

## FOOD FOCUSED NGOs MISSION IN THE EMERGENCE OF SUSTAINABLE FOOD PRACTICES IN THE UK

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### ABSTRACT

In their mission, Food Focused Non Governmental Organisations (FFNGOs) are moderating and redefining governance processes, power and social relations in their effort to introduce ethical values across the food supply chain (FSC). In this study the mission and vision of FFNGOs were identified and exploratory evidence of their application in the supply chain ethics and the emergence of sustainable food practices were studied. Analysis of their mission was drawn upon information on the websites of 106 UK FFNGOs. Additional data were drawn from semi-structured interviews with key officers and directors of 42 FFNGOs in the United Kingdom. One half (50.48%) of the UK food NGOs falls into the central category (106 NGOs) that are wholly involved in food sector work while the rest were involved intermittently in food sector; or environmental and developmental in cross sector activities. The seven missions of FFNGOs identified were aimed at transforming the entire food supply chain in three broad areas: production and supply chain processes; creation of alternatives (more sustainable and competitive) products; and, improvements in consumer awareness. This paper contends that by deploying their mission within FSC, FFNGOs are active participants' in the emerging discourses around sustainable food landscape. Their participation implies a change from economic centric supply chain to one that is more inclusive and responsible in the use of resources, price equity and the spread of benefits to upstream operators.

**Keywords:** Food focused NGOs (FFNGOs); food sustainability; ethical landscape; mission statement; food governance

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### INTRODUCTION

There have been different discourses on the idea of sustainable food and agriculture in recent years (Lang and Barling, 2012; Miele and Evans, 2010; Yakovleva, 2009; Yakovleva, 2007; Watts *et al.*, 2005; Freidberg, 2004), suggesting a range of alternative approaches to food and agriculture (Feagan, 2007; Scrinis, 2007; Kloppenburg *et al.*, 2000) in order to achieve sustainability (Alkon, 2008). Yet the identity and involvement of Food Focused Non Governmental Organizations (FFNGOs) within the sustainable food

landscape have not been clearly articulated (Smith, 2012; Johnson and Prakash, 2007).

Understanding the mission landscape used by different FFNGOs' in their intervention work is crucial in developing a framework for ethical landscape for food. Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) provide templates for pluralism and democratisation processes that channel and advance expressed public interests and deliberations to influence the state and corporate decision making (Edwards, 2009).

Food and farming goes to the heart of the sustainability challenge (SDC, 2011) and a shift from conventional modes, reduction of impacts and adoption of sustainable systems are advocated (Yakovleva *et al.*; 2012; DEFRA 2006; 2002). The kind of NGOs driven by their mission to lead this shift towards reforms within the food supply chain and also playing central engagement role in the transition to sustainable future for the sector are the FFNGOs. This paper identifies and categorises the mission of FFNGOs in the United Kingdom (UK) as third sector organisations at the nucleus of the food supply chain committed to centrally tackle the diversity of issues in order to promote food sustainability. The aim of this study therefore was to create a mechanism to provide an overview and critical understanding of the priorities of different FFNGOs.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Selecting and classifying participants**

A UK food NGOs directory was developed by identifying FFNGOs that were involved in the Food Supply Chain (FSC) and could be further classified as FFNGOs in this study. Even though several thousands of NGOs are registered with the UK Charity Commission (with different focuses) involved in development, environmental and social issues and operating at regional, national and international levels, no specific classification of UK FFNGOs was found for this study. In order to develop a comprehensive list (directory) that classifies UK FFNGOs, a search of the following internet websites and publications (UK NGOs; Database of Archives of Non-Governmental Organizations-DANGO; London fair-trade guide; Guidestar UK; and the Charities

Commission) was conducted to identify and classify NGOs involved in food sector activity. Additionally, snowballing technique (internet links from other NGOs) was used to identify 210 NGOs which were used in this study. The initial process of identifying and classifying NGOs broadly involved in food in this study represents a significant task in providing an organized directory as well as bringing order to a complex food sector.

This study was conducted with 106 FFNGOs drawn from a wider research work aimed at identifying and classifying NGOs involved in FSC intervention. Websites were used initially to gather mission and vision statements and contacts information on each of the 106 NGOs and prospective participants were invited in writing to participate in the interview to which 42 agreed to be involved. The first 6 interviews were a face to face explorative scoping exercise with an interview guide in order to allow themes on mission and vision to emerge upon which further 36 telephone interviews were based. Strauss and Corbin (1998) advised that explorative interviews should precede final formulation of questions in order to be able to capture reality in further data collection. Tape recording of all the interviews of the research was done and with the approval of all the respondents in order to enhance transcription into verbatim (Punch, 2005).

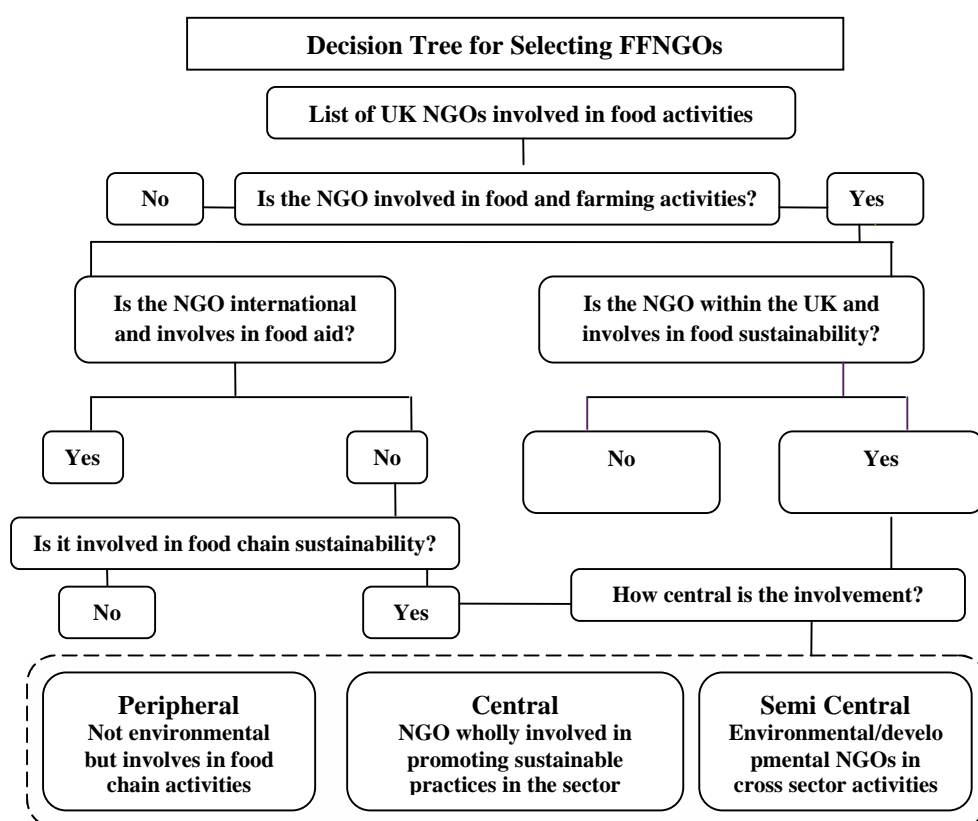
The use of telephone interviewing was a practical and cost effective approach compared to face to face interviews in reaching out to participating respondents who are located across the UK. In order to analyze the interview data, full verbatim transcriptions of the 42 interviews were carried out. The mode of participation of FFNGOs in this survey is as shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Mode of participation of FFNGOs in the research**

Mode of participation in the research	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Face to face Interview	6	3.90
Telephone Interview	36	23.38
Supermarket CSR reports	6	3.90
Website content analyses	106	68.83
<b>Total</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Having identified these NGOs, a further search of their individual websites was conducted to determine not just their involvement but also the extent of their activities in the UK FSC. On that basis a sampling guide was deployed to select NGOs from the directory already developed for this study whose work was centrally focused on food chain activities. To this end a decision tree (Figure. 1) with specific predetermined criteria was devised

(Pope *et al.* 2002) and used to guide the process of narrowing down the number of organizations from 210 by categorizing food NGOs into 3 groupings namely: peripheral (NGOs which are involved in food chain activities intermittently); semi central (that is, environmental/developmental NGOs in cross sector activities); and central (NGOs that are wholly involved in promoting sustainable practices in the FSC).

**Figure 1: Decision Tree for Selecting FFNGOs**

## Data analysis

The approach used in the analysis of the data was developed from the coding system to extract text fragments for analysis (Corbin and Strauss 1990). The research data analysis employed procedures for forming codes, concepts, categories and theory (Table 2). The purpose of codes was to identify anchors that allow the key points of the data to be gathered, while that of concepts was to enable the collection of codes of similar

content that allows the data to be grouped. Categories served the purpose of organising broad groups of similar concepts that are used to generate a theory; while theory became a collection of explanations that explain the subject of the research (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). A software package called NVIVO 9 from QSR was used to assist with the organisation and retrieval of research data in order to apply the coding technique (QSR, 2010a and 2010b).

**Table 2: Coding process of research data**

Initial read through text data	Identify specific segments of information	Label the segments of information to create concepts and categories	Reduce overlap and redundancy among the categories	Create a model incorporating most important categories
Many pages of Text	Many segments of Text	Bigger categories	Fewer categories	Smaller categories

Source: Adapted from Creswell (2002).

Further analysis critically examined and summarized the mission and vision deployed by FFNGOs to promote a more sustainable UK food industry. There is also exploration of the interrelationships existing between FFNGOs individual missions in creating a transition to sustainable food production.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Classification of UK NGOs based on food focused activities is as shown in Table 3 below. Ten per cent of the selected

NGOs falls within the peripheral classification category that are intermittently involved in food chain activities while 39.52% falls within the second or semi-central category. The semi-central category of NGOs is environmental and developmental oriented in cross sector activities. A larger proportion (50.48%) of the identified food NGOs falls into the central category (106 NGOs) representing NGOs that are wholly involved in food sector work.

**Table 3: Classification of UK NGOs based on food focused activities**

Classification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Peripheral	21	10.00
Semi Central	83	39.52
Central	106	50.48
Total	210	100.00

Source: Field Survey (2015).

### FFNGOs mission statements

Classification of FFNGOs mission and vision is as shown in Table 4 below. The mission and vision statements of 106 FFNGOs obtained from interviews and their websites were explored and placed into categories. Following the NVIVO coding seven broad categories emerged from the mission's statements of FFNGOs (Table 3). Some of the mission statements were found to be overlapping and were placed within the overlapping categories.

In first category for instance, the mission for the National Sheep Association stated that *'this specialist organisation is dedicated to safeguarding the interests and future of sheep farmers throughout the UK'*. Garden Organic stated that they are *'dedicated to researching and promoting organic gardening, farming and food'*. These FFNGOs represent organizations that seek to protect the systems and practices within their specialist sector as well as strengthening the capacity of farmers and their competitiveness within the industry. Higher percentage (23.49%) of the respondents (FFNGOs) mission and vision falls into this category.

The second category is made up of 18.67% of the FFNGOs studied, that broadly stated in their mission statement that they are safeguarding public health and consumers' rights for access to healthy food. For instance the Community Food Enterprise stated: *'Our mission is to partner with the diverse people of the East London region, and nationally to safeguard and sustain their rights to the right food as a fundamental condition for individual and community health and well-being'*. FFNGOs pursuing this mission are the ones promoting consumers' awareness and empowering them to make the right choices for their health and well-being. They are also seeking to mobilize and sensitize consumers to the issues of food

and agriculture and show that their choices can make a difference.

FFNGOs within the third category (13.25%) showed from their mission statement that they want to use food and agriculture to advance a better society by tackling environmental and economic issues. The Food Ethics Council for instance stated that their *'aim is to create a food system that is fair and healthy for people and the environment'*. FFNGOs within this category also say that they are advancing better society, public health, economy and environment through proper production and consumption of food within local settings. Their pursuit implies that they have support for sustainable production and consumption of local food and they are making a link between healthy eating and diets and a viable economy and environment.

A fourth category of mission statement (19.28%) focused on creating community growing networks and connecting people, consumers and producers to alternative food ways and systems, reskilling and crafting them to use alternative ways to grow and consume food in local settings. This also includes people growing, cooking and consuming local food produced by themselves within community growing networks. By doing so, these FFNGOs are shaping production and consumption towards alternative systems and products. These FFNGOs were also claiming that they are building strong and well informed communities involved in long term, improved and viable production and consumption approaches. This includes protecting the viability and interests of all the actors of the supply chain. One example is Food Upfront whose mission stated that *'the idea was to encourage, enable and support individuals to grow food in their unused outdoor space'*. Somerset Community Food stated that their mission is that *'which aims to re-connect people with the*

*social, health and environmental effects of growing, buying, preparing and eating local food’.*

Category five describes those 13.25% of the FFNGOs whose mission statements promoted efficient resource use and tackled social, economic and environmental injustices. An example of this is BananaLink which worked within the banana and pineapple sector seeking a holistic supply chain approach from producer to consumer; their mission statement states: *‘raising awareness about the social, economic and environmental conditions of banana production and trade to mobilize action by consumers, NGOs and trades unions; building and strengthening alliances and solidarity between producer and consumer countries, particularly with small-scale farmers’.* FFNGOs within this category also mobilized public support and were involved in creating public movements. For example Compassion in World Farming developed public support to end factory farming and what they consider unfair practices of corporations. Some FFNGOs (e.g. Sustain, The British Pigs Association and East of England Agriculture Society) within this mission category supported farming systems that care for people, environment and animals. They envision the removal of conventional systems and instead advance building capacity for people to feed themselves long term through knowledge of informed choice.

The FFNGOs in the sixth category (4.22%) introduced broader ideas of responsibility such as Christian responses to issues around farmers, farming communities, young consumers’ health including children and vulnerable people within food and farming industry. For instance the Agricultural Christian Fellowship stated that: *‘it exists to help them to make a Christian response to the many blessings, challenges and problems they face’.* This category of FFNGOs

focused on the relationship between people, farming systems and practices and issues such as whether people should farm or leave farming with dignity.

The seventh category (7.83% of the FFNGOs) involves FFNGOs whose mission statements claimed they are leading a transition to responsible business in the supply chain. They do this by leading a process of internalizing rather than externalizing risks associated with food and farming. For instance The Dairy Council stated that they: *‘provide dynamic leadership to the entire UK dairy sector and seek to create an environment which allows the sector successfully to compete and realise a sustainable future’.* In other words this group of FFNGOs is advocating that instead of causing adversity, the food sector should be active in contributing economic, social and environmental benefits to the community. This category of FFNGOs is proposing and implementing programmes that introduce alternative systems and modes of production. Such FFNGOs are also seen to be seeking transformative measures such as a dairy roadmap that calls for accountability at each stage of the dairy supply chain.

The seven categories depicted in table 2 are not mutually exclusive; the organisations do not necessarily have mutually exclusive mission and vision. This overlap seems to suggest two implications: firstly, the reinforcing construction of FFNGOs activities within the UK FSC; and secondly, a broader research conclusion that FFNGOs often would use multiple mission, strategy and goals in positioning themselves within the UK sustainable food narrative in order to increase their network and broaden their partnership, power and representation. A single FFNGO could appear in more than one category. For instance Community Food Enterprise sought to protect the UK food system by shifting it towards sustainability while at the same time

advocating for consumers' awareness and health protection. This investigation had created mechanisms that provide an overview and critical understanding of the priorities and broad scope of activities in which FFNGOs are engaged. The research demonstrates the importance of understanding how FFNGOs through their mission statements organise themselves and work with diverse interest groupings

to tackle multiple issues and practices of the FSC. By deploying their (FFNGOs) mission within FSC, FFNGOs are active participants' in the emerging discourses around sustainable food landscape. Their participation implies a change from economic centric supply chain to one that is more inclusive and responsible in the use of resources, price equity and the spread of benefits to upstream operators.

**Table 4: Classification of FFNGOs Mission and Vision**

No.	Mission and Vision	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Protecting industry, systems and practices	39	23.49
2.	Empowering and safeguarding consumer interests and public health	31	18.67
3.	Advancing better society, environment and economy	22	13.25
4.	Creating and connecting communities & networks to alternative food ways	32	19.28
5.	Advocating and promoting sustainable food policies, systems & practice	22	13.25
6.	Introducing broader responses & ethos to issues of food & farming	7	4.22
7.	Leading a transition to responsible business in the supply chain	13	7.83
	<b>Total</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey (2015).

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

- Analysing the mission and vision statements of FFNGOs assists us in understanding the ways that FFNGOs can successfully engage with food supply chains to help the transition to a more sustainable future. FFNGOs have the important role of deploying their mission (set against the background of issues that they are trying to tackle) in spearheading reforms in the FSC.
- One half (50.48%) of the UK food NGOs falls into the central category (106 NGOs) that are wholly involved in food sector work while the rest were involved intermittently in food sector; or

environmental and developmental in cross sector activities.

- The seven missions of FFNGOs are aimed at transforming the entire food supply chain in three broad areas: production and supply chain processes; creation of alternatives (more sustainable and competitive) products; and, improvements in consumer awareness.
- A further work in this area might gain from interrogating the perception of the state and market this time on FFNGOs mission and strategy for a sustainable food supply chain.

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