

Cash for food

Freedom or
dependency?



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Ensuring decent food for all.....?

Enabling people to eat decently and sustainably is a fundamental requirement of all societies, but the role of the state is a tricky challenge. Where do rights and responsibilities lie? In this issue we look at social protection: public sector interventions which enable people to get through tough times, particularly those who are vulnerable to forces of impoverishment and destitution. In general, these measures are directed at the labour market, social insurance and social assistance, which includes cash or in-kind transfers. It is the latter which tend to apply to food poverty – transfers of food or cash – particularly in richer countries where household level food insecurity or poverty is largely seen as a private matter of failed household management. Many have challenged such assumptions, but ‘hungry people are only in Africa/India’ is an enduring myth. Certainly the struggle to feed a family on insufficient money is largely invisible to the public eye.

Cash transfer, which people seem to prefer since it confers autonomy and choice [Arnold p13], come under scrutiny the world over for their potential to create dependency, ‘poverty traps,’ and demeaning rather than motivating solutions [Guy p14, Kent p22]. Many a government has wrestled with this, but solutions may too readily ignore the cost realities of basic living, especially for the poorest. Hirsch [p16], Poppendieck [P14] and Nicolson [p21] here cogently demonstrate the evidence and consequences for getting the rates wrong.

How can people manage, especially where food poverty’s existence is denied? They shuffle bills, juggle food and fuel, seek out bargains and, inevitably, eat diets which stave off hunger but don’t serve long-term health. Along the way, they might use a food bank – not all the time (rules and dignity don’t permit it) and only if available. Despite their importance as stop-gaps, Power’s [p18] coruscating argument is that food banks serve as smokescreen, preventing responses to poverty and hiding the reality of hunger. They let states off the hook: from their obligation to fulfil

rights to necessary means of living, and of responsibility to show political leadership over such difficult issues. Caraher [p15], too, wants more public debate on rights and responsibilities. The challenges in enabling vulnerable households to survive and thrive seem to be paralysing governments and institutions in rich countries, with the end of ‘cheap food’ on which social policies of low minimum wages and cash transfers have been based. The answers seem to be firstly, to promote waged work as a way out of poverty, however unreliable, poorly paid or inappropriate, but not to develop sustainable livelihood possibilities. Secondly, to continue challenging the legitimacy of claims for social welfare benefits, and demonising those who cannot ‘manage’ on incomes demonstrably too low to meet needs. And thirdly, to leave the practicalities of meeting people’s pressing needs for food to individual philanthropy and, increasingly, an institutionalised private charity sector. We have been here before¹ but the lessons of justice and social responsibility get lost.

In the global South, by contrast, there is a growing track record of social protection measures such as food/cash-for work or direct cash transfers, in programmes carefully designed to avoid dependency and short-termism, and build household and community resilience against short-term shocks and longstanding vulnerabilities. As Martins and Yablonski [p10] outline, evaluation has shown positive impacts in food productive capacity and improved food security, and in uptake of education and health services, particularly for antiretroviral therapy (ART), essential to combat the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS on agriculture, family nurture and life expectancy.

This echoes Devereux’s [p4] examination of social protection interventions successfully negotiating a fine balance between promoting self-reliance or increasing hand-out dependence. He sides firmly with the former: well designed programmes are empowering, generating sustainable improvements in household incomes and poverty

reduction. His examples are innovative, powerful good news stories from places around the world too readily assumed to be ‘basket cases’ by those in richer countries.

Indeed, Brazil’s increasingly famous ‘Fome Zero’ programme is widely hailed as an imaginative attempt to break the cycle of poverty, malnutrition, poor health and child development. It involves cash transfer and much more, including targeted interventions to vulnerable households and use of consumer power and public procurement to stimulate food production by small producers – also poor.

In other words, a comprehensive policy framework exists where agricultural and rural development policies, aimed at strengthening small producers and diminishing the control of the powerful, work alongside creative social protection and health promotion intervention. Sectors are working together which so often elsewhere work in silos.

Finally, there is sustained public engagement and involvement of civil society in policy governance. As José Graziano da Silva [p7] argues, “enabling people to assert their human right to food can be harnessed as an important stimulus for economic growth with equity”. The Brazilian example does not suit every situation and is surely not perfect, but it points to the possibilities of a “right mix of public and private action [...] to make a significant dent in hunger [...] and promote local growth by tying economic, social and agricultural policies into a single bundle”. Not for the first time, the global North has much to learn from the global South.

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Social protection and agriculture

Graduation or dependency?



Can social protection support people to become independent and self-reliant, or does it encourage them to become dangerously dependent on that assistance? The related issues of ‘graduation’ versus ‘dependency’ are receiving a great deal of attention in social protection thinking and programming, explains **STEPHEN DEVEREUX**.

Social protection programmes provide vital assistance to people who need help to sustain their lives and livelihoods. Many social protection interventions in Africa, Asia and Latin America target smallholder farmers, with the aim of ‘graduating’ poor rural families out of extreme poverty and food insecurity. These programmes are popular with governments and donor agencies, because they have defined budgets and exit strategies, they minimise risks of ‘dependency’, and they support agricultural productivity and economic growth.

This article briefly reviews the evidence for and against ‘dependency syndrome’, and introduces innovative approaches to ‘graduation’ in several social protection programmes.

Dependency

Governments often fear that introducing social protection programmes, especially free transfers of cash or food, will encourage beneficiaries to become lazy and rely on these ‘handouts’ instead of their own initiative. These concerns have preoccupied policy-makers in Europe for decades, where social

welfare programmes are designed to provide enough support to cover poor people’s basic needs, but not so much support that they create a ‘welfare trap’ – meaning that it makes more sense to claim unemployment benefits from the state rather than look for work.

There is very little evidence for ‘dependency syndrome’ in social protection programmes in Africa, at least at the household level. In Ethiopia, where food aid has been the standard response to chronic and acute food insecurity in farming communities for decades, several studies have concluded that the food received is so small,

unpredictable and badly timed that it is impossible to survive on, and it would be irrational for farmers to stop farming in the expectation that they will receive food aid when their harvest is inadequate. Even during famines, it is estimated that humanitarian relief rarely covers more than 10 to 15% of the food consumption needs of affected populations. At the national policy level, however, it is possible that the ‘drip-feed’ of food aid has allowed governments to neglect investment in agriculture and rural livelihoods, perpetuating agricultural stagnation and dependence on future flows of food aid.

Defining ‘dependency’

Individuals are defined as dependent if they cannot meet minimum subsistence needs without assistance from others – either their family or community, or formal institutions such as the state.

Dependency syndrome occurs when people modify their behaviour in a deliberate attempt to qualify or remain eligible for social protection.



By Eileen Delhi

One way of discouraging ‘dependency syndrome’ is to make social protection difficult to access. Public works programmes are popular with governments in Africa and Asia because they introduce a work requirement, which makes them self-targeting – people who don’t need low-paid temporary employment won’t apply. Also (as discussed below), public works projects can create useful infrastructure that boosts agricultural productivity and economic activity in rural areas. In India, the introduction in 2005 of a ‘right to work’ through the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has empowered agricultural labourers to negotiate decent wages with employers.

Concerns about the possible ‘dependency’ and ‘disincentive’ effects of food aid have motivated a shift in recent years towards cash transfers, either as unconditional social grants, ‘conditional cash transfers’ (discussed below) or as payment on public works – ‘cash-for-work’ rather than ‘food-for-work’. Available evidence suggests that cash transfers are even less likely than food aid to trigger ‘dependency

Defining ‘graduation’

Graduation from social protection programmes occurs when participants’ incomes or living standards improve such that they are no longer eligible for assistance.

In Ethiopia, a household graduates from the ‘Productive Safety Net Programme’ when it is food secure (“it can meet its food needs for all 12 months” of the year) and it is resilient (“is able to withstand modest shocks”)

syndrome’ among beneficiaries. Not only is cash invested in economic activities that generate additional income, but programmes that target vulnerable groups such as women and older persons strengthen their economic autonomy. Rather than generating dependency, social protection can reduce dependence on relatives and neighbours – who are often equally poor – and empower vulnerable individuals and marginalised groups.

Graduation

Many social protection programmes in Africa, Asia and Latin America aim to promote graduation by supporting

both ‘lives and livelihoods’. In Africa, two innovative programmes are the ‘Productive Safety Net Programme’ (PSNP) in Ethiopia and the ‘Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme’ (VUP) in Rwanda. Both target chronically poor and food insecure farming families, by offering temporary employment on public works projects if they have members who can work, and free cash or food transfers if they do not. The PSNP and VUP have several ‘graduation pathways’:

- They transfer cash rather than food (except where local markets are too weak) – and evaluations across

the world confirm that some cash transfers are likely to be invested in farming or family enterprises, whereas food transfers tend to be entirely consumed.

- The 'public works' components aim to construct or rehabilitate useful physical infrastructure, such as rural feeder roads that link farmers to markets and reduce transport costs, or irrigation canals and terracing that raise the productivity of local farms.
- The PSNP offers 'household asset-building packages' that allow poor farmers to diversify into secondary income-earning activities, such as livestock fattening or beekeeping to produce honey for the market.
- The VUP has a microfinance component that provides individual or group loans at low interest, for small businesses such as rearing rabbits or chickens or cows, and these loans are repaid by sales of meat or eggs or milk.

In Ethiopia, the PSNP provides regular support to eight million people for six months of each year for up to four years, after which time participants are expected to have graduated, meaning that they are no longer food insecure and aid-dependent, but 'self-reliant' and resilient against moderate shocks. In Rwanda, the VUP is 'retargeted' every year, meaning that communities assess the poverty status of all local households and, if a VUP household has moved out of the poorest category, it is no longer considered to be in need of support.

In Bangladesh, interventions such as the 'Chars Livelihood Programme' (CLP) and 'Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction' (CFPR) transfer a package of productive assets (such as a dairy cow, or horticulture inputs) to poor rural families, as well as livelihood support (especially training) to generate streams of income. Programme participants are also given a monthly cash transfer, to ensure the asset is not sold to meet pressing household needs. Evaluations of the CFPR recorded significant



By Adam Cohn

improvements in nutritional status, and hundreds of thousands of participants have 'graduated' out of extreme poverty. In many countries of Latin America, 'conditional cash transfer' programmes such as Bolsa Familia in Brazil and Oportunidades in Mexico provide cash transfers and other benefits to poor families, but only on condition that their children are immunised, go for health check-ups, and attend school regularly. The aim is to complement providing support for immediate basic needs with investment in the human capital (health and education) of children. There is no immediate graduation objective, but an expectation – based on empirical evidence – that healthier and better educated children are less likely to be poor when they grow up, and will have healthier and better educated children of their own, thereby breaking the inter-generational cycle of poverty.

Conclusion

Social protection in smallholder agriculture, especially cash or asset transfers and employment guarantee schemes, has great potential to contribute to food security and agricultural growth, both directly (for example, cash transfers boost purchasing

power and provide incentives to farmers and traders) and indirectly (for instance, cash transfers are invested in farming, public works create useful infrastructure that stimulates agricultural production and trade). There is no convincing evidence for dependency on social protection in developing countries. On the contrary, there is growing evidence that well designed programmes are empowering and generate sustainable improvements in household incomes, reducing poverty and leading to sustainable graduation. ■

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Ending hunger

Brazil's Zero Hunger programme



In spite of often-repeated commitments by governments to reduce hunger in the world, little progress has been made in reducing the number of chronically hungry people, writes **JOSÉ GRAZIANO DA SILVA.**

The rise in international prices of food between 2006 and 2008 pushed up the number of hungry people from around 800 million to over one billion; a figure that has now declined to about 925 million¹. As we can see from the current outbreak of famine in the Horn of Africa, the failure to protect vulnerable people from chronic hunger has left them with no resilience to the shocks caused by conflict and drought.

Even at the height of the food price crisis, there have been ample food supplies for all the seven billion people with whom we share this planet to eat adequately. The fact that so many people are still hungry is partly a reflection of the lack of a substantial and coordinated effort by all the parties involved at both global and national levels. Even though some countries – and the world as a whole – have been able to consistently increase food production, hunger continues to persist. The reason for this is that, in most cases, the majority of people are hungry simply because they do not have money with which to buy food.

In the 1990's FAO began to promote the concept of a twin-track approach to hunger reduction 'in which measures to promote rural development through growth in agriculture and rural off-farm activities are complemented by measures to broaden access to food for the most needy'². The idea was that each track would reinforce the other, with grants to the poor enabling them to translate their food needs into incremental demand which would, in turn, stimulate growth in local food production.

Where there is hunger we usually find economically stagnant communities. They are like the dry vegetation of a parched field. Cash transfers and cash-for-work programmes operate in the same way as rain on dry soil, allowing these communities to bloom.

The cycle of planting, harvesting and consuming is what spins the economic wheels of millions of small communities throughout the planet. At a national scale, expanded support

for these processes – through credit, technical assistance, guaranteed markets for small-scale producers and better infrastructure, combined with social protection – will not only reduce hunger but also spur broad-based economic and social development.

In launching its Zero Hunger programme in January 2003, at the beginning of the Lula presidency, Brazil was one of the first countries to apply this approach on a national scale. The programme was premised on the assumption that poor people in both urban and rural areas were caught in a hunger trap from which escape by their own means alone was more or less impossible. Their chronic lack of food left them physically weak and exposed to disease, reducing their competitiveness in the job market, and hence progressively making them less able to afford enough to eat. To break this vicious circle, the programme included the distribution of Food Cards to poor families, with which they could withdraw funds each month in order to close their food gap.

On efficiency grounds, the Food Card was subsequently amalgamated with other grant programmes into a single nationwide cash transfer programme, Bolsa Familia (or Family Grant). Its coverage was rapidly built up to reach over 13 million poor Brazilian families (of per capita income less than US\$80 per month), providing an average monthly transfer of US\$56 per family. Wherever possible, electronic withdrawal cards are issued to adult women members of the family, who are now recipients of over 90% of the grants. All participants are listed on a regularly updated national registry, and their continued eligibility for assistance is conditional on their children attending school regularly and undergoing periodic health checks³.

Zero Hunger, however, is about much more than the Family Grant, because, from the outset, it has sought to address hunger, malnutrition, poverty and social exclusion in Brazil through a wide range of simultaneous direct interventions, targeted on vulnerable sectors of the population. But it has



By Prefeitura de Olinda

also sought to use the added purchasing power that goes with these programmes to stimulate food production, especially by small-scale farmers, many of whom are exposed to extreme poverty. Finally, it has begun to address some of the underlying 'structural' causes of poverty and hunger, addressing the need for economic policies that result in a more equitable distribution of the benefits of growth and of the country's resources.

Much of the incremental disposable income from the Bolsa Família – about US\$700 million per month, to which a further US\$ 100 million can be added for school meals – naturally ends up in the purchase of food from small-scale farmers who supply up to two-thirds of the most important staple food products like rice, maize, milk, beans and cassava in Latin America and the Caribbean. Zero Hunger deliberately added further to the demand for the products of small-scale farmers by engaging in public sector procurement for emergency and institutional feeding programmes and subsequently through requiring at least one-third of the federal funding for school meals to be spent on products from the local small-scale farm sector.

To strengthen the supply capacity of the sector to respond to this demand, it greatly increased farmers' access to seasonal and long-term credit as well as crop insurance, strengthened research and advisory services, and accelerated the land reform programme. A large-scale programme for construction of rainwater storage tanks on farms in the arid Northeast increased the independence of rural people from the powerful interests that usually control access to water in this area.

From the beginning, Zero Hunger successfully sought the engagement of all Brazilians in a truly national – rather than merely governmental – effort to end hunger. This led to an outpouring of good will towards the programme, reflected in gifts of food and money and in the engagement of volunteers in many local activities. Civil society has played a more formal role in influencing policy through their extensive representation in the CONSEA – the Brazilian National Food and Nutrition Security Council that reports directly to the President.

The upshot of this combination of mutually supportive activities is that Zero Hunger is having a very significant and wide ranging impact on important nutritional, economic and social indicators.

In just eight years, Zero Hunger has had a fundamental transformative impact on the livelihoods of tens of millions of poor Brazilians. One statistic summarizes its achievement: undernourishment in children under five years old fell from 12.5% to 4.8% between 2003 and 2009.

Zero Hunger has spearheaded a new set of national policies that have contributed to reverse past trends towards greater income inequality, put an end to the effective exclusion of the poor from the social and economic life of their country, and greatly raised the profile of women within their families and communities. It has had a massive impact on employment, especially in rural areas, and it has been shown to reduce the vulnerability of the poorest members of society to rising food prices.



By Imprensalauro Decom

When Zero Hunger was launched, it was immediately controversial. Critics argued that the programme was fiscally unaffordable and predicted that it would bankrupt Brazil "within 15 days". Others claimed that the provision of regular grants would reduce the incentive for beneficiaries to work, create a class of people that would become dependent on Government handouts, and undermine their dignity.

This has not happened. People who were excluded from the workforce because of their hunger are now taking up jobs, and Zero Hunger's weight in the national budget is not cumbersome, with the Family Grant component remaining less than 0.5% of GDP.

Of greatest significance, Zero Hunger demonstrates that enabling people to assert their human right to food can be harnessed as an important stimulus for economic growth with equity. It is therefore not surprising that current President Dilma Rousseff has launched a sequel – 'Brazil without Poverty' – which is intended to benefit the 16 million people who still live in extreme deprivation.

Brazil is already sharing its experience with Latin American, Caribbean and African countries; for example by helping them adapt and adopt programmes that tie local food production to school meal programmes.

This doesn't mean, however, that the Brazilian model is the only path ahead or that it fits like a glove in all African countries. This is by no means the case. What it does mean is that we do not need to start from scratch when tackling the

problems of food insecurity and extreme poverty in countries around the world.

The Brazilian experience can inspire other countries to find the right mix of public and private action necessary to reduce hunger and extreme poverty, just as Zero Hunger was inspired by the New Deal and the US Food Stamps programme.

Perhaps the greatest lesson is that it really is possible to make a significant dent in hunger over a short period of time, and to promote local growth by tying economic, social and agricultural policies into a single bundle.

It's a lesson of hope. ■

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New solutions to enduring problems

Food insecurity and vulnerability in sub-Saharan Africa

Over the past decade, policymakers in sub-Saharan Africa have increasingly been using social protection as a crucial tool for reducing widespread vulnerability, explain **DEOLINDA MARTINS** and **JENN YABLONSKI**.

Many countries have implemented new social protection programmes or scaled-up existing ones, ranging from different forms of cash transfers such as conditional and unconditional transfers for families with children, or pensions; public works programmes; removing user fees for health and education; and family support services.

UNICEF is working with governments and other partners in over 20 countries in the region to help develop and strengthen their burgeoning social protection programmes. The increase in such programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa since the early 2000s has been due to a confluence of drivers, but it is worth highlighting two in particular: the persistence of food insecurity in a context of widespread chronic poverty and the impacts of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Food insecurity in the region has persisted for the past few decades, as evidenced by the fact that the number of malnourished children and adults increased from 88 to 203 million between 1970 and 2002. Over the past decade, rising food prices due to a number of factors including climate change, food shortages and low investment in agricultural production have rendered the cost of a nutritious and adequate diet inaccessibly high for many Africans, 30% of whom are undernourished.

Despite the prevalence of smallholder agriculture in many sub-Saharan countries, it has been shown that the negative impact of food prices on poor net consumers outweighs the benefits to poor net producers. Furthermore, this incremental rise in food

prices is often punctuated by crises such as the one that hit in mid-2010. Not only was this crisis more severe in low-income countries (they experienced a 5% rise in national food prices during August-November 2010, while middle-income countries actually saw food prices decline) but it also followed the earlier 2007-08 crisis, from which many Sub-Saharan African countries never recovered.

This is an only-too-common scenario: as food insecurity and climate change endure, populations become increasingly vulnerable to new shocks, having previously used 'negative' coping strategies such as selling off productive assets (livestock

or farms) and cutting back on healthcare. The impacts of these shocks are not only short term; undernourishment during children's critical early years causes indelible damage to physical and cognitive development, negatively affecting a child's chances of escaping poverty later in life.

The impact of HIV/AIDS, a pandemic that affects 22.5 million people in the region, 2.3 million of whom are children, has also been a major catalyst for the implementation of non-contributory

social protection programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa. Social protection has been used to address not only improved treatment and access to social services by HIV-affected people (through home-based care, for example) but also the repercussions of the pandemic on the wider community.

The burden of disease and mortality, particularly among the working age population, has decreased the labour capacity of many households, increased responsibilities for caring

Undernourishment during children's critical early years causes indelible damage



By Colin Crowley

for those that are ill and their children, and heavily strained informal support networks. Here too, we see a vicious cycle: labour constraints engendered by HIV/AIDS are detrimental to food production and, at the same time, inadequate nutrition undermines individuals' ability to cope with HIV. Good nutrition is particularly critical for HIV-affected people, who need 30% more nutrients, and who need to take their antiretroviral therapy (ART) on a full stomach. If they don't take their ART properly, then life expectancy is reduced, as is their capacity to work.

Over the past decade, these drivers have contributed toward social protection becoming an integral part of many African countries' development and poverty reduction strategies. This is in part because social protection benefits can be used in a variety of ways, thus making them particularly well suited to addressing the compounding sources of vulnerability that are so typical in the region.

For example, as a response to food crises, programmes such as public works or cash transfers can simultaneously boost consumption in the short-run; prevent asset depletion; support individuals' economic and agricultural capacity; and ensure that human development among the next generation is not sacrificed. While care must be taken not to overload programme objectives and mechanisms, social protection instruments that allow for flexibility in their use (such as child grants, pensions, public works, home-based care and

cash transfers) can reduce different forms of vulnerability simultaneously, as we show below.

Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) arose out of the recognition that, despite several decades of emergency food aid, populations suffered from underlying vulnerabilities that made them less resilient to food crises – an estimated 5-6 million people were, in fact, chronically food insecure. With technical and financial support from donors, the government launched a package of food security programmes that included the PSNP.

This programme for chronically food insecure households combines a public works component for able-bodied adults with an unconditional cash transfer component for labour-constrained households. Within a year of its implementation in 2005, the PSNP had become the largest social protection programme in Sub-Saharan Africa outside of South Africa. As of 2009, it was reaching 8.2 million people (10% of the population).

The PSNP has had several positive impacts on recipients and communities at large. One year after the implementation of the programme, three-quarters of beneficiary households reported consuming more or better quality food than the previous year, and 90% of these households attributed the improvements to the PSNP. The predictability of the cash transfers also allowed recipient families to smooth consumption and avoid asset

depletion: three in five recipients avoided having to sell assets in 2005, 90% of whom credit this to the PSNP. Households also reported increasing their use of healthcare and education services as a result of the programme and acquiring new skills thanks to the PSNP's public works component.

At the community level, the locally chosen public works projects built water and soil conservation infrastructures, which were shown to make farmland more productive, especially in areas affected by climate change. The PSNP has also been shown to increase demand for goods sold in local markets, thereby contributing to the recovery of local economies. Finally, the programme links to and enhances the performance of Ethiopia's other food security programmes. For example, while these food security programmes only had a marginal impact on agricultural productivity when implemented on their own, when combined with the PSNP, they led to a 38% increase in maize yields.

Although it also seeks to address hunger and vulnerability, the Social Cash Transfer Scheme (SCTS), in Malawi, differs significantly from the PSNP in its design. This unconditional cash transfer run by the Malawi government effectively targets households with children that are ultra-poor and labour constrained – criteria that allow it to reach HIV-affected households (70% of recipients) without explicitly singling them out. As of December 2008, the SCTS covered 18,180 households in seven districts and by 2012, it is set to reach 300,000 households (roughly one million children) in Malawi's 28 districts.

An evaluation conducted in 2008 demonstrates positive impacts of the SCTS on households' food security: 44% of programme households reported having three meals on the day prior to the survey, relative to only 8% of comparison households. Among children, the programme was found to increase healthcare use and school enrolment and attendance. Additionally, recipients were able to increase the amount of food reserves for future use and to purchase fertilisers and farm labour, which stimulated agricultural production and decreased food insecurity. At the community level, recipients report that the transfers lead to increased purchases in local markets as well as to indirect transfers of wealth to non-recipient households through hired labour, loans and gifts.

In addition to these case studies, there is evidence that social protection is also permeating dialogues on what constitutes effective humanitarian aid. In response to the 2011 food crisis in the Horn of Africa, Somalia and its supporting donors have looked to an emergency cash transfer (not food aid alone) as an instrument to mitigate the impact of the crisis on about 3.7 million Somalis, 3.2 million of which are in need of life-saving assistance. Since August 2011, UNICEF has been implementing the Livelihood Intervention for Emergency, an

unconditional cash transfer set to scale-up to the estimated 50,000 households in crisis by October 2011.

Given the delicate context in which it is operating, the programme explicitly addresses a number of risks through its design: it establishes relationships with producers in order to contain inflationary pressures; it uses local cash distributors (private actors experienced in the delivery of remittances) to avoid corruption and security issues; and it makes public commitments to providing transfers for six months in order to avoid out-migration from affected areas.

As illustrated in our examples, a number of successful experiences in implementing social protection in sub-Saharan Africa have demonstrated substantial impacts on food

consumption, nutrition, and in supporting agricultural production. Although social protection programmes in the region have experienced a number of challenges, particularly related to implementation and administrative capacity, UNICEF and other international actors continue to provide technical assistance to countries as they improve programme design, testing, and implementation. Moreover, as governments continue to both develop new models and adapt existing ones to their national contexts and needs, regional learning is being used to improve the practice and

impact of social protection in the region. ■

This article presents the views of the authors. The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily represent those of UNICEF or the United Nations.

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An evaluation conducted in 2008 demonstrates positive impacts of the SCTS

The big question

Social protection: Dependency or freedom?



Tom Arnold is the CEO of Concern Worldwide

Concern Worldwide aims to work with the poorest, most vulnerable people in 25 of the world's poorest countries.

Many of these people struggle to make ends meet or provide enough food for their families and are subject to repeated shocks caused by hazards such as drought, floods and human conflict.

The international humanitarian community is increasingly switching away from food aid to predictable, time-limited cash transfers to support poor households during these times of crisis. Since Concern's first cash transfer in Malawi in 2006, this approach has proven effective for thousands in contexts ranging from food insecurity in Somalia, Kenya and Niger, to supporting basic needs and recovery following the earthquake in Haiti and floods in Pakistan, to responding to displacement from post-election violence in Kenya, and recently to assisting households displaced by conflict in DRC.

Evaluations make it clear that households overwhelmingly prefer this to traditional 'handouts' from aid agencies. Cash provides people with choice, giving them power to determine and prioritise their own needs. It gives people their dignity. Rather than create dependency, the evidence is that poor households use money wisely. Cash transfers allow households to purchase food for their families, whilst keeping up with school payments, purchasing soap, medicines and essential household goods and even investing in small enterprises.

These transfers directly address insecurity by preventing households falling further into poverty and widening the gap between rich and poor. When regular and predictable, they have potential to act not just as a safety net, but as an essential tool for reducing poverty and inequality. For this reason Concern supports the delivery of national, inclusive, permanent social protection systems. Social protection is not the silver bullet for poverty reduction, but is a vital ingredient in the policy mix for pro-poor development.



Robin Garrett is the CEO, The Tourism Partnership of Niagara, in Niagara Falls, Canada. Ms. Garrett also serves as the Chair of the Board of Food Banks Canada, the national organization that represents the food banking community in Canada

In Canada, it has long been recognised that targeted cash transfers are an acceptable method of acknowledging the contribution of certain groups of citizens to the broader wellbeing of the nation. Such transfers include our relatively generous public pension system (which has played a major role in reducing poverty among seniors from 30% in 1977 to 5.2% in 2009), and our progressive system of cash payments to families with children.

These examples exist on one end of the social protection continuum in Canada. On the other are programmes for working-age adults considered employable but who are not, for various reasons, able to make ends meet without government assistance.

Unlike pensions and child benefits, for which eligibility criteria are relatively simple and straightforward, initiatives for poor working-age adults are governed by literally thousands of rules that are impossible to fully understand, even by those who work by and enforce them. These programmes are also characterised by below-poverty level 'welfare' benefits and systemic under-resourcing of administrative capacity.

The continuum of social protection in Canada is, in other words, governed by the age-old yet still relevant deserving/undeserving poor dichotomy. It demonstrates clearly that social protection can have positive or negative effects depending on the approach taken.

In the case of children and seniors, we invest in well-being and take pride in the results. We have not taken this approach in the case of poor working-age adults – a failure of public policy that has resulted in persistent poverty and growing inequality.



Duncan Green is Head of Research at Oxfam. His From Poverty to Power blog on development is on www.oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/

I accept that in Europe and America concerns over welfare dependency are genuine (though often exaggerated, I suspect), but my experience is that they are largely irrelevant in the poorest countries.

It is hard for someone living in the rich world to grasp the level of risk and anxiety that characterises the lives of poor women and men. Sickness, injury, robbery, a major expense like a marriage or funeral; any of these can tip families or individuals into a downward spiral in which they are forced to sell vital assets to get through the emergency, thus sacrificing their future welfare. In such circumstances, social protection can play a vital role, cushioning vulnerable people against the vagaries of life and helping them to survive without unduly harming their futures.

Many such mechanisms are informal – networks of family and friends or the community, burial societies and savings groups, churches and mosques. But governments also have a vital role, putting in place the kinds of cash transfer schemes that have sharply reduced hunger and poverty in Brazil (and have been copied in New York) or the other 'automatic stabilisers' (like unemployment insurance) that kick in when disaster strikes. As we face a future increasingly characterised by volatility and shocks, from erratic weather patterns to more frequent and deeper financial crises, social protection will play an increasing role in development.

The big question



Christian Guy is the Director of Policy at the Centre for Social Justice. Britain's welfare system was established with the best of intentions;

as a safety net for those who fall on hard times and the first rung on the ladder of social progress.

Today's reality, however, is very different. Far from acting as society's springboard, the British welfare system is more often a poverty trap for people. Compounding its failure, successive Governments have ducked difficult reform, assuming they could tweak their way out of trouble.

Its central problem, exacerbated by ballooning investment year on year, is an inherent disincentive to work. For job seekers the decision to take work, or work more, simply doesn't pay. A myriad of complicated tax traps and punitive withdrawal rates means claimants can lose up to 96 pence in every pound earned in work, meaning the logical choice is to stay on a similar income through benefits for much less effort. As well as this, it is a system which fuels family breakdown – its 'couple penalty' says families are financially better off living apart than together.

But Britain finally has a government determined to tackle these fatal anti-work, anti-family flaws. Although it will be no panacea, the new Universal Credit, developed by the CSJ, will 'make work pay' by withdrawing benefits in a fairer way, allowing people to keep more of what they earn. The couple penalty will also be reduced significantly.

Work, not welfare, is the best route out of poverty. Let us hope years of failure and anti-aspiration for the poorest are coming to an end.



Janet Poppendieck, Professor of Sociology, Hunter College and author, Sweet Charity? Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement and Free For All: Fixing School Food in America

Social protection as we know it in the U.S. falls far short of lifting people out of poverty. In fact, most forms of cash assistance limit people to incomes at or below the poverty line. The only programmes that have a substantial record of lifting individuals and families out of poverty are universal ones such as Unemployment Insurance and Old Age, Survivors, Disability and Health Insurance: social security.

Benefit levels in most of our means-tested programmes are set so low that they can be seen as enforcing poverty rather than alleviating it. The fear that they will create dependency, however, surrounds these programmes, ensuring that they are loaded with deterrent features and inadequate to the poverty prevention task to which they aspire.

The one exception is the Earned Income Tax Credit, a refundable tax credit estimated to have lifted some 5.4 million people above the nation's obsolete and extraordinarily parsimonious poverty income threshold in 2010.

Despite their failure from a poverty-elimination standpoint, means tested programmes such as SNAP (The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programme, formerly known as Food Stamps), TANF (Transitional Assistance for Needy Families) and SSI (Supplemental Security Income) do make life more bearable for poor people and contribute to the maintenance of health, family life and the capacity to work.

In the U.S., the biggest threat that I see in such forms of social protection is not that they will undermine individual work effort and invite dependency, but that they will divert society from the more fundamental tasks of ensuring that there are living wage jobs for people who need them and education to prepare people for those jobs.



Lindsay Boswell is the Chief Executive of FareShare, the national food charity

At FareShare, we fight hunger and food waste in the UK by redistributing quality surplus food from the food industry to a network of organisations that support homeless and other vulnerable people.

We work with these organisations to improve access for low-income, vulnerable individuals to good quality healthy food, support and information.

Last year, we redistributed enough food for 8.6 million meals to 700 community organisations and in the process, saved them nearly £8 million per year in food and other costs.

The problems that we are fighting are huge, the root causes of which are too big for FareShare to solve, but we are part of the solution, in that we address the symptoms of the disease.

We help alleviate food poverty by providing food to our recipient projects, thereby enhancing their services and helping them increase their capacity to better support their beneficiaries.

For many organisations, food is only one part of the service they provide. By receiving FareShare food, 81.5% are able to save funds and reinvest these into other support services for the clients, such as personal development and employability training.

Furthermore, 92% of the clients surveyed agreed that FareShare food helps them improve their health and 84% said that the food enabled them to make their money go further.

Current food price inflation, record unemployment, and spending cuts are real causes of hardship and hunger. The many organisations that FareShare works with are providing a safety net to some of the people struggling and work tirelessly to help their clients move on and rebuild their lives. We at FareShare are happy to be contributing to this.



Martin Caraher is Reader in Public Health policy at City University.

Across Europe, the charity philanthropic movement has traditionally plugged gaps in state provision. Increasingly, however, in large parts of Europe the charity philanthropic sector is delivering services previously delivered by the state. We need an urgent investigation into this relationship between the charity sector and the state.

As an academic I have a tendency to want to define and measure the problem, but this should not blind us to the necessity for action to tackle it. As Amartya Sen (2008) says: we need to 'make the world less unjust [rather] than attempting to articulate a grand theory of justice'. Therefore we need research which shows us the way forward in tackling the problem. In an attempt to begin the debate, I suggest we need to address the following issues as a matter of priority:

- Set minimum income standards necessary for healthy eating so benefits levels cannot fall below this, and families cannot be penalised.
- Relate benefit levels to culturally-defined eating habits.
- Extend free school meals and Healthy Start to those low-income families earning an income, and extend the scheme to cover holiday periods. Consider offering free school meals as a universal benefit (that is free to all).
- Examine tensions over targeting of specific groups for food security versus whole population approaches (for instance, should we campaign for universal free school meals or food benefits for all new mothers?).
- Open up a debate on whether food banks are the approach we as a society want to adopt towards food poverty or whether we should be exploring other ways of allowing families to put a hot meal on the table (such as an electronic card system to allow people to shop and source from conventional sources such as supermarkets or farmers markets).
- Standardise the foods delivered by food banks along healthy eating lines. If they are to be the main route for food welfare then the state should regulate and fund them accordingly. This would fit with the 'Big Society' approach.
- Locate the right to food within a human rights approach or citizenship approach and not a consumer one.
- Kick-start a conversation about the 'inhumanity' of food poverty and a move beyond tabloid approaches which brand food poverty as a feckless choice of those on benefits.

Analysis on a plate

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Food prices Back on the UK social policy agenda



A decade ago, writes **DONALD HIRSCH**, the declining relative price of food was helping to drive rising living standards for people in Britain. Today, the situation is reversed.

Long-term pressures on world commodity prices are making some of the physical essentials of life, notably food and energy, more expensive to UK households. At present, stagnant cash incomes mean that such inflation makes people worse off across the board. But over the longer term, the distributional effect could be great, with people on the lowest incomes hit hardest.

The facts about food prices are stark. They rose just 20% over the whole of the 1990s, a period when prices generally rose 35% and median incomes rose around 60% in cash terms. This meant that the average proportion of a family income represented by food fell by a quarter.

Since 2000, in contrast, food prices have risen by 43%, compared to a 28% rise in the Consumer Prices Index. In the first part of that period, incomes were also rising, but since about 2005 they have stagnated and then fallen in real terms, while the rise in food prices has accelerated. So we are now in a situation where food is taking up an ever-growing share of household income, rather than an ever-diminishing share.

This phenomenon particularly hits low income families, partly because they have less leeway to meet the shortfall but also because they spend a higher than average percentage of income on food.

The return of relatively high inflation in the UK has been particularly important for social policy because it is very unevenly distributed across commodity categories, with significant distributional consequences for groups with different patterns of consumption. For example, in the past three years, people with mortgages have had large falls

in their housing costs, due to lower interest rates, which have helped compensate for rising prices elsewhere (www.minimumincomestandard.org).

On the other hand, people who do not own their homes, who are on low incomes which require them to spend a relatively high proportion of their resources on an adequate diet, and who live in poorly heated homes can face very high personal inflation rates. It is true that petrol prices have imposed higher costs on better-off families who are more likely to use cars, but a long-term and continuing increase in the cost of public transport imposes similar increases in travel costs for worse-off families.

Putting all these factors together, I have constructed an alternative inflation index for people whose incomes are close to or below the minimum required for an acceptable standard of living – typically households in the lowest third of the income distribution. This is based on the cost of a basket of goods and services identified by research at Loughborough University on A Minimum Income Standard for the United Kingdom, using detailed deliberations by the general public to construct minimum acceptable household budgets for families of different types.

Strikingly, this index has risen by 43% over the past ten years, compared to a rise of 35% in the Retail Prices Index (RPI) and 27% in the Consumer Prices Index (CPI). Part of this divergence is due to the rising cost of items such as public transport, council tax and water rates that have been getting relatively pricier over many years. In the past three years, however, rising food prices have accounted for the greater part of the increasing relative cost of a basic household basket.

Some people (especially politicians trying to avoid addressing the problem) argue against putting too much weight to these differential inflation rates, since as we have seen, the relative movement in items such as food can be in different directions at different times. There are however three important reasons to take seriously the impact of rising food prices on the well-being of the worst-off groups in our society.

The first is that it is part of an underlying trend that could tilt the pain of relative economic decline towards the worst-off groups in the UK. Rapid growth in emerging economies initially had great advantages for Western consumers, with spectacular falls in the price of many manufactured goods. Yet as these countries both compete as producers and put more pressure on demand for the world's natural resources, the purchasing power of a Western wage in terms of imported food and energy is likely to decline.

This turnaround can presently be seen most clearly in the price of clothing, which is now rising (mainly because of cotton prices; partly through higher labour costs) after two decades of becoming ever cheaper. The long-term pressure on food prices, driven by world demand, is closely tied up with the pressure on energy prices, since much of the cost of producing and transporting food is energy-related.

While much is made by the middle classes of rising petrol prices, the overall burden of increased commodity costs falls on the worse off, whose shopping basket is much more tilted towards physical consumption rather than buying services.

A second factor is that people on low incomes face the prospect of a much longer period of absolute falls in their incomes than the better off. As and when growth returns, those in work will be the first to benefit, while those heavily dependent on benefits (including low-paid workers on tax credits) will have incomes largely tied to the Consumer Prices Index.

As we have seen, this index has tended to under-represent the real inflation rate in the minimum cost of living, and is likely to continue to do so in the future. Elsewhere, I have estimated that this could lead to a decline in the real living standards of someone depending on benefits of the order of at least 10% in the next decade, following a similar decline in the past decade. This represents a significant deepening in absolute terms of the type of poverty that people in the next generation will have to face compared to the last.

Thirdly, this matters because the resulting pressure relates to the ability of the worst-off people in our country to afford the most basic necessities of life. We must not exaggerate here. Previous falls in the price of food means that the cost of

an adequate diet remains a much smaller proportion of even a low income in the UK than in the poorer countries of the world, and malnutrition thankfully remains a rare occurrence here. However, as shown by the recent proliferation of food banks, a cut in the poorest families' already highly constrained resources has created severe tensions. For many families, the sacrifice will be eating a balanced, healthy diet, with large potential consequences for health.

Policy responses to these issues are far from easy. UK governments do not try to influence the overall price of food or other products, and it would not seem appropriate for them to do so. However, a clear acknowledgement of the impact of inflation on the well-being of people on low incomes could lead to three types of response.

The first and most important is to consider the actual cost of living for those on low incomes when seeking to preserve their living standards. The Consumer Prices Index is an inaccurate measure of these costs, so the linking of benefits and tax credits to this index is an inadequate form of social protection in the long term. Even if it is used as a baseline, the damaging additional effects of rapid rises in the price of food and other commodities consumed disproportionately by poorer families should prompt consideration of supplementary increases.

Second, there are ways in which governments can try to curb at least some of the increase in prices of basic goods. For example, the Competition Commission has sought to ensure that supermarkets do not collude in fixing prices, and the Government has put pressure on gas and electricity suppliers to contain their price rise. While this will not stem the rising tide of a long-term increase in commodity prices, it can help contain its impact.

Finally, the government can make efforts to enable people to afford a healthy diet even as food prices rise. Here again there is a parallel with domestic fuel, where the main response to "fuel poverty" has been to help people reduce the cost of heating their homes, for example through insulation. Better education and information on how to afford a healthy diet could be combined with working with producers to improve price signals. One parent in our research admitted guiltily to buying 40 frozen sausages for 89p to feed her children when the money ran out. A long term strategy to ensure that healthy eating makes sense, even on a limited income, would help reduce the damage that high food prices will have to the well-being of the poorest people in Britain. ■

The government can make efforts to enable people to afford a healthy diet

Donald Hirsch is Head of Income Studies at the Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University

Canadian food banks

Obscuring the reality of hunger and poverty



“It’s time to close Canada’s food banks”, wrote **ELAINE POWER** in Canada’s national newspaper, The Globe and Mail, on 25 July 2011¹. The 700-word article was like a bombshell, helping to clear a space to start a different national conversation about food banks, one that includes considerations of their role, effects, unintended consequences, and legitimacy.

Deliberately provocative, this think-piece argued that food banks – which many Canadians believe are taking care of hunger – have inadvertently become a smokescreen, hiding the reality of hunger in Canada and preventing us from seeing and understanding the poverty that creates hunger in the first place.

The impression that food banks ‘solve’ hunger is fostered by their advertising campaigns, which suggest that hunger could disappear if only everyone would donate more food. This impression is supported by the most common reaction to the Globe and Mail column, which can be summarised as “what will hungry people do without food banks?” The strength of emotion accompanying this reaction suggests the extent to which many have accepted the notion that food banks keep Canadians from going hungry.

The reality is that the majority of hungry Canadians never even get to a food bank. Canada has carried out only one national survey asking people who were

objectively classified as ‘food insecure’ about the strategies they used to cope with their hunger. Only 23% included food banks². Other smaller studies have also found that most of Canada’s hungry do not use food banks.

This fits with research that shows people find the experience of using a food bank stigmatising, humiliating and degrading, no matter how kind the food bank staff and volunteers are. Thus it is not surprising that approximately 40% of food bank clients are children. Parents will do anything to keep their kids from going hungry, but many adults would rather go hungry than submit to the indignity of going to a food bank. Or they decide to leave the food for the children and others who, they tell themselves, ‘really’ need it.

Even worse, receiving a food bank hamper does not change one’s objectively measured food security status. In other words, food banks do not create food security for their clients. That’s because food banks run on donations and are only able to provide what is

donated, sometimes supplemented with purchased food. Most food banks in Canada have restrictions on how often households can use the food bank (usually once a month) and how much food is provided (usually enough for 3-5 days). The 2010 Hunger Report³, an annual report issued by the national association of food banks, Food Banks Canada, reports that 35% of food banks across the country ran out of food and 50% cut back on quantities because of rising demand – a 28% increase from 2008 to 2010 – and inadequate supply.

In other words, the problem is too big for community-based, largely volunteer-run, donation-driven organisations to fix.

Food banks were unknown in Canada before 1981, when the first opened in Alberta during a deep recession. During the 1980s, as neo-liberal political and economic policies took hold and governments began chipping away at the social safety net, food banks sprang up all over the country. The kind-hearted founders of food banks, who were horrified to think anyone would



By Canadian Food Bank.

go hungry in such a wealthy country, initially believed that their services would be temporary and disappear once the economy revived. They debated when and how food banks would close.

Now there are over 800 food banks in every province and territory, serving almost 900,000 people a month (in 2010). Food banks started institutionalising in the 1990s, as they bought property and equipment and hired staff. Along with providing food assistance, some food banks have now expanded to include other food services, such as community kitchens and community gardens, and other types of social services, including homeless shelters and employment counselling. They have become an integral component of our social safety net.

It is not surprising that some of the large food banks felt attacked by the publication of my opinion piece. Their most common response was that they are at the vanguard of anti-poverty activism, often consulted by government about poverty-related issues, conducting

research, writing reports, and raising the public profile of poverty and the inadequacy of income supports. They mounted a case for the ways in which they have become essential in addressing poverty.

And while it is true that Food Banks Canada, provincial food bank associations, and large food banks across the country are politically active, they walk a fine line. First, the federal government mandates that to keep its charitable status, a charity can devote no more than 10% of its activities to political activities. When they first started, food banks scrupulously avoided taking donations from any level of government, so there would be no conflict of interest with their anti-poverty advocacy and so governments could not point to their support of food banks as their response to poverty.

However, the Food Banks Canada 2011 Annual Report⁴ lists the federal government’s ministry of agriculture, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, as a key financial partner, and shows that

government donations made up 4% of their fundraising in 2010, the third most important source of revenue, tied with individual donations.

More importantly, food banks must continually woo their major sponsors, corporate donors, and carefully avoid anything that would alienate them. In 2010, Food Banks Canada, which distributes food and money to its members across the country, received over 6,400,000 kilograms of food from corporate sponsorships and programmes. Corporate financial donations comprised 79% of their total revenues of \$3,600,000⁴. This suggests that they would be very careful not to advocate for policy changes that would adversely impact corporate Canada.

On the one hand, in its HungerCount Reports, Food Banks Canada issues strongly worded recommendations to strengthen the Canadian social safety net, including the implementation of a federal poverty reduction strategy, a federal housing strategy, and improving the fairness of the Employment

Insurance system, among others. Food Banks Canada has also published commendable research and positions on other social policy issues, such as national employment strategies and seniors' poverty, as well as thoughtful responses to federal government budgets. On the other hand, one must look hard to find these resources on its website. With its slick graphic design, and beautiful photos of food with strategic product placement, the overwhelming first impression that the Food Banks Canada website gives is that food donations and corporate partnerships – not poverty reduction – are the answer to hunger. This 'double-edged' position means that food banks can be chameleons, changing their message as needed. One wonders when push comes to shove, where they would stand. Or maybe not...

Advertising for food banks and food drives promotes "feeling good" by the simple act of donating food. Their literature, websites and videos feature happy volunteers collecting, transporting and sorting food, all for the cause of 'helping hunger disappear.' Who wouldn't want to feed a hungry person, especially a child? What could be more emotionally satisfying? I wonder if there is a person in the country who has not contributed to a food bank or a food drive at some point in his or her lifetime. Most Canadian children are now introduced to the idea of charity through a food drive at their school or church, and many businesses use food drive competitions to build team spirit among their workers.

This weekend, as I write, fans attending a Canadian Football League game are encouraged to support a food bank by bringing a non-perishable food item to donate. Such appeals have become ubiquitous. They help perpetuate the idea that ending hunger is easy – we just need more people to drop more non-perishable food items into the food bank collection bins – and we can all feel good by doing our part, through the simple act



By Bad Alley

of donating a tin of soup or tuna, a box of cereal or pasta, a jar of peanut butter or baby food. And now with the advent of mobile phone philanthropy, one need not even make a physical effort: just text HUNGER to 30333 to make a \$5 donation to Food Banks Canada. What could be simpler?

Who wouldn't want to feed a hungry person, especially a child?

As income inequality grows in this country, food banks have become yet another wedge in the split between 'us' and 'them'. As food bank donors, we create an 'Other' who is not us, but makes us feel good about ourselves, rather than recognising our common humanity and working towards social justice. For recipients, food bank food is one more reminder in their lives of poverty that they are 'lesser' citizens who do not have the same choices and options that others do. We might think of choice as a luxury that the poor can't afford and don't need. But in our consumer society, it is fundamental to human dignity.

Food banks can never solve the problem of hunger; they are a band-aid on a gaping wound. They function to let government off the hook from their obligation to ensure that all Canadians have a standard of living adequate for health and well-being. Everyone can support the simple idea of giving food to those who are hungry. Solving the problem of poverty requires political leadership and a commitment to wrestle with diverse ideas about causes and solutions. Despite their good intentions, food banks stand in the way of a clear understanding of poverty and hunger in Canada, and we will never get to a democratic discussion about solutions – real solutions – until we can see through the smokescreen that food banks have inadvertently created. ■

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Welfare, sanctions and debt

A damaging diet



PAUL NICOLSON

assesses the likely impact of the UK's Welfare Reform Bill, which proposes to introduce a new benefit (to be known as universal credit), which will replace existing in- and out-of-work benefits.

The Welfare Reform Bill's weakness is its lack of any consideration of the minimum incomes needed for healthy living. It also has an almost unlimited capacity for reducing already inadequate welfare incomes with new laws which create sanctions and penalties (euphemisms for fines), and make it easier to enforce overpayments against claimants even if they are blameless and the overpayment is the result of official error. Unmanageable debt is the result for many claimants.

The headline figures used to publicise reductions in poverty are before housing costs (that is, rent or mortgage) have been deducted. But it is the income after deduction of housing costs which is the best measure of poverty; when that measure is used we see that reductions are lower by several hundred thousand.

This income has to pay for the rising prices of food, fuel, clothes, transport and increasing debts, the arrears when the capped housing benefit does not pay all the rent and the capped council tax benefit falls short of the tax; and the extortionate interest of payday and door-step lenders.

A rise of over 1.4 million to nearly 12 million people in absolute poverty after housing costs is projected in the UK in the five years up to 2013 by the IFS, and that does not count the plight of pensioners.

The Centre for Research in Social Policy has shown that the weekly cost of a healthy diet, currently £46.31 a week, will soon overtake the £53.45 a week adult unemployment benefit



By Howard Russell

for the under 25s if there is not a change of policy. The move to uprate welfare using the Consumer Prices Index rather than the faster rising Retail Prices Index is likely to cut £1 a week from every £50 paid out in welfare every year, £2 the second year and so-on.

This careless reduction of already inadequate incomes is very serious for women of child bearing age and their offspring.

The risks of low birthweight for the babies of mothers who cannot buy a healthy diet before they conceive and while they are pregnant have been demonstrated by the Institute of Brain Chemistry and Human Nutrition. They report; "Low birthweight associated with foetal growth restriction is the strongest predictor of poor learning ability, school performance, behavioural disorders and crime."

The rate of low birthweight per 1000 live births in Turkey was 11% in 2008, the worst in the OECD. Three wards in riot torn Haringey experienced 12.5%, 9.4% and 11.62% according to NHS records. In London only one ward had a worse crime record than those three Haringey wards. So the 760,000 welfare claimants in the UK who suffered a sanction for not attending an employment related interview at a jobcentre in 2010-11, up 270,000 from 2009-10, either went short of food or had to beg, borrow or steal to survive.

Baroness Hollins and Lord Ramsbotham have tabled amendments to the Welfare Reform Bill which are designed to relieve the pressure of damaging debt on welfare claimants.

One amendment deals with the enforcement of overpayments against claimants which are entirely the fault of the officials of job centres and local authorities. It's currently illegal to penalise claimants for the faults of the authorities, but that sensible bar has been removed by the House of Commons in the Bill. Peers will try to retain it.

Another amendment endeavours to ensure that officials will make themselves formally aware of the facts and circumstances of claimants, including their health, before they decide to reduce their poverty incomes by imposing sanctions and penalties, and therefore creating inevitable debts. They are supported by the Royal College of Psychiatrists, Mind and 20 other NGOs.

The relationship between debt and mental illness has been noted by the Government Office for Science and other researches which have shown that 50% of people in debt have a mental health problem and 25% of people with a diagnosed mental illness are in debt.

Lord Kirkwood's amendment is the result of a government amendment at the report stage of the Bill in the House of Commons. It created a level of earnings below which earnings must not be reduced when overpayments are being enforced

against welfare claimants. It follows the practice in Scotland where there is a protected minimum balance in bank accounts when debts are being enforced and similar legislation in several European countries. In other words – debts are never enforced to the point where debtors cannot buy food.

The problem with the government amendment to the Bill is that it only covers earnings and overpayments, so the protected amount would soon be swallowed up by rent or council tax arrears. The Kirkwood amendment covers all incomes and the unemployed.

Underlying all this is a monumental injustice. The deregulation of lending in the 1980s resulted in a flood of money pouring into a housing market in short supply forcing up prices and rents. Billions of taxpayers' money was paid out to the profit of landlords in housing benefit every year, reaching £22 billion in 2010-11. The landlords have not been hit by the measures to reduce the deficit; but the poorest citizens are being hit very hard by an £18 billion reduction in their already inadequate welfare incomes, so damaging their health and ability to find work and keep it.

The Rev Paul Nicolson is Chair of the Zacchaeus 2000 Trust which provides practical, legal and emotional support to welfare claimants in debt to the state due to the complexities and errors of the welfare system.

Social protection A human rights perspective

GEORGE KENT
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The human right to adequate food contains various levels of obligation: respect, protect, and fulfill. Fulfill comprises facilitation (helping people help themselves), and provision (directly giving people what they need).

The obligation to fulfill by the government's directly providing what is needed is a kind of residual category, becoming operational when respect, protect, and facilitate prove inadequate. The government is the provider of last resort, but only for certain categories of people in certain kinds of extreme conditions. The government does not have the obligation to fulfill the needs of those who are healthy and have reasonable access to employment or to productive

resources (for example land or fishing opportunities) and thus should be expected to provide for themselves. Governments must do some things to prevent food inadequacies; they don't have to do everything.

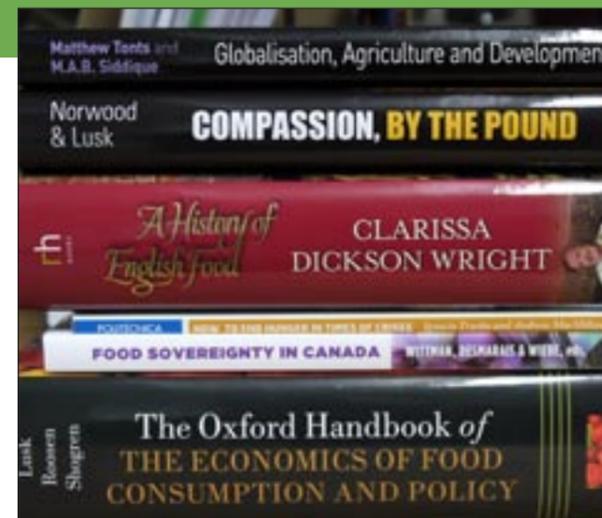
Thus, the first objective of agencies wishing to help the hungry should be to help them find decent opportunities to provide for themselves, by helping them find ways to produce their own food, or to find decent work that allows them to purchase food and other requirements of an adequate livelihood. This corresponds to "facilitate". There is also an obligation to provide food directly to people who cannot provide for themselves through no fault of their own.

Programmes that promise free food to people who can prove they are poor only too often encourage people to

stay poor. Assistance programmes should not reward poverty; they should reward the climb out of poverty, and emphasise facilitation (an empowering approach). Where there is a need to provide directly, to whatever extent feasible, this too should be done in ways that are empowering. Measures such as putting time limits on direct assistance can motivate people to find ways to climb out of poverty.

So long as hunger and poverty exist, social protection programmes are absolutely necessary. We should distinguish carefully between types of programmes, and favour those that are empowering.

George Kent is Professor of Political Science at the University of Hawaii.



The Food Junctions cookbook

Marina Chang and Lukas Meusberger eds. | 2011 | University College London | ISBN 978-0-9570354-0-9
An eclectic collection of essays from academics and community activists working towards 'living recipes for social innovation'. From the history of Coronation Chicken (and a recipe!) to an exploration of certification, alongside a musical score, this book can be a snack to dip into or savoured over a long lunch. EB

Globalisation, Agriculture and Development

Matthew Tonts and M.A.B. Siddique Eds. | 2011 | Edward Elgar | ISBN 978-1-84720-818-7
A wide ranging exposition of the interconnections between farming and development within and between Asia-Pacific nations. Unafraid to tackle complex issues, a wide range of authors assess how the global challenges of climate change, economic uncertainty and social change impact development and agriculture across the region. EB

Compassion, by the pound: The economics of farm animal welfare

F. Bailey Norwood and Jayson L. Lusk. | 2011 | Oxford University Press | ISBN 978-0199551163
An attempt to shine an objective light on animal welfare issues through economics, this book is wide ranging and tackles some of the most pressing problems in the food system. Fairly academic and full of scholarly references, this is more for the bookcase of researchers and economists, than for interested members of the public who want to find out what to eat. EB

How to end hunger in times of crises

Ignacio Trueba and Andrew MacMillan | 2011 | UPM Press | ISBN 978-84-939196-1-0
The first ever imprint out of the UPM Press stable, this slender book nevertheless packs the punches. A razor sharp investigation into global hunger, it demands concrete and practical action underpinned by a vision of a fairer, sustainable food system. Written in accessible and engaging language, the book carries a real sense of urgency for change. There is an expanded e-book version available at www.endofhunger2025.com. EB

Food sovereignty in Canada

H. Wittman, A. Aurélie Desmarais and N. Wiebe Eds. | 2011 | Fernwood Publishing | ISBN 978-1-55266-443-8
A wide-ranging examination of Canada's incipient food sovereignty movement, this book resonates with domestic priorities, including the role of social justice in food policy, farmer participation in policy making, strengthening the position of women in agriculture, and environmental stewardship. Important distinctions also emerge such as Canada's struggle with its heritage as 'breadbasket of the world'. SR

CAFO: The tragedy of industrial animal factories

Daniel Imhoff Ed. | 2011 | Earth Aware | ISBN 978-160109-058-4
A coffee-table style book providing a painful glimpse into the reality of concentrated animal feeding operations, CAFO contains over 400 shocking images and 30 essays which encourage the reader to ensure that their meat is sourced from responsible producers who do not subscribe to this particularly cruel method of industrial farming. LU

The Oxford handbook of the economics of food consumption and policy

J.L. Lusk, J. Roosen and J.F. Shogren Eds. | 2011 | Oxford University Press | ISBN 978-0-19956944-1
As well as providing the erudition and detailed economic modelling that one would anticipate, this comprehensive collection also brings home the relevance of food economics for some of today's pressing policy debates such as behavioural economics, food safety and nutritional labelling. There's even some welcome, if brief, consideration of the economic dimension of food ethics. SR

A history of English food

Clarissa Dickson Wright | 2011 | Random House | ISBN 978-1-905-21185-2
Clarissa Dickson Wright is a knowledgeable and entertaining food writer. Here she traces the evolutionary and historical journey of English food, starting the 1100s and finishing with English food as we know it today. A fascinating account of the origins of our favourite foods, from roast beef to pizza. EB

Forthcoming events

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| 8th - 9th Dec '11 | 19th Annual Conference - Fertilisers for Food and Nutrition Security International Fertiliser Society http://www.fertilizer-society.org/Content/Events.asp Cambridge, UK |
| 9th - 10th Dec '11 | Food Studies Conference 2011 Food Studies http://food-studies.com/conference-2011 Las Vegas, USA |
| 14th - 15th Dec '11 | Food Security 2011: Transforming the Food Production System Chatham House http://www.chathamhouse.org/food2011?campaign=confalerts London, UK |
| 17th - 19th Dec '11 | Food Security and Environmental Sustainability CIMMYT http://www.agri.iitkgp.ernet.in/fses2009/index.html Kharagpur, India |
| 19th Dec '11 | Milk and Dairy Products in Health and Disease British Society of Animal Science http://www.bsas.org.uk/Meetings_&_Workshops/Other_Conferences/ Reading, UK |
| 18th - 19th Jan '12 | Organic Producers' Conference Organic Farmers and Growers http://www.organicfarmers.org.uk/news/events/event_detail.php?id=276 Birmingham, UK |
| 8th Feb '12 | Feeding the World: The 9 Billion People Question Economist Conferences http://cemea.economistconferences.com/event/feeding-world Geneva, Switzerland |
| Spring 2012 | Future Leaders in the Biotech Industry BioCentury http://www.biocentury.com/Conferences New York, USA |
| 2nd Mar '12 | Annual Conference 2012 Soil Association http://www.soilassociation.org/Conferences/2012conference/tabid/1678/Default.aspx London, UK |
| 26th - 29th Mar '12 | Planet Under Pressure 2012 The Royal Society; Natural Environment Research Council; Living With Environmental Change http://www.planetunderpressure2012.net/index.asp London, UK |
| 24th - 25th Apr '12 | Annual Conference; Healthy Food from Healthy Animals British Society of Animal Science http://www.bsas.org.uk/Meetings_&_Workshops Nottingham, UK |
| 27th - 30th April '12 | World Nutrition Rio 2012: Knowledge Policy Action World Public Health Nutrition Association http://www.worldnutritionrio2012.com/ingles/ |
| 7th - 12th May '12 | 6th World Fisheries Congress The World Council of Fisheries Societies http://www.6thwfc2012.com Edinburgh, UK |
| 30th May - 2nd Jun '12 | Climate Change and Sustainable Development 10th Congress of the European Society for Agricultural and Food www.eursafe2012.eu Tübingen, Germany |
| 27th - 31st Aug '12 | EAAP Annual Meeting European Federation of Animal Science http://www.eaap.org/Content/meetings.htm Bratislava, Slovak Republic |