

## Abstract

**The new barriers to developing a fairer society: Are Food Banks contributing to the vicious circle that is widening the poverty gaps in our cities and communities**

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### Purpose and objectives:

This paper looks at some of the unintended consequences of food banks and the potential barriers they are now creating to developing a fairer society. It will consider how food banks have become part of a vicious circle that is contributing to plugging the gaps of widening poverty within our cities and communities.

It explores some of the aggravating factors such as the impact of austerity which has led to a lower quality of life (Goodman and Field, 2018),

Narrowing the inequality gaps in our cities and communities will require implementing several of the 5P's, interwoven within key strategic partners and stakeholders plan to reverse the erosion, being fought on education, health and income (O'Donnell, Van Doorslaer and Van Ourti, 2015), antipoverty (Ravallion, 2015), food aid (Cooper, Purcell and Jackson, 2014) food aid (Sandmo, 2015) etc.

**Keywords:** Food Banks, Vicious Circle, Poverty, Sustainable Cities, and Communities

### The methodology used

A mixed-method approach was adopted, qualitative analysis was used to investigate government policy, implementation, and its key strategic partners in executing its agendas. In tandem, qualitative consideration was given to third sector agencies who were presenting evidence-based practice for the government to change their strategies in support of the most vulnerable within the communities. Where the analysis identified trends and changes over time a quantitative analysis was used. To gain a deeper insight into the secondary research material, Nvivo 12, a qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) was applied (Bazeley, P & Jackson, 2013) to carry out a thematic analysis (Caulfield, 2019) of the literature. A deductive approach was undertaken (Saunders, 2019) having already constructed some preconceived themes which the research would be investigating. A realist innovative conceptualised process approach was adapted to help understand and support the literature by way of illustration.

### Main findings

**Reconfiguring the United Nations 17 sustainability development goals to identify the 5p's areas of critical importance**

One of the strengths of the United Nations 17 sustainability development goals (UN SDG's) is its monitoring and tracking processes to measure the change in outcomes between 2015 and 2030 (Giles-Corti, Lowe and Arundel, 2019). This should include urban strategies and policies to address sustainable cities and communities to help narrow the gaps between "poverty, good urbanisation, job creation, livelihood opportunities and improved quality of life" (Rozhenkova *et al.*, 2019). All

of which are key elements that are consistently challenged by the government's austerity strategies, that only served to make the gaps larger. To achieve sustainable change, it is critical to have implemented good practice. This paper puts forward the notion that by recognising the clear interconnectivity and interrelationship between numerous SDG's (Akuraju *et al.*, 2020) such an approach can assist in achieving SDG 11 sustainable cities and communities. Invariably, it will accomplish much more effective alignment if several of the SDG's are aligned at the same time (Morton, Pencheon and Squires, 2017). To help make the SDG's more relatable in terms of their relevance and practicality, five areas of critical importance was identified, People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership also known as the (5P's) as shown in fig.1 below (Morton, Pencheon and Squires, 2017).

**Figure 1 A summary of the UN'S 17 SDG, linked to the five areas of critical importance (5P's)**

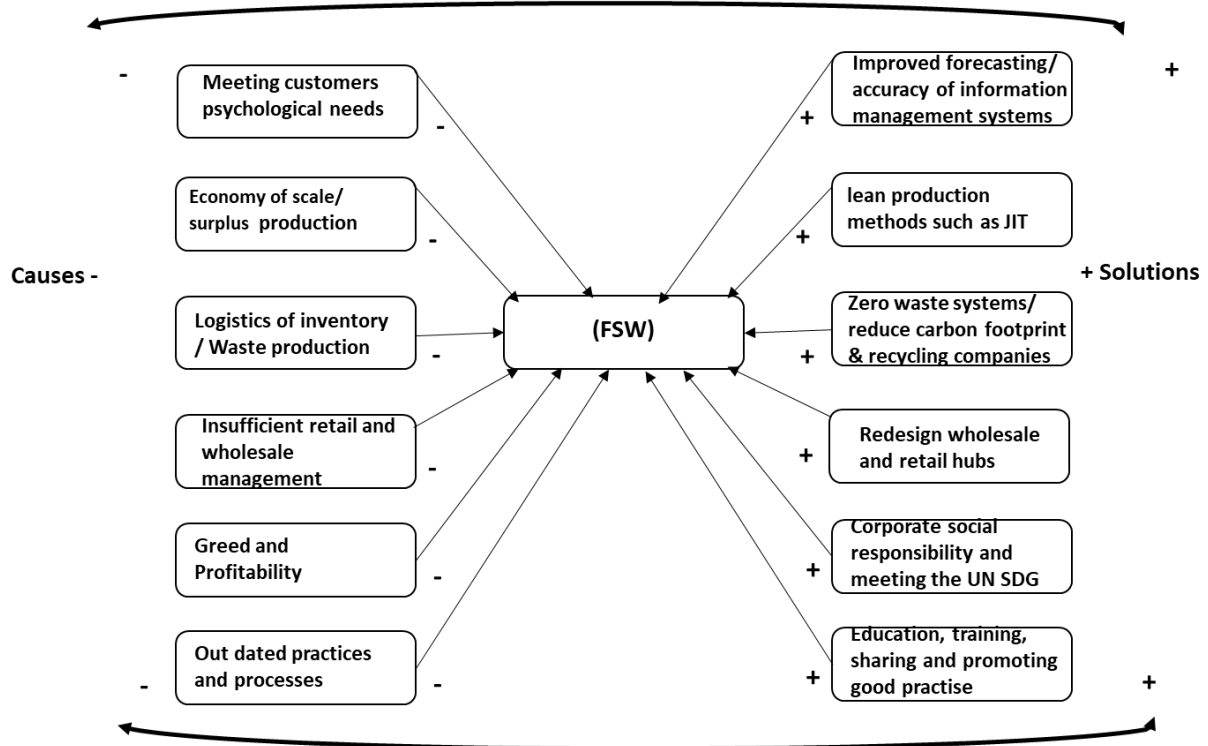


Adapted from UN's 17 SDG – The Five Areas of Critical Importance 5P's (Morton, Pencheon and Squires, 2017)

## Understanding Global Food Surplus and Food Waste

According to the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) Globally, approximately 1.3 billion metric tonnes per year is either lost or wasted which was fit for human consumption which leads to both social and environmental problems (Huang, Liu and Hsu, 2020). The World Bank 2016; Huang, Liu and Hsu, (2020) has projected the amount of food wasted to more than double the current amount by 2050. Across UK household and a number of the food manufacturing, wholesale and hospitality sectors, it was estimated that in 2018, 70% of 9.5 million tonnes a food which was wasted, was meant for human consumption (WRAP, 2020a). There is a higher proportion of food waste in developed countries which generally occurs at the retail and consumption stage. Huang, Liu and Hsu (2020) goes on to point out that to meet customers psychology needs, and in pursuit of high-quality products, manufacturers and food processing companies are removing large amounts of edible parts, therefore, food is wasted due to undesirable features such as shape, colour, appearance or expiry date. In response, some retailers have been pushing for the introduction of zero food waste strategies. This leaves approximately 660,000 tonnes which goes to animal feed in 2015 (WRAP, 2016; WRAP, 2020). Figure 2 provides an explanation of some of the possible causes and solutions to food surplus and waste.

**Figure 2 the Causes and Solutions of Food Surplus and Waste (FSW)**



Adapted from logistical challenges to address food waste in the grocery retail sector (Krasteva, Kotzab and Lienbacher, 2019)

### **The discourse of community participation and responsibility**

Carson (2008) raises some fundamental questions, around how and when did community responsibility and participation become a legitimised charitable concern. It is important to note that charitable work is nothing new as shown in the statute of Elizabeth 1, also known as the (preamble of the statute of charity users 1601) (UK Parliament, 2005). Besides, during 1812-1850 there was already a commissioner inquiring into the role of charities and what was considered as charitable contributions (The National Archives, 1812). However, the establishment of the Charity Commission was not until 1853 (The National Archives, 1853). There is also evidence to show the history of food banks dates back to 1967 when John van Hagel, started the St Mary's food bank in Arizona. However, it was not until the year 2000 that the United Kingdom (UK) saw its first food bank (Salisbury Foodbank, no date). There is a striking similarity in the origins of most food banks relate to people and food insecurity.

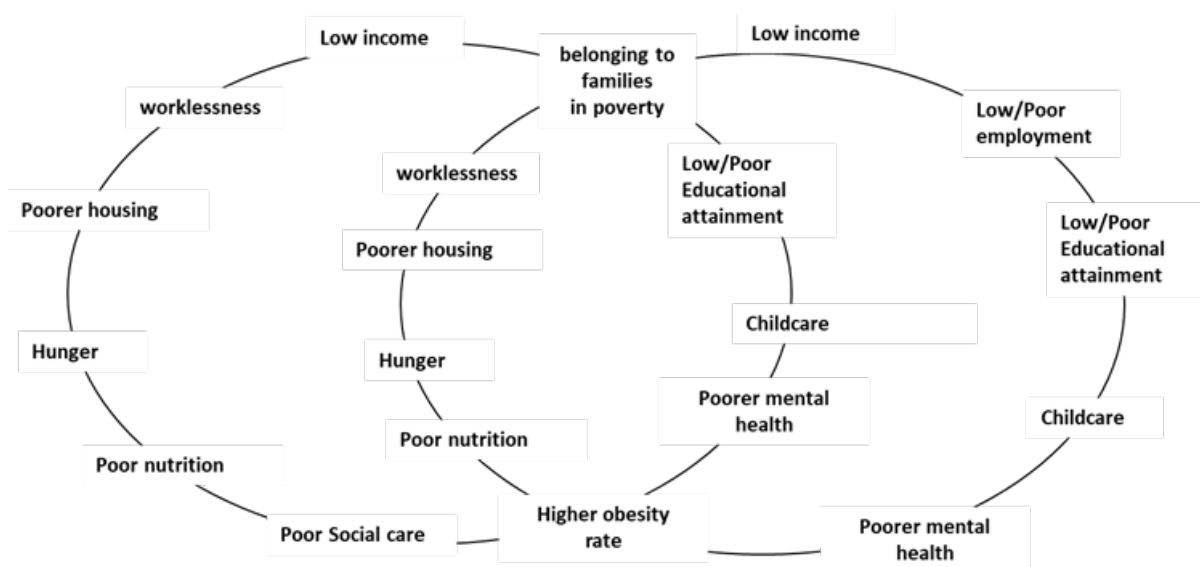
### **How is poverty measured**

Poverty is commonly measured in terms of relative poverty which is defined as income below 60% of the average income (CPAG, 2020) and (Morelli, Smeeding and Thompson, 2015) and absolute poverty is defined as an essential resource which people need to acquire a decent standard of living (O'Leary, 2020). At the turn of the Millennium, the overall poverty rate in the UK was 24% and in the year 2017/18, this rate had fallen steadily down to 22%. The number of people in poverty was 14.3 million, of which 8.3 million were of working-age adults (this was based on a calculation of 54% of their main resource available) (SMC, 2019). 48% of those in poverty have been in poverty for at least two of the last three years, categorising them as being in 'persistent poverty (SMC, 2019).

## The deserving versus undeserving poor

There are two common schools of thought when it comes to categorising the poor in need. The first is defined as victims of circumstances, therefore ‘deserving assistance’, and the latter relates to those who have made ‘poor choices’, these are considered to be less deserving (Fischer, 2018). Figure 3 illustrates a conceptual understanding of Associate Professor Fisher’s notion of the probability of people getting out of poverty. Poverty is significantly increased when these individuals are living in households or belong to families in similar situations to themselves which contributes to the perpetuating vicious cycle of poverty. Due to their limited ability to elevate each other out of poverty. Deborah Warren, 2018; Levine (2020) recognises there are two counter-arguments which are no longer about presenting facts to justify the safety net, but now focus on the ‘power of the storey’ and ‘value-based measurement’ which assess the effectiveness of the government itself and can hold the government accountable for bringing about significant change.

**Figure 3 The vicious circle of limiting odds of someone escaping poverty**



## Aggravating factors of austerity and those who are being left behind

As a result of austerity, it is possible to identify how it has impacted on four of the 5P’s, whilst in the pursuit of cutting the public expenditure and the nation’s deficit.

### People

There have been reductions to both welfare and taxes between 2010-2014. The number of people over 65 who did not receive help with essential activities, had risen by 48% in 2010, from 57,6000 to 1.2 million people in 2018, and children in relative poverty rose by 30%. By far, one of the hardest impacts has been levied at women who make up the majority of lone parents, and housing benefits claimants, they also saw changes to their benefits entitlement change dramatically (Gill, 2018).

### Prosperity

Since 2008 there have been considerable consecutive government cuts to the public spending, this is against a backdrop which has also seen GDP tracking in a downward trend from 2007 reaching its lowest point in 2009, and has never recovered up to 2016 (Gill, 2018). This has resulted in the poorest fifth of the population experiencing the greatest cuts

to their net income (Oxfam, 2013). In some cases, single parents could have lost up to a fifth of their income and disabled children and adults could have lost up to £6,500 per year (Portes, 2018).

One of the direct results of reducing Social Security provisions has been the level of increased benefit sanctions placed on people for not following the rules (Oxfam Case Study, 2013). Between 2008-2018, the number of people who were unable to get full-time work, resulting in part-time working more than doubled (Oxfam, 2013). There is also evidence that the unemployment rate for under 25 and the long term unemployed has greatly increased (Oxfam, 2013).

### **Peace**

Goodman and Field (2018) are resolute that the community has also suffered by way of cuts to crime and community safety budgets, an example of this is the 83 deaths between 2007-2017 in Greater Manchester, from accidental house fires. They robustly defend their statement, that the overall effect of austerity cuts as led to destitution and that the government's strategy had nothing to do with economics, it was about the politics of abandoning vulnerable people (Goodman and Field, 2018).

### **Partnership**

Through the withdrawal of services, it was once again, noticeable, the direct impact austerity has had on direct support for women at community levels such as voluntary sector support activities, home start, home care, children centres, and sure start (Dowler, 1997). The austerity strategy is best summarised by Daniel Finkelstein, a Conservative member of the House of Lords when he said "It wasn't driven by the desire to reduce spending on public services. It was driven by the fact that they had a vast deficit problem and the debt was going to keep growing" (Goodman and Field, 2018).

## **Food Insecurity**

A large percentage of those surveyed by the Trussell Trust<sup>1</sup> said they had experienced severe food insecurity, which is attributed to households who reduce their food intake or experience hunger for the whole day without eating (Tarasuk, Mitchell ed al. 2016; The Trussell Trust 2017). Whereas, hunger may fall under the category of severe or moderate household insecurity where a household's level of the economic and social condition is limited or uncertain access to adequate food (The Trussell Trust *et al.*, 2019). During 2016 -2018, 8-10% of the household were deemed to be in food insecure (The Trussell Trust *et al.*, 2019) the trust also found that in a family consisting of man, wife and child, it was the woman most lightly than the men to go without food to ensure their child had enough to eat.

## **Food banking and a food bank**

When we refer to the term food banking, this is normally carried out on a national or regional and in some case local level, where surplus food is collected and stored for redistribution. Organisation's that contributes or supply food banking facilities include manufacturers, farmers, fishers, retailers, and government supplies (this list is not exhaustive) (Global Foodbank Network, 2011). Notwithstanding these facts, there remains a growing discourse around charitable food banking and how in reality, there is a global surplus of food and wasted food. 700,000 tonnes of surplus food is

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<sup>1</sup> The Trussell Trust is a Non-Government Organisation and charity that works to end the need for food banks in the UK.

being redistributed, 56,000 via charitable organisations such as food banking and food banks (WRAP, 2019; WRAP, 2020). A food bank is normally a charitable resource that acquires donated food generally at a local level to be redistributed through community networks to people who seek it (Tyler, 2020). However, we are now seeing an increase in both regional and national food bank organisations where the structure and operational activity is very similar to the food banking principle.

### **The institutionalisation and corporatization of charities**

Dowler; Herdt (2019) suggest that charities are becoming institutionalised and corporatized, a theory also perpetuated by (Riches; Herdt, 2019) who sees it as nothing more than ‘rich world food poverty’ because arguably, it is these transnational charities who according to Riches who are pushing the agenda of domestic hunger as a matter for charities and by doing so it lets austerity-minded governments ignore their political, moral, and legal obligations under the law to recognise the right to food (Riches; Herdt, 2019). In 2016/17 the UK charity sector employed 865,000 people which added 17.1 billion to the economy and formal volunteering added a further 23.9 billion (Wilson, 2020). In 2017/18 a total of 167,972 charities were registered in the UK (Clark, 2020). It's important to mention that this is a general statement about charities and not necessarily about food banking and food banks.

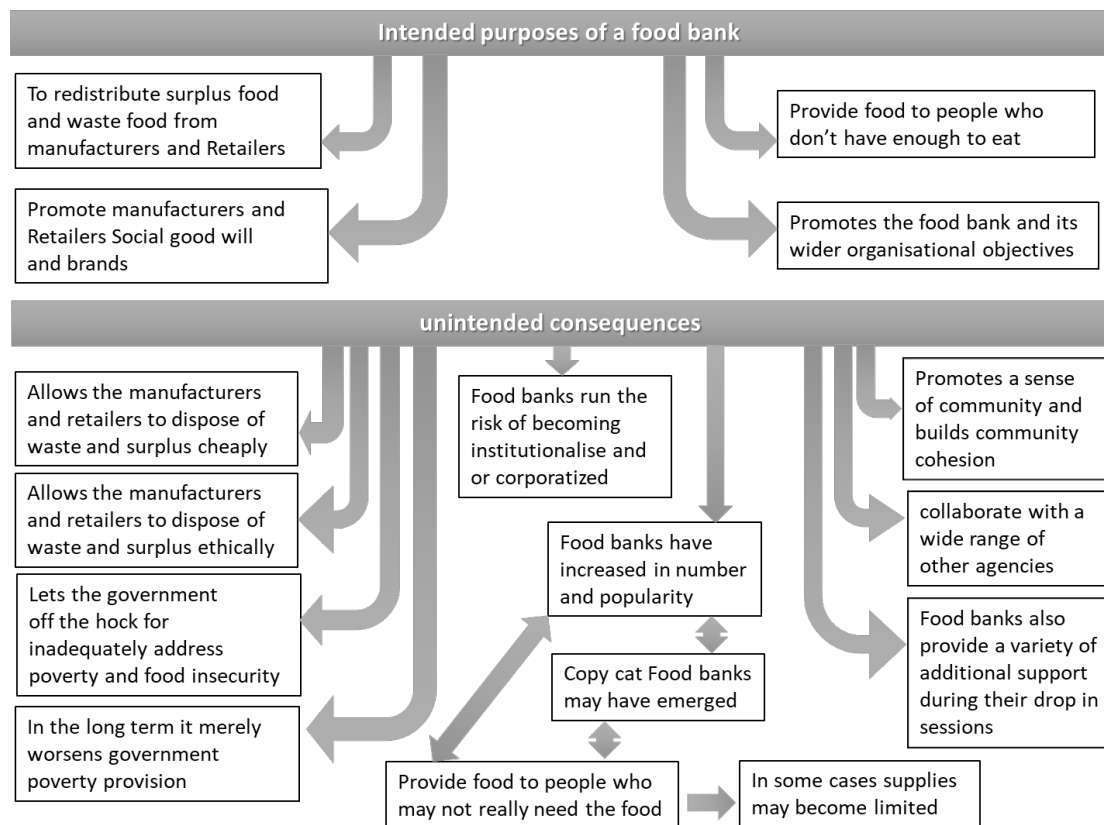
### **Promoting the cause**

From the Olive Branch Food Bank Study (Carson, 2008) the research was able to pull out some of the commonly used features used by food bank organisations to promote the cause. These include conveying a sense of desperation of food bank users where hunger is the emergency and the problem of hunger as a whole and linking this to insufficient donations to meet the need, implying donations are the solution. The research goes on to identify examples of how the community membership and responsibility debate, was articulated through implying a sense of belonging and association in both a local and or regional context. The inference drawn is a sense of membership and part of this membership requires a sense of responsibility, for food-insecure community members. In the case of decreased donations, there is commonly a link to increased hunger whereby hunger is framed as the problem that can be addressed through community donations.

### **The use of food banks**

Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 until 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2019, the number of people in crisis who received a three-day emergency supply from the Truffle Trust rose from 913,139 to 1,583,668 an increase of 173.43% (The Trussell Trust, 2019). International research suggests that people only use food banks as a last resort when all other possible options have been exhausted or they have gone into debt. (The Trussell Trust, 2017). According to a House of Commons briefing note, 43% of respondents surveyed were referred to a Trussell Trust for emergency food part because of problems with the benefits, 94% said that they were destitute, unable to buy essentials to keep warm, clean, or to feed themselves. 23% were said to be homeless and 75% had a mental issue in their household (Tyler, 2020). Between 2012 to 2013 over 30% of all independent foodbanks opened, and over the last nine years, 75% of independent foodbanks started operating. Just half of all foodbanks had no restrictions and just under 20% of foodbanks allowed their clients to access food parcels just over one per month (Tyler, 2020).

**Figure 4 The intended and unintended consequences of a food bank**



Source: The Guardian.com. 2018 & 2019, Cooper, Purcell, Jackson. 2019, Dowler, Herdt, 2019

### The unintended consequence of implementing food banks

Figure 4 illustrates some of the intended and unintended consequences of a food bank. What is also abundantly clear is this shift in public perception seeing food banks as an acceptable response to poverty and food insecurity, which has now become an unintended consequence of implementing food banks. Carson (2008) was adamant that this distraction deflects the focus away from the root cause of food insecurity. Furthermore, by communities becoming emotionally, personally, and morally invested whereby the lack of donations or food for distribution is commonly seen as the problem, and the solution now becomes the role of the community to raise the awareness for contributions to the food bank, thereby legitimising the community responsibility. It is for these reasons why Riches; Herdt (2019) says these responsibilities do not reduce inequality it helps to perpetuate them by shifting responsibility from politicians into the community.

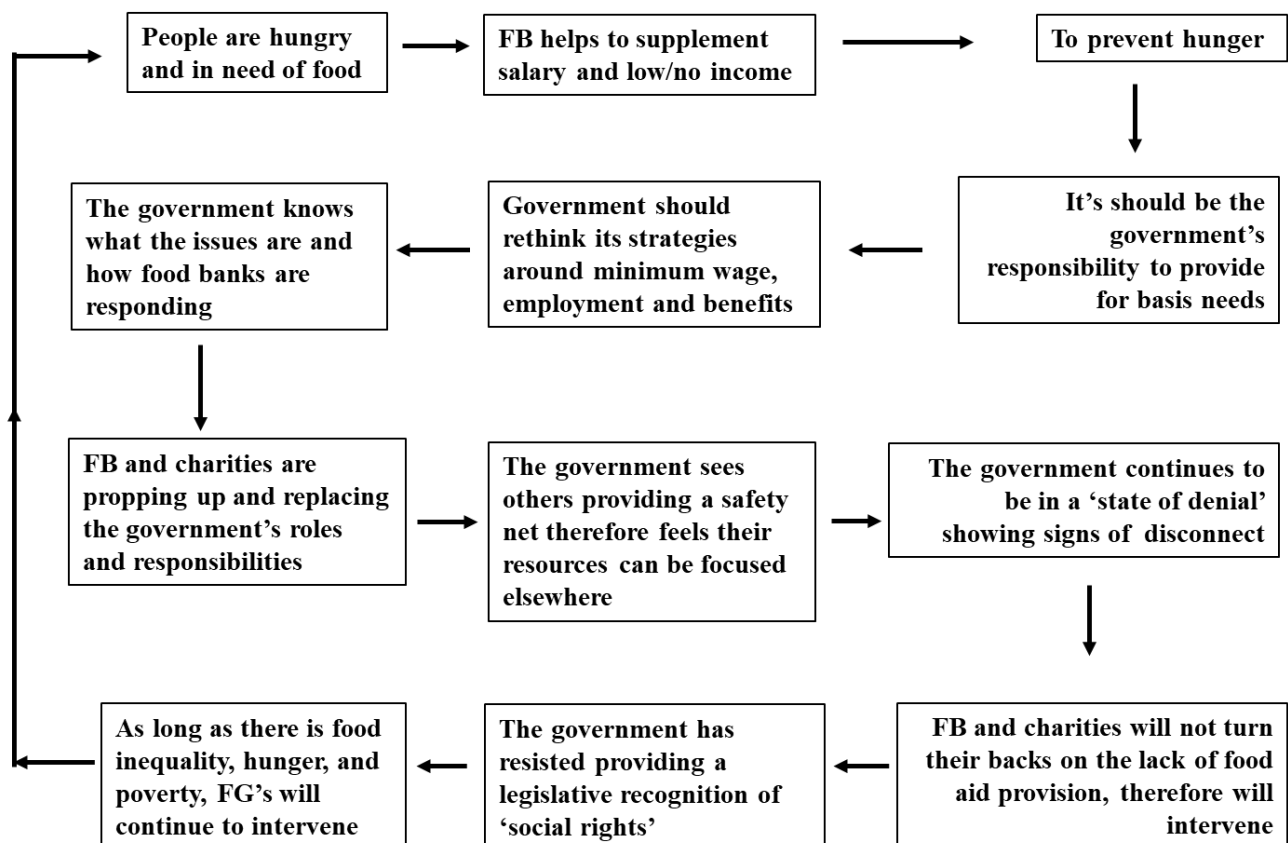
Carson (2008) goes on to suggest that the very nature and operational framework of a food bank acted as a key indicator for the government to dismiss food insecurity at a public and personal level. Hendriks and McIntyre (2014) argue that in South Africa, food security policies may be a short terms solution to hunger, however, in the long term, it merely worsens poverty, because it allows “rich country governments to ignore the underlining problem of poverty and the ‘right to food’ under the Human Rights Act 1948” (Riches, 2018; Herdt, 2019). Some suggest that the rise in food banks are partly due in the short term, to the nature of free food (Williams, 2013; The Trussell Trust 2017). Although this view is strongly opposed by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) “Who has stated 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, point in the opposite direction” (Cooper, Purcell and Jackson, 2014). The evidence pointed out in the above sections and replicated in figure 4 highlights the increasing propensity for the existence of new food

banks. If this is coupled with food banks in close, proximity, based on anecdotal evidence that I have personally witnessed from breakfast clubs. Clients can move from one food bank to another, learning how to play the system. The extent to which this is occurring has not been quantified within this report. The direct impact that this could have on some food banks in terms of the numbers coming through the door, has in part, resulted in the reduction in the size and frequency of food bank contributions.

### How food banks are now perpetuating the vicious circle

George Kirkpatrick, of the West Dunbartonshire Community Foodshare pronounced his perception of a further unintended consequence of food banks when he spoke about these activities should have been a temporary measure, however, he now fears foodbanks are being encouraged as the new norm to deliver welfare to the destitute (Cooper, Purcell and Jackson, 2014). Many food banks also provide a range of additional support during their drop-in sessions and through their partnership working with other agencies, which go way beyond just the provision of food (Haddad, Perry and Hadfield-Spoor, 2017). The result, therefore, limits the possibility for change or adequate alternative provisions being provided elsewhere. Particularly when the United Nations Special Rapporteur, Philip Alston highlights the logistical activities of food banks are reminiscent of “activity you might expect for a national disaster or epidemic” (Booth and Butler, 2018). It could be argued that many of these unforeseen circumstances are helping to maintain the status quo thereby perpetuating the vicious circle shown in figure 5.

Figure 5 the vicious circle of why food banks (FB) exist



Source: Haddad, Perry and Hadfield-Spoor, 2017, The Guardian.com. 2018 & 2019, Cooper, Purcell, Jackson. 2019



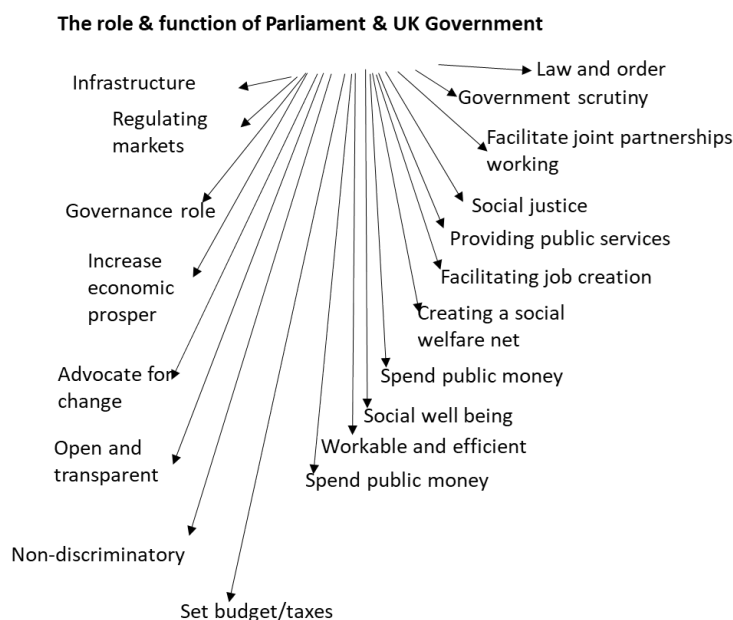
## Are there any alternatives to foodbanks?

What would happen if we abandoned food banks is a critical question to ask? The research identifies that there are over 3000 independent food aid providers working across the UK. This includes meal providers, food cycles, social supermarkets, magic breakfast clubs and holiday clubs for school children, feeding Britain, social kitchens, on school breakfast, (Tyler, 2020) this list is not exhausted. The question now remains have charities including food banks now become nothing more than a self-serving beast with slick advertising, professional fundraising, and good marketing campaigns? Regardless of how you see this, the solution is not more of the same or similar type of charitable gap fillers, it should be about how the government is going to implement suitable alternative solutions that replace them.

## The role and function of parliament and the UK government

Figure 6 outlines some of the key roles and functions of the UK parliament and its government, one of the key observations is that the mechanism is currently in place to both respond more positively and to create more safety nets in terms of food insecurity and social wellbeing. This, therefore, leaves one somewhat perplexed, since the structures are there, however, there does not appear to be the political will.

**Figure 6 The role and function of parliament and the UK government**



Source: Parliament UK, no date, and McKague, K., Wheeler, D., Karnani (2015)

McKague, K., Wheeler, D., Karnani (2015) saw the role of government as governing civil society organisations, advocate, watchdogs, and the catalyst for joint working with the private sector, social entrepreneurs, and communities. They went further to say the government should be defining allowable activities through the use of regulatory standards (Kydd and Dorward, 2004; McKague, K, Wheeler, D., Karnani, 2015). In the third select committee report on international development the UK government stated: "If people and communities are to escape from poverty traps and move towards food security and sustainable livelihoods, they must be enabled both to cope with crisis-related risks and to make the risky investments which are needed to climb out of poverty" (UK Parliament, 2003). Although this report related to the UK government's thoughts on southern Africa, the sentiments remain equally as valid for the UK.

## **The UK government implementation of national Area-Based Initiatives (ABI)**

The government has in the past used area-based initiatives (ABI), to bring together a wide cross-section of key stakeholders to address a range of common issues and to help stimulate local deprived neighbourhoods across England. Perhaps one of the most significant of all ABI's was the £1.7bn, New Deal for Community's (NDC) programme<sup>2</sup> (Christina Beatty, 2010). This was one of the most concentrated attacks on area deprivation (SEU, 1998; Lawless, 2012), the programme ran for 10 years (from 2000 through 2010), targeting the 39 most deprived neighbourhoods across England (Romero and Noble, 2008). Some of its main objectives included narrowing the gap between the 39 deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country (Batty *et al.*, 2010), secondly to build and develop partnerships in the voluntary, business, and public sectors to secure improvements, whilst maintaining the community at the heart of all of its initiatives. The underlying fact is, the NDC area-based initiative was successful, however that level of success varies according to the authors from "Modest, place orientated, benefits" (Lawless, 2012) to 27 of the 32 core indicator showing statistical significant change (Batty *et al.*, 2010).

## **Conclusion**

This paper has offered an alternative configuration of the SDG's, which makes it easier to understand how the 5P's contributes to sustainable cities and communities and why it's difficult or futile to apply singular SDG's to a particular strategy. Only by understanding the policy mechanisms that lead to sustainable change and improved outcomes can policymaker's and stakeholders identify comparable replicable indicators which not only can identify the gaps but equally 'what works' strategies, that are scalable to suit a given situation (Morton, Pencheon and Squires, 2017).

Preventative strategies have been identified to help reduce the raw material, redistribution to people, and the amount of food sent for animal feed. WRAP has a vision about how to reach global resource sustainability, Their suggestions are against the backdrop of the Courtauld 2025 report on the UN SDG 12.3, which would include an "accelerated sustainable resource-efficient economy through reinventing how we design, produce and sell products; rethinking how we use and consume products; and redefining what is possible through reuse and recycle" (WRAP, 2020b). Their reports suggest that where industries and consumers are motivated to act and work in partnership, significant reductions can be achieved. Based on the progress being made between 2007 and 2018, should these strategies be maintained in line with the current trends and reductions, they would achieve the UN SDG baseline targets for 2025.

"Ending the need for foodbanks will require action from every level of government, those delivering public services, employers, and charities" (Menuforchange, no date). By removing these food aid provisions (Tyler, 2020) they will help to unveil the bias priorities which such mechanisms, perpetuate, such as the argument to address the growing debt of the vast deficit problem (Goodman and Field, 2018). These masks have artificially supported these mechanisms which have now become the official safety net (Carson, 2008), for those who are furthest behind. Philip Alston is clear in his gesticulation, that the government is in a 'state of denial' showing signs of a disconnected action between what he heard from ordinary people and the government's thinking on austerity (Booth and Butler, 2018). Therefore, to achieve sustainable cities and communities, more thought must be given to how the government aligns its social and economic policy interventions to address the impact on those most vulnerable and furthest behind without these safety nets (Haddad, Perry and Hadfield-Spoor, 2017).

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<sup>2</sup> Although I have worked for two of the NDC's in the past, the information outlined is factually based and independent of my personal views and experience.

To deliver an agenda for change, unlike anything ever seen before, the 5P's strategies would help to encompass those who are furthest behind. The better we become at intertwining interdisciplinary cooperation of the 5P's in our approach, the greater level of success which potentially could be achieved by moving away from agencies working in silos to embracing multiple SDG's simultaneously. Area-based initiatives have proven that it is possible to achieve change at a local level, however, one should be mindful of the lessons learnt before the implementation of similar programmes is repeated. DEFERS suggest all political parties should commit to reinstalling a safety net which has its core purpose of creating a Social Security system and that the government should develop and implement an action plan to deal with food poverty (Cooper, Purcell and Jackson, 2014). Philip Alston of the United Nations goes one step further to suggest that the government needs to introduce legislative recognition of 'social rights' (Booth and Butler, 2018). Unfortunately, if the government continues to resist the introduction of such legislation, they will continue to be in breach of "four UN human rights agreement relating to women, children, disabled people and economic and social rights "(Booth and Butler, 2018).

Without such measures, there will be a continuation of the widening of the poverty gaps as a result of the Dickensian models of welfare (Cooper, Purcell and Jackson, 2014).

## **Recommendations**

That more training, education, and awareness needs to be carried out to help change the discussion, dialogue and debates related to both causes and solutions of food surplus and waste.

There is better alignment of food surplus and waste, it is imperative that we look at the food and drink material hierarchy (WRAP, 2020b) and how more measures can be put in place to reduced waste and surplus.

In order to reduce the drive and appetite for food banks there are several criteria which the government should put in place:

- i) Improve the access to short term benefits in advance,
- ii) Enhance the availability of training, decision making and the linkages between local health and financial support services for people with mental health issues,
- iii) Improve the access to hardship payments and other allowances whilst identifying ways to alleviate the level of sanctions,
- iv) The need to improve and maintain access to emergency financial support schemes,
- v) Improve the support and advice services across the board to better meet the needs of all clients,
- vi) The need to strengthen the social safety net to prevent hunger and poverty by the government introducing legislative recognition of 'social rights'
- vii) Stimulate local economic development, bust educational attainment, and reduce worklessness would significantly help to reduce poverty.

More research needs to be carried out into the unintended consequences of food banks, and the extent to which food banks are growing before they reach a point of saturation. It would also be welcomed to investigate to what extent there are correlations between the growth of food banks and the rate of multiple food bank hoppers.

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