

**Hungry Britain: The rise of food charity by Hannah Lambie-Mumford. Policy Press, 2017**

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## Book review: Hungry Britain The Rise of Food Charity

At the time of writing there are over 400 Trussel Trust affiliated foodbanks and 21 regional FareShare distribution centres operating throughout the UK. They all work, in their respective ways, to distribute food to individuals and families in need. Eight years on from the start of the 2010 austerity agenda, foodbanks and other food charities seem more firmly entrenched than ever within the national welfare system.

Their growing prominence has attracted significant academic attention (for example, see Buckingham and Jolley, 2015 and Iafrati, 2018 in this journal). Hannah Lambie-Mumford is a particularly prominent voice in debates surrounding emergency food provision (2016a; 2016b). *Hungry Britain; The Rise of Food Charity* reports the findings of her ESRC-funded study, consisting of 52 in-depth interviews with staff, volunteers and users from two national food charities. These are the Trussell Trust and FareShare, though there is a stronger focus upon the former throughout the book. Lambie-Mumford herself succinctly identifies the social policy debate to which the study and the book both contribute:

*"what are the roles and responsibilities of the state and charitable sector when it comes to preventing and protecting people from poverty and food insecurity?" (p.4)*

The book's central argument is built around the 'right to food' concept. Lambie-Mumford argues the case that individuals have a human right to a sustainable food supply, sufficient in quality and quantity and accessed via culturally acceptable methods. In the UK this means shopping via the private market, underwritten by financial benefits if needed. Crucially, she argues this right implies a primary responsibility for the state to ensure it is upheld.

The second major strand of the book's argument is that despite its marked increase over the last decade, charitable emergency food provision is an insufficient means to meet and safeguard the right to food. This is because despite there being advantages to a voluntary response, it fundamentally relies on donated food and volunteer time. As a result the support it is able to offer is inevitably limited. Restricted and time-limited support is necessary to conserve scarce resources and to maintain a distinction from the financial, non-emergency welfare provided by the state. The risk, however, is that these restrictions also make access to an adequate food supply feel stigmatising and disempowering rather than an inalienable right.

The voluntary nature of the Trussel Trust and FareShare lies at the core of many of the issues discussed. They are registered charities, not-for profit, reliant on donations and volunteers and committed to a clear mission or set of values. The concept of 'care ethics' is used in the book to elucidate some of the tensions that emerge as a result. On the one hand the desire to enact values relating to care for those in need is the primary driver of the voluntary support provided. But the subsequent reliance upon goodwill also results in many of the issues of insufficiency

discussed. Furthermore, the private, discretionary nature of a charitable transaction is at odds with the idea of a structural, collective response to food insecurity many proponents of a right to food approach are likely to endorse.

These tensions put practitioners in an unenviable position when faced with the context of a retreating welfare state and policies such as benefit cuts, sanctions and delays in payment which drive demand for emergency food. Lambie-Mumford captures well the sometimes agonised attempts of the participants to steer a course between enacting their values, and trying to avoid further legitimising the withdrawal of the state.

As with charitable food provision itself, debates about the voluntary sector's relationship with the state have a long history (for example, Knight, 1993). The topic will therefore be of broad interest to many readers of Voluntary Sector Review interested in both food charity and the sector more widely. The language of rights is a useful lens through which to view the responsibilities of different sectors, but inevitably this leaves less room to engage with theory more directly concerned with the mixed economy of welfare. There is a clear opportunity for future research to link the material covered in the book to the work of theorists such as Salamon (1987) or Billis and Glennerster (1995). This in turn might open up further discussion around how some of the advantages of voluntary, mission led provision could best be retained. Within an alternative system, the voluntary sector might be able to supplement, rather than substitute for, the responsibilities of the state towards the right to food (Young, 2000).

Overall, concerns about the current food and welfare systems are articulated strongly within *Hungry Britain*. Lambie-Mumford argues effectively for the state to recognise and protect the fundamental right to food and draws attention to areas in which a charitable response, whilst allowing an avenue through which to enact values of care, proves insufficient. It can be recommended to readers with the additional hope that it spurs further discussion about the implications of foodbanks in the wider welfare mix. Given that the need for foodbanks appears set to continue indefinitely, they are likely to remain at the centre of these debates for a long time to come.

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