

*The International Conference
on Poverty, Food and Health
in Welfare: Current Issues,
Future Perspectives*

Calouste Gulbenkian
Foundation
Lisbon July 2003



Scottish Community
Diet Project

*Supporting local
communities tackling
inequalities in
diet and health*

Scottish Community Diet Project

Our over-riding aim is to improve Scotland's food and health. We do this by supporting work within and with low-income communities that improves access to and take-up of a healthy diet.

Major obstacles being addressed by community-based initiatives are:

AVAILABILITY - increasing access to fruit and vegetables of an acceptable quality and cost

AFFORDABILITY - tackling not only the cost of shopping, but also getting to shops

SKILLS - improving confidence and skills in cooking and shopping

CULTURE - overcoming ingrained habits

We help support low-income communities to

- identify barriers to a healthy balanced diet
- develop local responses to addressing these barriers and
- highlight where actions at other levels, or in other sectors, are required

We value the experience, understanding, skills and knowledge within Scotland's communities and their unique contribution to developing and delivering policy and practice at all levels.

Contents

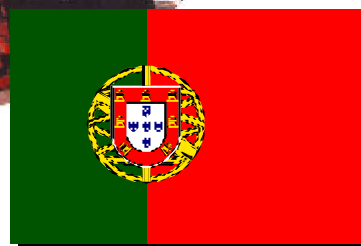
Introduction	page 1
What?	page 2
Where?	page 3
Learning	page 4
Participation	page 6
Some highs and lows ..	page 7
Applying new learning	page 9
Final thoughts	page 11
Delegates	page 12

"Don't stop what you're all doing and never be afraid to speak out."

Professor Peter Townsend speaking with the SCDP delegation, Lisbon 2003

Introduction

Opened by the Portuguese Minister of Health, Dr Luis Filipe Pereira, and closed by the Portuguese Minister of Social Security and Labour, Dr Antonio Bagao Felix, the **International Conference on Poverty, Food and Health in Welfare** promised to break new ground. As stressed to all delegates on the first day of the event, Health in Welfare expressed the thrust of many of the papers to come over the next four days - collaborative action in socially and culturally acceptable ways is a way forward to addressing food insecurity in the global world. As the delegation from the Scottish Community Diet Project was to discover, Lisbon was an intense conference for people who 'deal with hard things'.



(from left to right) Anna Craven, Susan Eley, Lizanne Hume, and Heather Sloan, Lisbon

What?

The conference aimed to set and influence the agendas and priorities of international agencies, including the World Health Organisation, and other key policy makers working to fight food poverty. Its idea originated from the United Nations Millennium Summit¹ and the consequent publication of the World Development Report 2000/1². The international organising committee for the event wanted to gather together those who deal with poverty, food and health issues, to enhance not only the international debate, but also to prioritise setting future challenges as well as meeting current ones, which includes halving the number of poor and hungry globally by 2015.¹

The event itself promised to be a unique opportunity to bridge the multidisciplinary areas of food security, public health and social sciences. True to this promise, a wide range of participants attended the conference. from public health professionals to social scientists, policy makers, academics, educators and field workers, including volunteers, from over 50 countries.

The Scottish Community Diet Project was delighted to be represented by a team also spanning this range of interests and experience. In the project's usual style, places to attend were allocated on a lucky draw basis with names pulled out of the hat by the SCDP's steering group. Anna Craven, community food worker from Ayrshire, together with Heather Sloan, Have Heart Paisley's Locality Team Leader and Dr Susan Eley from the University of Stirling joined one of the SCDP's development officers, Lizanne Hume, to form the Scottish contingent at the event.

As a collective voice, this small team worked hard to communicate to delegates, who sometimes were critical, the wide range of community led activity and research underway in Scotland to help tackle local and national inequalities in diet and health.

¹ The Millennium Development Goals www.un.org/millenniumgoals/

² World Bank (2000) World Development Report 2000/1: Attacking Poverty. Oxford University Press.

Where?

All conference activities took place in the Fundacao Calouste Gulbenkian, a private Portuguese institution which supports work in the arts, education, science and, most aptly health and social welfare. The spacious premises are home to an orchestra, three concert halls and two galleries. Astonishingly all the main exhibits were acquired by one man, Calouste Gulbenkian (1869 -1955), an Armenian oil magnate. During World War II, Gulbenkian auctioned himself and his collections to the European Nations: Portugal bid security, an aristocratic palace and tax exemption to acquire in return the Gulbenkian collection. The Gulbenkian Foundation today makes charitable grants to a number of worldwide initiatives, including community food activity. To find out more about the UK grant programme, please visit: www.gulbenkian.org.uk.



Lisbon



Fundacao Calouste Gulbenkian

Learning

The structure of the event included eight plenary and thirteen keynote lectures by international experts in many disciplines, ten workshops on specialist areas, 62 posters and one video. Two special sessions sponsored by the WHO and the International Food Policy Research Institute also took place. The event's considered planning contributed to the organic processes of inquiry and debate, offering building blocks of commentary that may have passed by a conference 'tourist' approach (dipping in and out of the conference to listen to papers and question presenters).

The SCDP delegation tried as far as possible to attend all sessions by dividing the task between the group. Opportunity for discussion and networking between conference delegates, however, was often limited by time constraints. Even workshop sessions turned out to be presentations, but in smaller rooms.

"Mostly the workshops were mini lectures with very little opportunity to debate or even contribute to the topic. There was scope for questions from the floor, but this was very limited."

Like the unpeeling of an onion, the conference plenary speakers, across the four days, unwrapped significant layers of philosophical and empirical analysis to reveal 'the new food policy agenda'. A few selective highlights included Professor Emeritus of Social Policy (LSE), Peter Townsend, who spoke on anti-poverty policies to meet hunger and other forms of deprivation drawing upon a human rights perspective. Professor Townsend made the argument that the universality of the human rights has the advantage over the selectivity of development projects that will eradicate poverty.

On day two, Graham Riches, Director of Social Work and Family Studies, University of British Columbia (Canada) spoke on Food Poverty and Food Justice: Challenges and Possibilities for Social Policy in the Rich World. The following day, Tim Lang, Professor of Food Policy in the UK, presented Poverty, Food Insecurity and Health in the Global World, and on the final day, Simon Maxwell, Director of Overseas Development Institute, gave his plenary on Food Policy Old and New.

Some of the repeating and cross cutting themes throughout the week included:

- ? the nature of food insecurity in the global world
- ? the neglect of food poverty by the world leaders
- ? adequate food access as a basic human right in a civil society
- ? food justice in the rich and poor world

Many of the speakers talked about 'the one size fits all' approach as not being appropriate. Graham Riches expressed his argument about 'food as an intimate commodity' and that access to food is a social issue and not solely a public health issue. Some presenters embraced the language of food poverty; others, notably from Western Europe, distanced themselves from such a term. Illuminating in itself, the multicultural audience brought freshness to the debate and the notion that food insecurity is a simple idea to advance but more challenging to find a solution to.

"If the human right to food can not be guaranteed to all people living in the wealthy nations, then what are we really promising to the less wealthy countries throughout the world?"

Professor Graeme Ritches, School of Social Work and Family Studies
University of British Columbia (Canada)

"In the case of India, it would take a miracle in public policy for this country to reach its Millennium Development Goals by 2015."

Dr Charles Griffin, Director of the Human Development Department, The World Bank (USA)

Several presenters were confident that their projects were effective local solutions. Diverse in context, Laura Davis presented on the new Malthouse and Salop Drive Market Garden in Sandwell, England, and Professor Marie-France Raynault described the green roofs in Montreal. Listening to achievements from elsewhere helped deepen the group's understanding and appreciation of what has already been achieved in Scotland and how valuable learning from elsewhere is to Scotland.

While there were few direct references to community food activity throughout the event, there was regular mention of sticking plaster solutions to hunger such as 'food banks' and 'food stamps' programmes. Sometimes there seemed to be confusion amongst some of the delegates less familiar with community food activity as to the differences between community food activity and food banks. A paper from Adelaide, South Australia, however helped highlight the stark contrasts between such programmes and the empowering impact of community food projects. Dr Sue Booth presented from her PhD thesis, which looked at the factors affecting food access and intake of young homeless people in Adelaide. The three major barriers to food access were firstly the location, quality and operational policies of welfare food services, such as food banks; secondly, feelings of shame or embarrassment when having to access food by this route, and thirdly food affordability. Community food interventions were found to be more appealing and acceptable to this group than food banks. The author hopes that this paper's findings will have implications for the development of more effective and sensitive public health policies and services not just in Australia, but also internationally.

"On the surface 'food banks' may seem to be an altruistic way of providing food security to many people. However when you dig deeper, there are hidden benefits for the large conglomerates that provide this food, benefits such as land fill taxes being saved, as unwanted food does not need to go there. Instead surplus foodstuffs are given to food banks and there is little or no choice about the quality and range of this food."

"Food banks are symptoms and symbols of the welfare state in crisis."

Professor Graeme Ritches
School of Social Work and Family Studies
University of British Columbia (Canada)

Participation

“Participation – it is essential to include the first line of workers at the interface with populations in developing solutions to hunger.”

Professor Ivan Beghin

Institute of Tropical Medicine, Antwerp (Belgium)

The SCDP delegation participated at the conference on a number of levels: attending the plenary and paper sessions, asking questions formally and informally, and making connections concerning the evidence for the benefit of your own work and networking. The impact of participating at future events maybe even stronger if the SCDP ambassadors presented their own paper to highlight the wealth and range of activity taking place in Scotland. As one of the group’s members describes however, not presenting at this event also had its advantages. *“On this occasion, it was a refreshing opportunity to embed myself in the experience of the content and composition of a food-related conference. Active deep thinking and note taking about drawing parallels between work elsewhere that has transferable relevance to the Scottish landscape was possible. As a group, we were enabled to expand the voice and presence of SCDP through contact, conversation and leaflet dropping (against some competition!).”*



Fado band performing as conference delegates network in Pateo Alfacinha, Lisbon



Some Highs and Lows

The following quotes recount some of the group member's personal highs and lows during the conference.

Our delegation was quite perturbed at a speaker from Canada who said community food projects are part of the problem, rather than part of the solution. We challenged the viewpoint, but were unable to debate this view within the workshop. It would seem in hindsight that the speaker's definition of a community food project varies vastly from our experiences of community food projects.

This workshop made us feel quite frustrated that we could not argue our case. However a high point came straight afterwards when we accidentally bumped into the eminent Professor Peter Townsend. I was in awe of this man since I was a student at Glasgow University where I read all of his books. Professor Townsend raised our spirits when he said 'keep on fighting your corner, there are many big fish in a small pond'. He had listened to our challenge within the workshop and applauded the work that was being done in Scotland with regards to food poverty. This really set us up for the rest of the conference and indeed highlighted that we should have put forward a paper. There are many great examples of quality food poverty work going on in Scotland and maybe we could have informed other across the continents of the diversity and sheer volume of work that is being carried out across the communities of Scotland.

Heather Sloan
Have a Heart Paisley

Being part of the SCDP team, promoting a unique Scottish approach and meeting others with similar experiences of what works to connect and exchange ideas was what I enjoyed most. One of the genuine highlights for me was the SCDP walking along the Avda de Berna with Professor Peter Townsend. He talked with warmth of the Glaswegian families that he had interviewed in his poverty research in the 1960s and how he had remained in touch with several of them. Wearing his University of Stirling tie for his presentation, he remembered receiving his Honorary Doctorate in 2002 from the late Professor Colin Bell. His generosity of time and insightful comments offered a lift that remained for the rest of the conference.

Personally, I found participating at a conference, stripped of title and affiliation uncomfortable, at times very frustrating and revealing of the power dynamics at play in the conference scene. This did reduce my enjoyment and changed my experience of talking to academics. I became sensitised to the subtleties of an 'academic' conference and how aspects of a conference can act as barriers to participation. For example, the orchestration of the evening events and cost, the prominence of Anglo-American delegates within the conference group, which did have representatives from over 50 countries. The multicultural aspect of so many different countries represented did add to the flavour of the debate that the conference delivered.

Dr. Susan Eley
University of Stirling

As a community food worker operating at a grass roots level, it was particularly exciting to be part of a conference with around 47 countries represented. Many speakers had carried out research that involved community workers helping to promote better eating habits. There were similarities between my own work and work taking place in Tennessee USA for example. The conference provided a glimpse of how my work in Ayrshire could grow into something bigger and more sustainable – lay workers are making an impact and useful contribution around the world, and this is very encouraging.

On the down side, I felt there was not enough opportunity to network. Papers often ran over time cutting out question time and scheduled breaks.

Anna Craven
Community Food Worker, Ayrshire



*Anna, Susan
and Heather
in the
grounds
of Fundacao
Calouste
Gulbenkian,
Lisbon*

³ Professor Colin Bell, who has died aged 61 in 2003, was one of the pioneers of the sociology of class and race relations in the UK. Having lectured at Essex University between 1968 and 1975, he went on to hold chairs in New South Wales, Aston and Edinburgh. He was vice-principal at Edinburgh University for five years until his 1998 appointment as vice-chancellor at Bradford. He returned to Scotland to take the helm at Stirling University, where he served just less than two years as principal before his sudden death on campus.

Applying new learning

When each member of the group was asked how they would apply new insights and learning they had made at the event within their own roles, the responses made are as follows:

The value of comparative analysis to understanding poverty, food and health in welfare was a theme that had resonance to my own work. The 'new food policy agenda', as Simon Maxwell argues, the food policy in 2010 will look different with new partnerships, new players and new topics. This task will need multidisciplinary teams for the skills-mix and comparative work needed.

While Scots can embrace 'difference', our poor access to food is not unique to our country and we can offer valuable information exchange to others about our achievements and challenges here. Different cultures will have different definitions of their community-based initiatives including food banks, breakfast clubs, a healthy diet and food projects. Sharing good practice with others in the field can offer personal support and stimulate collaboration in community food activity. Cultural sensitivity is an issue. There is no universal solution and what answers have been found need to be clearly expressed and debated fairly.

Dr. Susan Eley
University of Stirling

I personally found this conference to be beneficial to me both on a personal and professional level. It has reinforced my belief in a community development approach to food poverty issues. It has made me realise that I would never like to go down the road of food banks.

The conference has renewed my confidence in putting forward papers to conferences such as this one. Some of the papers were thought provoking whilst others were very weak. If there was the opportunity for future conferences of this nature I would not think twice about putting forward a paper, and indeed I would welcome the chance for Scotland to actually host a world conference to showcase the work that is being done here.

Heather Sloan
Have a Heart Paisley

The conference gave me an insight into what can be achieved if policy makers and funders take community projects more seriously. I will bring back many of the ideas about monitoring and evaluating work as well as new approaches to training groups in non-patronising ways.

Anna Craven
Community Food Worker, Ayrshire

"We know much less about what works – more funded action, monitoring and evaluation, documentation and dissemination of good practice is needed if global food security is to ensue."

Dr Alfredo Bruto da Costa, Centre for Social Intervention Studies (Portugal)



Pateo Alfacinha, Lisbon



Local Fado Band, Lisbon

Looking back to the conference, the words of Professor Ivan Beghin from the Institute of Tropical Medicine, in Antwerp (Belgium) still leaves a strong impression. Debating the merits of nutrition surveillance versus poverty surveillance, Prof Beghin emphasised that genuine involvement of communities in tackling inequalities in diet and health was what mattered most. He stressed the importance of developing indicators with communities to measure success that were few, feasible, relevant, acceptable and sustainable. He also suggested that for interventions to make any real impact they should be aiming to have a life span of at least 10 – 15 years! As many of the papers focused more on the nature and extent of global food poverty and less on what can be done to tackle the underlying causes, I was encouraged by Prof Beghin's contribution as he focussed more on what can be done and could be done better. Scotland's policies to tackle food and health problems are increasingly more action orientated with community involvement at their heart. The work of Prof Beghin would suggest that we are beginning to travel in the right direction for positive change.

Lizanne Hume
Scottish Community Diet Project

Final thoughts

By day, this hectic indoor conference programme meant that delegates were, for the most part, indoors. However, a carefully planned evening social programme gave delegates the opportunity to sample some of the wonders and beauty of Portugal's capital city.

For the SCDP delegation, the conference dinner on the last evening truly captured some of the best local food, music, scenery and history that Lisbon has to offer.

To the sound of a local Fado band, delegates arrived close to sunset at the Pateo Alfacinha. Traditional fado music is Portugal's working class blues and is described to evoke the characteristically Portuguese emotion of *saudade*, a yearning for something lost or missed. *Saudade* was certainly one of the emotions felt as delegates followed the band into one of the city's few remaining pateos, which was like a walk back in time. From about 1860, working country people flooded into Lisbon looking for a better life. This new workforce built a new sort of town, squeezing many families into small areas called pateos. Keen to preserve the community spirit of the countryside, pateos were designed with small gardens, attic roofs, secret yards, and sunny taverns. A school, chapel, police station, public washtub, baker, butcher, pub, grocer and workshop might also be incorporated. Pateo Alfacinha has been restored to keep the memory of old community life alive in modern day Lisbon.

Treated to a feast of local wines, port, cheeses, hams, fruit, freshly baked bread and barbecued fish, delegates toasted the conclusion of a successful and exhausting conference in surroundings a far cry from the famine, poverty and despair that had only just been discussed, debated and deliberated a few hours before.

So, returning to the original purpose of the conference, did it break new ground? It did break new ground in that it brought more countries around the conference table than ever before in an attempt to get to the heart of global food poverty, but did it bring the right people and what will be the real outcomes of these discussions? Only time will tell. Encouraged by Peter Townsend's advice to keep going, new ground seemed to be breaking as the worlds of community action and academic interests are drawn ever closer. Will they ever merge or cross-over?

Future action based on the conference's academic discussions is now the challenge that awaits everyone as Dr Elizabeth Dowler reminded delegates during the UK session, Poverty Bites:

"For learning to be shared and action taken forward between and by local workers, national policy makers and global leaders, there has to be greater negotiation and a collapsing of boundaries between different knowledges and experiences. This process is about being reflexive, which means being reflective as well as establishing common ground for ongoing co-learning and joint action."

Scottish Delegates

Lizanne Hume
Practice Development Officer with the Scottish Community Diet Project
c/o Scottish Consumer Council
Royal Exchange House
100 Queen Street, Glasgow G13DN, Scotland
Tel: (0044) 0141 226 5261
Email: lhume@scotconsumer.org.uk
Web: www.dietproject.org.uk

Dr Susan Eley
Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Stirling
Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology Section
Dept of Applied Social Science
The Colin Bell Building
Stirling
Tel: (0044) 01786 467986
Email: susan.eley@stir.ac.uk

Heather Sloan
Locality Team Leader with Have a Heart Paisley
(A National Health Demonstration Project)
Mile End Mill, Seedhill
Paisley, PA1 1TJ, Scotland
Tel: (0044) 0141 587 2479
Email: heathersloan@haveaheart.org.uk
Web: www.haveaheart.org.uk

Anna Craven
Community Food Worker, North Ayrshire
Three-Towns Healthy Living Project
(A New Opportunities Funded Healthy Living Centre)
12 Hamilton Street, Saltcoats
Ayrshire, KA21 5DS
Tel: (0044) 01294 466 901
Email: life@healthy3towns.org.uk



Scottish Community Diet Project

c/o Scottish Consumer Council
Royal Exchange House, 100 Queen Street
Glasgow, G1 3DN

tel: 0141 226 5261

fax: 0141 221 0731

e-mail: scdp@scotconsumer.org.uk

www.dietproject.org.uk