERSECTIONALITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE**

Black feminist theories claim that the experience of a double burden of racial and gender discrimination gives rise to different understandings and expressions of their position in relation to sexism, class oppression, and racism.  

Intersectionality, a theory developed by African American Black feminist lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw, is a tool for practice and a framework for analyzing the intersections of race and gender within the complexity of power, systemic racism and other structural oppressions, such as class, age, sexual orientation, and disability. In a recent talk given by Crenshaw in London, she emphasized the importance of race in intersectional analysis: “centering black and brown experiences in the failures and inadequacies of capitalist, patriarchal, white normative structures”, she reiterated, “without race, it is not intersectionality”.  

Across Europe, race is being depoliticized through the erasure of race in intersectionality – i.e. looking at the intersections of gender, class, disability and other oppressions, but not race. This is due to far-right Eurocentrism in German and French politics, as well as by white feminists, often masked by liberal multiculturalism. However, this has not done away with racism. In the European context, this uncritical reproduction of racism by some feminists is an “erasure both of contemporary realities of intersectional subjects and of the history of racial categories and racializing processes across the whole of Europe”.  

The Intersectional Approach Model for Policy and Social Change, developed by Dr. C. Nicole Mason, to contribute to ending the invisibility of women of color in public policy, offers a tool for analyzing and developing strategies for addressing food, hunger, race and gender issues. It analyzes macro and micro causes of inequality and examines differing intersectionalities – structural, political, economic, representative and institutional. This model seeks to better address root causes of inequalities and “challenges single-issue organizing agendas, policy frameworks and models”.  

Addressing violations of the right to food and nutrition requires a holistic analysis into structural issues and factors which contribute to a violation, existing across sectoral policies and organizing. Food insecurity for women of color in the UK is a result of inadequate social policies across many issues. Addressing just one area neglects the multiple forms of violence where poverty, marginalization, and discrimination have impact on people and communities.

**HUNGER, POVERTY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE**

Whilst the UK government dismisses the Alston report in a display of imperialistic arrogance, Alston’s recommendation to “[r]eview and remedy the systematic disadvantage inflicted by current policies on women, as well as on children, persons with disabilities, older persons and ethnic minorities” is quite weak without a stronger body of research and evidence. However, more importantly, the political will is missing to dismantle deeply entrenched institutions of oppression.
In the fight for economic equity, and racial and gender justice, enshrining the right to food and nutrition into UK legislation will help to tackle deep-rooted social and economic inequalities, and is a prerequisite for long-term structural change. The emerging ‘food justice’ paradigm in the UK draws on an intersectional approach to the right to food and nutrition, with some leadership by Black women. Food justice calls for critical considerations of working towards fair, sustainable and just food systems and highlights the need to develop understandings within an intersectional social justice framing shaped by diverse communities in the context of gender, race and class power dynamics.

There is a need to articulate different narratives in our analysis and advocacy including critical race theory, the coloniality of power, and decolonial theories, as well as frameworks such as intersectionality, all of which offer illumination. As emancipatory frameworks they open up pluralistic knowledge systems and praxes that go beyond the patriarchal Cartesian duality of the academy. There is also a need to increase the visibility of Black women, and to build advocacy and capacity informed by diverse ways of being, doing and knowing.

For women of color:

issues of power, exclusion and marginalization should inform our activism. This has to be in terms of prioritization of issues, whose realities we address and representation. When we do this, we move towards a more holistic vision of ensuring all are being carried forward by a movement purported to be universal in nature.

Rising food insecurity in communities of color is a clear indication of exclusion and marginalization, and is a clear call for rethinking our advocacy strategies and representation of leaders and voices within the right to food and food sovereignty movements.

The rekindling of Black feminism and Black women organizing in the UK offers new hope in all areas of life – from food security, community and health, to academia, politics and policy. New movements and organizations like KIN are picking up the mantle left by UK Black feminists in the 70s and 80s and nurtured by the resilience and resistance of women of color in British society to continue the struggle. KIN, through a series of talks and events, brings Black activists and organizers of all ages, class and gender together, across borders and struggles for mutual support, collaboration and to build strategies for liberation.

The right to food and nutrition cannot be met without the leadership of those who are most oppressed in the global food and economic system, and those who are most at risk of regressive state social policies. Black women are stepping into leadership roles, building the capacity of other Black women and non-binary people, building alliances and solidarity with other struggles, and making Black women both visible and heard.
IN BRIEF
Food insecurity amongst communities of color, particularly Black women in the UK, is a result of inadequate social policies across many issues, and a clear indication of exclusion and marginalization.

Addressing just one area neglects the multiple forms of state violence, as poverty, marginalization, and discrimination have an impact on people and communities. It is a clear call for rethinking our advocacy strategies and representation of leaders and voices within the right to food and food sovereignty movements.

Gaps in research, analysis, and representation reduces the capacity to advocate not only by mainstream organizations, but also by policy makers and politicians, Black women and Black led organizations.

An intersectional social justice framing – shaped by diverse communities in the context of gender, race and class power dynamics – is emancipatory and illuminating for Black women.

Promoting intersectional analysis for right to food and other human rights issues faced by communities of color in the UK ensures space for advocacy.

KEY CONCEPTS
→ Intersectionality is a tool for practice, and a framework for analyzing the intersections of race and gender within the complexity of power, systemic racism and other structural oppressions.

→ Food justice recognizes the influence of race and class on the production, distribution and consumption of food in the food system. It seeks to address the structural causes and disparities by drawing from established social and environmental theoretical frameworks to effect policy change and practical solutions.

→ Black feminist theories claim that the experiences of black women gives rise to a particular understanding of their position in relation to sexism, class oppression, and racism.

KEY WORDS
→ Gender and Women's Rights
→ Intersectionality
→ Monitoring and Accountability
→ Social Protection
→ Race