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# Buying responsibly in the food sector

## *Impact Strategy*

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# INTRODUCTION

## 1. “Consum’actor” in the food sector

Representing 15 to 25% of the population in 2020, acting consumers are a non-negligible and increasingly important part of the current customer base. The “consum’actor” is a consumer who emancipates himself from the products and lifestyles that the market designs for him, becomes autonomous in his choices and could, therefore, contribute to the regulation of the consumer society. This trend advocates a more responsible and ethical consumption which results in a new range of products that are also ethical and responsible in today's consumer offer. Particularly, many initiatives have emerged in the food sector and many consumers have started raising their voice to boycott supermarkets and eat more local food to protect their health and the Earth.

Unfortunately, these local and healthy products are often more expensive than those sold in supermarkets. As a result, the acting consumer is generally a person from the middle or even upper social class. So, what about people experiencing poverty? Are health and environmental cause only concerning the middle or upper social class? Is there a real lack of interest among people experiencing poverty? Are prices the main reason for this potential lack of interest? Aren't there other barriers that make it difficult for people experiencing poverty to have access to healthy food? If so, how do they manifest themselves? Do solutions already exist and how effective are they?

Sadly, this problem not only concerns the consumer but also the farmers providing this local and healthy food. The selling prices of their products are sometimes a way more expensive than what people experiencing poverty can pay for. Is it a choice or is there an uneven supply from intensive and conventional agriculture? Don't they also face extreme poverty? What are the brakes and motivations they face to produce such products?

These are all questions that need to be raised in order to understand the problem of access to healthy and local food for people experiencing poverty.

# DEVELOPMENT

Before presenting the results of our research, it seems essential to define clearly our target audience as well as the methodology used to collect data and draw conclusions.

## **1. Definition of the target audience**

To identify our target audience, we first had a look at the characteristics of responsible buyers in the food sector. Obviously, the objective of this study is not to understand why some customer groups buy responsibly but rather why some do not. Therefore, this short analysis was conducted in order to identify a leading non-consumer group: low-income and low-educated people.

Secondly, we had to set our own definition of “low-income group”. We decided to focus on monetary poverty which refers to people who earn less than 60% of the Belgian median wage, which is 1.184€ netto per month for isolated people and 2.487 € netto per month for a household of 2 adults and 2 children. In Belgium, approximately 16%<sup>1</sup> of the inhabitants live under this poverty line (Statbel, 2018).

There exist different types of profiles among them: unemployed people, single-parent families, foreign families, etc. The riskiest profiles for monetary poverty are respectively (1) single-parent families and (2) families with 3 or more children<sup>2</sup> (IWEPS, 2018). In order to get more specificity in our research, we have decided to focus on families (with 2 adults and at least one child) for several reasons. Firstly, we believe that there is a real challenge as there are children involved. Secondly, a significant part of them benefit at least from one income for the household which means that their situations are often less critical than other profiles (such as single-parent families we have excluded for that reason). Finally, the literature has demonstrated that children are an effective lever towards healthier food habits. For all those reasons, we believe that families may be a consistent and more easily convertible target.

It is also necessary to note one last important characteristic of our audience: its origins. In fact, the risk of leaving under the poverty line for non-Europeans is assessed at about 30% while this same risk for Belgian is assessed at about 10%<sup>3</sup> (Perrin N. & Van Robaey, 2007). Therefore, we must be aware that foreign families represent a significant part of our target audience.

This short analysis allowed us to define more precisely and representatively our target audience: **Belgian and foreign families living under the poverty line in Belgium.**

## **2. Methodology**

Above all, it must give a consistent and complete overview of the problem. Is this access to healthy and local food a real problem or is it just an image printed in the collective consciousness? This question of validation was discussed using 3 different approaches ; a literary research, meetings with people on the spot and finally a practical case with the evaluation of the price of an average basket from a discount store, a regular store and an organic/local store.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.luttepauvrete.be/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/04/chiffres\\_nombrepauvres.pdf](https://www.luttepauvrete.be/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/04/chiffres_nombrepauvres.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.iweps.be/indicateur-statistique/taux-de-risque-de-pauvrete-selon-type-de-menage/>

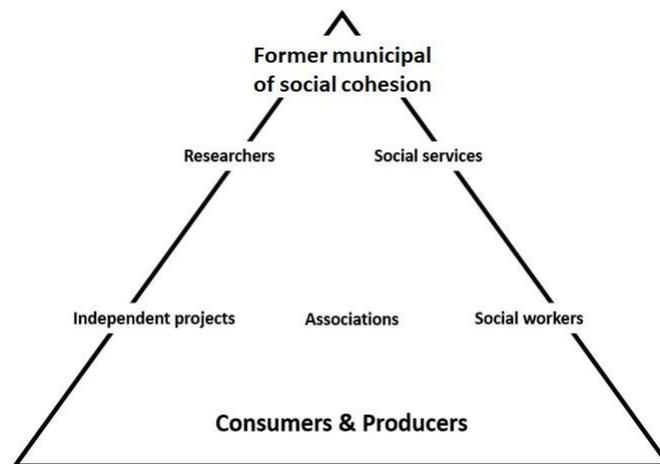
<sup>3</sup> [http://www.stes-apes.med.ulg.ac.be/Documents\\_electroniques/POP/POP-IMM/ELE%20POP-IMM%20A-8126.pdf](http://www.stes-apes.med.ulg.ac.be/Documents_electroniques/POP/POP-IMM/ELE%20POP-IMM%20A-8126.pdf)

It quickly became clear that this problem is real and involves two distinct major players. On the one hand, consumers living in poverty and on the other hand, those who offer these target products, i.e. local and organic producers. It is therefore necessary to understand the motivations and barriers that exist for, on the one hand, procuring healthy and local products and, on the other hand, producing and selling them. Therefore, the methodology presented below was applied to both parties: consumers and producers.

This analysis was done first through a literary analysis. Once the main barriers were identified through this in-depth research, it was necessary to confront these drawn conclusions with practical reality.

The interviews were not limited to the actors as such, but rather to all the people involved, specialists, public authorities, etc. Indeed, the multitude and diversity of positions is of crucial interest because, although all these stakeholders may be concerned by this issue, their different levels of involvement affect their point of view and the resulting analysis. The different types of actors interviewed are presented in the pyramid below and a complete list of interviews including the stakeholder, his or her function and the date of the interview is provided in the [appendix 1](#).

**Figure 1 : Type of actors interviewed**



In order to test our theoretical hypothesis, three different interview grids were set up : (1) for the target people, i.e. people experiencing poverty, (2) for social workers and associations and (3) for producers.

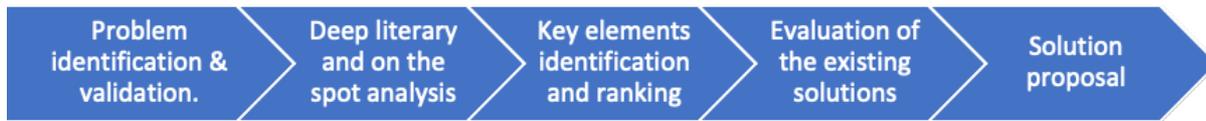
Once the problem and all the barriers were identified and validated in the field, the existing solutions were listed. Each of these solutions was evaluated on its capacity to satisfy the needs, on its efficiency, i.e. to bring a solution to an identified problem (problem-solution fit). In order to have a better understanding of those solutions' efficiency, we interviewed some actors involved. This phase is crucial because it allows us to understand why a solution such as a Non-Profit Organization (NPO), for example, is successful or unsuccessful with the target audience.

Finally, a solution based on the ID sprint and the analysis of the whole identified ecosystem is proposed. Its strengths but also its weaknesses are listed and argued in order to improve it. More than a solution, we propose lines of thought based on the analysis findings.

To sum up, the overall methodology has been the following: once the problem was confirmed and identified, a deeper analysis was done to list all the key factors to take into account when trying to understand this problem. Based on those factors and their (in)efficiency to give an adequate

understanding of the problem, all the existing solutions have been rated. It was then easier to propose a suitable solution. This five-times process is summarized by the following timeline:

**Figure 2 : 5 steps of the methodology**



### 3. Main findings

Now that the context is clearly established, the main findings of the research will be exposed. To do so, the main barriers and motivations to consume healthy products for the consumers will be presented first. Those results come from both the literacy and the conducted interviews. Then, the results of the analysis regarding the producer side will be presented. Finally, the key factors highlighted by this whole research will be summarized before looking at the benchmarking analysis.

#### 3.1. Consumers' brakes and motivations

A lot of studies have demonstrated that the level of income as well as the level of education play an important role while looking at food habits. The following finding is irrefutable: the less educated people with lower revenue eat, in most cases, less healthy. Our approach is to understand the main reasons for this sad statement and to identify the main consumption brakes.

- **Primary needs**

At first, we can rely on the Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a pyramid representing the development of well-being and thoughts, according to the satisfaction of needs. In order to reach the top of the pyramid, individuals must first meet their basic and their psychological needs. These are prerequisites to demonstrate meta-analysis on the surrounding environment, and take an effective stand on current social issues. That first principle may illustrate the existing inequalities in terms of needs between middle/high groups and low-income groups. In practice, this means that vulnerable people will have other priorities than eating healthy such as paying their rent and bills to simply provide a home for their family. This first hypothesis was highly approved by all the interviewed social workers and associations.

This notion of primary needs has to be kept in mind as it has a transversal impact on the other brakes identified below.

- **Prices**

In a second step, we made the hypothesis that local and organic food is more expensive than “conventional” food. In order to test this hypothesis, we compare the cost of a similar basket composed of basic products in (1) a conventional supermarket, (2) a shop with only organic products and (3) a shop with only local products. The results are very clear : the total cost is 2,5 times bigger in (2) and 1,4 times bigger in (3) compared to a conventional supermarket (Appendix 2).

Therefore, it is an undeniable fact that buying local or organic food is more expensive. According to the literature, it is also established that low-income groups are more price-sensitive and consequently, buy more junk food from discount supermarkets. Junk food is a kind of compensation for people who have serious lack of means. This way of eating is easy and very satisfying in the short run, because it is largely made of very tasty sugar and fat ingredients. Moreover, because of the

extremely cheap cost of this type of food, households with monetary problems can easily reduce their food budget for the benefit of other expenses. In this way, one of the interviewed social workers observed a dramatically-low food budget in many of those vulnerable families.

However, politics have tried to lower prices on healthy products to promote a better diet. Impact was effective on middle and high-income groups, but not on the intended target. In fact, nowadays, a few solutions exist to make healthy products available but they don't seem appropriate to this target consumers' needs, which means that the price is far from being the only brake.

In order to understand the other brakes, we finally turned our attention to education and to the living environment of the low-income groups. Actually, people with lower income are more price-sensitive but show also a stronger resistance to change for several reasons. Moreover, it appears that social and cultural factors also have to be taken into account in this issue.

- ***Practical brakes***

Firstly, inappropriate cooking skills and habits were considered by the literature to be an important brake. People with lower income usually have tiny kitchens and cooking tools. In addition, they need to know how to cook seasonal vegetables in order to bring pleasure to their consumption, which is more difficult if they don't have the inherited cooking skills. Moreover, cooking new products also means risking to face food wastage which is unacceptable for those households. The experts in the field, in contrast, seemed less convinced by this lack of cooking skills. However, they still argue that few kitchen equipments as well as the energy consumption limits in those households were important brakes.

Another important brake is the notion of practical accessibility: some people don't have a car nor the time to go to several stores to buy their food. This is especially true for people living in urban areas, where the offer from supermarkets is clearly higher than the farmers'. This brake is about an important need for speed, and not only does it concern this specific segment but the majority of people.

- ***Social and cultural brakes***

In many families, culture is also an important brake to seasonal and local consumption. Most of them simply don't know how to cook Brussels sprouts and cooking is sometimes the last remaining tradition from their home country. It is therefore even more complicated for those people to change their habits as there is a real motivation to consume products they are familiar with. This brake was addressed by almost every expert in the field.

Then, less societal involvement can also be used as an explanation. We can relate this lack of commitment to the Maslow's principle, introduced earlier in this report. As a result, inequalities and social exclusion felt by this part of the population may not encourage people to get involved. Many of them feel that eating local and healthy is only reserved for wealthy groups. On the other hand, eating only seasonal vegetables and less meat doesn't seem attractive for some people within this low-income segment. Indeed, being rich for them also signifies being able to unlimitedly choose all the products they may want. For that reason, this kind of eating habits doesn't offer any progress perspective to those people. Many actors on the field have confirmed this "fear" of getting involved in initiatives mainly represented by higher social classes. These people have an important lack of self-confidence and simply don't feel being up to it.

- ***Education / lack of information***

Another explanation presented in the literature is the low education about the importance of a balanced and healthy diet: Diet and health are learnings and habits that come from childhood and adolescence, with parental and sibling models. However, the experts warned us about this type of

argument. In many cases, families are aware of the bad impact of their food habits but don't have the possibility (for monetary or practical reasons) to change, or simply don't know how to do it. Sometimes the problem lies rather in a lack of information. As an example, some families are just not aware that making a soup is highly cheaper than eating meat, or they don't know what the seasonal vegetables are. We were able to note this last point through the low-income group questionnaires. These people want to eat healthier and more local but they cannot cite a seasonal dish. The real challenge is to provide them with the suited information about the impact of their food habits on their health, about what is seasonal or local, etc. instead of making them guilty about their habits. Indeed, numerous housewives claim to be lost in the important flow of contradictory information regarding healthy diet and it is therefore appropriate to provide them with trustfull information. Various interviewees also state that cooking lessons or educational workshops were generally quite effective, which confirms their motivation to learn.

Finally, this whole analysis has shown that there is a real need for healthier food among this population. Indeed, all the interviewed associations argued that beneficiaries are always happier to receive fresh food or vegetables than receiving any kind of processed food. However, many brakes exist and complicate the access to this kind of food. One should consider every identified brake and work on each at the same time, which would make a real difference.

### 3.2. Producers' brakes and motivations

This part focuses on the producers' side of the problem by listing and understanding the motivations as well as brakes producers must deal with a renewable way of producing and a more direct contact with customers. Indeed, as presented in the methodology the producers have to be taken into account in order to deeply understand the issue.

A funny fact about conventional agriculture is that it is not conventional at all regarding natural processes. Aware of the climate change caused by their industry, producers are up for a change in their way of producing, but why are they so few to be ready to take the first step? Why is it so hard to convert to local sustainable and/or organic agriculture when demand has never been so high?

Let's clarify that in this work, the adjective "local", is used to indicate a short or shortened circuit between producers and final consumers. Far from mass distribution circuits where the list of intermediaries is endless.

- **Organic certification**

Note that till now, the terms "organic" and "renewable" have both been used when talking about the way of farming. It has been made on purpose since some producers that produce without any chemical may not want to use the term organical when talking about their products. Why giving up this certification when it has been produced with respect to the environment? First because organical can be associated with "green-washing" phenomena since the rules about this certification are far from being clear and eco-friendly. Second because a farmer has to pay to use organic certification, whereas no additional cost is involved for a conventional product. There is therefore a huge paradox that putting organic products on the market costs more than any other product. From now the term "renewable" will be used to avoid misleading when talking about eco-friendly ways of farming, whatever organic certification or not. ● **Fair prices**

Renewable products are also more expensive to sell because of their intrinsic production methods. The fair price for such products is highly superior to that of conventional food, which leads to an unfair competition based on prices. Indeed, producing in a renewable way multiplies the burden of manual labor by 10. This burden, coupled with a lower efficiency when producing renewably, inevitably increases prices.

- **Conversion to renewable farming**

The price of conversion to renewable agriculture is often far too high. Indeed, the contracting farmers are already over-indebted by their usual production methods and their suppliers have almost no freedom to change. Moreover, it takes 2 years from the beginning of the conversion during which the conventional (lower) prices must continue to be applied, which compensates even less for the return on investment. This is all the more distressing for a farmer that those who were able/decided to convert earn on average more after than before their conversion.

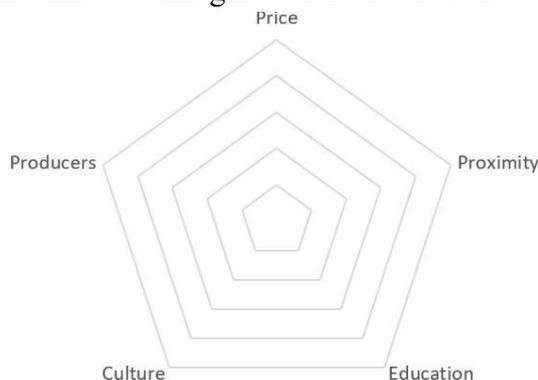
- **Logistic**

The farmers are generally asking for more connections with the customer, which they rarely get from conventional ways of working which is a B2B approach. Still, the logistics associated with a short sales channel is for most of them totally unknown. In the first instance, sales have to be organized either by themselves and/or by local associations and sales stores. Consequently, they need to diversify their offer in order to get out of mono-culture and to be able to offer a diversified range of products that responding to demanding consumers.

Finally, one of the most interesting findings was about the farmers mindsets. Most of the interviewed farmers defend noble human values such as inclusion as well as access to healthy food for everyone. They want to use their work to fulfill them. This ability to provide healthy products is one of the driving forces behind their work.

### 3.3. Key factors identification

Thanks to this multidimensional analysis we were able to identify 5 main key factors which are essential to tackle this specific issue. The first 4 ones are those identified in the consumer analysis : prices, proximity, cultural/social and education. The last one relates to the respect of the producers through a fair price. According to us, those key factors have to be taken into account in order to tackle this issue efficiently. They will be used as an analysis grid to evaluate the efficiency of each existing solution and have also been mobilized to imagine our own solution.



## 4. Ecosystem overview

Before undertaking an in-depth analysis of each identified solution in the benchmarking, it seems important to take a step back and have a look at the main actors and dynamics within the studied ecosystem. Indeed, one of the main findings of this research is also that this issue is the result of bigger other societal issues. Therefore, beyond the brakes' analysis undertaken in the previous point, it is appropriate to remind the main actors and dynamics behind the problem.

At the center of this ecosystem, we have the two struggling parties previously identified:

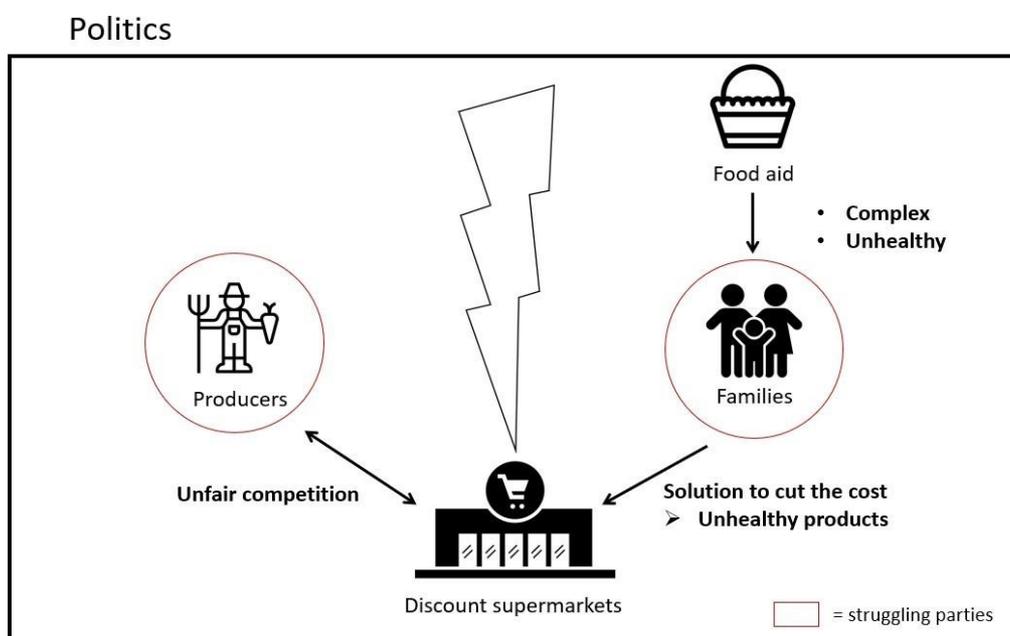
**vulnerable families** and **producers**. Their difficulties are indeed indirectly caused by an unfair competition with **discount supermarkets**, which is directly linked to mass production issues. Actually, this cheap offer allows the low-income families to easily reduce their food budget by buying unhealthy food in those shops while producers cannot compete against such low prices. In other words, the current capitalist system is at the root of the problem.

Then, those families are sometimes also dependent on the **food aid service**. This system is very complex in Liège as many actors are involved (NPO's, Ville de Liège, CPAS, etc) and is not very efficient as few means are allocated. Moreover, this system is also criticized as it offers very few fresh and healthy products.

Finally, **politics** oversee this whole ecosystem, as they set the rules regarding the functioning of the food aid, as they establish the budget allocated to producers or to fight poverty, etc.

This quick overview below makes it possible to realize how complex the issue is and how many different actors are involved.

**Figure 3 : Ecosystem overview**



## 5. Benchmarking

Luckily, some people are aware of this issue and many initiatives have been launched in recent years. In this paragraph, we will take a look at some of the existing solutions and try to understand the reasons for their success or failure.

In order to understand the Belgium offer properly, it is appropriate to distinguish 3 types of initiatives which are clearly related to our issue : (1) the free distribution of healthy food, (2) the selling of healthy food with an idea of targeting a vulnerable segment of consumers (or at least working on one of the main brake previously identified) and (3) the local initiatives with educational purposes regarding this issue.

The objective here is to present some of the solutions and have a look at their limitations. In order to identify those limitations, one should keep in mind the main previously identified barriers. It

is also important to note that this list is not exhaustive, the emphasis being mainly put on the various types of selected offers.

## 5.1. Free distribution

More than 450.000 Belgians (and approximately 10.000 in Liège) benefit from the food aid sector. However, one of the main criticisms is that the allocated food mostly comes from agro-industries and is most of the time unhealthy. Moreover, this service is especially complex in Liege as the CPAS receives the subsidies while the city of Liège has the legal competence for this service. **Le panier solidaire** centralizes all the distribution offers and acts as an intermediary between the city of Liège and all those associations. One of its additional purposes is to increase the amount of qualitative food into the distribution system. However, this purpose is not fulfilled because those associations depend on bigger entities (Fonds Européens d'Aide aux plus Démunis (FEAD), banque alimentaire, etc) which deliver mostly processed food. On the other hand, the means allocated by the state are clearly not enough to meet such an objective. Another serious identified limitation is that a large amount of the allocated food doesn't fit with the culture and religion of its beneficiaries.

It is important to point out that these associations try to coordinate their actions for more efficiency thanks to "La Table Alimentaire Liégeoise". This initiative brings together these multiple NPO and is an opportunity to reflect on the implementation of effective long-term solutions. However, it is difficult for these NPO to think about long-term projects when their primary mission is difficult to accomplish because of a lack of human, material and financial resources. The situation in which the associations find themselves can be compared to that of low-income groups : as their primary needs are not met, it is impossible for them to worry about anything else, as shown by Maslow's pyramid of needs. This is what emerged from the interviews with associations and project managers in food aids.

Other types of free services exist in Liege such as **FrisKot**, launched by some students a few years ago. The concept is very simple: an accessible fridge where everyone can put some food every day for the benefit of people in need. One of the organizers states that this concept attracts a broad variety of profiles (including vulnerable families). However, most of the beneficiaries are Belgians even if the fridge is located in a multicultural neighborhood.

## 5.2. Selling

A good example is the cooperative **Beescoop**. This shop decided to establish itself in an underprivileged area of Brussels (Schaerbeek) in order to reach its population with an offer of healthy and, as far as possible, local food, at affordable prices. To do so, the shop adopted the cooperative status which means that all consumers are also workers in the shop. Many researches have been conducted in order to fit with the demand of inhabitants (mostly foreigners) of the area. However, after a few years of existence, the company notices that the poorest inhabitants are not the main consumers in the shop. The main reason could be that the specific running of this cooperative makes them afraid. Actually, a change in the eating habits added to this specific running may be too complicated for them. Another explanation for this failure is the communication campaign which may have not been adapted to this specific target audience.

Other movements are developing themselves with the main objective of reducing the cost for the consumers and respecting the producers. The international movement **GASAP** (known as AMAP<sup>4</sup> in France) consists in creating a contract between a group of consumers and a group of farmers. Together they agree on the quantity and the variety of food which will be produced during a given season. Then, during the crop, every type of food will be distributed to the consumers into baskets. On the one hand, this system allows the farmers to sell their entire food stock. On the other hand, it also decreases the price for the consumers (it is approximately the same price as a similar basket in supermarkets). In Belgium, the GASAP network is mostly developed in Brussels. 39% of the GASAP consumers earn less than 1500 euros per month and 7% are unemployed. However, the main common point between those consumers is that they are mostly highly educated. For vulnerable people, the project coordinator has identified the following brakes : fear of annual commitment, cultural and social barriers. In the same vein, the **GAC** movement is mostly developed in Wallonia. The solidarity engagement is here a bit softer as there is no mandatory pre-ordering. In this case, a number of consumers gather together and place group orders by producers (the price is in such a way also decreased). However, GAC's members observe that vulnerable families are often out of this kind of consumer group. The main reason is surely because it requires a high level of engagement (as well as a pre-payment in some cases) and mixes different social classes. Another explanation is also that information about this kind of movement is only circulating within high-educated social groups.

In a different spirit, **Le Chaudron** in Liège is a grassroots canteen which offers vegetarian dinners twice a month at free price. The objective is to give everybody the possibility to eat out. Moreover, the non-profit organization tries as much as possible to buy its food in short circuits. The public here is very broad but, once again, a few vulnerable families regularly take part to the dinners.

Some initiatives have also developed themselves to increase proximity and centralize a broader range of local products. For instance, Les **Petits Producteurs** in Liège or even **Point Ferme** which works with several sales points. However, these last offers don't reach our target audience as prices remain quite high.

### 5.3. Educational campaigns

The non-profit organization **de Bouche à oreille** tries to promote the local food towards everyone. To target more vulnerable people, they started to organize cooking lessons in partnership with the CPAS of Liège. The aim here is really to give them some tools to eat healthier but also to talk with them in order to understand their conditions, their reality. Those lessons are effective and appeal to the target audience. The organizer insists on how important it is to inform and listen to the audience, instead of blaming them. Moreover, social contacts created by this type of workshops are also very appealing to those people who are often very isolated.

Many neighborhoods or CPAS have also implemented cooking lessons, community gardens, sensibilization classes, etc. in order to create social ties among inhabitants and to promote vegetable's consumption as well as short circuit food. The large number of **Community gardens** often succeeds in attracting this vulnerable audience as there is no long-term commitment needed nor payment requests. A community garden participant observed that once the initiative is taken by CPAS or medical home directly, the participation rate becomes higher.

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<sup>4</sup> The solidarity mechanism is even stronger in the AMAP community because the farmers' revenue are predefined and must be considered as "acceptable" by every party before the beginning of the contract. Moreover, every crop will be automatically equitably divided between every single consumer.

Another possibility is to organize educational workshops directly in schools. It is notably what **Liège ville santé** is doing. They observed that sensitizing children is often more effective than sensitizing their parents.

A last type of very interesting social enterprise is **le potager de Saint-Germain**. This company sponsored by the municipality of Pepinster has created an educational vegetable garden and is also active in social reintegration as it employs exclusively article 60<sup>5</sup> workers. Moreover, they organize several workshops with children to raise awareness about the importance of eating fresh vegetables and to teach gardening. All the vegetables are produced then sold to inhabitants of the area.

#### **5.4. Benchmarking conclusion**

This short analysis shows how large the number of initiatives regarding this issue is. Moreover, it gives many ideas on how to address the issue. However, we can also notice that all those solutions address one or maybe two parts of the issue, and are therefore not 100% effective. Each solution has been analyzed through the 5 key factors previously presented. The result of this analysis is presented in the **appendix 3**.

On the following page, the whole previously exposed analysis is summarized thanks to the Impact Gap Canevas tool.

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<sup>5</sup> People who lost every right to substitution incomes (unemployment allowance)

# IMPACT GAPS CANVAS

## CHALLENGE MAPPING

### 6. Impact Gap Canvas

What's happening, what's the impact of the challenge, and what's holding the challenge in place?

Difficult access to healthy and local food for people living in poverty.

⑦ risk of disease, inequalities, bad for the environment, few support to local producers.

#### How do you describe the challenge ?

They consider it as "less important" because of all the daily problems that they encounter.

It could contribute to giving more dignity to these people as well as supporting local farmers.

It is closely linked to health, mass production, unfair competition, capitalism, etc.

#### What is the impact of the challenge ?

15% of the Belgian population face monetary poverty. They are struggling to have access to healthy food. The risk of disease is increased for these families and the inequalities between them and upper social classes are enhanced. Belgian producers also face poverty and are also struggling to receive a fair price for their products.

#### What is the cause of the challenge ?

Raising of inequalities, mass production in the food sector, too few federal means allocated to fight poverty or to support local farmers, a bad understanding of the consumers' needs and the existence of many stereotypes stating that poor consumers don't want to consume healthy food.

What is the history and future of the challenge ? The current crisis (Covid and ecologic) showed how important it is to get back to basics, to switch from our current capitalist economy to a more local and fair system.

## IMPACT GAPS

What is missing that could close the gap between the challenge and solutions, where are opportunities for collective impact, and what are the lessons learned?

#### Where are the gaps between the challenge and solutions ?

Building a direct link between producers and poor

#### Where are the gaps within the solutions ?

Partnerships between the farmers, the associations and the end consumers.  
Better dialogue with the end consumers in order to understand their real needs.

#### Where are the unaddressed obstacles ?

The existing solutions address only one or two aspects of the issue. There is a need for more complete and multi-dimensional solutions.

#### What are the key lessons learned ?

### Learning log and actions

The progress that remains to be made is mainly in the understanding of the exchanges and their nature that could take place between producers and beneficiaries.

## SOLUTIONS MAPPING

What models are already being tried, what's working, what's not, and what resources are available?

there is a need for more partnerships and dialogue between the actors involved. In particular, CPAS and schools have to be included in the discussion.

#### What is happening locally ?

There are already a large number of one-off initiatives, but little overall coordination. Most of them operate in the form of associations or NPOs.

#### What is happening globally ?

None of the initiatives sufficiently satisfy the key factors identified. This observation can be easily shared through meetings or a written report.

What's working, and what's not ? Initiatives that take into account the primary needs of the beneficiaries such as food and housing are more successful. It should also be noted that none of the initiatives directly link producers with beneficiaries.

#### Where is the focus and the future ?

Producers are generally left on the sidelines. They intervene only through their products but rarely as a person as such to communicate directly with the beneficiaries.

# CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this issue is very complex and involves many actors with many different interests. As conclusion, we will first focus on lines of thought for future solutions. And then, we will share our experience and expose what we mainly learned throughout this mission.

## **7. Lines of thought for future solutions**

### **7.1. Key success factors**

On the basis of the analysis of the existing solutions, several conclusions were drawn. In the first place, it is interesting to note that none of the solutions satisfies the 5 identified axes or key factors, maximizing some but completely neglecting others. This could therefore explain why none of them meet a stunning success. More specifically, farmers are generally left out of the initiatives and/or only very rarely communicate directly with people experiencing poverty. However, it was noted that farmers also experience poverty, so both parts cope with the same problem related to money but for two different reasons. Other success factors have been identified thanks to our multiple interviews. Firstly, a need for partnerships with social actors (CPAS, associations, etc) in order to reach the target audience. Secondly, a need for dialogue between the actors setting the solution and the audience. Indeed, the solutions have to be tested and approved by the audience to be effective. Only people experiencing poverty know their reality and difficulties. Finally, the solution should involve children as this is the most effective way to reach parents.

To sum up, here are the main **success factors** identified:

- Working on the 5 key factors
- Including the producers
- Creating partnerships with social actors
- Opening the dialogue with the audience
- Involving children

### **7.2. Solution proposal**

The solution we imagined involves both the producers and the consumers experiencing poverty. The producer who wants to share his job on one side and people who want to have access to sustainable food on the other side. Many people living in poverty also want to reintegrate professionally while the renewable farming sector could offer these opportunities given the growing number of job opportunities. The idea is quite simple: a producer would sponsor a disadvantaged neighborhood and so, would create direct links between both parties.

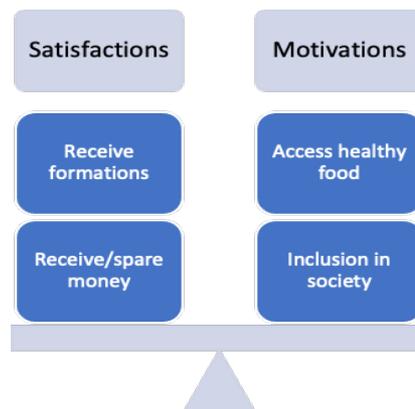
The approach would be the following, an independent producer would link up with a CPAS and a school to offer training to both adults (parents of students) and children. One of the producer's "win" would be to receive manpower as well as a constant salary to train these people and raise awareness at school. One of the "win" of the consumer would be to be able to train himself, to have access to the precious products he has worked for. Of course, this approach could also include cooking

workshops, local products markets and meetings in order to break the cultural barriers that may exist between producers and beneficiaries. The balance for each producer and recipient to invest themselves in the project is shown by the following figure. Note that the satisfactions and motivations that are given is a non-exhaustive list.

**Figure 4: Balance for the producer**



**Figure 5: Balance for the consumer**



The nature of the counterparts for each of the stakeholders has been deduced from our observations, but these must be validated on the field.

## 8. Main Learnings

Finally, it is interesting to have a look at the different learnings we will remind from this experience. What did we learn from a personal point of view? What should a social entrepreneur keep in mind while analyzing a given social need?

Our first learning is that, as it is the case while studying social issues, a complex and broad ecosystem has to be considered. Within this ecosystem, some dynamics are simply out of our scale. For instance: mass production in the food sector, capitalism, unfair competition between discount supermarkets and farmers, etc. Even if this statement is frustrating as we have very few impact leverages on those dynamics, we still need to be aware of them in order to understand the issue in its entirety.

This ecosystem includes different types of players: social workers, politics, economic actors, farmers, customers, etc. During our interviews we were able to notice to what extent they had different perspectives, opinions and point of view depending on their status. As we adopted an external view, we were able to see that those different actors' perceptions were sometimes biased as they only take into account one facet of this complex issue. The main learning here is **to remain objective** and to meet a broad enough number of stakeholders in order to draw representative conclusions.

The second type of learning is more related to a raising of awareness. Actually, during this mission, we discovered the reality and all the difficulties that many Belgian households face. As we

are mainly surrounded by educated people from the same social class, we were unfamiliar with this part of the Belgian landscape. This mission was therefore an opportunity to raise awareness among our group. As we are not common with this reality, it was also a hard exercise to **get rid of classical stereotypes**. For example, thinking that the low-income class is not interested in eating healthy or even, believing that the only brake in this issue is the price of healthy food. In other words, this exercise allowed us to break a lot of a priori as well as learning a lot about poverty in Belgium. We will surely remember how important it is to deeply understand an issue in order to draw consistent conclusions.

Last but not least, this mission was also a rich social experience as we met people with strong and inspiring values. It is nice to see that so many people are involved in this issue and give so much energy to fight it. It is with no doubt a source of motivation and positivism for young entrepreneurs like us.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper aims to understand the brakes and motivations for people experiencing poverty to consume local and healthy products and to propose lines of thoughts for future solutions. To do so, every step of the methodology and its results is presented in this paper.

Firstly, the audience characteristics are defined: Belgian families living under the poverty line. Those families are rather native or of foreign origins. This audience has been chosen because of its representativity of the Belgian landscape as well as for its potential convertibility towards healthier habits.

In a second step, every actor of the ecosystem is identified. Namely, the local producers, the food aid associations, social workers, politics and consumers. The diversity of the actors involved shows the high complexity of the issue. Moreover, it is essential to note that the issue is also closely interlinked with many other societal issues. One of them is essential in the good understanding of the issue studied: the difficulties faced by the Belgian producers. Therefore, beyond an analysis of the consumers' brakes and motivations, an analysis of the reality faced by the Belgian producers is also carried out.

In order to draw consistent conclusions, a literacy research as well as many interviews have been conducted regarding both consumers and producers' issues. A first important finding is that prices are far from being the only brake faced by consumers experiencing poverty. Indeed, to understand their actual need, it is essential to have a closer look at their living conditions, their social surroundings, their habits, etc. In other words, those conclusions can only be drawn thanks to a deeper analysis and thanks to multiple interviews. This kind of analysis has been carried out and the main findings are presented in this paper. Then, a benchmarking analysis was carried out in order to identify the existing solutions and their limitations. Finally, the results of this multi-dimensional analysis are listed: (1) the main brakes and motivations for both parties and (2) the essential success factors to create an effective solution.

In the end, this paper proposes food for thought based on the main findings identified. More precisely, the success factors are summarized and illustrated by an example of practical solution.

## APPENDIX

**Appendix 1.** Complete list of interviews including the stakeholder, his or her function and the date of the interview.

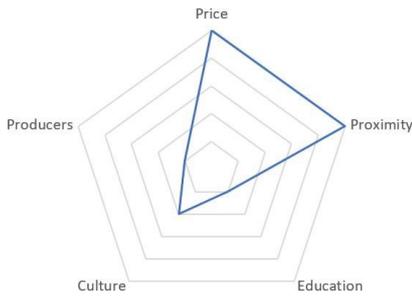
1	NOM	FONCTION	DATE
2	Geneviève Boxus	Responsable communication BeesCoop	01/10
3	Chantale Ysorentan	Maraichère circuit-court & bio	11/10
4	Miriam Pignoloni	Médiatrice de dettes (CPAS Grâce-Hollogne)	12/10
5	Alain Klein	Fondateur nos racines et de bouche à oreille	13/10
6	Laurence Lewalle	Coordinatrice réseau GASAP	14/10
7	Myriam Mollet	Responsable GAC Bressoux / coop. Champs des possibles	15/10
8	Service social Laveu	Gérante de l'ASBL (nom à compléter) service social du Laveu	15/10
9	Elise Lesenfants	Fondatrice Friskot	16/10
10	10 consommateurs cibles - Lidl		17/10
11	Kévin Maréchal	Doctorant circuit-court	19/10
12	Vinciane Ernst	Coordinatrice du panier solidaire	19/10
13	Jérôme Battistini	Secrétaire de l'échevin des solidarités, de la cohésion sociale et des droits de personnes	20/10
14	André Frisaye	Responsable GAC Seraing	20/10
15	Jacques Rémy	Responsable maraichage potager de saint Germain	20/10
16	Brigitte Grisard	Responsable de projet aide alimentaire	23/10

**Appendix 2.** Cost comparison of a similar basket composed of basic products in (1) a conventional supermarket, (2) a shop with only organic products and (3) a shop with only local products (€/Kg - €/L).

1	Produits	Carrefour	Les petits producteurs	Bioplanète	
2	<b>Panier moyen</b>				
3	Lait	0,59/L	1,19 /litre	1,25/l	
4	Beurre	7,16/kg	12,32 /kg	10/kg	
5	Choco	10,35/kg	27,42 /kg	12/kg	
6	Pain	1,39 / pièce	3,90 / pièce	5/pièce	
7	Oeufs	0,12cents /pièce	40cents /pièce	0,35/pièce	
8	Pâtes	0,7 / kg	2,44 /kg	2,58/pièce	
9	Riz	1,10 /kg	3,85 / kg	5/kg	
10	<b>Total</b>	<b>22,01</b>	<b>53,52</b>	<b>37,93</b>	
11	<b>Plat : hamburger</b>				
12	Tomate	1,49/kg	4,50 / kg	4,5/kg	3x plus cher chez LPP/BP
13	Oignons	0,99/kg	1,65 / kg	1,28/kg	1,5x plus cher chez LPP
14	Pain	0,37/pièce	/	0,69/pièce pistolet	1,9x plus cher chez BP / coût temps LPP
15	Salade	0,99 / pièce	1,92 / pièce	1,69/pièce	1,5x plus cher LPP
16	Fromage	7,45/kg	19,87 / kg	10/kg (gouda)	2,3x plus cher chez LPP
17	Mayo	2 / L	17,5 / litre	10/l	10,5x plus cher chez LPP
18	Ketchup	1,07 /l	/	4,64/l	4,3x plus cher chez BP / coût temps LPP
19	Moutarde	1,14 /L	11,56 / litre	12,45/l	6x plus cher chez BP
20	Bacon	16/kg	/	17/kg	1,06x plus cher BP / coût temps LPP
21	<b>Steak</b>				
22	Herbes (botte persil)	0,99	1,73	2	1,5x plus cher chez BP
23	Chapelure	0,79/kg	/	/	Coût de temps
24	Hachis	9/kg	/	14/kg	1,5x plus cher chez BP / coût temps LPP
25	Steak déjà prêt	9,99/kg	18 / kg	/	1,8x plus cher chez LPP / coût temps BP
26	<b>Frites</b>				
27	Surgelées	0,76/kg	/	/	Coût temps LPP/BP
28	Pommes de terre	0,99/kg	1,80 / kg	1,69/kg	1,43x plus cher LPP/BP
29	Huile de friture	1,25/L	/	5/l (huile tournesol)	4x plus cher BP
30	<b>Total fait maison</b>	<b>44,52</b>	<b>58,8 sans viande / frites four</b>	<b>84,94</b>	
31	<b>Total déjà prêt</b>	<b>43,5</b>	<b>75 et sans frite</b>	<b>62,25 sans viande / frite</b>	

**Appendix 3.** Existing solutions.

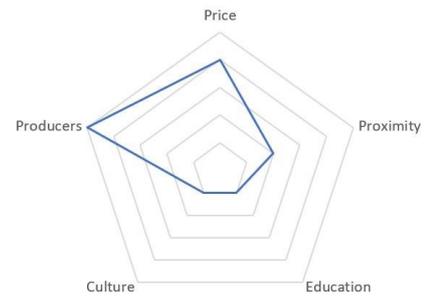
Discount supermarkets



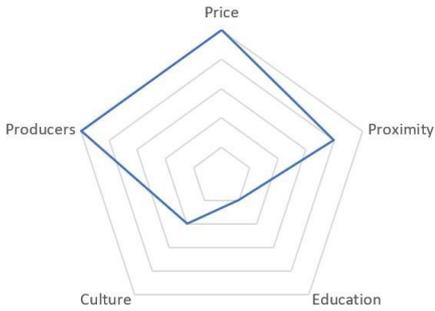
BeesCoop



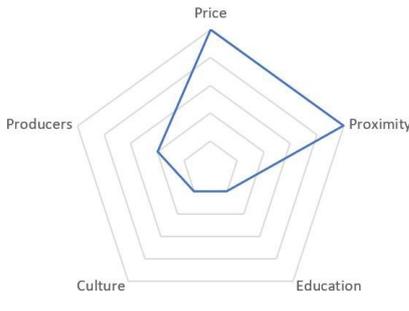
GAC – GASAP



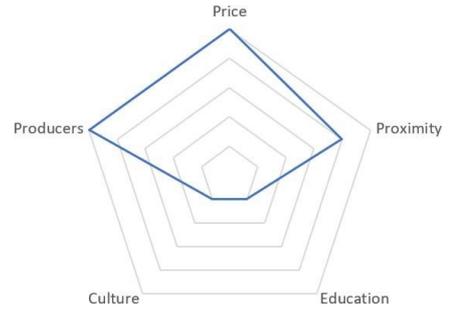
Le Chaudron



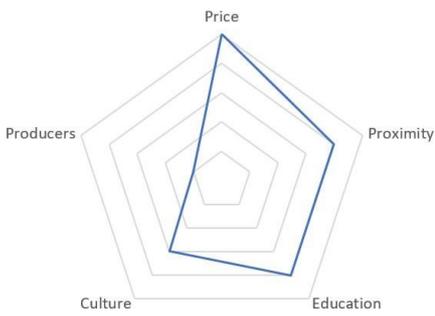
Food aid



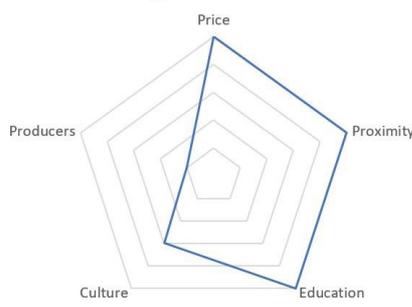
Friskot



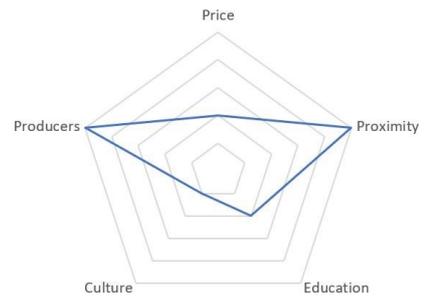
CPAS initiatives



Liège Ville Santé



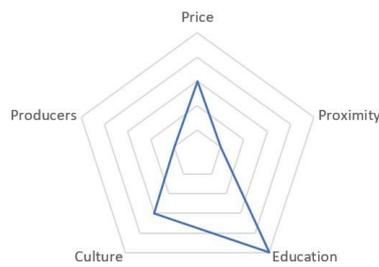
Les petits producteurs



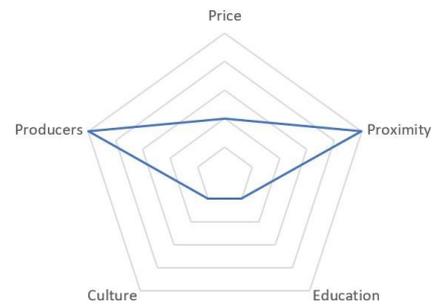
GAC1050



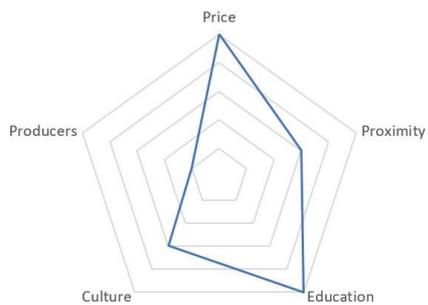
Les ateliers cuisine de la Porte verte



Distribution point (Nos racines)



## Bouche à oreille



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