

Towards Inclusive Environmental Sustainability:

Researching Everyday Sustainability with Pakistani and Somali
Households in Manchester

Final Report



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Executive Summary

This is the final report of the Towards Inclusive Environmental Sustainability (TIES) project. Conducted by an interdisciplinary and multicultural team of social science researchers based in the Sustainable Consumption Institute at the University of Manchester, TIES investigated how and why people who have moved to the UK from two climate-challenged Global South (GS) countries - Somalia and Pakistan - engage in environmental sustainability practices in their everyday lives. The project aimed to centre the knowledge and experience of these GS communities in environmental research and to demonstrate the relevance of culture, religion and migration experiences to the goal of developing more inclusive approaches to sustainability.

This report represents the culmination of over seven years of place-based research in Manchester and is written for a general audience. Analysis of a large amount of quantitative and qualitative data collected from a survey of 530 and interviews with 180 Manchester residents yielded the following main findings, summarised as follows:

Key Findings

- The environmental sector in Manchester is not inclusive of racialised minorities such as those are GS-born, neither in terms of professional roles nor citizen participation; the domination of the 'green agenda' by white people needs to be addressed.
- Awareness of this lack of inclusivity has prompted a push for new strategies for increasing the inclusivity of environmental governance in Manchester over the past few years.
- To the extent that efforts are being made to include a wider variety of population groups in local processes around sustainability, these efforts are often instrumentally valued rather than valued for their own sake, raising concerns about tokenism and lack of trust.
- There is no significant difference between UK-born and GS-born respondents in the frequency of engagement in household sustainability practices.
- GS-born participants have a high level of environmental concern, not significantly different from UK-born participants, which challenges assumptions of an 'environmental concern gap'. In addition to being concerned about environmental protection more generally, GS-born participants have a high level of concern about the environment, family members and other loved ones in the places they lived before migrating.
- GS-born participants' engagement in household sustainability practices after migration to the UK is shaped by habits and practices adopted in their home countries (e.g., habits, knowledge, traditions, relationships to land).
- GS-born participants are motivated to engage in household sustainability practices by a combination of factors, including religious teachings, saving money, experiences of resource scarcity in their countries of origin, cultural identity, and desire to care for future generations. Importantly, Islam as a way of life and a 'translocal' understanding of sustainability are two types of motivation that are specific to these participants.
- Where GS-born participants said they are not able to engage in household sustainability practices, the main barriers mentioned are lack of access to necessary infrastructure (e.g., land for growing food), cost (e.g., of 'green' products), and cultural preferences (e.g., for meat in their diets).

- GS-born participants are less likely than UK-born participants to access information about environmental issues from the Internet and social media, and more likely than UK-born participants to access information from traditional forms of mass media (e.g., newspapers, TV, radio) and educators.
- The vast majority of GS-born participants said they had never received environmental information in their own language.
- GS-born participants are about twice as likely to trust government messages as those born in the UK. They are less likely to trust NGOs than UK-born survey respondents. A small percentage of non-UK-born respondents said they trust information received from religious institutions compared to a tiny percentage (under 1%) of UK-born survey respondents.
- GS-born participants spoke of feeling excluded from, or being included only for tokenistic and instrumental reasons in, 'green' events in Manchester. Some expressed frustration with the invisibilisation of the work their communities are already doing to advance sustainability goals in the city.

Photo of In Our Nature's mural and raised beds being constructed in a Moss Side Islamic Centre (credit: Nafhesa Ali).



Recommendations

- **Understand** the structural and cultural barriers to inclusion, starting with the domination of the environmental sustainability field by white, middle-class people and the related marginalisation of people from minoritised backgrounds, including people who have migrated to the UK from climate-challenged countries of the Global South (GS).
- **Challenge** and move beyond the incorrect assumption that minoritised and marginalised communities are 'hard to reach' and/or uninterested in environmental issues. The first step should be to assess whether existing structures, barriers and exclusive processes are to blame for perceived lack of engagement rather than deficiencies within these communities.
- **Listen** to and accept GS knowledge and experience as valuable. Incorporate the translocational knowledge of GS communities into public debates about how to address climate threats and accelerate the move to net zero. See their contribution as an asset to collective sustainability efforts, thereby challenging the assumption that they lack motivation and need to be educated in order to 'change their behaviour'.
- **Be proactive** in hiring more people with GS backgrounds into the environmental sector. Avoid relying on volunteers and one-off engagement to increase representation. Create paid roles and pay people fairly for their involvement in environmental policy processes in order to build trust and ensure sustained and meaningful engagement.
- **Create** culturally relevant environmental messaging for citizens with GS migration backgrounds. Design sustainability campaigns that use accessible language and language that reflect the cultural values and knowledge of their communities. Tailor messages to resonate with religious teachings and migration experiences, acknowledging the diversity of sustainability practices across groups.
- **Engage** religious communities and their leaders in sustainability efforts. Partner with faith-based institutions and recognise the influential role of religious leaders in promoting sustainable practices within their communities. Do not rely exclusively on this strategy because leaders do not necessarily represent the whole of their communities and may engage in gatekeeping that constrains rather than enables inclusive participation.
- **Organise** advisory bodies and public forums where immigrant communities can discuss and contribute to local environmental policies in their own languages if desired. Ensure meetings include language interpreters for those who need it, have gender-sensitive arrangements, and are scheduled at times that are sensitive to religious practices.

Box 1: The purpose of the report is to...

- Improve understanding of the knowledge, experience and daily practices of non-UK/GS-born people, specifically members of the Somali and Pakistani communities, who are frequently marginalised in environmental policy and decision-making in the UK.
- Present evidence needed to challenge assumptions about and enable greater inclusion of GS-born citizens in environmental policy and decision-making processes in the UK.
- Argue for meaningful inclusivity and against tokenism in these processes, as well as to suggest how meaningful inclusion can be achieved in practice.
- Make recommendations for positive change based on the research findings

1. Introduction

Policies aimed at tackling climate change and achieving sustainability have often overlooked the perspectives of people who have migrated from the Global South (GS) who make up a growing proportion of the UK population. The climate debate is often focused on inequalities and injustices at the global level due to awareness that countries of the GS are harder hit by climate breakdown, while having less responsibility for causing it than countries in the Global North (GN). Yet this understanding rarely seems to be applied locally to foster conversations about climate justice closer to 'home' in the UK. Rarely is there interest in the experiences of people who have left climate-challenged countries to make a new home in relatively less affected places in northern Europe. As a result, there has been a missed opportunity to listen to and learn from the knowledge of climate impacts and how to live more sustainably, which people bring with them as they migrate.

The starting point for the Towards Inclusive Environmental Sustainability (TIES) project is that the knowledge and experience of people from global majority cultures living in the GN - who we call 'the South within the North' - should be included in policies and public debates about environmental problems and solutions. To foster greater inclusivity it is essential to challenge assumptions, as well as to foreground narratives that have been sidelined from mainstream environmental politics. For example, because of anti-immigrant politics and racism in the GN, people who have migrated from the GS, and from Muslim-majority countries especially, face social and economic barriers to sustainable living that often go unnoticed in mainstream sustainability-focused research. And yet it is common to find assumptions about them being less interested in environmental issues than GN-born citizens, needing to be educated about how to live sustainably, and that they are 'hard to reach'. What is in fact more accurate is that for many people who identify as Muslims with GS origins/roots, resource conservation and waste minimisation are shaped by Islamic principles of stewardship and by experiences of resource scarcity.

Box 2: What is the problem?

- Social inequality and environmental breakdown are interconnected, globally as well as locally.
- Anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim racisms are on the rise in the UK and are fuelled by fears of climate and economic crises.
- Research in the environmental sustainability field is white, Eurocentric, often ignores social difference, and tends to make assumptions that are rarely challenged by evidence.
- Lack of inclusivity in environmental decision-making and governance leads to assumptions about and exclusions of racialised and minoritised people, especially those who come from climate-challenged, global majority countries of the Global South.

With the UK committed to achieving net zero by 2050, there is no option but to implement policies that accelerate the transition while leaving no community behind. It is for good reason, then, that more questions are being asked about what inclusivity means and how barriers to greater diversity and inclusion in the ‘just transition’ can be overcome. Part of this involves critical analysis of why one-size-fits-all, individual behaviour change approaches, which tend to dominate sustainable consumption research and policy, are unsuited to deeply unequal and diverse societies (Anantharaman 2018). It also calls for acknowledgement that policies primarily centred on green industry and technology benefit the already-privileged within society, leading to unequal benefits for a minority and unintended harms to those who are marginalised. Our research not only responds to the need to redress the domination of the sustainability agenda by the UK-born white and middle-class middle population, but also focuses on the experiences and perceptions of Manchester’s citizens who are originally from Somalia and Pakistan. In the process, we hope to contribute to changing dominant sustainability narratives and to show how genuine inclusion could improve outcomes for everyone involved.

The intended audience for this report is professionals in the environmental and climate policy sector and advocates/activists working towards greater diversity and inclusion within this sector. We know that the environmental sector is overwhelmingly made up of people who are white, UK-born and middle-class middle class who enjoy the benefits of higher education and other opportunities (RACE Report; Ogunbode et al. 2023). The process of challenging and changing the ‘whiteness of green’ needs to start with a critical understanding of this context.

Box 3: A note on terminology

Finding the best term to refer to people who do not identify as ‘white UK-born’ or ‘white British’ is challenging and controversial. Many terms that are commonly used, such as ‘BAME’ and ‘ethnic minority’ are problematic, whereas others, such as ‘people of colour’ and ‘global majority’, are more accepted. In this report, we are drawing on our interviews with people who have migrated from ‘Global South’ countries (Pakistan and Somalia) who are also people of colour and Muslims. The intersections that are relevant to our research are the intersections of: racialised minority (i.e., being Black and Brown in a white majority country), Muslim identity, and Global South migration background. These intersectional identities are referred to collectively or individually throughout the report.

We would ideally prefer to avoid labelling people as ‘migrants’ or ‘immigrants’, because doing so reduces them to a category that may carry negative connotations for some readers. However, for the sake of clarity (and as a shorthand), we use the term ‘GS-born immigrant’ to describe research participants who have moved to and settled in Manchester from Pakistan or Somalia. Although in UK parlance the term ‘migrant’ is more often used as a generic term for all people who have moved from ‘abroad’, we do not use it because the academic term ‘migrant’ refers to a person who has temporarily or seasonally relocated (within or across borders) whereas ‘immigrant’ refers to someone who has chosen to stay and settle in a new country of residence. For a discussion of the problems arising from terminological debates over these terms in the UK context, see Anderson & Blinder (2021).

2. About the TIES Research Project

TIES was the first research project of its kind in the UK to take an in-depth, social science-informed look at how Global South (GS) to Global North (GN) migration and environmental sustainability intersect. It has been inspired by the work of other scholars who have done similar research with im/migrant communities in countries such as Sweden (Bradley 2013), Australia (Head et al. 2018, 2021), Canada (Gibson-Wood & Wakefield 2013; Teelucksingh 2019), and the Netherlands (Brons 2022), and who share our commitment to greater diversity, inclusion and justice in the sustainability field.

Approaching this topic through the academic lenses of sociology and politics, we explored how cultural beliefs, economic conditions, and policies shape the everyday practices of people who have moved to the UK from GS countries, specifically from Somalia and Pakistan. We looked at these two nationalities of GS-born immigrants because they are large and rapidly growing population groups in Manchester. These groups are very different from each other, as well as being internally diverse. However, they share the experience of leaving countries where Muslims are in the majority, where there is a significant global diaspora, and where the impacts of climate breakdown (e.g., floods, droughts, extreme weather) have been felt for decades. It is not the purpose of this report to compare these two groups, nor do we claim to present evidence that is representative of the entire Pakistani and Somali populations in Manchester or the UK. Instead, we explore how knowledges of, and challenges faced by, these two groups can and should inform more inclusive academic research and policymaking on sustainability. We regard this project as the long overdue start of a process of changing mainstream sustainability narratives.

We collected data using different methods over the period from 2021 to 2024. The purpose was to answer the following overarching questions:

- What economic, cultural, and religious factors combine to shape the environmental concerns and household practices of people who have moved to Manchester from GS countries?
- What can we learn from their knowledge and practices about alternative conceptions of sustainability and environmentally-significant household practices?
- How can listening to and learning from GS born communities contribute to better, more inclusive and just sustainability policies? What needs to happen to foster greater inclusivity?

*Photo: Surveys done with a ladies group
Credit: Nafhesa Ali*



2.1 Research Context

The research was conducted in Manchester, in the north-west of England. Being located close to the university meant that the researchers were able to develop connections and networks that informed the project over time. It is important to note that the TIES project was built on two previous projects based in Moss Side; one that looked at the problem of street litter from residents' perspectives and one that explored perceptions of environmental quality and household practices among a small sample of Somali residents of Moss Side (see Annex A for more details).

Manchester plans to become a carbon-neutral, environmentally sustainable city, an ambition that aligns with the UK's decarbonisation targets. The UK is legally bound to become carbon neutral by 2050, and the transition to a 'net zero' economy has become a key policy focus of the central government. Soon after being elected in 2017, the mayor of Greater Manchester (GM), Andy Burnham, pledged to reach net zero by 2038. After the 2024 UK general election, there was a renewed commitment to this pledge, buoyed by the promise of greater support from the new Labour government in Westminster.

At the same time as striving to be cleaner and greener, the GM city-region is also experiencing a high level of in-migration from the GS. According to the 2021 Census, 69% of Manchester's population was born in the UK and 57% identify as white. A significant proportion of the population not born in the UK have moved to Manchester from countries of the GS: 14% from Asia and the Middle East, and 7% from Africa (there are much smaller percentages from other world regions) (Office of National Statistics [ONS] 2021).

There is growing awareness of the need to improve race relations and race equality in all institutions of local governance in Manchester. A Race Equality Panel was established by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) in 2020 to tackle racial discrimination and disadvantage, and to champion GM as an inclusive city-region. In June 2020, an independent review was set up to investigate the lack of diversity in Manchester City Council (MCC). The resulting report reveals that while a third of Manchester's population is 'BAME' (their usage), people of colour make up only around 20% of the council's workforce (MEN 2020). In that report, it is acknowledged that non-white employees are under-represented at more senior levels and that overall progress towards equality has not been fast enough.

When the TIES project started, it was difficult to find evidence that the net zero agenda and the race equality agenda were being 'joined up' in Manchester. While the 2025 city plan adopted by MCC promises to put 'equality, inclusion and sustainability at the heart of all we do' (MCC 2016), we heard from people working in local environmental governance that the whiteness of the field and lack of inclusion of racialised minority citizens needs 'a lot more work' to be addressed effectively. In light of the growing incidence of far right anti-immigrant politics in the UK, which fuels anti-Black and anti-Muslim racism (as seen in the riots that took place in Manchester and other places in England in summer 2024), it is clear that all governments need to be much more proactive in their efforts to ensure that racial justice is woven into - and is not an afterthought in - net zero and sustainability policies. We discuss this point in depth in a separate report (Ahmad et al. 2025).

2.2 Collaborative Approach to the Research

The research was carried out by a team of academics in collaboration with members of the Somali and Pakistani communities in Manchester. Community co-researchers were involved at various points in the research process. This collaboration was important in helping us to establish trust with participants and ensuring that we sensitively approached the research, consistent with the 'nothing about us without us' principle. Although the research team is multicultural, with three members of Pakistani heritage, for much of the time, we did not have researchers of Somali heritage taking an active role in data collection.

While we do not claim to have been able to co-produce the findings or the contents of this report, we have taken many steps to ensure constructive collaboration and to avoid an extractive approach that does not benefit participants. Early in the project, we set up a research advisory group made up of professionals, academics and community members. We gathered insights through advisory group discussions, ensuring that a range of different perspectives were heard and respected. We also engaged with people involved in local governance to discuss their views on whether and how environmental policies could be more inclusive. Some of these people remained involved as advisors throughout the project.

In the final year of the project, we presented our preliminary findings to small groups of people from the Somali and Pakistani communities (many of whom were research participants) and invited feedback. This step helped to ensure that our analysis accurately reflects their views and experiences. These review sessions opened up dialogue about the issues and allowed us to refine our recommendations. We then asked for feedback on a draft of this report from research advisors and participants in two group meetings and through one-to-one exchanges.

Box 4 : Who did the research?

The research was conducted by a multicultural and multidisciplinary team of academics based in the Sustainable Consumption Institute at the University of Manchester. Three members of the team are UK-born Pakistani-heritage Muslim women who speak English, Urdu and Punjabi. Two team members have Somali heritage: one was born in Kenya and is in the UK on a student visa and one was born in Somalia and moved to the UK as a small child. Two members of the team are non-UK/GN born women (one Jewish Israeli and one white Canadian) who have personal migration experiences. The team worked with community co-researchers from the Somali community to help with language translation, participant recruitment, and data analysis.

3. Data Collection

We collected data in three stages. Before starting data collection, the project was approved by the University of Manchester Research Ethics Committee (see Annex A for more detail). In the first stage of the project, we conducted key informant interviews with people involved in local environmental governance, including councillors, officers, leaders of environmental organisations, and environmental activists. Some of these key informants were ‘insiders’ and some ‘outsiders’ to the environmental field. We asked for their views on the extent to which the ‘green agenda’ is responsive to and inclusive of the concerns and experiences of GS heritage communities and for their views on the challenges involved in engaging with these residents as part of their work. This stage enabled us to understand the local research context.

In the second stage, we conducted a survey designed to gather data on practices and perceptions relating to environmental sustainability from people living in Manchester. The survey asked questions about participants’ concerns about the environment, both globally and locally, and how they engage in environmentally friendly practices at home (the eight different practices were; recycling waste, minimising food waste, conserving energy, green travel, conserving water, avoiding new things, keeping a diet low on animal products, and growing your own food.). We also collected basic demographic information, such as age, gender, educational level, and housing type.

The third stage involved talking with participants, mostly in one-to-one and paired interviews and in a few focused discussions with small groups. We interviewed people with first-hand experience and memories of living in and migrating from Pakistan and Somalia to resettle in Manchester. These discussions allowed us to explore the issues we asked about in the survey in more detail, as well as helping us to understand participants’ experiences of migration, memories of daily life and environments in their home countries, and their perceptions of living in Manchester.

In Box 5, we provide a summary of the separate but related PhD research conducted by Zarina Ahmad with British Pakistani-heritage women living in Manchester and Glasgow.

*Photo: Participants at the 'Mangoes, Meat and Motors' event organised by the TIES Project in November 2023.
Credit: Sherilyn MacGregor*



3.1 Research Participants

We interviewed 27 participants we call 'key informants' because they are able to give us contextual information in their professional capacity. We recruited them purposively because they could give us information that is not available in published sources. They are people involved in various aspects of environmental and climate change policy in Manchester, including 20 people working inside different levels of local government and seven working in NGOs and community and activist groups. Of the 27 people we interviewed, 17 are white and ten are people of colour, including individuals who identified themselves as Somali, Indian, Pakistani, Jamaican, and mixed-race (we did not ask their country of birth); 12 men and 15 women.

Table 1 provides a summary of all of the research participants, not including the key informants. People completed the survey either online or on paper. We found people to complete the survey by distributing it in several public settings, including a mosque, a primary school, and community centres. We sent a link to an online version of the survey by email to a selection of community listservs, and we distributed a postcard (with a QR code linking to the online survey) in public spaces, including at St Peter's Square tram stop near Manchester City Hall. Three co-researchers administered the survey in the Somali community via their own local networks. Because the survey is in English, in some cases, live translation into a Pakistani or Somali language by a member of the team enabled participants to complete the questions. We recruited interview participants through similar networks and using the 'snowball method'.

Most of the people who participated in the surveys and interviews reside in the wards within the city of Manchester with the largest Pakistani and Somali populations, such as Moss Side, Rusholme and Longsight. A few reside in other parts of Manchester and in Greater Manchester boroughs. The survey was completed by 530 participants in total, of whom 290 reported a GS migration background and 211 said they are UK born (mostly 'white British' but not exclusively). A further 29 identified as 'other' than these categories. Within the UK-born group, there inevitably were people with a migration background, for example, with parents or grandparents who were born outside the UK. Because in this study we are interested in differentiating between people who have lived in the UK their whole lives and people who were born in a GS country and moved when old enough to remember their lives 'back home', we have not looked at the influence of second-hand migration experiences (e.g., children learning about the migration of their parents). But these experiences are important to look at in future research.

The TIES team interviewed 38 Pakistani participants (15 men, 23 women) and 20 Somali participants (9 men and 11 women). Our Moss Side pilot study involved 56 Somali participants. A further 81 participants of Pakistani background were involved in focus groups in Manchester (40) and Glasgow (41) conducted by Zarina Ahmad. So in total, the project engaged directly with 236 people of Pakistani background and 207 people of Somali background.

Participants in the survey, interviews, and focus groups constitute a contextual rather than a representative sample. They agreed to take part by answering questions about environmental issues, so there will inevitably be a degree of self-selection. It is important to stress that we make no claims that our findings can be generalised to broader Somali or Pakistani populations in Manchester or the UK. Rather, we sought to document the nuanced perspectives of participants, focusing on how their lived experiences shape attitudes toward sustainability practices. We know that Somali and Pakistani populations are internally diverse and have different migration histories. We used an intersectional approach in the research, foregrounding participants' self-described religious identity, age, and migration trajectories – particularly their lived experiences of migration to the UK. Themes related to gender roles/identity and class came up in our discussions, but we did not collect sufficient qualitative or quantitative data to explore them systematically. For example, the majority of participants chose not to answer questions about income.

The extent to which each group can be called 'a community' is up for debate, so we have used the term here as a lay rather than academic concept. The Pakistani community represents a well-established, significantly larger demographic group in both Manchester and the UK, with migration patterns spanning multiple generations. In contrast, Somali settlement in the UK is relatively more recent, shaped by complex sociohistorical factors including conflict and displacement. Awareness of and sensitivity to these differences informed our analysis of participants' heterogeneous identities and perspectives.

Table 1 Summary of Research Participants

N.B: Not key Informants

Category	Number	Notes
1. Survey Participants		
GS migration background	291	131 born in Somalia 117 born in Pakistan 43 born in other GS countries
UK Born	210	UK Born = 189 and Other GN=21 Includes some with indirect migration backgrounds (e.g., parents/grandparents abroad).
Total survey	501	
2. Interviews with Participants		
Pakistan-born	38	15 men and 23 women
Somalia-born	20	9 men and 11 women
Total	58	
3. Interviews for a Pilot study in 2018	56	Interviews with Somalia-born residents in Moss Side (before the TIES project)
4. Zarina Ahmad's PhD research focus groups		
Pakistani-heritage women	40	Manchester
Pakistani-heritage women	41	Glasgow
Total	81	
Total GS-born participants: 486 (Somalia=207 ; Pakistan=236, Other GS=43)		

Box 5: Exploring the food provisioning practices of Pakistani-heritage women in Manchester and Glasgow

Photo: Traditional Pakistani Clay Dishes Credit: Saima Ansari



Zarina Ahmad's thesis research, conducted as part of the TIES project, investigated environmentally sustainable food practices among UK-based Pakistani-heritage women, alongside intersections of cultural identity, migration, and ecological stewardship. The PhD research aimed to understand, challenge and redress the lack of research with (and therefore data about) ethnic minority and GS-born communities in mainstream environmental policy narratives in the UK. It involved researching the food knowledge and practices of Pakistani-heritage women who are invisibilised from these narratives and the sustainable consumption field more generally. This research is important, not only because it fills a huge evidence gap, but also because it can help to explain why existing campaigns and messaging about household sustainability (often presented as 'behaviour change') are culturally inappropriate and/or fail to acknowledge and value the existing cultural knowledge of women from racialised communities.

Zarina's project investigated: (i) how Pakistani-heritage women understand the concept of environmental sustainability; (ii) how their identity and culture shape their food practices; and (iii) what practices they perceive to be environmentally sustainable. Zarina held 13 focus groups with 81 Pakistani women in Manchester and Glasgow between August 2022 and June 2023. The purpose was to get the women talking together in a focused way about themes relating to food practices and knowledge. To prompt discussion, everyone was asked to bring a food item that resonated with their understanding of environmental sustainability.

The participants brought a range of items to the focus groups that illustrated how they embed sustainability into their everyday food habits. Staples such as rice, flour, lentils and raw cane sugar were viewed as sustainable because they are easy to store, widely available and can be bought in bulk. Homemade preserves, including pickles, chutneys and jams, were valued for extending the life of seasonal produce. Those with access to growing spaces shared home-grown fruit, vegetables and herbs, seeing this as a way to avoid chemicals and support both personal health and the environment. Several cooked dishes demonstrated the importance of reducing waste, with participants using leftovers to create items such as roti made with leftover lentil curry and chana chaat made from potatoes, peppers, onions and chickpeas. Overall, the discussions showed a wide range of understandings around sustainable food practices. Notably, the women did not refer to meat or bring items from farmers' markets or eco-focused shops.

Themes of Zarina's Research

In all of Zarina's discussions, it was clear that British Pakistani-heritage women's food practices are shaped by the interconnection of cultural, social, and gendered dimensions of food provisioning, cooking, and waste management. Food practices often hold deep cultural significance, shaping dietary choices, social norms, and sustainability behaviours. Zarina's research highlights how in Pakistani-heritage households, food-related tasks largely fall to women, yet having responsibility for this domain also empowers them. Their cooking reflects skill, creativity, and joy in feeding loved ones.

A year or so after the focus group stage of the project, Zarina held further discussion groups with ten women who identify as environmentalists/activists. These discussions helped her to reflect on and interpret the findings of the focus groups and to distil these into a set of three main themes that emerged from research, relating to food provisioning, cooking and meal preparation, and food and food-related waste.

Food provisioning: This theme entails all aspects of food sourcing, including food growing, food shopping, and food inequalities. Concerning food growing, participants emphasised the importance of access to land, expressing a strong desire for gardening spaces to grow fresh and culturally significant produce, while reflecting on connections to farming heritage in Pakistan. In food shopping, the women favoured local 'apana' (translated as 'our') shops for culturally appropriate products (i.e., South Asian), but noted challenges such as affordability, limited accessibility, and gendered dynamics at butchers' counters. Farmers' markets were deemed unsuitable, while supermarkets in Manchester were praised for catering better to diverse diets than those in Glasgow. Discussions on food inequalities revealed regional differences, with higher costs for halal meat and cultural items in Glasgow compared to Manchester.

Cooking and meal preparation: This theme entails making meals and the skills and tools involved, in addition to decisions about where, when, and how meals are consumed. Here, Zarina found some common sub-themes around gendered labour, food choices and diets, convenience, and food as love. It seems clear that practices involved in meal preparation reflect cultural identity, gender roles, and household dynamics among British-Pakistani women. Focus group participants predominantly saw cooking as women's work, with responsibilities extending beyond meal preparation to include planning, shopping, and washing up. While some participants noted some shifts in gender norms, they agreed that women tend to bear the mental and physical labour associated with cooking. Women's food choices put family members' preferences and tastes first, especially men's and children's, before considering their own. They spoke of traditional dishes being deeply tied to cultural identity and a way to pass on heritage to younger generations. Cooking from scratch was considered both a sustainable and meaningful practice; however, time constraints and busy lifestyles increasingly drive the use of pre-prepared ingredients and takeaways. The emotional connection to food was also significant, with many participants associating cooking and meal preparation with love, family bonding, and cultural belonging.

Food and food-related waste: This theme entails household practices like recycling, composting, and reducing waste, which are all important for lowering the environmental impact of food systems. Under this theme, Zarina identified the common sub-themes of packaging waste and plastic pollution, minimising food waste, bulk buying, and leftovers. Here, the findings show how sustainable food behaviours among British Pakistani-heritage women are shaped by cultural and religious values. Packaging waste, particularly plastic, was expressed as a major concern, with participants preferring loose produce and reusing packaging creatively. Religious beliefs strongly influenced efforts to minimise food waste, with practices like food redistribution, sharing leftovers, and bulk buying seen as integral to their culture and values. Creative use of leftovers, such as turning them into dishes such as parathas (a type of bread) and biryanis (a layered rice dish), reflected both resourcefulness and cultural tradition. The family-style serving method, which is common in Pakistani households, also helped reduce waste by allowing individuals to take only what they want to eat.

What these findings highlight is that despite being underrepresented as consumers and as agents of environmental change, Pakistan-heritage women offer valuable insights into sustainable household food practices. Zarina's research suggests that recognising and valuing the knowledge and experiences of these seldom-heard women can lead to a healthier, fairer, and more sustainable food system in the UK.

Photo: Examples of traditional Pakistani foods Credit: Women from Zarina's focus groups



“My mum showed me to pick up the produce, smell it and feel the level of firmness before placing into my basket and I still do this when I’m shopping, but I wouldn’t dream of doing this in Tesco.”

(Yasmin A, Glasgow)

“In Pakistan and Italy, I’ve lived in both places, people took their time to have lunch, lunch was pleasurable not rushed like here, picking up a sandwich and eating it on the go is normal.”

(Sajida, Manchester)

“All my food is cooked from scratch, I don’t see how else we would cook our food.”

(Taj, Glasgow)

“When I buy a big sack of rice it goes straight into my rice drum, and I reuse the empty rice sack as an alternative to a black bin bag.”

(Cossar, Manchester)

4. What We Learned: Key Themes

In this section, we present key themes from the data gathered from key informant interviews, followed by themes from the survey and follow up interviews with GS-born participants. This is not an exhaustive list of themes, but one that enables us to answer our overarching research questions in a concise way for a general audience. Although Zarina Ahmad's findings (Box 6) come from a separate dataset, we make reference to her insights when relevant to these themes.

As an academic research project, we have developed in-depth analyses of our findings that have been published in peer-reviewed journal articles (see p; an academic book about the project is also being written.

4.1 Themes from the interviews

Our analysis of the key informant interviews is focused on how individuals working within spaces of local governance understand and react to the problem of and need for greater inclusivity in the green agenda in Manchester. We wanted to understand the relationships that produce and sustain exclusion, because it is not a one-way street. This requires researching symmetrically (i.e., to look at both sides together). Therefore, before we started asking Pakistani and Somali GS participants about their everyday practices and knowledge of sustainability, we interviewed people with knowledge of sustainability and climate policy in the city. We asked these participants (called 'key informants' because they are asked to give us information drawn from their professional experience) about their perceptions of the lack of diversity in the environmental sector, the strategies being used to redress it, and the struggles and successes they have experienced in the process.

Three notable themes that emerged from these interviews, which can be summarised as follows.

First, **the domination by white people of the climate/environment sector in Manchester was acknowledged as something that needs to be addressed.** Interviewees agreed that, while there is a need to improve – 'to up our game' – on ethnic diversity, there are barriers to making it happen. The barriers are due to a lack of know-how and/or inability to learn how to engage with a more representative population of Manchester's citizenry. Some interviewees suggested that this problem is partly due to a lack of necessary resources and noted the severe budget cuts that have affected local councils for over a decade.

All of the interviewees who talked about whiteness and racial inequality were people of colour. In most cases, these reflections occurred in a one-to-one conversation with the interviewer, who is of Pakistani heritage. Whereas white interviewees did not directly speak about racism or white privilege in the interviews, and tended to use the word 'diversity' as a catch-all for this topic, for interviewees who are people of colour, these issues were central to their opinions about, and involvement in, the green agenda in Manchester. As with all people we interviewed, these interviewees said that the environmental sector in Manchester is not inclusive, but they went further to voice criticisms of the lack of inclusivity – and dominance of whiteness – of local governments in general.

Second, **there has been a noticeable increase in activity and a push for new strategies for increasing the inclusivity of environmental governance in Manchester over the past few years.** The strategies mentioned by interviewees include: working with religious leaders to reach into faith-based communities (e.g., Muslims), hiring external companies and consultants to deliver environmental campaigns in local areas, and increasing the role of neighbourhood-level initiatives (e.g., through three local climate change officers and facilitating processes to produce local climate action plans).

Third, we heard that **to the extent that efforts are being made to include a wider diversity of population groups in local agenda-setting and decision-making processes around environmental sustainability, these efforts are often instrumentally valued rather than valued for their own sake.** In current policy research, becoming more inclusive is not necessarily about improving or challenging the mainstream green agenda by learning from marginalised perspectives or discovering how different knowledges can contribute to the agenda. Instead, it is often about spreading the message of behavioural change to achieve results. This is because the agenda is now set and based on scientific expertise and public consultation processes that have ended.

Photo: Arndale Centre image of woman in a hijab Credit: Nafhesa Ali



Box 6: Selected quotes from key informants about the inclusivity of local environmental governance in Manchester



"[the local government] puts people in the bucket of Usual Suspects and Unusual Suspects, that's kind of, their term, used as an excuse. It's an easy out for them to say 'these people are just hard to reach and we don't have the capacity to reach them so this is why we haven't engaged them' ... As an organization [it] values engaging with certain types of stakeholders, and those are people who are professional, who are trained, the kind of usual suspects that they engage with. So it's not that it's impossible for them to engage with Unusual Suspects or people that are 'hard to reach', it's just they aren't who is valued..."

"I would say that the whole agenda isn't particularly diverse [...] it's partly an issue of not getting the right balance. I'm not sure whether it's all on the shoulder of employers is what I'm trying to say... I think employers could do more to ensure that we are more diverse as a working population, but I actually think there is a cultural thing in there as well. There are certain communities I think that don't see the environment as being a valuable job, so they push their kids into other professions."

"... I don't think the Council's necessarily the right people [to deliver an inclusive green agenda], it's too white middle class. If you don't feel you don't belong and then somebody comes in from the more affluent, academic background and a different area, you just find it very patronizing. But if you look similar and are from there, they take it differently. And I have found some of the other services, there is [name of external charity], I've not found them right for our communities to be honest."

"We made a really good connection with a mosque in Moss Side used by Somali community. And I think it was just a perfect example of, you know, people see certain communities as hard to reach, but they weren't hard to reach - we reached out to them and they were so happy to work alongside us and they were really [helpful]."

"... there's a lot of hand wringing about how the environmental movement is too white-middle class [...] there's a lot of segregation and people might not feel welcome in those spaces. That's why people are working within their own communities because they don't really feel like they're welcome."

"...some of the things that I do are sort of dominated by a white demographic. And I find myself doing a lot of things where I definitely stand out, where I am the only ethnic minority. And I think that's when people wanted me to get involved more... because they're like 'great you know we've not had one before'."

4.2 Themes From The Survey And Interviews About Household Sustainability

Next, we discuss the main findings of our analysis of the survey responses and interviews with Somali and Pakistani participants. We do not provide a comprehensive presentation of the findings here. Instead, we present concise thematic summaries, with statistical evidence provided where relevant to support the claims we make about what we've learned from participants' responses to our questions.

No significant difference in the frequency of engagement in sustainability practices between UK-born and GS-born respondents

Our survey data enables us to answer the question of whether or not there is a difference between UK-born and GS-born respondents in the frequency of engagement in household sustainability practices. Answering this question is important in light of the assumption that we would expect to find an 'environmental concern gap' (Macias 2016), whereby people from what some call 'less developed' countries are less likely to engage in so-called green lifestyles than members of the dominant social group (white British/GN-born people in this case).

The survey included questions about the extent to which people engage in eight household sustainability practices: recycle waste, minimise food waste, conserve energy, green travel, conserve water, avoid new things, keep a diet low on animal products, and grow your own food. These eight practices are commonly included in major surveys about sustainable consumption (such as those used by Eurobarometer), which we drew from when designing our survey. (The full survey is available on our project website).

When analysing the survey data, we used multivariate models to estimate whether there is a statistically significant difference between UK-born and GS-born respondents, controlling for several factors including level of environmental concern, gender, age, time lived in Manchester, education, level of religiosity, and type of accommodation.

We found the differences between UK-born and GS-born are slim and not statistically significant. We also concluded that there is no significant difference between UK-born and GS-born respondents in frequency of engagement in six out of eight sustainability practices (once controlling for all the other variables) and that UK-born respondents are more likely to conserve energy and less likely to recycle waste than non-UK born.

Engagement in household sustainability practices after migration is shaped by everyday lives in home countries

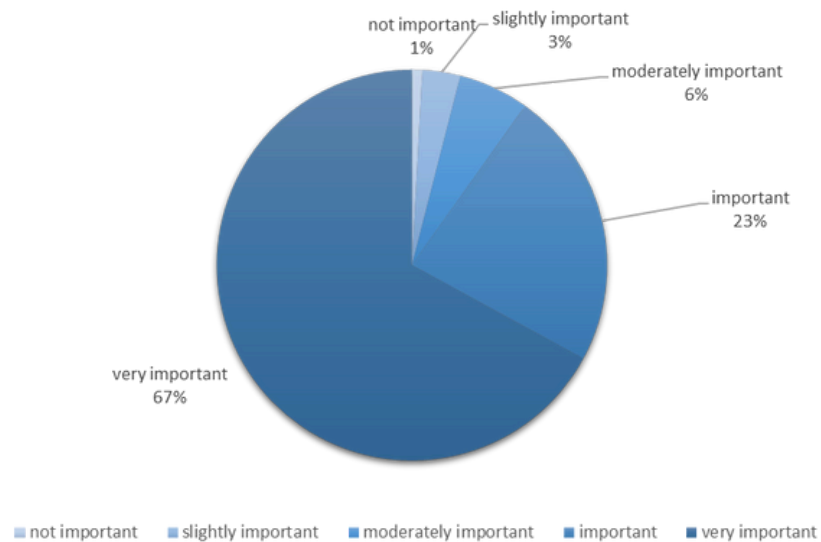
From our analysis of the interviews with Somali and Pakistani participants, we gained important insights that were echoed in the survey findings, illustrating how participants' experiences with sustainability practices in their home countries continue to influence their post-migration lives. Many interviewees recalled sustainable habits such as minimising food waste, recycling, conserving water and electricity, and repairing items instead of purchasing new ones. These habits were reflected in the survey results, where GS-born respondents reported slightly higher engagement in recycling waste, conserving energy, and avoiding unnecessary consumption compared to their UK-born counterparts.

Participants also noted a shift towards increased consumption of cheap clothing and processed foods as wealth grew in their home countries, which paralleled the survey findings of lower engagement in the sustainable practices of avoiding buying new items and adopting low animal product diets. The introduction of throwaway plastic products was highlighted as a negative change, in contrast with the traditional use of natural materials that were once commonly used (and reused) back home.

GS-born participants have a high level of environmental concern

Survey participants from the Somali and Pakistani sample groups demonstrated significant concern for the environment. Notably, 90% of survey participants from GS backgrounds reported a high level of environmental concern (see Figure 1). This finding challenges the commonly held belief that GS immigrants lack interest in or concern for environmental issues.

Figure 1: Survey responses by GS-born participants to Q1: How important is it to you personally to protect the environment?



Concern for people and environments ‘back home’

Another theme that emerged in the interviews with GS-born participants is that, in addition to being concerned about environmental protection more generally, participants have a high level of concern about the environments in the places they lived before migrating, and about the welfare of loved ones who still live there. Pakistan and Somalia are countries on the frontlines of the climate crisis, with both experiencing catastrophic climate events (floods and droughts) at the time of the research project. When introducing the topics of climate change and the corresponding need for sustainability policies in the UK, we often referred to the conditions in GS regions to prompt discussion.

Several participants’ reflections suggest that people with migration experiences have understandings of the environment and climate change that differ from those who were born and have lived in the UK their whole lives. We could call this a ‘translocational’ understanding, with reference to the work of sociologist of migration Floya Anthias (2021). For people who have migrated from the GS, the environment and climate are never only local, but always about both their country of origin and the place they live now. The UK has experienced relatively fewer negative effects of climate breakdown than Pakistan and Somalia.

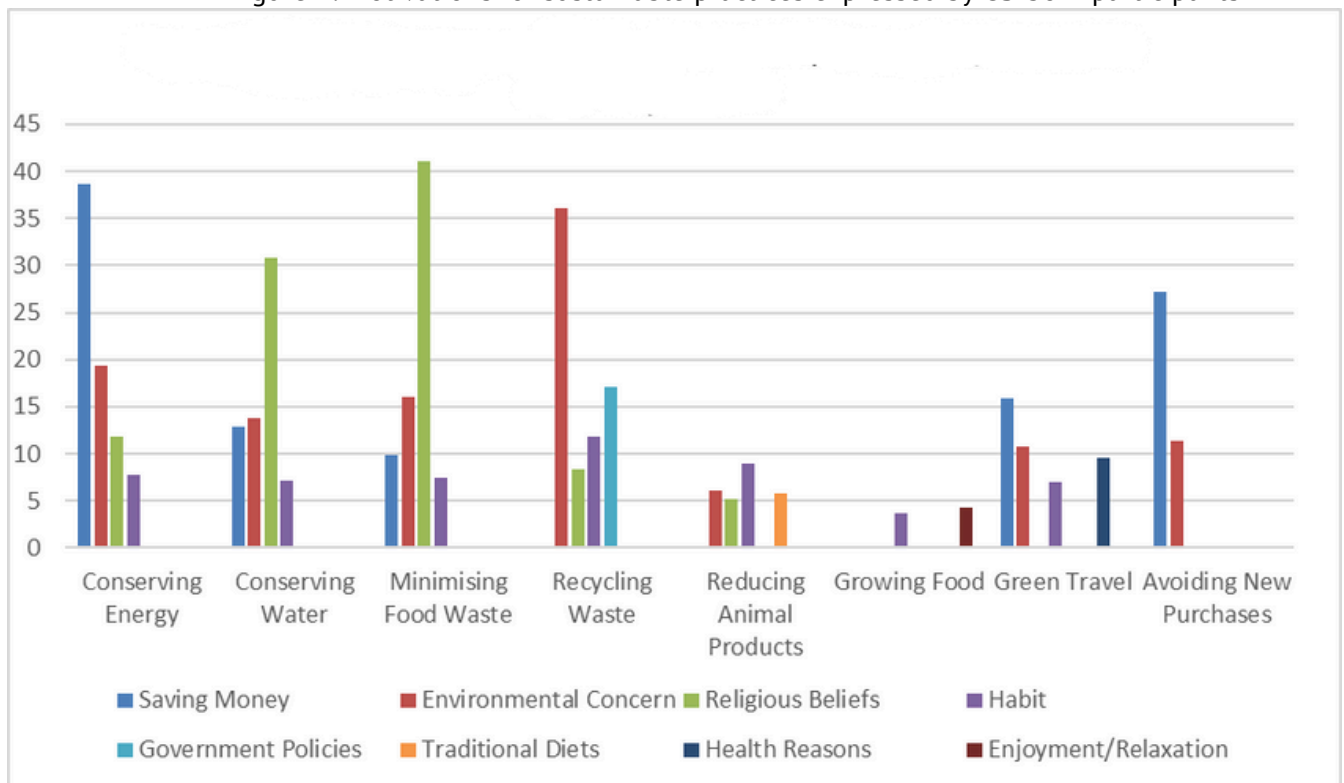
Many participants spoke of having travelled back to visit their pre-migration homes and seeing the effects of climate change first hand. They described in detail the changes they have seen in the landscape; those who were farmers talked about the devastation to agricultural land. Some talked about the introduction of plastic and other disposable items from a Western 'throwaway' society as something that has changed since they left. In relation to these changes, some participants expressed anger at the injustice of GN countries imposing the harms from industrialisation and global carbon emissions on people living in the GS.

A few people discussed sending money to family members back home to help them cope in times of crises caused by climate impacts. One participant referred to this as a form of double taxation: she pays her taxes in the UK and then pays part of her income in direct aid to people in Somalia.

Motivations for sustainable practices expressed by GS-born participants

Our data allow us to dig deeper into the motivations behind people's engagement in household sustainability practices. We asked survey respondents who frequently engage in sustainable practices what motivates them, giving them a set of options as well as blank space for their own responses. The response data shown in Figure 2 (below) shows valuable insights into enablers and drivers of these practices.

Figure 2: Motivations for sustainable practices expressed by GS-born participants



We learned from the interviews that participants are motivated by a combination of religious teachings, financial savings, and a desire to care for future generations. Many expressed a sense of concern and personal responsibility towards the environment, shaped by their experiences of resource scarcity in their countries of origin. In addition, we learned that a strong motivation for engaging in some sustainable practices, especially those relating to food, is retaining cultural identity. Women participants (in Zarina Ahmad's research in particular) talked about the motivation to pass down knowledge about food practices to the next generation out of fear of it being lost in a culture where it is minoritised. There is also an emotional element: some practices are important for expressing love and maintaining a connection to family members and family cultural identity.



Islam as a sustainable way of life

Islamic principles, particularly stewardship, play a pivotal role in shaping environmental practices in households, demonstrating a sustainable approach deeply embedded within Islamic culture and practice. While participants may not frequently use the term 'sustainability', their daily actions reflect its principles and are guided by religious values, economic sensibilities and a responsibility towards future generations. Islamic teachings promote care and respect for all beings—neighbours, animals, and plants alike—values often imparted through religious education and family traditions, fostering a holistic sense of responsibility. Participants emphasised how these teachings align with environmental goals, advocating for stewardship and care as intrinsic parts of their faith.

Cleanliness, deeply rooted in Islamic practice, was consistently highlighted as essential for personal and communal well-being. This daily responsibility, ingrained in religious teachings, reflects a broader commitment to maintaining a harmonious and healthy environment. For participants, living as a Muslim is a blend of religious obligations and cultural traditions. These practices are passed down through generations and inform a way of life that integrates faith with daily responsibilities, reinforcing a holistic and sustainable ethos.

Islamic dietary practices, such as adhering to halal standards, emphasise the ethical treatment of animals, moderation, and avoiding waste. Participants highlighted these principles as part of a broader lifestyle philosophy that promotes generosity and mindfulness, extending beyond food to encompass all aspects of consumption. Conserving water and other resources also emerged as a key concern, reflecting the Islamic principle of avoiding waste, known as *Israf*. This principle underscores moderation and responsibility, encouraging the reduction of waste in water, food, and energy.

Photo: Stock Image of Islamic Calligraphy.

Box 7: Complex intersections of religion and culture



This project engaged with religion and culture as intersecting frameworks through which participants articulated their identities and practices. While religious and cultural narratives emerged in the interviews, we explicitly avoid framing these narratives as homogeneous or representative. We are also aware that we have not been able to delve into the complex intersections of religious and cultural identities or how these change over time with migration and resettlement experiences.

While both Somali and Pakistani communities in Manchester share Islam as a majority faith, their lived religious and cultural experiences reflect significant intra-group heterogeneity. Though grounded in shared Islamic principles, participants' beliefs and practices diverged across sectarian, interpretive, and cultural lines. This underscores the importance of avoiding essentialist assumptions about 'Muslim communities', as doctrinal and devotional practices are shaped by dynamic socio-cultural factors.

Likewise, cultural identities are multifaceted. Somali participants often referred to nomadic heritage and more recent migration trajectories, whereas Pakistani participants predominantly traced roots to agricultural communities in northern Pakistan. Generational settlement patterns further distinguished these groups: many Pakistani participants belonged to second- or third-generation UK households, fostering cultural adaptations distinct from the more recent and much smaller Somali community in Manchester.

Furthermore, we found that the concept of *Dunya*, meaning 'world' in Arabic, resonates strongly with participants and serves as a framework for understanding sustainability through an Islamic lens. Unlike the term 'sustainability', which can feel disconnected from cultural contexts, *Dunya* links worldly matters, such as environmentalism, with religious and ethical responsibilities. This approach highlights the importance of using culturally meaningful language to engage communities effectively in sustainability efforts.

Islam's holistic approach to life integrates sustainability, social responsibility, and spiritual practice. By grounding environmental behaviours in Islamic teachings and culturally resonant concepts like *Dunya*, there is immense potential to foster sustainable practices within Muslim communities. This approach highlights the value of aligning sustainability initiatives with cultural and religious contexts to engage diverse groups effectively.

Photo: Somali Traditional Baskets, sourced online "How Minneapolis Somali immigrants are keeping their artistic traditions alive", available at: <https://www.somaliaonline.com/community/topic/69829-how-minneapolis-somali-immigrants-are-keeping-their-artistic-traditions-alive/>



Barriers to engaging in sustainable household practices

Participants told us about some of the challenges and barriers they experience when trying to engage in sustainable practices; in some cases, the barriers mean they are not able to make them part of their everyday lives.

One common barrier to growing food is the lack of a garden or access to an allotment. Some participants told us about problems with recycling created by a lack of appropriate infrastructure (e.g., communal bins that were frequently uncollected) and confusing information about waste collections. We also heard that some felt unable to engage in what could be called ‘sustainable consumption’ (buying organic products or electric cars) due to financial constraints; the cost of living crisis was mentioned frequently. Some participants highlighted cultural preferences as a reason for not adopting sustainable practices. For example, they said that some sustainable dietary practices common in the UK, especially vegetarianism, would not be acceptable in their households.

Sources of and trust in information about environmental issues

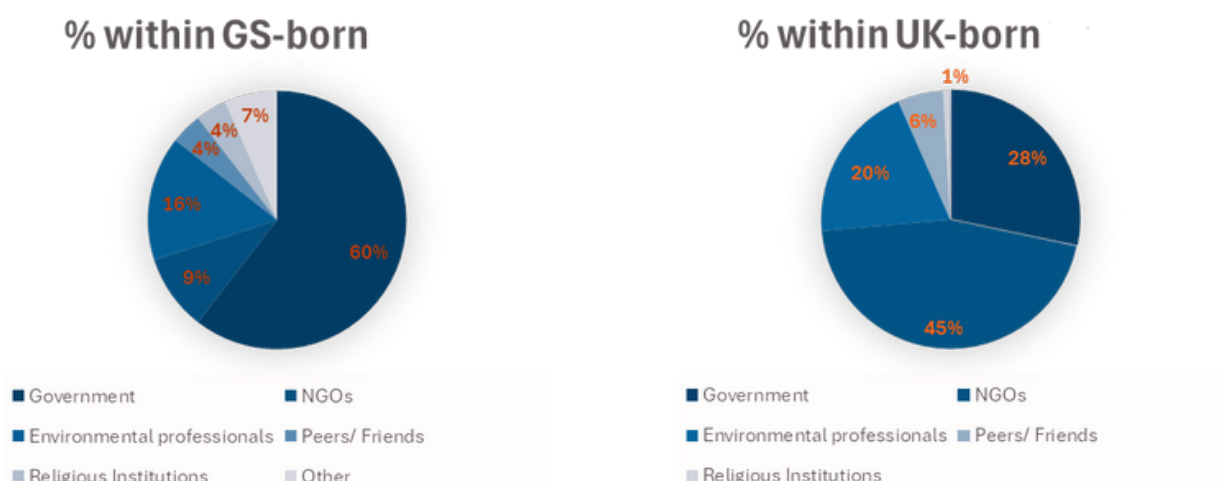
The survey included the questions: ‘Where do you normally find information about environmental issues?’ and ‘what sources do you trust the most when it comes to information about environmental issues?’

We found that 58% of UK-born respondents access information about environmental issues from the Internet compared to 40% among GS-born. Among UK-born, 27% rely on social media compared with 19% among GS-born respondents. The latter rely more on traditional forms of mass media (e.g., newspapers, television, radio) (18% compared with 8%) and more on educators (5% compared with 0.6%). Finally, GS-born (16%) said they rely on a variety of other sources of information listed, including environmental professionals.

It is important to note here that we asked whether respondents had ever received environmental information in their own language if their first language is not English, to which 31% said this was not applicable, 50% said no, 8% said yes, and 11% could not recall.

We also asked what sources of information on environmental issues people are likely to trust. Table 2 shows that GS-born survey respondents said they are about twice as likely to trust government messages compared with those born in the UK. They are much less likely to trust NGOs. A small percentage of GS-born said they trust information received from religious institutions, compared to an even smaller percentage of UK-born survey respondents.

Figure 3 Sources of trust for GS (N=410) and UK-born (N=106) survey respondents



Experiencing inclusion in, and exclusion from, the green agenda in Manchester

We did not ask about experiences of inclusion and exclusion in the survey. In general, both the survey and interview questions focused on household practices rather than political participation. However, political issues and issues of inclusion/exclusion from the green agenda came up in some of the interviews and in discussions with members of our advisory panels. From these, we found evidence to suggest that people from racialised and minoritised communities do not feel included in the mainstream environmental debate in Manchester. This observation was also made in some of the key informant interviews, as discussed in section 4.1.

Those participants who talked about this issue said they felt excluded from local environmental discussions, largely because 'green' events are dominated by white middle-class professionals and residents. This gives people of colour with GS migration backgrounds the impression that green issues are not relevant to them and/or that their perspectives are not of interest to the organisers. The Greater Manchester Green Summit and events catering to the green business community were mentioned as specific examples.

Some participants highlighted their impression that if, when and where it happens, the inclusion of GS-born people in environmental policy issues is often approached in a tokenistic way. Some mentioned the use of images depicting people of colour (e.g., women wearing hijabs) in environmental campaigns. Others said it was common to see consultations select only leaders from minority communities, such as Imams, to tick the box that 'the Muslim community' had been included. It was noted that these types of inclusion are both tokenistic and unrepresentative, and have the effect of causing scepticism and mistrust.

Beyond exclusion and inclusion, we heard that participants also experience invisibilisation. Some participants expressed frustration that people from Pakistani, Somali and many other GS-origin communities are already doing environment-related work that goes unnoticed, ignored, and, crucially, unfunded by the mainstream green sector, while assumptions of them being 'hard to reach' and 'not engaged' are made. Examples given included a garden project, sustainable businesses, and regular litter picking in neighbourhoods local to mosques.

*Photo: wall art in Rusholme quote from the Qur'an.
Credit: Rasol*



Box 8: Selected quotes from interviews with Somali and Pakistani participants

"I think it's just you get in a habit. As a kid, we've been always raised and told there is no electricity and you have to save electricity, so we are in the habit of doing that."

"You're exposed to poverty first hand. My mother never used to let anything go to waste, you know, whether it's food or recycling your clothes and, you know, doing stuff up with them. And seeing that and not taking money for granted has made me much more aware of waste as well. I've grown up with that practice because of that. I guess, subsequently, then learning that it's by your faith as well. We ask the children to be very diligent about recycling, and I get mad at them and say put recycling in the right places."

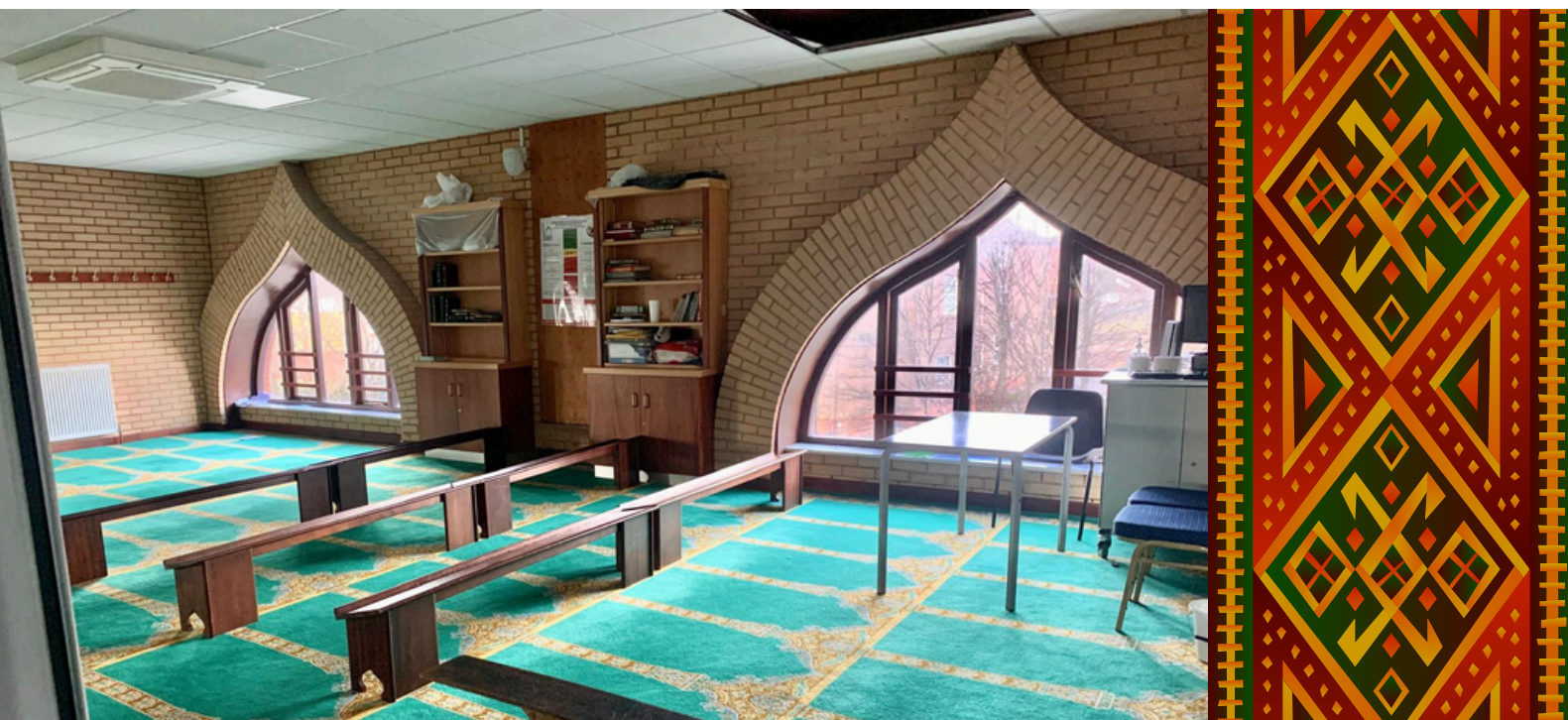
"I live in an apartment. I wish I had a garden here, but no, I don't have that access."

"No, that's not the Somali culture, the Somali culture is eating meat and milk."

"We are not wasting people, our religion is not... If you give me this [bowl] full of rice, I can't leave one, I will finish. That is the rules my mum taught me, saying listen, if you didn't finish, just don't in the first place to put, someone else might come and have it, so why are you putting it on your plate? So even my children don't leave things. If they leave something, they put it in the fridge and after they warm and eat it so that is a kind of recycling."

"In Arabic, it's called Israf. I don't know whether you have come across this word before, but a Muslim person will tell you Israf means to overuse it, waste it. Israf is not allowed in Islam, in anything, not only water, but in anything. When you are cooking food, you have to cook it for the number of people that are going to enjoy that meal, and if you are heating the kettle, you just put enough water for a cup of tea, not fill it and heat it and then throw that water late, you know?"

Photo: Khizra Mosque in Cheetham Hill. Credit:Nafhesa Ali



5. Reflections and Recommendations

'Social inclusion is about working together as a society to foster active participation of, and equity for, all citizens ... [and to] *change dominant systems of knowledge, power, and decision-making.*' (Teelucksingh 2019:47, emphasis added)

The TIES project was motivated from the start by a commitment to challenging and changing the status quo. By calling for greater inclusivity, we are not simply envisioning more opportunities for people from GS migration backgrounds to be involved and to be listened to in environmental politics. As Canadian environmental justice scholar Cheryl Teelucksingh argues, meaningful inclusion requires more: it requires fundamental changes in existing power structures, including those that determine whose knowledge counts, who gets to decide the direction of travel for society, and how collective resources are distributed and used. Important steps towards this deeper understanding of inclusivity are to recover, value and amplify what has been sidelined by dominant systems. Our research, and this report, therefore aims to centre the knowledge and practices of a demographic group that has been marginalised and stereotyped - 'the south within the north' - in order to challenge some of the assumptions that are rarely acknowledged, much less corrected, in white-dominated, Eurocentric environmental research and policy.

In this final section of the report, we reflect on the main messages from the research and why they are important to our overall aim of contributing to greater inclusivity within the field of environmental sustainability. We then provide a list of recommendations that are backed up by the evidence gathered in the TIES project and by existing research and advocacy on social inclusion and environmental justice.

Message 1: People who have immigrated to the UK from GS countries (such as Somalia and Pakistan) are neither better nor worse than UK-born people in terms of their level of environmental concern and engagement in household sustainability practices. We did not find any significant differences in levels or frequencies of concern or engagement. This means we can challenge the assumptions of an 'environmental concern gap' (Macias 2016) and that people from GS countries need to be educated or assisted to adopt so-called 'green behaviours' to play their part in the drive for greater sustainability.

At the same time as emphasising that there is no obvious knowledge deficit, however, it is also important to appreciate that people who have moved to the UK from GS countries may access information about local environmental issues in different ways and from different sources than UK-born citizens, and that some sources may be seen as more trustworthy than others. It would be beneficial and respectful to provide GS-born citizens with culturally appropriate messages, in the media sources they use and trust, and in their own language where possible.

Message 2: How GS-born people think about and engage with environmental issues is shaped in specific ways by their religious and cultural beliefs and their migration experiences. It is difficult to disentangle these factors from each other and near impossible to generalise about the influence of different factors over time. But the key point is that the importance of these factors needs to be better understood and recognised in the sustainability field.

In our research, all of the GS-born participants identify as Muslims and the specificity of Islam as a way of life plays a central role in how they relate to environmental and sustainability issues. Islam integrates sustainability, social responsibility, and spiritual practice. Most Muslims adopt everyday practices that are considered 'green' and 'eco-friendly', such as not wasting resources, sharing abundance with others who have less, and keeping environments clean - even if these are not defined as such in Western terminology. On the one hand, this finding again challenges the deficit view of GS people from Muslim-majority countries.

On the other hand, it could be argued that by grounding environmental practices in Islamic teachings and culturally resonant concepts like *Dunya*, there is potential to promote more visibly sustainable practices within Muslim communities. Our research seeks to highlight the value of aligning sustainability initiatives with cultural and religious contexts to engage people more effectively and in an inclusive way.

Our research also suggests that there is something in the knowledge gained through migration experiences, of having at least two places one can call 'home', that could contribute to better, more inclusive meanings of sustainability. We think it makes sense to see immigrant perceptions of sustainability and environmental problems as 'translocational' (Anthias 2021). This concept highlights the dynamic and interconnected ways in which individuals navigate the world. It helps us understand how people who have experienced mobility— whether through migration, travel, or diaspora—can develop an acute sense of awareness and concern for the people and environments in their country of origin. By recognising the complexity of these experiences, we can better appreciate how global and local issues intertwine, fostering a sense of responsibility and advocacy across borders.

Our research also serves as a critical reminder to policymakers, practitioners, and researchers engaging with Muslim communities: while religious gatekeepers (e.g., community leaders) may offer valuable entry points, their perspectives should not be conflated with the plurality of needs, priorities, and lived experiences within the broader community. Over-reliance on a narrow cohort of figureheads risks obscuring intra-community diversity, including competing cultural priorities, generational shifts, and intersectional identities. A holistic understanding of sustainability practices – or any community-focused intervention – necessitates intentional engagement with grassroots voices to complement (not substitute) institutional narratives. Such an approach not only aims to enrich analysis but also aims to foster more equitable and context-sensitive outcomes.

Message 3: In the process of centring and valuing the knowledge and practices of people from GS migration backgrounds, it is also important to avoid generalising, othering and romanticising. We have already made it clear that we did not conduct this research with a representative sample of the two population groups included in the study, and as such, do not purport to provide generalisable findings or to make any general claims about the Somali and Pakistani populations living in Manchester. We also avoid presenting Muslims as one homogenous community.

Early in the project, when we explained our plan to conduct research with people born in Somalia and Pakistan, we were often met with sceptical looks and the question 'why are you asking us?' This led us to realise that by wanting to centre people who have been marginalised, we risked making the unintended move of treating them as 'other'. We therefore added a step to the research design intended to balance our focus by also researching with people who hold the power to make decisions and set agendas in Manchester; those whose positionality may prevent them from understanding their role in sustaining exclusion.

This step happened in our first stage of data collection, via interviews with key informants from whom we gained contextual information and reflections on the processes by which environmental policies are made in the city. We call this a symmetrical approach to the research.

One important way to avoid romanticising the knowledge and practices of GS-born participants is to acknowledge that both continuity and change are an inevitable part of most people's migration experiences. We know that some aspects of immigrants' lives may stay the same, but many things change due to locational, cultural, generational and other factors. People who have migrated very often adapt to the dominant culture over time.

Many of our participants talked about adopting practices and attitudes that are part of Western consumer culture. This was sometimes a concern expressed by so-called 'first generations' about changes observed in their children and grandchildren who were born in the UK. For some, this integration into UK society and 'Western' culture may lead to 'unsustainable' consumption practices, for reasons that may include striving for social mobility and status or simply enjoying comfort and abundance that was not available back home. We heard that some practices, such as conserving water and energy, were maintained after migration, while others were harder to follow in the UK due to economic pressures or lack of communal spaces. For example, growing food or sharing resources with extended families, which were common in their countries of origin, became more challenging.

Message 4: In order to move towards inclusive environmental sustainability, people in positions of power must critically reflect upon their own assumptions and practices. We found that they are open and willing to do this when given the chance to reflect. In our interviews, people involved in environmental governance in Manchester expressed regret that they largely fail to engage with GS-born residents and accepted that the 'hard to reach' phrase is inaccurate; the fault and responsibility lie with those sitting in the driver's seats of consultation and engagement processes. Several admitted that they and local governments as a whole need to 'do more and do better', but there is a lack of the necessary know-how and resources, including time, to be able to make their work more inclusive.

A key message of our research, therefore, is that this process of reflection, of what we call 'holding up a mirror', is a necessary step in committing to the creation of meaningful inclusion in environmental and sustainability-related policy processes. It is an essential step in understanding and changing the power relations that create exclusions in the environmental field. It is the opposite of starting with the mindset that people who are currently not participating actively are the ones who need to be educated to change their behaviour and need to be 'empowered' to get involved. Instead, we encourage policymakers to take a step back, acknowledge their own backgrounds and the backgrounds of those in key decision-making positions. And to reflect upon why valuable insights from GS-born citizens are currently being lost through a lack of meaningful inclusion within environmental policy and decision-making processes.



Photo: Stock Image of Pakistani traditional clay container used to store water and keep it cool

5.1 Recommendations

- 1. Understand** the structural and cultural barriers to inclusion, starting with the domination of the environmental sustainability field by white, middle-class people and the related marginalisation of people from minoritised backgrounds, including people who have migrated to the UK from climate-challenged countries of the Global South (GS).
- 2. Challenge** and move beyond the incorrect assumption that minoritised and marginalised communities are 'hard to reach' and/or uninterested in environmental issues. The first step should be to assess whether it is existing structures, barriers and exclusive processes that are to blame for the perceived lack of engagement as opposed to deficiencies within these communities.
- 3. Listen** to and accept GS people's knowledges and experiences as valuable. Incorporate the translocational knowledge of GS immigrant communities into public debates about how to address climate threats. See their contribution as an asset to collective sustainability efforts, thereby challenging the assumption that they need education and lack motivation compared to UK-born citizens.
- 4. Be proactive** in hiring more people of colour and people with GS backgrounds into the environmental sector. Avoid relying on volunteers to increase representation. Create paid roles and pay people fairly for their involvement in environmental planning and decision-making processes in order to build trust and ensure meaningful engagement in sustainability initiatives.
- 5. Create** culturally relevant environmental messaging for citizens. Design sustainability campaigns that use accessible language and language that reflects the cultural values and knowledge of those from the GS . Tailor messages to resonate with migration experiences, acknowledging the diversity of sustainability practices across groups.
- 6. Engage** religious communities in sustainability efforts. Partner with faith-based institutions and recognise the influential role of religious leaders in promoting sustainable practices within their communities. But be aware that leaders do not necessarily represent the whole of their communities and may engage in gatekeeping that reduces rather than enables inclusive participation.
- 7. Organise** advisory bodies and public forums where those from the GS can discuss and contribute to local environmental policies in their own languages if desired. Ensure meetings include language interpreters for those who need it, have gender-sensitive arrangements, and are scheduled at times that are sensitive to religious practice

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Appendix A: Project Background and Ethics

Providing a brief account of the origins of the TIES project helps to put the research in context and to explain the motivations that underpin it. Sherilyn MacGregor's research on how local environmental quality in Manchester is shaped by social inequality started about a year after she moved to Manchester in 2016. After moving into a house in a terraced street in Moss Side, she became curious about why there was so much litter in the streets and alleys in the neighbourhood. This led to a small research project about residents' perceptions about the problem, which involved a doorstep questionnaire, resident focus groups and interviews with local council officers and representatives of the waste company Biffa. Sherilyn conducted that project in 2017 in collaboration with a grassroots community organisation called Upping It. The report from this project, *Talking Rubbish in Moss Side*, is available on our TIES website (see Bibliography).

That project yielded a number of findings that Sherilyn wanted to investigate further. One was that many of the residents who participated in the questionnaire and focus groups were immigrants from Global South countries, including Pakistan and India, who expressed shock at what they called 'third world conditions' in Moss Side and frustration about the way they had been treated by the council. A second finding was that the many Somalia residents living in the area did not agree to participate in study. These two findings inspired a second research project, which became the pilot study for the TIES project.

The purpose of this pilot study was to investigate the environmental perceptions and experiences of Somali-origin residents in Moss Side. This project was designed by Sherilyn and with two colleagues working in the Sustainable Consumption Institute, Tally Katz-Gerro (a sociologist) and Catherine Walker (a human geographer). It was conducted in 2018-19 and involved a survey and follow up interviews. The research was made possible through collaboration with co-researchers Salah Abdisamad and Safia Abdirahman, who could translate and interpret our questions into Somali language and recruit participants via their own networks. We were also fortunate to have the support of the Somali Adult Social Care Agency (SASCA) who allowed us to conduct the survey in their office and helped us explain the project in a way that gained us the trust of participants. The pilot study with Somali participants allowed us to learn about the community and to establish relationships that helped to ensure that the research was valued and made a difference, rather than being beneficial only to us as researchers. We wrote a report to communicate the findings that we had translated into Somali and held a community event at Claremont Primary School to ask for feedback, which involved live translation from English to Somali. The report, *Challenging Assumptions, Enabling Inclusivity*, is available on our TIES website (see Bibliography).

After we finished that research, we again had questions we wanted to investigate in greater depth. The role of religion in people's engagement with sustainability and how experiences of migration from a climate challenged country to the UK shape perceptions and practices were key aspects we wanted to pursue. We therefore decided to apply for funding for a larger study with more resources, more time (4 years) and more participants. In designing this study, which became TIES, we decided to continue working with Somali participants and co-researchers in order to build on what we had already learned. We decided to include a second population group in order to make comparative analysis possible as well as to broaden the types of experiences we would hear about.

We decided to include people who had migrated to the UK from Pakistan, because they are the largest non-UK/Global South born group in Manchester (with a much longer history of migration than Somalis). We also thought it made sense to include another group from a Muslim-majority and climate challenged country. We entertained the idea of including people from any GS-country and not limited it to these two, but decided against it mainly for a practical reason: it would be too difficult to cope with multiple languages other than English.

Research Ethics

All aspects of the TIES project research design were reviewed and approved by the University of Manchester Research Ethics Committee (Reference: 2021-11454-18493) prior to starting data collection. The research team followed a GDPR-compliant data management plan, as required by the University of Manchester.

All participants were given a detailed information sheet explaining the research project prior to asking them to give us their informed consent to take part. They were given information about how their data would be used and stored. They were allowed to withdraw their consent at any time.

Participants' confidentiality and privacy have been protected by the research team. All people taking part have been anonymised and/or given a pseudonym (no real names or information that could identify them have been used in this report).

Survey participants received a £5 voucher to thank them for their time. Interview participants who gave us up to one hour of their time received a £15 voucher. Key informants who spoke in a professional capacity did not receive any remuneration.



In July 2024 we shared preliminary findings with approx 20 members of the Somali and Pakistani communities and asked for their honest, critical feedback at two in-person meetings. Participants were given a £50 voucher to thank them for their time.

We shared a draft of this report with research advisory group members and members of both communities in January 2025. We held online and in-person meetings for feedback and discussion. We sent this report for peer review to a selection of research advisory group members and other relevant experts before finalising and making it publicly available in Autumn 2025.



Photo: Moss side alley way credit: Anne Tukcer

Appendix B – Recommendations at a Glance

	DO 	DO NOT 
Structural & Institutional Practices	Address structural barriers (e.g., dominance of white, middle-class perspectives).	Maintain exclusionary structures that marginalise Global South (GS) communities.
	Proactively recruit and fairly remunerate marginalised and GS backgrounds people.	Rely on unpaid labour or tokenistic participation to meet diversity quotas.
	Audit institutional processes to identify exclusionary practices.	Attribute perceived disengagement to community deficits rather than institutional barriers.
Knowledge & Communication	Integrate GS climate knowledge into policy debates.	Dismiss GS expertise as inferior to Western sustainability frameworks.
	Design campaigns using culturally resonant language and migration-informed narratives.	Assume homogeneity in sustainability practices across or within communities.
Community Engagement	Partner with faith institutions while ensuring representation of grassroots voices.	Treat religious leaders as monolithic representatives of their communities.
	Provide language interpreters, gender-sensitive spaces, and faith-aware scheduling and catering.	Organise events that ignore linguistic, gendered, or religious needs.
Ethical Participation	Prioritise co-production of solutions with participants.	Confine participants to passive roles in predefined interventions.
	Centre intersectionality (gender, race, migration, faith) in policy design.	Overlook how overlapping identities shape access to sustainability resources.

About the authors

This report is the product of a team effort. The research team is affiliated with the Sustainable Consumption Institute (SCI) at the University of Manchester (UoM). The Principal Investigator of the project is Professor **Sherilyn MacGregor**, who developed and proposed the original research design for funding (2019) in collaboration with Professor **Tally Katz-Gerro** and Dr **Catherine Walker**, who have been co-investigators from the beginning of this project. In 2021 Dr **Nafhesa Ali** joined the team as a full-time research associate. She left in 2022 to take up a lectureship at another University, but remained involved as a co-investigator. Nafhesa was replaced for a short time by Dr **Udeni Salmon** who was responsible for conducting some interviews in 2023. In 2024 **Dr Saima Ansari** joined the team as lead research associate. **Zarina Ahmad** has been working towards a funded PhD since the start of the project, carrying out an independent but closely related programme of research. **Nuura Ahmed** and **Saabira Abdirahman** joined the team as paid research interns in summer 2022 and stayed involved in an advisory capacity while pursuing their full time studies at the UofM.

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Towards Inclusive Environmental Sustainability: Researching Everyday Sustainability with Pakistani and Somali Households in Manchester

Final Report

Photo: Moss side alleyways. Credit: Anne Tucker



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Our TIES Team

