

A literature review: the response of civil society to poverty and inequality in the UK in recent decades.

Poverty, The Good Society , Civil Society and Food Aid.

Conducted by Edge Hill University
on behalf of Webb Memorial Trust

Katy Goldstraw
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Contents

03	Introduction	19	Sociological and Economic Perspectives on Poverty <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Structure and Agency• Poverty, Worklessness and Stigma• Class and Social Exclusion• Economic Perspectives
05	Methodology	22	Moving from Philosophy to Practice: Poverty Statistics <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The demographics of poverty• Demographic Shifts• Welfare Reform• Inequality Statistics
06	Definitions of Poverty <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Absolute Poverty• Relative Poverty• Measuring Poverty• Poverty Cycle• Defining Inequality	26	Food Poverty <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Food Aid and Food Banks• The Scale of Food Provision• A Growing Issue• Food Aid: A Strategy of Last Resort• The Trussell Trust• Benefits of Being Part of a Food Bank• Independent Food Banks• The Food Cupboard• Alternative Independent Food Aid: Church, Garage, Delivery Van
09	Philosophical Perspectives on Poverty <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Philosophical Debates Around Poverty – What is a Good Society?• Capabilities and Freedom• Questioning a Good Society: Where does the duty to relieve poverty sit?	31	Developing New Models of Charity <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Growing Demand• Diversity• Partnership Working
11	A Good Society: Civil Society and the Voluntary Sector <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Great Society• Utopians and Realists• From the Great Society to the Big Society• Is the Good Society a Civil Society?• A Globalised Civil Society• Blurred Boundaries, Hybrid Organisations• Faith and Civil Society• The Voluntary Sector: Civil Society formalised?• A Third Sector• Big Society and the Office for Civil Society• The Voluntary Sector’s Response to Market Failure• Poverty Trap• The Economic Value of the VCS – New Forms of Civil Society and Voluntary Organisations• Voluntary Sector Challenges	33	Critiques of Food Aid: Maintaining Poverty <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supporting corporate interests• Focussing on the Symptoms of Poverty – Not the Cause• Is the Growth in Food Aid a Misconception?• Meeting Demand?• Who gives to Charity?
		35	Conclusion

Introduction

'It's not about the food, that's just the warning light on the indicator.'
(Lambie-Mumford et al. 2014:52)

This literature review seeks to consider the response of civil society to poverty and inequality in the UK in recent decades. The literature is examined through the lens of food poverty. Civil Society and voluntary action are defined and set within the background of Beatrice and Sydney Webb's parallel bars/extension ladder model before poverty is examined. Definitions of poverty are considered from sociological, economic and philosophical perspectives within a consideration of what a good society might look like. Demographic changes in poverty over recent years are then explored. Demographic changes in poverty are especially relevant when viewed through the eyes of food poverty, food aid responses and food banks, as it is predominantly the housed working poor and those experiencing benefit changes and benefit sanctions that are accessing food aid at a point of crisis. This is a marked change from those who used food aid in previous decades, when soup kitchens and other food aid was accessed by populations with longer term needs, such as homeless clients.

The Reason for using Food Aid as a lens through which we consider notions of the Good Society.

This review has focussed its examination of poverty and civil society's response to poverty on food poverty and food aid. Food poverty and the response of civil society in offering food aid offers a fast moving, innovative and diverse lens through which to consider what a good society might look like. The response of civil society to food poverty has varied from large scale Voluntary and Community (VCS) groups such as The Trussell Trust franchises through to church and community groups operating independent initiatives from delivery vans and garages. The speed and enthusiasm of the response to food poverty, to absolute poverty on their doorstep is an area where civil society is currently rapidly expanding (Lambie-Mumford et al 2014, Cooper et al 2014) and where a good society potentially can be found.

Food aid has increased significantly since the economic crash, with The Trussell Trust food bank franchises expanding across the country and a large number of independent food aid providers offering a variety of services across the UK. The literature review identifies a research gap around the independent food aid providers, with many operating under the radar. The Webbs may have found this independent, civil society response to food aid and poverty both inspiring and frustrating, for their extension ladder vision for civil society has been undermined by the return of civil society to relieving poverty, to responding to basic minimum standards of need. However, this response, the response of independent civil society groups, in providing food aid is more nuanced than simply providing parcels. Many independent providers are offering peer-to-peer support, advice, listening and social support. Others are cooperative projects that are project managed by service users. Social media is being utilised for social justice with groups operating as not-for-profit companies or social enterprises rather than registered charities.

Viewing the response of civil society to poverty alleviation through the lens of food aid reveals a complex multi-layered picture of formal Trussell Trust franchises, independent organisations and individuals who run food aid from their garages. Food aid is offered alongside formal support projects, under the radar within community services, independently and as community social enterprises. These projects can be considered as parallel bars models but also as extension ladders, offering social support, community spirit and a sense of community action.

The research methodology will now be briefly examined before discussing poverty definitions.

Methodology

A literature review can be defined as ‘a systematic and thorough search of all types of published literature in order to identify as many items as possible that are relevant to that particular topic’ (Gash 1999:1). The size of this research topic did not allow for a complete review of the literature. In view of these limitations, a snowball (Ridley 2012) approach was taken to the literature, whereby after an initial literature search, other relevant literature was drawn from the bibliographies of existing documents.

This literature review aims to gain a detailed picture of current policy, theory and practice (Ridley 2012, Boyd et al. 2007). In recognition of the vastly changed political environment following the 2010 and 2015 elections, it has focussed on literature post-2010 and where possible has sought to locate documents published after the May 2015 General Election.

Classification and Selection of Literature

Key texts were identified (Lansley and Mack 2015, Lambie-Mumford et al 2014, Cooper et al 2014, Milbourne 2013, Lambie 2011, Wilkinson and Pickett 2009) and the literature search was snowballed from the bibliographies of these key texts. A broader document search was also conducted using internet search engines to ensure policy and think tank publications were included in the review. Literature was broadly classified under these terms; poverty, civil society, good society, food aid. The material was then analysed according to the classification context, this allowed interpretation of key issues such as poverty traps, the poverty cycle, diversity of food aid provision. The review cites over two hundred and fifty sources; these are made up of policy papers, academic articles, books and news articles. The literature review begins with defining key terms: poverty, inequality and civil society.

Definitions of Poverty:

Absolute Poverty

Poverty is a difficult word to define (Unwin 2013). The UK government does not have an official definition of poverty but the Office for National Statistics (ONS) uses a monetary measure, as does the 2010 UK Child Poverty Act (Davis and Sanchez-Martinez 2015:12). Poverty is most often defined within the boundaries of absolute and relative (Townsend 1979). There is no clear definition of the word poverty; most common definitions refer to notions of absolute poverty, relative poverty and social exclusion (Knight 2015). Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) (2014) defines poverty as a 'situation where a person's resources (mainly their material resources) are not sufficient to meet minimum needs (including social participation)' (in Davis and Sanchez-Martinez 2015:7). Most definitions separate absolute and relative poverty. Absolute poverty can be defined thus:

... the term poverty is commonly used in two ways. It is used to describe a state of affairs in an absolute sense or to describe a state of affairs relative to another. When one is described as poor in the absolute sense, one is said to be living at or below the level of subsistence. The emphasis here is on biophysical survival: if one is poor, one's needs that make living possible are not met. (Hull 2007:9)

Hull (2007) states that absolute poverty is of greater moral importance, yet relative poverty is still important. Pogge (2007) uses the term severe poverty instead of absolute poverty. Pogge's definition of those in extreme poverty includes 'those in contract peril of being unable to meet their basic needs' (2007:2). Lötter (2011) suggests two alternative definitions of poverty: extreme and intermediate. Extreme poverty can be described as not having the ability to maintain basic needs, such as physical health. Intermediate poverty is 'demarcated by a loss of human dignity' (Lotter 2011:35). Indeed Oxfam's latest campaign uses the term extreme poverty . Campbell (2007) suggests that poverty can be understood in two ways; as an injustice deriving from the relationship between the poor and affluent or as an injustice experienced by the poor in suffering and hunger. Campbell (2007) discusses the consequences of poverty as social exclusion. Sen (1999) uses a capability approach to understanding poverty, assessing people's lives in terms of what they can do and be. Sen's (1999) capability approach is discussed later in this review.

Relative Poverty

The most commonly used definitions of poverty are relative poverty definitions (GMPC 2013:5). Relative poverty definitions

emphasise the need for living in a more substantive or qualitative sense. This is because they tend to pinpoint the gap, or gulf, between those who enjoy a high standard of living and those in the same society who do not, even if they cannot be said to be poor in an absolute sense ... The concept, then becomes meaningfully operative only after subsistence has been achieved. (Hull 2007:10)

Fleurbaey (2007) reminds us that poverty is not simply quantitative but also qualitative. Relative poverty is usually described as having less than sixty per cent of the median income. The sixty per cent threshold is used within the European Union. Relative poverty has clear links to inequality (Sen 1983). There are issues with the concept of relative poverty if one considers it simply in comparative terms. If poverty is defined solely in relative terms, Shaw (1988) argues that a rich but unequal society would be considered to have more poverty than one in which the majority were mostly poor. Sen (1983) uses an example of a Cadillac to demonstrate some of the conceptual difficulties with relative poverty. He argues that we would not call a person poor on the basis that they were not able to afford to purchase a new Cadillac a day, when others can purchase more. Indeed, Harrison (1988) links a definition of poverty to an examination of what is desired in order to achieve a socially acceptable life.

Measuring Poverty

Income or consumption is regularly used to measure poverty, to create a poverty line; 'a person is considered poor if his or her consumption or income levels fall below some minimum level necessary to meet basic needs. This minimum level is usually called the poverty line' (Ravallion and Chen 2008). The poverty line differs between nation states to reflect the diversity of living standards in each country (GMPC 2013). JRF (2009) offers a definition of poverty which is inclusive of absolute and relative terms:

...low resources is just one indicator of poverty. A fuller picture looks at all resources, not only income. This can include access to decent housing, community amenities and social networks, and assets i.e. what people own. Somebody who lacks these resources can be said to be in poverty in a wider sense' (JRF 2009:19).

Mack and Landsley (1985) developed an approach to mapping a poverty line by identifying the minimum acceptable way of life for Britain in the 1980s. This minimum standard has been updated throughout the decades to reflect changes in modernity, with items such as televisions and computers added to the minimum standards. More recent research has defined minimum standards for various groups such as those living in London (Padley et al. 2015), Leicester (Hirsch et al. 2014) and single people living in shared housing (Hill et al. 2015). Poverty is, as discussed above, difficult to define as there is 'little agreement about the means for measuring it' (Knight 2015:9).

Poverty Cycle

Rowntree (1901) identified a poverty cycle. The impact of poverty is damaging, having both short- and long-term consequences for individuals and families (Knight 2015). Poverty results in spoiled lives of individuals, reduced life opportunities for children born to families with low incomes and costs to society in general (Knight 2015). A poverty cycle can be tracked, by correlating the incomes of parents and the achievements of their children (Knight 2015). Work by Karelis (2007) considers the notion of a poverty cycle. Karelis's (2007) research is based in the USA; he concludes that 'children born in the lowest 10 per cent of families ranked by income have a fifty-one per cent chance of ending up in the lowest twenty per cent of adults' (2007:x). Karelis's (2007) philosophical considerations as to why this is the case, why poor people seemingly choose behaviours that sustain their poverty, are controversial (Wolff et al 2015). However, Karelis (2007) argues that poor people need to be removed from their experience of poverty before it becomes economically efficient for them to change their behaviours, i.e. the behaviours that keep them poor. Indeed, Lotter (2011) adds to the philosophical debate around human behaviours and poverty by noting that poverty is a distinctly human characteristic. The link between dignity and poverty is developed by Wolff and de-Shalit (2007). They note that in their definition of poverty, Bradshaw and Finch (2002) offer three approaches to describing poverty, one of which is subjective. Bradshaw and Finch (2002) define poverty as related to income, standard of living and feeling poor. Wolff and de-Shalit (2007) reinforce the importance of subjective measures alongside more objective definitions.

Defining Inequality

Poverty and inequality are closely related but are distinct and different concepts (Smith 2010). Inequality provides the basis through which we can understand poverty (Titmuss 1965). Inequality is focussed on the equality of the distribution of resources throughout society as a whole; 'inequality refers to disparities between individuals, groups and nations in access to resources, opportunities, assets and income' (Ridge and Wright 2008:2). Importantly 'economic inequality is particularly significant for people's capacity to have access to and command of resources' (Ridge and Wright 2008:2). Indeed Wilkinson and Pickett (2009), in their detailed examination of the impact of inequality on society, identify a range of negative effects of unequal societies not simply on the poorest of a nation but on all social strata within a country. Piketty states 'extreme inequality is the antithesis of a good society' (2013:5). There are rising levels of inequality (Dorling 2012, Rowlingson et al. 2010, Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). Inequality statistics will be examined later in this literature review. Poverty will now be discussed from a philosophical perspective, considering ideas of a good society.

Philosophical Perspectives on Poverty

Philosophical Debates Around Poverty: What Is a Good Society?

Philosophical discussions of poverty centre on the currency of justice debate: the concept that if we make people equal in one respect then they may well become unequal in another. In this instance what matters the most? This debate, although drawn into current philosophical discussion by Dworkin (1981) and Sen (1980), begins with an observation that can be linked back to Marx (1979 [1867]). Rawls (1971) and Dworkin (1981) argue that equality of resources matter most. Arneson (1989) argues that it is equality of welfare that matters most. Cohen (1989) argues for a hybrid of resources and welfare. Sen (1980, 1999) and Nussbaum (2000) developed the capability view, stating that what is important is not what you own, or how to feel about what you have, but what you are able to do or be. Sen (1999) offers an alternative definition of poverty which focusses on capability as opposed to wealth or income. For Sen (1999), development means the removal of various sources of unfreedoms. Development can be seen as ‘an integrated process of expansion of substantive freedoms that connect with one another’ (Sen 1999:XII). Resources are the means to achieve freedoms, but freedoms have other determinants such as social provisions and political rights. For Sen (1999) freedoms have two roles: evaluation and effectiveness. Sen (1999) lists key freedoms: protective security, transparency guarantees, economic freedoms political freedoms and social opportunities. These freedoms were linked; transparency, trust and reciprocity are linked to social trust and social capital.

Capabilities and Freedom

For Sen (1999) poverty is the deprivation of basic capabilities but the deprivation of capabilities is linked to low income. Any consideration of poverty, however, should focus on the capabilities and not the income. This, Sen (1999) argues, is because focusing only on income can hide other inequalities, such as gender bias, within household incomes. Capabilities, Sen (1999) argues, therefore give a better understanding of poverty. Nussbaum (2000) considers poverty in terms of human capabilities, focusing specifically on gender because gender inequality is strongly linked to poverty. Nussbaum’s (2000) theory of poverty aims to set a minimum that all state’s should respect. Nussbaum’s approach constitutes a theory of justice (JRF 2014). For Sen (1999), capabilities are a basis for comparison. Capabilities and Constructional Principles

For Nussbaum (2000), capabilities are a basis for constructional principles. Nussbaum (2000) lists the following capabilities as essential: to have control over one’s environment, to play, bodily health, bodily integrity, affiliation, practical reason, freedom of senses, imagination and thought, emotion, and to live in association with other species. The universalism of Nussbaum’s (2000) approach, however, can be critiqued as paternalistic. The capabilities also rely on social and material circumstance for realisation. They require the absence of discrimination or oppression. Societal redistribution will be needed. In its focus on capability to function rather than actual functioning, Nussbaum’s (2000) approach can be linked to Rawls’ (1971, 2001) liberalism. It makes the approach compatible with diverse conceptions of what is a good life: respecting human reasoning and agency. For example, there is a difference between a fast for a charitable fundraiser and fasting due to lack of access to sustenance.

Sen's (1999) and Nussbaum's (2000) approach helps to capture cases of poverty that an approach that focuses purely on income or resources might miss. The advantage of their approach is that it emphasises the role of choice. However, if a person lacks the capability to function; it is always a matter of justice. Sen (1983) relates relative deprivation and capabilities. He uses Adam Smith's example of a linen shirt to make his argument; while having a linen shirt by itself is not an absolute need, not owning a linen shirt when your peers do, creates an absolute social disadvantage in terms of public perception. A critique of capability approaches would be the question of whether we can use the capability approach without changing the meaning of what we understand by poverty. Hull (2007) suggests that poverty might be more clearly understood as resource related deprivation and that a better word for capability definitions of poverty would be deprivation.

Questioning a Good Society: Where Does the Duty to Relieve Poverty Sit?

A philosophical discussion of poverty asks the question, where does the duty to relieve poverty fall? With the state or the individual? Is it the duty of all depending on their capacity to help (Campbell 2007), or is it the individual first, then the wider family and then the state (Wenar 2007)? Or if the state has not made provision, does the duty fall on the individual (Ashford 2007)? If there is poverty at home and abroad, where should a state's poverty alleviation priority sit (Shaw 1988)? Is poverty alleviation a particular responsibility of governments? Arguably, as individuals, we have responsibilities towards the poor and we delegate this responsibility to our governments. In this sense political authorities are only legitimate if they increase the wellbeing of persons subject to them (Raz 1986). Hence, governments have a duty to combat poverty.

Indeed, what sort of duty do we have towards the poor? Is our duty one of justice or charity? Can poverty be considered as preventing citizenship (Rawls 2001)? Does living in poverty prevent a person from citizenship? Does it prevent them from fulfilling their role as a fully cooperating citizen participating in society? (Rawls 2001:58). If primary goods are thought about in terms of as citizens' needs, then those experiencing poverty would find it more challenging than those not in poverty to act as citizens, e.g. donating to charity. Whose responsibility is poverty? Is it bad luck or choice (Arneson 1989, Cohen 1989)? Here, we begin to question if all choices are as free as others. The philosophical debate around poverty brings us to a discussion of what is a good society.

A Good Society: Civil Society and the Voluntary Sector

‘Society’ is an amorphous term. It has been used to justify a variety of political objectives, from Blair’s communitarian vision (Sage 2012) to Thatcher’s ‘there is no such thing as society’ (1987). In recent years ‘both the Conservative party and the Labour Party have begun to argue the institutions of civil society and community should be reinvigorated and strengthened’ (Sage 2012:1). The term ‘society’ can be traced back to a Roman legal word, ‘societas’, that originally referred to small private business or associations, and was only later used with reference to larger groups such as the empire (Stiein 1988, Nichols 1975). Innes (2009) argues that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Roman law began to penetrate English commercial, social and religious life. Innes (2009) states that the Roman term ‘society’ was at this point incorporated into the English language.

The Great Society

Adam Smith (1790) discussed the concept of a ‘great society’. Smith (1790) discussed the meaning of society to a ‘man of system’ or to ‘a man of public spirit’. Smith (1790) criticised the feudal system where those in poverty were dependent on their feudal masters for benefice, and advocated a ‘great society’ where the poor engaged in a marketed economy, liberating them from their feudal masters. Ishkanian and Szreter state that ‘Smith appeared to envisage a strictly limited role for private charity and benefice, other than for the totally helpless’ (2012:29). Smith’s (1759) ‘man of system’ was taken on by mid-nineteenth century French Positivist philosophers Henri Saint-Simon and August Comte. Smith’s ‘positivist version of a great society ... was also to become widely pervasive in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain among Fabien sociologists, “new liberals” and managerial conservatives’ (Ishkanian and Szreter 2011:30). Tocqueville (1835) offered a US version of the meaning of society, where new American citizens developed new styles of associational behaviour. Lippmann (1937), having discussed the concept of collectivism, rejected it in favour of what he referred to as the ‘Good Society’. Lippmann’s ‘Good Society’ was based on free competition ‘restrained and humanised by private generosity, as set out by Adam Smith’ (Ishkanian and Szreter 2012:31).

Utopians and Realists

Knight (2015) states that the debate on the good society has divided between the utopians and the realists. Key utopian thinkers include Hobbes, Rousseau, Locke, Voltaire, Marx and Engels. Central to the utopian idea is that things could improve and progress is possible (Knight 2015). Realists perceived utopian ideas as at odds with reason; they were either resigned to the status quo or satisfied with it. Key realist thinkers include Lippman, Hayeck, Popper, Lipsett and Burke. The Webbs (1909) believed a good society to be a planned society, with an increased role of the state in economic and social management; ‘such an approach distinguished them from realists who believed that the “invisible hand” of the market would regulate society as needed’ (Knight 2015:15). The Webbs’ views famously influenced their research assistant on the 1909 Minority Report. Beveridge attributed much of the ideology behind his 1948 report to the influence of Beatrice and Sydney Webb (Knight 2015).

In 1916, in their book *The Prevention of Destitution*, Sydney and Beatrice Webb set out the parallel bars/extension ladder model of voluntary action. In the parallel bars model, the state and civil society work side by side to reduce poverty. In the extension ladder model, the state and civil society hold different roles. In this model, the state provides the basic minimum for all citizens and voluntary action extends from this basic minimum. In the Webbs' (1916) model, voluntary action and civil society are not a substitute for state action; they are additional to it. The Minority Report (1909) 'began a new public argument about the causes of poverty, about the responsibility for preventing it and, by extension, about the nature of citizenship' (Katwala 2009:2).

From the Great Society to the Big Society

Adam Smith's (1759) 'great society' has been perceived as 'a powerful guideline or slogan with which to address certain concrete public policy problems at a specific moment in time ... [or] ... an almost Platonic vision of how human societies should organise themselves, if all perverse obstructions could be removed' (Ishkanian and Szreter 2012:37). The 'great society' is an ongoing dialectic between a slogan used to address policy problems and a conception of how society should organise itself if government were removed. Ishkanian and Szreter question 'how far the classic and much-contested theme of a "Great Society" bears any relation to the debate surrounding the notion of a "Big Society" at the present time' (2012:37). There are similarities in the convergence of civic, moral and economic goals between David Cameron's 2010 Big Society speech and Gordon Brown's 2002 Arnold Goodman lecture on civil society. However there is a considerable uncertainty about whether the great society fits into the Big Society; neither Blond (2010) nor Norman (2010), major contributors to the Big Society rhetoric, suggest that it does.

Norman (2010) also fails to make any suggestion that the Big Society bears any relation to the great society, stating that British Society 'is not well' and should be cured not by 'disembodied rational calculation but by connectedness and compassion' (Ishkanian and Szreter 2012:38). Ishkanian and Szreter state that 'what is missing from all of these discussions, however, is any attempt to explain how the "Big Society" of the future will relate to the globally encircling presence of the "Great Society," one form or another has been with us for several hundred years and seems unlikely to go away' (2012:38). Indeed, how is a good society understood in current circumstances? This review will now consider the role of civil society and the voluntary sector.

Is a Good Society a Civil Society?

Civil society sits outside the domain of state, market and family. Civil society is a broad term; civil society is a 'vibrant, diverse and evolving space' (WEF 2013:5). Definitions of civil society are developing, as civil society is recognised as encompassing more than just a 'sector'. Modern civil society includes 'an ever wider and more vibrant range of organised and unorganised groups, as new civil society actors blur the boundaries between sectors and experiment with new organisational forms, both online and off' (WEF 2013:5). Bunyan and Diamond define civil society as 'the myriad of groups and institutions within society, which are distinct from the state and the market and founded on the basis of voluntary action' (2014:8a). Roles are changing, and civil society actors are becoming facilitators, convenors and innovators (WEF 2013) while the private sector is developing a visible role in responding to societal needs. Bowles and Gintis (2005) reinforce the interrelatedness of market, state and communities; 'by a community we mean a group of people who interact

directly frequently and in multi-faceted ways' (2005:381). The World Bank (2009) defines civil society as follows:

The wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organisations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Civil Society organisations therefore refer to a wide array of organisations: community groups, NGOs, labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations and foundations.

Civil society will always be needed (WEF 2013:5, Carnegie UK Trust 2010:10). Organisations that are independent from state and market are essential to act as watchdogs and ethical guardians, and have a key role in monitoring and ensuring accountability of state, private and civil organisations. We need civil society to 'play a particularly powerful role in this process as enabler and constructive challenger, creating the political and social space for collaborations that are based on the core values of trust, service and collective good' (WEF 2013:5). UK civil society 'has a critical role to play in bringing together marginalised groups to build global alliances around an agenda of empowerment' (Carnegie UK Trust 2010:10)

A Globalised Civil Society

Civil society is networked and globalised. The CIVICUS State of Civil Society 2012 report states that individuals within eighty-eight countries (home to half the world's population) engaged in mass action during 2011. These informal networks and civil resistance movements are enabled by ever advancing digital technology. They sit too within more traditionally organised civil society groups. Descriptions of civil society typically include volunteers and community groups, online groups such as social media activist groups, social movements of collective action, faith communities, labour unions, social enterprises, grass-roots community organisations and cooperatives (WEF 2013:8). The UK over the last twenty years has increasingly become a leader in anti-poverty campaigns, through civil society based campaigns such as the multilateral developments that led to the millennium development goals and other projects such as Make Poverty History (Woolcock 2009).

Blurred Boundaries, Hybrid Organisations

As society becomes increasingly globalised, traditional boundaries between private, public and civil society are blurring. Sources of social capital are developing in a globalised, hyperactive, connected and multi-stakeholder world. Billis's (2010) notion of hybrid organisations is relevant here. The concept of civil society, as a space for social justice, where groups of individuals and organisations act for the common good, is increasingly carried out in partnership. The World Economic Forum (WEF) (2013:10) suggest new paradigms for development where previously separate spheres of action existed; state, business and civil society are now merged into new frameworks for collaboration, partnership and innovation resulting from increased intersections of activity. Hybrid organisations emerge: social enterprises that are profit making but with a social purpose and civil society organisations as market actors.

Faith and Civil Society

Faith and religious culture within public life have re-emerged as sources of social justice values (Bunyan and Diamond 2014a). The dynamism of individual faith groups, the resources that many of the larger faith groups have access to and the social capital that faith groups link into are recognised as important contributors to civil society. The application of faith to offer a critical perspective on the world is another area that faith groups can contribute to in civil society. There has been an increasingly sophisticated appreciation of the role of faith in terms of its response to extremism and conflict (WEF 2013).

Constructive Challengers

Civil society plays a valuable role in offering constructive critique. In a globalised, networked world where boundaries are blurred between sectors, the core values of civil society have 'the opportunity to transmit many of these core values to an increasingly receptive set of business and government institutions' (WEF 2013:34). Civil society organisations are 'at the forefront of tackling poverty and inequality in the UK but more can be done' (Bunyan and Diamond 2014:11). Most big civil society movements of the past, such as the anti-apartheid movement, have been led by volunteers. Today, most NGOs are staffed by employees; institutional isomorphism becomes a threat to civil society as 'professionalization often becomes bureaucratisation' (Carnegie UK Trust 2010:11). It should be recognised that social development is as much a process of the delivery of services as professionalism (Carnegie UK Trust 2010). The Carnegie UK Trust (2010) warns that bureaucracy and professionalism should not be at the expense of voice and action.

The Voluntary Sector: Civil Society Formalised?

The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) is a diverse and heterogeneous grouping. Defining the VCS is not simple, and to attempt to define the VCS is contested space (Milbourne 2013). Definitions of the VCS have focussed on similarities between groups and the services that they offer (Halfpenny and Reid 2002, Salamon et al 1999, Billis 1989, Knight 1993, Kendal and Knapp 1994). Funding sources are often included in VCS definitions (NCVO 2012, as is the focus of the VCS on using volunteers (Milbourne 2013). Other defining characteristics of the VCS are independence (Knight 1993) and its social justice value base (Billis 2010, Neville 2010). However, despite commonalities in value and purpose the VCS includes a wide diversity of community groups and organisations: large and small, self-help groups, activists and service delivery organisations.

Before the 1948 creation of the Welfare State, voluntary organisations played a significant role in the provision of health and welfare services (Baggot and Jones 2014). However, the creation of big government and the associated welfare services of the 1948 Welfare State did not reduce the role of civil society; indeed, the voluntary sector thrived rather than declined during the era of big government (Alcock 2011 Lewis 1999). A discourse of an adaptive and responsive voluntary sector can be drawn from a historical analysis (Hilton and McKay 2011). When linking today's experience of austerity into the historical context, Beveridge's concerns that the Welfare State might crowd out voluntary action have proved unfounded. Indeed, as the state has expanded it has sought out new relationships with the voluntary sector, particularly in the form of service provision. From the 1970s onwards successive governments have developed policies that build and develop voluntary sector relationships with the state (Baggot and Jones 2014). These policies intensified with the 'hyperactive mainstreaming' (Kendall 2000) of the newly redefined 'third sector' under the

New Labour Blair–Brown government. New Labour redefined the voluntary sector, including social enterprises and mutuals within its description of ‘third sector’.

A Third Sector

The third sector under New Labour was engaged in partnerships and capacity-building initiatives, and further contracted (for purchaser–provider arrangements had begun under the previous Conservative government) into service delivery. Key tenets of New Labour’s relationship with the VCS were partnerships (Lewis 1999), which were underpinned by the ‘Compact’ (Zimmeck 2010). The third sector ‘understood as the whole range of informal community groups, voluntary organisations and social enterprises, has always been a central focus of Big Society discussions and initiatives’ (Macmillan 2013:3).

The Coalition government, initially under the now defunct notion (Corry 2012) of a Big Society and later as part of their programme of austerity measures, continued the emphasis on the importance of civil society. The Coalition adopted the term civil society (Cabinet Office 2010). This term is broader again than New Labour’s third sector, including voluntary and community groups, mutuals, cooperatives and social enterprises. As such, Macmillan (2013) argues that the newly re-named third sector, which under the auspices of the Coalition government became civil society, came to be seen as a key agent of change, ‘of a recast relationship between citizen and state and reformed public services’ (Macmillan 2013).

Big Society and the Office for Civil Society

The report *Big Society Not Big Government: Building a Big Society* (BSNBG 2010) stated that the purpose of the policy is to develop a society where power and control are decentralised and people are inspired to solve their own issues within their own areas. Macmillan (2013) critiques the Coalition’s concept of the Big Society as risking overlooking the complex and varied nature of citizen action and volunteering. The term Big Society is no longer widely used in policy debate (Corry 2012). Civil society groups, the preferred new term (Office for Civil Society 2010), include a huge diversity of organisations.

Supporting a Stronger Civil Society (Office for Civil Society 2010) was launched by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) in 2010. Macmillan (2011) notes that its language has strong similarities to New Labour in stating the role of government ‘in strengthening the capacity of neighbourhood groups, social enterprises, charities and voluntary groups to meet the challenges and take advantage of the new opportunities ahead’ (Office for Civil Society 2010:3). The document focuses on support for frontline groups (2010:6) and for groups that wish to become more entrepreneurial (2010:8) and to access broader sources of support, linking more effectively with business organisations. Interestingly food banks have all taken these broad approaches on board. However, the Coalition’s localism can be critiqued as neglecting social justice; arguably, ‘this latest incarnation of localism is largely ineffective in solving problems requiring collective action because it neglects the important role that inequalities play in inhibiting the development of associational society’ (Catney et al. 2014:715). Catney et al. suggest that ‘staking environmental policy success on the ability of the local civil society to fill the gap left after state retrenchment runs the risk of no activity at all’ (2014:715). This leads to a consideration of the VCS’s response to the market failure argument.

The Voluntary Sector’s Response to Market Failure

The voluntary sector can be considered important as a solution to well-known forms of market and state failures. The sector can also be understood in terms of supply-orientated theories, voluntary sector organisations in this sense being seen as the result of autonomous behavioural patterns (Rose-Ackerman 1996, James 1986, Young 1980). Rose-Ackerman (1996) suggests that 'motivations for individual behaviours which cannot be understood within the standard economic framework require a richer conception of individual utility function' (1996:1). Voluntary sector organisations are successful in coordinating actions for social aims, cooperative behaviour and emergence of social trust. Supply side theories argue that that ideological commitment and intrinsic human motivation can be considered the driving force of the voluntary sector. Supply side theories state that, aside or despite state or market failure the voluntary sector exists built on ideologies of social justice, trust and reciprocity. Indeed, Putnam discusses the importance of 'networks of civic engagement' (1995:2) that build reciprocity and social trust. A comparative study carried out by Salamon et al. (1999) across several countries has highlighted the role of the VCS as a new institution of the economy, characterised by its own operating logic that focusses on reciprocity and social justice. This new institution (Salamon 1999) operates in a field that is independent of or complementary to the state and the market.

Poverty Trap

A role of voluntary action is clearly to meet need: 'one reason why charity has remained at the heart of the voluntary sector is that the concept enshrines the two key elements: public benefit and independence' (Fries 2014:21). The voluntary sector's economic and social impacts are significant. There are approximately 161,000 registered voluntary sector organisations operating in the UK, employing 800,000 people and producing a total Gross Value Added of £11.8 billion (Jones et al. 2015:2). The sector also supports volunteering which was recently acknowledged as a 'hidden jewel', both economically and socially, by the Bank of England's Lead Economist (Haldane 2014). The ONS has estimated that formal volunteering contributes £23.9 billion, or just over 1.5 per cent of national GDP (ONS 2013).

The voluntary sector, considered as an institution, can contribute to local development in the following ways: it sustains and transmits non-selfish preferences, it produces innovative strategies (such as for drug rehabilitation) and it favours active participation of all agents in all markets. For the VCS to efficiently contribute to local development, the benefits will only be effective if it consolidates and develops pro-social behaviour and if VCS organisations are as efficient at producing goods and services as the markets and state are (Olafsdottir et al. 2014). A strong civil society 'may be particularly beneficial to vulnerable populations such as the low income or unemployed' (Olafsdottir et al. 2014:174).

The voluntary sector is an economic sector in its own right (VSNW and CLES 2013), although it can be critiqued for working in silos and not engaging fully with Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). The 'voluntary and community sector is needed more than ever and yet there remains a significant disconnection between the sector and local economic thinking' (VSNW and CLES 2013:1). The voluntary sector works to overcome poverty by 'spreading behaviour based on altruism and solidarity but also by promoting investments in welfare services and human capital and by favouring the access of all agents to the various markets' (Amendola et al. 2011:850). Valentinov (2007) states that even if people are motivated to engage in voluntary work, they often are concerned with who most deserves their support, and if the resources donated are correctly and efficiently allocated.

Valentinov (2007) suggests that the voluntary sector can help in reducing transaction costs; this is especially important where small donations are concerned

The Economic Value of the VCS – New Forms of Civil Society and Voluntary Organisations

Internationally, the VCS has increased its value in relation to GNP and employment, and its role has diversified alongside diversified organisational typologies. So too have VCS relationships between state and market become increasingly diverse (Amendola et al. 2011, Ben-Neri and Gui 2003, Salamon et al. 1999). The VCS is a significant economic actor in its own right. It employs disproportionately high numbers of people in areas of low economic activity, employs a high proportion of women, draws down £1.70 for every £1 of public sector investment, and is particularly good at spending money locally (VSNW and CLES 2013). Over the last fifteen years, the voluntary sector, working alongside public sector partners, has developed an economic delivery track record that could outperform other sectors (VSNW and CLES 2013, Amendola et al. 2011). Civil society at community level and the presence of social capital are important in alleviating the effects of poverty and disadvantage (GMPC 2013). The third sector has also developed complementary approaches to state welfare systems, addressing new needs and developing new organisational forms (Amendola et al. 2011). The recent rise of social enterprise and cooperatives across Europe has contributed to the third sector's increasing contribution to GDP and employment (Amendola 2011). Social cooperatives and social enterprises are 'developing as an innovative institution which acts as a driving force favouring the accumulation of social capital stock' (Amendola et al. 2011).

Voluntary Sector Challenges

The VCS is also facing significant funding cuts, with many voluntary organisations fearing for their survival (NCIA 2015, Davidson and Packham 2015, GMCVO 2012ab, Davidson and Packham 2012). Many voluntary and community organisations have been affected by cuts in public funding and have had to reduce their employed staff and services at the same time that demand is increasing (Davidson & Packham 2015, Davidson et al. 2014, GMCVO 2012). Research by Newcastle Council for Voluntary Services (Young 2015) revealed that VCS organisations were experiencing large funding cuts, that many VCS organisations were using reserves in this financial year and that many of these organisations had less than 3–6 months of running costs left within these reserves. One in five organisations had developed new areas of work in response to welfare reform changes, and as a result of a change in income levels, there has been a change in the paid staff to volunteer ratio in many voluntary organisations (Young 2015:4).

Austerity and its associated funding cuts have resulted in a lack of strategic capacity within the sector (VSNW and CLES 2013); however, the VCS has, in developing the linkages between place, economy and people, recognised that strong communities and social inclusion are both inputs to and outcomes of economic and business success (VSNW and CLES 2013). CLES (2014) states that the communities and civil society are being weakened by austerity. It cites the cuts to public spending and the impact that reduced contracting has had on the voluntary sector. Indeed NCVO estimates that by 2018 funding for the VCS will have reduced by £1.7 billion compared with funding available for the sector in 2010. There is a real concern within the VCS about the long-term harm that the cuts will bring to the communities that they represent. There will be an impact on small organisations as a

result of these cuts and a risk of losing the connection with communities that the VCS offers; 'cuts to the voluntary sector will also erode social capital' (CLES 2014:7). The voluntary sector is in transition, facing hard times and new opportunities (Milbourne 2013).

Research by Newcastle Council for Voluntary Services (Young 2015) found that many smaller voluntary organisations saw the future of the voluntary sector as made up of larger organisations, and that action was required immediately if the rich and diverse mosaic of VCS organisations within Newcastle was to continue to exist. A key question is 'whether the ... [voluntary] sector, as an economic interior, can help form a new culture of civil cohabitation' (Amendola et al. 2011:864). The trust in oneself and in others that is built within the culture of social justice and reciprocity fostered by voluntary and community organisations (Sacco and Zani 2006) is 'an important input into the efficiency of the economic system and for the improvement of human development' (Amendola et al. 2011:866) within a community (Tabellini 2007, Sen 2000, Coleman 1988).

The National Coalition for Independent Action (NCIA) has heavily criticised Coalition policy, suggesting that it has led to a situation where VCS groups are experiencing a situation of 'fight or fright' (NCIA 2015). Coalition policy can be critiqued as silencing the VCS (Rochester 2014) and enacting welfare reform that has increased poverty (Bunyan and Diamond 2014b, Wilkinson and Pickett 2009) and as having re-focussed its relationship with the VCS into one of purchaser-provider (NCIA 2015). Larger VCS groups are developing and surviving as they have the capacity to develop and link into new funding opportunities. Medium sized groups, NCIA argues, are being pushed out of existence as they face funding challenges and lack the capacity to become business focussed (Milbourne and Murray 2014). The future of genuine voluntary action, NCIA argues, is under threat from the combined challenges of isomorphic service delivery contracts and the government drive for privatisation:

The future of voluntary services, as part of authentic voluntary action, will lie in groups relying on small amounts of money and operating outside of business and contractual relationships. It is these groups which will carry the burden of change, and attempt to meet social and other needs not covered by shrinking public sector contracts. (NCIA 2015:16)

Challenges experienced by the VCS in 2015, under the Conservative government, reflect the realities of operating in a radically changed policy environment. The VCS, both small and large, at national, regional and organisation levels, is facing challenges of silencing, funding and identity. Service users within the VCS are accessing services for increasingly complex needs. VCS identity has been challenged by Coalition policy. The resulting bifurcation (Fyfe and Milligan 2003) of the sector, alongside competition for contracts (Ryan 2014, Benson 2014, Rochester 2014) and the silencing of campaign roles (Aiken 2014), has affected VCS identity. As client needs increase, the formalised voluntary sector faces unprecedented funding cuts (NCIA 2015, CLES 2014) and poverty too is increasing (Bunyan and Diamond 2014b). Increased poverty takes this review into a consideration of structure and agency and stigma before it examines the demographic shifts in poverty in recent years.

Sociological and Economic perspectives on Poverty

Sociology, economics and philosophy all add to our understanding of poverty. By approaching poverty from different directions the different disciplines provide a multi-layered understanding of poverty that contributes to ideas of what a good society might look like. Sociology considers the societal organisation and structure and their impact on social issues and individual lives. Sociologists, when debating poverty, consider structural causes of poverty and the individual agency. Sociological debate has included concerns around individual moral failings, notions of deserving and undeserving poor and the impact of class on the understanding of poverty.

Structure and Agency

Much sociological discussion centres on the importance of structure and agency. Notions of the deserving and undeserving poor focus on this debate:

The tendency to conflate poverty with other social issues such as unemployment, welfare receipt or problem substance misuse or to uncritically cite these conditions as explanations of poverty is not only tied up with the tendency to portray poverty as a problem which is created by those experiencing it but it is also indicative of a more general tendency to downplay the significance of poverty altogether. (Shildrick and Rucell 2015:4)

Sociologists consider social class and its relationship to poverty; however, in recent years definitions of social class have become performatively more opaque. These links are often viewed through the lens of agency; that consumption allows individuals greater control over their lives. However, consumption in itself has become ‘an increasingly important element of distinction and stratification’ (Shildrick and Rucell 2015:4). Sociological debate can aid an understanding of the structural societal elements of poverty, such as the reproduction of inequalities over time. The ‘sociological imagination’ (Wright Mills 2000) can be a powerful lens through which to view poverty. It offers an approach through which we can consider the history and biography and the relationships between the two within history.

Much of the sociological debate on poverty has centred on the importance of structure and agency in alleviating poverty. Here, notions of the deserving and undeserving poor become linked to structural and behavioural patterns. Morris (1994) mapped sociological concerns around the underserving and deserving poor. Indeed, notions of deserving and undeserving poor can be traced back to the 1834 Poor Law, which differentiated between ‘deserving’ poor and drunken vagabonds. Welshman (2013) charted the changes in terminology used to describe disadvantaged groups. In the 1880s people were referred to as the ‘social residuum’, in the 1930s the ‘social problem group’ and in the 1950s a ‘problem family’. By the 1960s the language was of a ‘culture of poverty’, and in the 1970s a cycle of deprivation and the 1980s brought a debate about the underclass. More recently, sociologists have debated the ‘troubled family’. All these terms are arguably simply semantics to enable the focus on poverty to be centred on behavioural level explanations: agency over structure.

Poverty Worklessness and Stigma

More recently, poverty debates have linked poverty with unemployment and worklessness. However, research reveals that workless generations of families are statistically insignificant (MacMillan 2010). Further research has found a strong work ethic in deprived neighbourhoods, and linked work to emotional and moral dimensions. Indeed, 'the idea that the workless inhabit cultures of worklessness or that they pass on such attitudes and values to young people has also been found wanting' (Shildrick and Rucell 2015:10, Shildrick et al. 2012a, Shildrick et al. 2012b). The media's representations of worklessness have led to the re-branding of poverty as 'deserved' (Tyler 2013). The stigmatisation of the undeserving poor creates an 'othering' of poverty:

The notion of 'othering' conveys how this is not an inherent state but an on-going process animated by the 'non-poor' ... it is not a neutral line, for it is imbued with negative value judgements that construct 'the poor' variously as a source of moral contamination, a threat, an 'undeserving' economic burden, an object of pity or even as an exotic species. (Lister 2004:102)

Poverty arguably needs to be re-discovered (Shildrick and Rucell 2015) and disentangled from other related concepts. As lifestyles and life choices are arguably becoming more controlled by individual decisions and behaviour, consumption is becoming linked to identity (Shildrick and Rucell 2015). This is what Giddens refers to as 'reflexive biographies of the self' (1991:1), where individuals are now considered to have greater control over their own identity. Bauman (1992) highlights the role of consumption over production has having caused the most significant changes in modern society. Hamilton (2012) states that individuals make consumer choices in order to mediate against the stigma of poverty. Skeggs (2011) discusses symbolic consumption, focusing on how a symbolic violence can be attached to certain behaviours, attributes and ways of being. Consumption choices in turn lead to stigmatisation (Jones 2011, Shildrick 2006, McCulloch et al. 2006). Jones' (2011) book *Chavs* is a powerful narrative of consumer-based stigmatisation of the poor.

Class and Social Exclusion

There is a wealth of sociological research reinforcing that class is important to lifestyle choices: leisure (Hamilton, 2012, Archer 2007) work (Shildrick et al. 2012), daily life, confidence and attitude (Reay 2012, Walkerdine et al. 2001, Ball et al. 2000). Here, Bourdieu's (1984) ideas of capital interrelate. Bourdieu (1984) suggested that there are four capitals: social, cultural, economic and symbolic. These capitals are then used to maintain hierarchies and inequalities within society, with power being associated with each capital. Indeed, Putnam (1995) details the range of types of capital in his discussion of social capital, separating social capital into two types, bridging and bonding. With bridging capital being local immediate networks and bonding being broader cross-cutting ties. Furlong and Carmel (1997) identify the 'epistemological fallacy' of modernity where 'the greater the frame of opportunities available helps to obscure the extent to which existing patterns of inequality are simply being re-produced in different ways' (Lawler 2005 in Shildrick and Rucell 2015:24).

Social exclusion has provided an alternative to more behavioural understandings of poverty; the concept has allowed an examination of spatial deprivation (Hills et al. 2002). The concept of and debates on social exclusion lead to the next section of this literature review, which focusses on the philosophical debates around poverty. The concept of social exclusion offers an alternative perspective to poverty and exclusion (Sen 2000), including an examination of moral and behavioural approaches, unequal distribution of resources and social integration into employment (Levitas 2006). Here, an economic perspective on poverty is relevant.

Economic Perspectives

Economic theories of poverty have produced a variety of explanations and understandings of poverty. Classical economics argues that poverty is the result of poor individual choices. Therefore, one needs to create a market incentive to get individuals to work their own way out of poverty. Neoclassical economics suggests that the reasons for poverty are more diverse and that by raising human capital a society can reduce poverty. Neoclassical economics focuses on education as an important tool in raising human capital, which then promotes efficiency in the workplace. As more people are skilled, there is less unskilled labour. Supply and demand result in the increased price of unskilled labour. Keynes's (1936) liberal economic theories argue that market forces can produce economic development, which is the single most important tool to tackle poverty. Marxist and radical approaches to economics focus attention on class group discrimination and politics as central to poverty alleviation. Social capital approaches to poverty reinforce the link between social and economic issues in tackling poverty. This draws us towards from sociology, philosophy and economics towards the demographics of poverty.

Moving from Philosophy and Sociology to Practice: Poverty Statistics

Most income related definitions of poverty, using purchasing power parity (PPP) work on a 'dollar a day' or 'two dollars a day.' Poverty, especially in-work poverty, is rising (VSNW and CLES 2013). ONS data (2013) states that just over half of the fourteen million people in poverty are working families, while currently pensioner poverty is at record low levels (JRF 2014). The Institute for Fiscal Studies predicts that poverty will increase over the next five years (Knight 2013). Fairness Commissions and similar projects have evidenced that inequality is an issue which has significantly negative local effects (NEF 2015). In-work poverty has been steadily rising for the last decade (Macdonald and Shildrick 2013). Analysis reveals that it is families and children who are being hardest hit by the cumulative impact of the government's austerity programme (Earnham 2013).

The Demographics of Poverty

The associations between demographic characteristics such as family structure, ethnicity, age, disability and gender are well established (Falkingham et al. 2014). Demographic changes and their impact on poverty have been the subject of academic debate since Malthus's (1798) principle of population. Booth (1889) and Rowntree (1901) did not record the poverty induced 'check' on population growth that Malthus (1798) imagined. Since then the research on poverty and demographic change has developed, and a more nuanced approach has evolved. It is now recognised that government policy can impact on the demographic causes of poverty; 'whether countries are able to reap the benefits of the demographic dividend depends as much on political will and the existence of appropriate policies and instructions to foster employment as on demography' (Ahlburg 2002:3). Indeed, at a micro level selection effects need to be taken into account when considering the relationship between poverty and childhood outcomes (Culliney et al. 2014). Association is not the same as causation and when selection is considered the causal links between demographic characteristics and poverty are reduced.

The family is changing and anti-poverty strategy needs to reflect the changing nature of the modern family. Evidence at the macro level of the relationship between population change and economic growth is inconclusive; and the link between population change and aggregate poverty is sparse (Falkingham et al. 2014). However, at a micro level the association between a number of demographic characteristics and poverty is well established. Emerging demographic changes associated with the risk of poverty include the rise in solo living, lone parent families and large families. There is a need to focus poverty measures on working families; 'planned benefit cuts over this parliament will hit low income working age households hardest and will therefore tend to put upwards pressure on absolute income poverty – including in-work poverty' (Belfield et al. 2015:6).

Demographic Shifts

One of the most significant demographic shifts in UK population has been age related. In 1901, the proportion of Britons aged over sixty-five was five per cent. By 1941, it was ten per cent, and in 1981 it was fifteen per cent. Today just over sixteen per cent of Britain's population is aged over sixty-five, which is a statistic that has been stable over the last twenty years (Falkingham et al. 2014). However, the older population is itself ageing, with over-eighty-five-year-olds the fastest growing group in the UK population. Since the late 1980s, the percentage of pensioners as a group falling below the relative poverty line has

continued to fall (Falkingham et al. 2014). This trend is explained by Falkingham et al. (2014) as due to a combination of successive cohorts of people reaching later life with more resources and changes in the welfare system which have increased the absolute value of their pension over time. However, despite significant progress in reducing pensioner poverty, not all groups have benefited from these developments, and women are associated with a higher poverty risk in old age (Falkingham et al. 2014). The demographic distribution of young and older populations at national level 'will continue to have a profound effect on how civil society, business and government position their strategic approaches to deliver employment and welfare services' (WEF 2013:15).

Emerging demographic shifts associated with a risk of poverty include the rise in solo living, especially men living alone in mid-life who have not partnered or fathered children and men in young adulthood who are more likely to return to the parental residence following a relationship breakdown. Poverty measures are not accurate for all groups, for example the self-employed, the unemployed and students, whose incomes tend to be unstable. Since 2004/5, the Family Resources Survey has measured those who are materially deprived. Welfare reform has increased debt in two specific areas: council tax arrears and under occupancy charges. Analysis of specific benefit cuts introduced in April 2013 suggests that giving low-income people new bills to pay can cause significant numbers of those people to fall into arrears on those bills (Belfield et al. 2015:78). This has driven rising deprivation rates in working families (Belfield et al. 2015).

There has been a change in poverty demographics, with more in-work poverty and more working families experiencing poverty (Bellfield et al. 20125). Families led by young adults are the sole demographic whose worklessness rate is higher than pre-recession (Bellfield et al. 2015). Falls in the numbers of workless families have reduced poverty statistics but there have been rises in poverty rates among working families, 'meaning that the overall figures show very little change' (Bellfield et al. 2015:56). Broadly speaking, 'income poverty and material deprivation rose among children in working families but fell among children in workless families' (Bellfield et al. 2015:80).

Welfare Reform

Average incomes began to recover slowly between 2011/12 and 2013/14 (Belfield et al. 2015). However, the incomes of the working age population have remained below pre-recession levels. Benefits (including state pensions) and tax credits are the next largest components of earnings after earnings from employment. Benefit cuts have been most focussed on working age claimants, with pensioners largely protected, which perhaps explains the slow rise in incomes among the working age population (Belfield et al. 2015). In particular 'the nature of the recent recovery, combined with the continuation of longer standing labour market trends, is weakening the effectiveness of paid work as an anti-poverty strategy on its own' (Cooke 2015:2). Byrne (1999) provides an account of social exclusion before the Great Recession, suggesting that poor work is the issue, the big story. Indeed, Schmuecker (2014) argues that there is a need to tackle issues at the lower end of the labour market, if in-work poverty is to be addressed. The inter linkages between employment and poverty and employment are complex. (Shildrick and Rucell 2015), for not all low-income families are in poverty, yet it is an 'increasingly crucial part of the jigsaw in the fight against poverty' (Shildrick and Rucell 2015:31).

The Welfare Reform Act (2012) has impacted on who experiences poverty and how. The Greater Manchester Poverty Commission (GMPC 2012) highlights the impact that the Welfare Reform Act has had on the residents of Greater Manchester: a reduction in household incomes, increased vulnerability for women in abusive relationships and community cohesion changes, including increases in homelessness, increases in rent arrears and increased demands for emergency accommodation. Housing costs have an impact on poverty trends; housing costs have risen for low-income households relative to higher income ones (Belfield et al. 2015). Cooke (2015), writing for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, suggests that there is no 'right' approach to reducing poverty for all times and places, and is necessary to consider the economic and social circumstances behind poverty. Testimonies gathered by GMPC (2013) describe the experience of poverty as about having a lack of choice and a lack of options. It describes poverty as all encompassing, not just about not having enough food or money to pay the bills but about social exclusion, lack of dignity and lack of control.

Testimonies described poverty as being characterised by insecurity and lack of control, and as the embodiment of fear, anxiety and uncertainty. Persistent low income is defined as spending three or more years out of any four year period in a household with below sixty per cent of median income (GMPC 2012). GMPC (2012) research reports highlight how easily people slip into poverty, usually due to family breakdown, illness or losing their job. A job, however, does not always provide protection from poverty (GMPC 2012). In highlighting an area of Greater Manchester (Falinge in Rochdale) where over one third of residents are claiming incapacity or employment support allowance benefits and highlighting that this same area is classified as the most deprived within the index of multiple deprivation, the link between worklessness, poverty and deprivation becomes clear (GMPC 2012).

Four groups of the population are particularly 'at risk' of poverty; these are people who are unemployed, people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities, disabled people and lone parents. The number of children living in poverty increased by over 300,000 over the year to April 2012, and sixty six per cent of children in poverty lived in working households, with at least one parent employed (Cooper et al. 2014). Save the Children (2012) is clear on the impact of child poverty from an early age. For example, child poverty has a dramatic effect upon life expectancy at birth, prevalence of low birth weight babies and chronic illnesses later in life. Children's educational achievement and development are also impacted by poverty, which affects development in early years and educational attainment at school leaving age.

An unusual feature of this recession was the large fall in day-to-day expenditure (Cribb et al. 2015). Debt has an impact on the experience of poverty. Levels of debt and the scale of short-term lending have risen dramatically in recent years (GMPC 2012). There are many causes of debt but poverty impacts upon these causes. Digital exclusion is a further issue experienced by those in poverty, as use of and access to the internet varies across socio-economic groups within the UK (GMPC 2012). Universal Credit is digital in nature, with claimants required to job search for up to thirty hours per week (GMPC 2012). Fuel poverty was often linked to digital exclusion. Those without access to the internet cannot search for the cheapest fuel provider (GMPC 2012). A key issue was a lack of knowledge among those in Greater Manchester about the existence of social tariffs (GMPC 2012). Transport and accessibility issues are also affected by poverty, as these factors often reinforced

poverty (GMPC 2012). Transport issues also affected ability to access cheap food, with public transport to supermarkets proving expensive, so people often resorted to corner shops and hence paid a poverty premium.

Inequality Statistics

In May 2014 the ONS reported that the richest one per cent of Britons owned the same amount of wealth as fifty-four per cent of the population (Cooper et al. 2014). Inequality in the UK has been rising for some time, but the 'levels of inequity in the UK are striking' (Shildrick and Rucell 2015) and are among the highest levels in Europe (Dorling 2014, Haddad 2012, Jones 2011). Income inequality remained stable during the 1960s and 1970s, but rose significantly in the 1980s. The last twenty-five years have seen inequality fall across most of the distribution, except for the top one per cent of individuals who have taken an increasing share of total household income (Belfield et al. 2015). However, if you focus on working age families then inequality is far less flat; 'looking in more detail at working age adults, inequality has continued to rise (albeit gently) across much of the working age spectrum' (Belfield et al. 2015:36).

Many working age families are living below the breadline (Cooper et al. 2014). Oxfam and Church Action on Poverty calculated that there was a fifty-four per cent increase in meals given to people in food poverty in the financial year April 2012 and April 2013 (Cooper et al. 2014). Food poverty 'is one of the starkest signs of inequality in the UK' (Cooper et al. 2014:6). There are broad changes in society that are squeezing those at the bottom and middle-income levels: rising living costs, rising food prices, increased rents, rising utility costs, and low wages. While unemployment is falling, those on insecure contracts are increasing: 'there are now 1.4 million zero-hours contracts in the active workforce' (Cooper et al. 2014:14). The Welfare Reform Act has had 'a significant impact on low income households, the cash value of the majority of social security payments has been lowered in real terms' (Cooper et al. 2014:15). Belfield et al. (2015) reflect on how important benefit income is to low-income households.

New demographic themes have emerged, including increasing numbers of people in employment alongside increasing poverty within working families, especially relative to pensioners (Belfield et al. 2015). In the last fifty years, the inequality gap has increased (Belfield et al. 2015, Wilson and Pickett 2009). The incomes of pensioners have improved, catching up with working incomes. The increased pensioner income is attributed to higher private pension incomes and rising entitlements to state pensions and other benefits (Belfield et al. 2015). Having considered the sociological, economic and philosophical perspectives of poverty, civil society and the reality of UK poverty, this review will now consider the response of civil society to poverty through the lens of food aid.

Food Poverty

Food poverty is ‘worse diet, worse access, worse health, higher percentage of income on food, and less choice from a restricted range of foods. Above all, food poverty is about less or almost no consumption of fruit and vegetables’ (Lang 2012:1). The Department for Health (DH) defines food poverty as ‘the inability to afford, or to have access to, food to make up a healthy diet’ (DH 2005). Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) (2012) found that rising food prices combined with the economic downturn had affected low-income households disproportionately. Those households spend a greater proportion of their income on food; therefore, a rise in food prices has a larger effect on their disposable income compared with higher income groups. GMPC (2012) found that those on low incomes responded to food price increases by buying less food rather than trading down.

Food Aid – Food Banks

Food Aid is often used as an umbrella term to encompass a range of large scale and small locally based initiatives that focus on helping people to meet their food needs. Food aid includes food banks, community care (meals on wheels), food stamps, building based food provision (day centres and hostels) and non-building based food provision (mobile soup kitchens). Defra defines food aid as

An umbrella term used to describe any type of aid giving activity which aims to provide relief from the symptoms of food insecurity and poverty. It includes a broad spectrum of activities, from small to large scale, local to national, emergency one-off operations or well-established food banks. (In Lambie-Mumford et al. 2014:15)

These initiatives are often focussed on short-term crisis need; ‘more broadly they contribute to relieving symptoms of household or individual-level food insecurity and poverty’ (Lambie-Mumford et al. 2014). Food aid is a broad term; it is understood within the context of existing research (Cooper et al. 2014, Cooper and Dumpleton 2013, Sosenko et al. 2013) to include any provision of food parcels and meals. These include formally referred systems such as The Trussell Trust franchises and more informal services included within a civil society group’s operations. Provision of meals again covers a broad range of activity from building based services where snacks, soup and sandwiches are served, to community cafes and hostels. Most research (Cooper et al. 2014, Cooper and Dumpleton 2013, Sosenko et al. 2013) chooses to exclude free school meals, state provided food vouchers for disadvantaged mothers and infants, free meals provided within supported accommodation and ‘meals on wheels’ services. The term food bank is considered misleading by some researchers (Sosenko et al. 2013) as it excludes the large number of providers for which food aid was only a small ad hoc part of their service provision. It would be misleading to refer to food aid in this context as a food bank.

It is estimated that more than 500,000 people are reliant on emergency food aid in the UK (Downing et al. 2014, Cooper and Dumpleton 2013). Food poverty is increasing (GMPC 2013), which is leading to a rise in the number of food banks. Over the three years from 2010 to 2013 the rate of food parcel distribution tripled (Loopstra et al. 2015). An ‘estimated 18% of the country were forced to skip meals, ask friends or family for food, rely on a food banks or go without so their kids could eat in the last year’ (The Telegraph June 2013). The evidence is clear that ‘a growing number of families on low incomes are struggling with the

increased cost of living' (Peachey et al. 2013:2). Research completed by Barnados in 2013 reported that '94 per cent of services reported that food poverty was an issue for the families and young people that they work with' (Peachey et al. 2013:3). Downing et al. state that UK food poverty 'has all the signs of a public health emergency that could go unrecognised until it is too late to take preventative action' (2014:1).

The Scale of Food Provision

However, determining the exact scale of food aid provision and the dynamic of demand remain problematic (Sosenko et al. 2013). This is partially due to the often informal and diverse range of food aid providers. Charities provide 'the vanguard response to food aid poverty today, primarily through food banks, which in the last decade have become prolific providers of emergency food aid across the UK' (Livingstone 2015:2). Food aid covers a range of types of service provision and includes a range of users (Sosenko et al. 2013). For example, 'soup kitchens' were mostly used by homeless people but food banks were mostly used by people who were housed but on low or no income. Indeed, even food banks were used by different client groups depending on who operated them. Trussell Trust food banks were mostly used by people in crisis as Trussell Trust food banks have criteria that prevent more than three consecutive visits. Other food parcel/bank services run by independent organisations were used as a more regular source of support (Sosenko et al. 2013).

A Growing Issue

Research by Barnado's (Peachey et al. 2013) reported a range of reasons why food poverty is a growing issue among the families and young people that they work with, including the cost of living, in terms of food price inflation, welfare cuts, delays in receiving benefits, stricter sanctions and reforms to the Social Fund. Research by Barnado's states that 'the impact of rising prices and falling incomes is worse for families in the lower income bracket as essentials such as food are typically rising faster than the overall rate of inflation' (Peachey et al. 2013). The change in welfare reform relating to crisis loans has also impacted on increased use of food aid. The Welfare Reform Act 2012 abolished crisis loans, placing responsibility on local authorities to replace them with their own welfare assurance schemes. The Trussell Trust keep data on who is using food banks:

Over a six month period to September 2013, 65,177 people (19%) were referred to Trust food banks due to benefit 'changes,' compared to almost 14,897 (14%) in the same period in 2012. 117,442 people (35%) were referred due to 'benefit delay,' compared with 35,597 (33%) in the same period in 2012. Although it should be noted that the Trust does not distinguish between first time and repeat referrals. (Downing et al. 2014:8)

Welfare reform as a result of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 has had a significant impact on the use of food banks (CAB 2013:17-18). Benefit delays and benefit sanctions were primary reasons for the use of food banks reported by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (Citizens Advice). The Child Poverty Action Group s (2013) states that welfare reform has created a

system [which] has become an unhelpful be bureaucratic nightmare, with jobcentre setting targets to arbitrarily push up the numbers of people hit with a sanction The result is demand on food banks is surging from people whose claims are stopped for weeks, months and even years. (Child Poverty Action Group:1)

Benefit sanctions have been focussed disproportionately on men and young people, with twenty per cent cuts having been imposed on people with a disability (Cooper et al. 2014:16). The speed at which welfare reform was brought in combined with redundancies of Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) staff and lack of staff training resulted in large numbers of people being inappropriately sanctioned (Cooper et al 2014). Indeed, statistics gathered by the Policy Exchange suggest that ‘seventy thousand jobseekers have had their payments unfairly withdrawn, leading them to rely on food banks to feed themselves and their families’ (in Cooper et al. 2014:18). Loopstra et al. noted that ‘greater central government welfare cuts, sanctioning and unemployment rates were significantly associated with higher rates of food parcel distribution’ (2015:2).

Food Aid: A Strategy of Last Resort

Research by Lambie-Mumford et al. (2014) reveals that households utilise multiple strategies when faced with food insecurity, of which using food aid may be just one. Evidence from Lambie-Mumford et al. (2014) suggests that food aid is a strategy of last resort, when households have tried all other options. Lambie-Mumford et al. (2014) identified two major reasons for households turning to food aid: immediate problems that led to a sudden reduction in household income (such as redundancy or delayed benefits) and ongoing, underpinning circumstances (such as low income or debt). Lambie-Mumford et al. (2014) state that ‘the evidence suggests that food aid has a limited impact on overall household food security status’ (2014:VIII).

Given the emergency nature of food aid, such initiatives were ultimately limited in the scope of the impact that they could make. Here, a tension can be identified between emergency need and longer term causes of poverty (Lambie-Mumford et al. 2014, Kirkpatrick and Tarasuck 2009). However, wider research suggests a role for food bank volunteers in becoming advocates for those in food crisis (Lambie-Mumford 2014, Lambie-Mumford 2013, Poppendieck 1998, Riches 2002). Loopstra et al. (2015) identified a number of trends relating to food banks. Food banks were more likely to begin operating in local authorities that had higher unemployment rates, and the greater the welfare cuts, and cuts in local authority spending, the greater the likelihood of a food bank opening. By contrast, the overall level of economic activity and level of Christian faith in an area were not associated with the opening of food banks.

The Trussell Trust

The food aid landscape is ‘both diverse and difficult to document’ (Lambie-Mumford et al. 2014:VIII). The Trussell Trust is the most high profile food aid provider in the UK. The Trussell Trust defines itself as a ‘social franchise’ (Lambie 2011). Community organisations or churches apply to open a food bank. Organisations make a one-off contribution to purchase the franchise and agree to nominal annual donations (Loopstra et al. 2015). The Trussell Trust was set up in 2004 and works with churches throughout the country to establish food banks. The aim of The Trussell Trust is to provide a food bank in every community. The Trussell Trust food banks operate in a different way to other independent food banks in that they operate a voucher based referral procedure. As a result, they have low numbers of self-referrals. The Trussell Trust client base is not ‘traditional’ in that it includes very few homeless people or asylum seekers, and The Trussell Trust food banks hold the sole function of providing food aid. The Trussell Trust food banks have more people experiencing a one-off food crisis as the Trust restricts usage to three consecutive visits in order to

prevent dependency (The Trussell Trust 2013).

Benefits of Being Part of a Food Bank

There are benefits for a food bank that is affiliated with The Trussell Trust; 'I would defy anybody to set up an independent food bank [and] to be as far ahead as we are now... it cost us £1,500 to begin with and we've had about £8,500 back from Tesco' (Sosenko et al. 2013:24). The Trussell Trust provides guidance, experience and leadership in supporting new franchises, which supports the creation of new food banks. The success of The Trussell Trust franchise has been attributed to its alignment with churches and the provision of food banks as faith-based action (Lambie 2011).

Food aid provision in Scotland is delivered by three types of organisation (Sosenko et al. 2013): local independent groups, larger national groups and The Trussell Trust food bank franchises. In October 2013, there were about 400 food banks run by The Trussell Trust in the UK. However, the number of independent food banks is not known (Sosenko et al. 2013), 'therefore statistics provided by the The Trussell Trust are useful indicators and represent a percentage of those who use food aid, but they are not necessarily representative of the intricacies and complexities of the food aid picture' (Sosenko et al. 2013:18). There are no official statistics on the use of food banks (Downing et al. 2013). However, a map created by The Guardian (22.7.12) shows more than sixty independent food banks.

Independent Food Banks

There are a range of independent food aid providers; 'this patchwork of providers demonstrates the determination of communities across the UK to prevent people from going hungry' (Cooper et al. 2014:7). Lambie-Mumford et al. (2014) reinforce the importance of independent food aid provision, suggesting that it contributes significantly to the 'triangle of change' (business, public sector, civil society). Most independent food banks are often informal (Livingstone 2015). There are many independent local initiatives in the UK but data is 'currently hard to capture in data monitoring or research' (Lambie-Mumford et al. 2014:VI). Bateman (2007) states that there are food parcel schemes that exist all over the country, ranging from one-off deliveries at Christmas to longer term schemes. Research by Sosenko et al. (2013) states that they identified fifty-five providers of food aid across the eight locations that they covered in their research. Of these fifty-five food aid providers, thirty-six offered food parcel services and thirty-eight offered meals services (Sosenko et al. 2013). The independent food aid providers reported an increase in demand over the previous two years, with some respondents reporting that they were feeding an alarmingly high number of children (Sosenko et al. 2013). One food aid provider in Scotland has added nappies to its emergency food parcels as a response to the increased reliance of children on food parcels (Sosenko et al. 2013).

The Food Cupboard

An example of another type of independent food aid provision is the Food Cupboard at St Salvador's Church, in Scotland, which operates and distributes food parcels in a different way to The Trussell Trust, as it does not require vouchers or referrals (Sosenko et al. 2013). The Food Cupboard offers everyone within the Sunday congregation a food bag. The project began in 2005 when parishioners collected non-perishable items and distributed them on an ad hoc basis after the Sunday service. These ad hoc food parcels began to grow into the Food Cupboard. Today the project offers soup, baked goods, fruit and warm drinks to those that receive parcels. Prayers and religious support are on offer to those that wish to receive them. Users of the project tend to be regular visitors and attend for more than food parcels; '[its] a safe place and a listening ear, people are shown respect, the sense of companionship, the friendliness is amazing' (Sosenko et al. 2013:19).

Alternative Independent Food Aid: Church, Garage, Delivery Van

The Guardian (12.07.12) highlights the variety of different sizes and styles of food banks, from a church-led centre in Stoke-on-Trent to a woman who operates her food bank, Families in Need (FIND), from her garage in Suffolk. Maureen Reynel offers help for homeless people using a cardex system in her garage and includes a food bank service over Christmas that includes Christmas gifts (The Guardian 12.07.2012). Downing et al. (2014) give an example of the East Lancs Food Bank that also runs delivery services for those unable to get to a distribution point. Other projects offer food aid as supplementary to their services. Downing et al. (2014) describe a project in Dumfriesshire, First Base Agency, that was set up by an individual initially to support clients with drug and alcohol problems. From there it has developed into gardening projects with armed forces veterans. This project also offered under the radar food parcels to vulnerable individuals and families in the area. This under the radar project was supported by local churches whose donations enabled it to continue.

Developing New Models of Charity

Food Aid potentially offers a new model of charity; new forms of good society. UK food banks are 'adopting a more business-like model, akin to similar services now entrenched in North American society'(Livingstone 2015:3). The UK's first social supermarket opened in Barnsley, South Yorkshire, in December 2013. The purpose of the project is to give surplus food for a social purpose. This project is operated by Community Shop, whose parent company is Company Shop. Company Shop's core business involves purchasing major brands' 'residual stock'. Community Shop is using the first shop in Yorkshire as a pilot. Prices are considerably lower than the recommended retail price (in some cases seventy per cent below) and good advice is proffered on cooking and budgeting.

Growing Demand

There has been a growth in demand for food aid (Sosenko et al. 2013), from food parcel services to soup kitchens. The reasons for this demand can be broadly attributed to welfare reform. Sosenko et al. (2013) found that falling incomes, welfare reform, benefit sanctions and benefit delays, have been the main factors driving the increased demand for food aid. However, food aid is a 'rapidly changing landscape' (Sosenko et al. 2013) and as such monitoring is difficult. Only Trussell Trust food banks undertake detailed monitoring. Research by GMPC (2012) into organisations providing food aid in Manchester reported a total of eighty-five parishes within the diocese of Manchester involved in food intervention, including food bank activity, and forty-five organisations were identified by the diocese as providing support in Greater Manchester in the form of food banks or breakfast clubs. Non-diocese organisations such as the Tree of Life Centre in Wythenshawe, Lifeshare, The Booth Centre and Urban Outreach have all reported an increase in the number of people requesting emergency food (GMPC 2012). These organisations were all offering food parcel schemes and Lifeshare was offering breakfast clubs. At the same time as organisations were reporting a significant increase in the demand for food aid, donations in Greater Manchester were declining (GMPC 2012).

Diversity

There is considerable operational diversity of food aid provision. Lambie-Mumford et al. state that 'the range of diversity across and within types of food aid provision suggests that generalisations are inappropriate and that nuanced understandings of food aid provision are needed' (2014:48). There are peaks in food aid usage during the winter months. Accessibility of food banks is raised by Lambie-Mumford et al. (2014), and the comparative usage of food banks by BME groups raises questions of diversity (Minahan 2012, Sleightholme 2012). Minahan (2012) also questions the accessibility of food banks for older people.

Partnership Working

Food aid providers access food and goods from a range of sources such as: FareShare, supermarket collections, corporate donations individual donations, donations from schools and overspill from other food aid providers (Sosenko et al. 2013). Research in Glasgow (Sosenko et al. 2013) found that there was a degree of cooperation between food aid providers in the city. This is supported by research in other geographical areas. GMPC (2013) found that the food banks in Greater Manchester required further coordination to ensure that they are meeting the needs of their users as effectively as possible. The Trussell Trust has a relationship with Tesco (Sosenko et al. 2013); they collect food at Tesco from national collections twice a year. However, other independent food aid projects, such as Transform (Sosenko et al. 2013) in Dundee, have food relationships with supermarkets; typically, food from supermarkets is donated when it falls within a particular date code.

Lambie-Mumford et al. (2014) identified the importance of collaboration between food aid providers, and between food aid providers and other agencies – this collaboration was seen as ‘key to their functioning and success’ (2014:x). The networked large charities such as FareShare and The Trussell Trust operate with established business models and are able to collect data systematically across projects and partners (Lambie-Mumford et al. 2014). This is not the case for smaller independent food aid providers so there is a limited picture of how they operate. Lambie-Mumford et al. (2014) identified an opportunity for some of the major charities involved, or the corporate sector, or regional authorities to facilitate further collaborative work.

Critiques of Food Aid: Maintaining Poverty?

While there has been overwhelming support for food aid provision within civil society there is also an emerging critique of food aid provision. Should food aid be necessary? Is resilience an appropriate solution to absolute need? Is the reliance on volunteers asking too much? This section briefly examines the critiques of food aid.

Supporting Corporate Interests

Research by Lambie-Mumford (2014) identified concerns around food aid projects such as FareShare that use food which supermarkets cannot sell. Lambie-Mumford et al. (2014) identified an emerging debate around the intertwining of corporate interests with poverty alleviation. The joint intertwining of interests of those providing food aid with the corporate sector can be critiqued as having led to a situation where food aid is entrenched and normalised as a solution to food poverty (Lang et al. 2009, Tarasuck and Eakin 2005, Hawkes and Webster 2000). Indeed, can food aid ever be a solution to food waste (Lambie-Mumford 2014)? We can easily fall into the trap of focusing on symptoms rather than root causes (NEF 2015).

Focusing on the Symptoms of Poverty – Not the Cause

A focus on food itself may be a diversion when the cause of food poverty is often benefit cuts and low income. Policy in this area suggests that further research on incomes ‘is needed to enable households of different demographic structure to meet minimum, consensually defined standards of living, including minimum expenditure on food to meet healthy dietary requirements’ (Lambie-Mumford 2014:60). International research (Riches 2011) suggests that institutionalising food aid can result in responses to food poverty being de-politicised. Indeed to ‘allow the public and politicians to believe that hunger is being solved ... reinforces the notion of hunger as a matter of charity not politics’ (Riches 2011:768). Livingstone suggests that ‘food charities are becoming a fetishized commodity themselves as social franchises, which the government can affect and mould through legislation’ (2015:7).

Is the Growth in Food Aid a Misconception?

To what extent is food aid a product of its own success? Is the increased demand for food aid a result simply of increased publicity or a case of demand meeting supply? Research by The Trussell Trust (Lambie 2011) revealed that church franchises operating within The Trussell Trust Food Bank Networks had in fact already been operating some form of ad hoc food aid project before they took on The Trussell Trust franchise. However, while these findings highlight the complexity of food aid provider histories, there is clear evidence of a significant increase in both food aid provision and recipients. (Lambie-Mumford et al. 2014). Food banks are not being used as an additional resource;

there is no evidence to support the claim that increased food aid provision is driving demand. All available evidence, both in the UK and internationally, points in the opposite direction. Put simply there is more need and food aid providers are trying to help (Cooper et al. 2014:4).

In some of the most deprived areas of England, such as Derby 'where sanction rates rose to thirteen per cent of claimants in 2013, this equates to a substantial rise in food parcel distribution, to an additional one parcel for every 100 persons living in the area' (Loopstra et al. 2015:2).

Meeting Demand?

Another important concern was around the vulnerability of food aid and its potential ability or inability to meet rising demand. Charitable donations can be time and content limited and highly variable in terms of quality (Tarasuck and Eakin 2003). This critique of food aid was aimed at its reliance on donations and volunteers' time. Lambie-Mumford et al. (2014) questioned how appropriate it is to use volunteer energy and skills to meet basic immediate needs.

An emerging issue is that food aid providers are having to place limits on the amount of food aid that they hand out. Using volunteers also adds a further vulnerability to food aid (Poppendieck 1994). Emergency approaches that rely on the energy and commitment of volunteers and on donations can leave food aid initiatives vulnerable and fragile (Poppendieck 1994).

Who Gives to Charity?

Research conducted by Wixley and Noble (2014) considers public perceptions of charities, and it suggests that the sector needs to communicate its changing role. Wixley and Noble (2014) conclude, in line with other research by the Charity Commission and Ipsos MORI, there continues to be an increase in trust and confidence in charities. The public is more likely to trust a charity that it has heard of (Wixley and Noble 2014). Importantly, given the results of the May 2015 election there is a slight tendency for those who are older and for Conservative voters to be more negative towards charities (Wixley and Noble 2014). Those who vote UKIP are particularly likely to have become more negative towards charities (Wixley and Noble 2014).

Trust across organisations, sectors and generations therefore becomes ever more important as a pre-condition for societal engagement and influence; 'civil society can become a broker of trust between the other sectors' (WEF 2013:32). The recent Etherington Report (Etherington et al. 2015) on the regulations regarding charitable fundraising has brought considerations of trust in charities once again to the fore. This review has considered the sociological, economic and philosophical perspectives of poverty, discussed the demographic changes in poverty and considered civil society's response to poverty alleviation through the lens of food aid. The review will now seek to draw conclusions.

Conclusion

Poverty alleviation cannot be achieved merely by taking remedial measures. There needs to be a multidisciplinary approach and tackling the issue of poverty requires a paradigm shift (Shah 2014). There is a need to be creative in finding solutions to poverty; ‘the social science literature is almost wholly descriptive and fanatical about social problems, rather than creative and practical about their solutions’ (Knight 2015:10). Indeed ‘a comprehensive and effective poverty reduction strategy will strive to support effective responses to both technical and adaptive development problems, cognizant that concentrating on technical problems alone will not (and indeed cannot) make poverty history’ (Woolcock 2009:14). Trends in food aid provision can be identified in terms of the rise of national charities and within the wider context of other independent projects. These trends can be contextualised within the broad socio-economic shifts which have ‘impacted on household food security and the relationships with food industry partners’ (Lambie-Mumford et al. 2014:39). The key task is to ‘connect social history and personal biography to imagine better futures’ (Knight 2015:11).

Food banks have been described as ‘a magnificent response to difficult times’ (Cabinet Office Minister Nick Hurd quoted in Downing et al. 2014:11). The government does not provide support to food banks, nor has it given any indication that it will do so (Downing et al. 2014). Lambie-Mumford et al. (2014) state that there is very little evidence available regarding the relative advantages of the varying types of food aid, or indeed on alternative approaches to solving issues of household food security. Lambie-Mumford et al. (2014) suggest that solutions to food security lie with research into the longer term and underlying dimensions to household food insecurity. However, ‘civil society which is where most food providers are located can have an important and constructive role to play in terms of advocacy and lobbying, and in giving a voice to those who experience household food insecurity’ (Lambie-Mumford et al. 2014:XI, Poppendieck 1998, Riches 2002). Lambie-Mumford et al. (2014) identified areas of best practice in food aid provision around the importance of non-food related support and partnership work within and between food aid agencies. The ‘Food Plus’ model (Lambie-Mumford 2014:51) was an important source of stability and community in the lives of vulnerable people, offering care, support and listening. In more formal building based services this role was undertaken by support workers; in independent services it was undertaken by volunteers. The ‘Food Plus’ approach (Lambie-Mumford 2014:51) brings together a concern for the root causes of poverty.

The coupling of food provision with other forms of support builds relationships with other agencies and sources of support that can seek to address some of the deeper causes of an industrial or family food crisis. Knight asks:

... so, where is positive change going to come from? How can we think about the roles of civil society, business and government in addressing poverty creatively while being mindful of the background realities and finances that constrain what can be done? (2015:34)

Research by JRF suggests a fivefold approach to change: providing access to low cost credit and incentives to build savings, re-designing back to work support for disabled people, preventing a lifetime of exclusion, supporting a dual earners household model and boosting social investment and the social wage (Cooke 2015). The fivefold approach suggested by JRF aim to expand the social wage, protect households from high cost credit and debt, promote dual-earner families, boost the employment rate and prevent young people from being labelled NEET (not in employment, education or training). Taken together the measures aim to 'address some of the structural drivers of poverty, (Cooke 2015:14). Essential as economic growth is for poverty reduction (Kraay 2006) 'it is important to recognise that it is an outcome of complex and interdependent forces, not all of which are amenable to 'policy' control' (Woolcock 2009:11). There is a need to involve those in poverty in creating the solution; 'the deep-set problems and far reaching consequences of poverty will not be truly tackled until those living this reality are seen as part of the solution – not as part of the problem' (Lansley and Mack 2015:254).

There is 'no overall narrative of what a good society without poverty would look like' (Knight 2015:26); however, food aid and food banks offer a clue or suggestion of how a good society might be built. Examining poverty alleviation through the lens of food aid reveals a complex and multi-faceted picture of civil society at its best: of volunteering, positive action encapsulated in everything from garages, churches, delivery vans and buildings; of civil society, action organised by independent organisations, small community groups and national VCS franchises. It reveals that the response to need is to meet the minimum standards as critiqued by the Webbs' parallel bars model. As public trust in politics has been eroded,

civil society is gaining global influence. Global civil society has proven to be robust, diverse and creative in responding to the rising levels of frustration, anger and impatience with the injustices people are forced to live with. (Carnegie UK Trust 2010:6)

The real wealth offered by food aid is the 'Food Plus' approach (Lambie-Mumford et al. 2014): the social support and care that are offered as a side dish to food aid's main course. Here the Webb's extension ladder is evidenced. This is where the Good Society can be found.

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The Webb Memorial Trust has pursued the intellectual legacy of Beatrice Webb (1858–1943), who, together with her husband Sydney (1859–1947), embarked on a vigorous programme of social reform. Beatrice Webb had a plan of what a good society free from poverty would look like. It took 30 years for her views to be accepted, but they became the basis for Britain's welfare state, and in the 30 years following the Second World War, British society made good progress on poverty as a result.

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