research

100 Questions: identifying research priorities for poverty prevention and reduction

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Reducing poverty is important for those affected, for society and the economy. Poverty remains entrenched in the UK, despite considerable research efforts to understand its causes and possible solutions. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, with the Centre for Science and Policy at the University of Cambridge, ran a democratic, transparent, consensual exercise involving 45 participants from government, non-governmental organisations, academia and research to identify 100 important research questions that, if answered, would help to reduce or prevent poverty. The list includes questions across a number of important themes, including attitudes, education, family, employment, heath, wellbeing, inclusion, markets, housing, taxes, inequality and power.

Key words UK poverty • poverty policy • poverty research • anti-poverty strategy

Introduction

Tackling poverty remains a priority, albeit to varying degrees, for policy makers and practitioners across the UK and other countries. Not only is the reduction of poverty important for those affected, but it also has an impact on welfare spending, affects gross domestic product (GDP) and has costs to society through additional spending on services, lower earnings among adults who have experienced it (Hirsch, 2008) and lost human potential. Poverty is pernicious and enduring (Bradshaw, 1999); numerous problems highlighted in the work of early researchers (see, for example, Rowntree,

1902), such as low wages, inadequate incomes, poor health and high costs of living, remain entrenched in the UK today. Poverty, by which we mean an enforced lack of the material resources needed to meet needs and to take part in society, is also high in the UK compared with many other similar countries (Nolan and Whelan, 2010) and, on certain measures of poverty for some groups, is higher now than in the recent past (Browne et al, 2013).

Forecasts of future levels of income poverty in the UK indicate a risk of substantial increases by 2020, worsened mainly as a result of recent fiscal consolidation and some aspects of welfare reform, but also because of labour market restructuring (Brewer et al, 2012), including greater concentration of economic opportunities in certain regions. At the same time, facets of political, popular and media discourse about poverty continue to rely in large part on stigmatising people on low incomes and especially working-age adults claiming out-of-work benefits (Baumberg et al, 2012). There is a lack of political and public consensus over the causes and consequences of, and solutions to, poverty, with much of the division related to the relative importance of structural drivers and individual behaviour (see Lister, 2004, for a discussion).

Furthermore, the evolving socioeconomic context will bring about a range of novel longer- and medium-term changes affecting poverty in the UK and other similar countries, for example, the increased effectiveness of healthcare and other changes resulting in an ageing population (with the associated pressure on public and private pensions), immigration and globalisation creating changing cultural compositions, and increasing job automation reducing the demands for certain types of labour (Taylor et al, 2012). In the medium term, austerity arising from the debt crisis is likely to continue affecting the outlook for living standards in the UK.

National governing institutions, both at Westminster and in the devolved administrations across the UK, as well as those facing comparable issues elsewhere, have tried and considered a range of approaches to prevent and reduce poverty in the light of socioeconomic shifts. These have included the reform of social security systems, active labour market programmes, investment in education and training, area-based regeneration and a host of other initiatives. Some of these approaches have worked, but only to some extent and in some ways. The challenge is to sustain the investment and make it sufficiently broad and deep.

In order to deal with entrenched problems of poverty, improvements need to be made to knowledge about the drivers of poverty and the effectiveness of potential solutions. To this end, an exercise led by a partnership between the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Centre for Science and Policy at the University of Cambridge aimed to identify 100 important unanswered and researchable questions about poverty in the UK. As well as the potential benefits of improving the evidence base on poverty in general, this work is part of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's programme of developing strategies to reduce poverty in all the nations of the UK.

The process of generating questions and exploring consensus has been used and proved useful in a number of fields, including homelessness (Owen, 2011), UK ecological issues (Sutherland et al, 2006), global conservation issues (Sutherland et al, 2009), agriculture (Pretty et al, 2010) and the links between science and policy (Sutherland et al, 2011a). Such processes assume that at least a degree of consensus can be achieved and that it is desirable. Those are certainly some of the assumptions underlying the exercise described in this article.

Clearly, it is extremely difficult to prevent and deal with poverty in a manner that is resilient to economic cycles and political change. In the face of such uncertainty and lack of progress, it is important to try to build consensus about the evidence required to move towards sustainable solutions to poverty. This is one of the reasons for undertaking the exercise described below.

The focus was poverty in the UK. However, many of the questions generated will be equally relevant to other similar countries, although some will differ (for example, the relative importance of substance misuse, fuel poverty or family structure). Some of the questions will also apply globally, but in developing countries there would probably be a much greater emphasis on food security, access to essential services (such as education or primary healthcare), subsistence agriculture and disease. Within the UK, there are also governing institutions for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, with differing emphasis on the best means of responding to poverty.

Methods

The aim of the exercise was to generate questions capable of being answered through a medium-sized research programme. The aim was therefore to avoid questions that were broad and general, as well as those that were extremely specific. An existing methodology was adopted, as carried out by one of the authors many times in relation to a range of subjects (see, for example, Sutherland et al, 2011a). This method, described in detail in Sutherland et al (2011b), places great emphasis on making the process rigorous, democratic and transparent.

Participants were selected from a range of organisations across the UK. Of the 76 people invited to participate, 45 accepted. Four of these were from government, 27 were from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and 14 were academics or researchers working in universities or think tanks in the UK. Invitees were drawn from members of groups advising the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on its anti-poverty strategies programme and people from other organisations with an interest in poverty or groups, such as disabled people, with a higher risk of poverty from across the UK. Attempts were made to ensure equal representation of those with research or policy and practice backgrounds. Organisations working with people with direct experience of poverty, such as the Poverty Alliance and the Poverty Truth Commission in Scotland, were included. Civil servants from Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the UK-wide government took part.

The participants were asked to identify an initial set of research questions by consulting widely with others. They were asked to propose questions that would make a real difference to poverty in the UK but had not yet been adequately answered. They were also asked to record how many people were consulted and to identify the means of consultation (for example, workshop, informal discussion or active email correspondence). A total of 363 people were involved in submitting 470 questions.

The questions were then categorised into nine broad themes by two members of the research team. These two categorisations were carried out independently and differences negotiated before final agreement on the themes. Each theme covered approximately equal numbers of questions. The aim of the exercise was to generate 100 questions. This number was selected as a balance between having too small a number so resulting in very general questions and a large number that would have been impractical to use as an agenda. Participants were invited to vote for the questions

that they regarded as the most important and useful within each topic. The number of votes allowed in each section reflected its share of the total number of questions submitted. Thus if 11% of the questions were in one section, they were asked to vote for 11 questions. Participants were sent the results of the voting before the meeting and asked to reflect on the scores, to identify overlaps and consider options for possible rewording of questions.

The centrepiece of the exercise was a two-day workshop held over one afternoon and one morning in Cambridge in May 2013. At this meeting, the nine thematic groups of questions, together with the priorities attached to them as a result of the earlier phases of the exercise, were discussed in detail. This was achieved via three sessions of three parallel groups, with each session chaired by a different individual. Prior to the start of the workshop, there was a training session for those chairing that incorporated a practice group meeting. Chairs also had the opportunity to identify questions that had already been answered, as well as those that could be improved or duplicate questions, and were also asked to ensure that any duplication did not result in dilution of votes for an issue. William Sutherland, who has run many such exercises, oversaw this process and moved between the groups to ensure that the sessions ran smoothly.

The process started by removing those questions that had attracted no or few votes. While most of these were removed, participants were encouraged to identify any potentially important questions that could be improved by rephrasing. They then looked at those that had attracted the most votes and classified each as *gold* (likely to go through to the top 100 questions), or *silver* (may make the top 100), or 'other'. Chairs were asked to ensure that the process was democratic, with all views respected, and that major decisions were made by voting (conducted as a show of hands).

A final plenary session considered the 99 questions prioritised by all the nine groups (one group identified one fewer gold question than planned). The participants identified questions that were duplicates and one was selected for removal. One question was identified that the group decided to split into two. Some questions were rephrased. All major decisions were decided by majority voting, again using a show of hands. At the end of this process, there were 99 questions. Everyone selected their top five silver questions and the one with the most votes was included to make up the final total of 100.

This process of using a plenary session was devised so that similar questions originating from different thematic groups could be identified and removed, to prevent the problem of imbalance in the questions due to a disproportionate number of questions being submitted on one theme, and as a final check on the questions.

Following the workshop, introductory sections to each of the groups of questions were written by Abigail Scott Paul, Sonia Sodha, Chris Goulden, Emma Stone, Kate Bell, Annette Hastings, Ann Marie Gray, Esther Foreman and Julia Unwin respectively. An extensive editing process of the resulting draft article was then carried out by the entire group. All those who participated in the workshop are included as authors, except one who asked not to be listed.

Results

The questions

The questions are listed under their initial nine headings. They are not given in any particular order, and certainly not in terms of any priority. The list includes different kinds of questions pitched at different levels. Some are wide-ranging or fundamental in scope and others focus on evaluating particular policy areas or exploring the experiences for particular groups at risk of poverty.

Attitudes towards poverty

Against the backdrop of austerity, welfare reform and a projected rise in poverty (Brewer et al, 2012), public attitudes in the UK towards those living in poverty are hardening. New analysis of the British Social Attitudes survey (Clery et al, 2013) shows a growing trend towards blaming individuals for their fate: in 2010, 23% thought people lived in need because of laziness or lack of willpower, compared to 15% in 1994. Moreover, previous research (Bamfield and Horton, 2009) has revealed that attitudes towards those in poverty are often more negative than attitudes towards the 'rich'. It is clear that negative attitudes are a barrier to action on poverty and more evidence is needed on how they might be changed (Delvaux and Rinne, 2009).

Bamfield and Horton (2009) also showed that assumptions, values and beliefs are significant drivers of these attitudes, which are also driven by reporting by the media (McKendrick et al, 2008). However, more understanding is required about the values, frames and narratives used by politicians, the media and others – especially those working directly with people in poverty. And how do people's experiences of schooling, public services and/or wealth shape these attitudes? Other movements, such as the pro-gay marriage and anti-smoking lobbies, have been successful in changing public attitudes and driving social change. Can there be lessons for anti-poverty campaigners to build public and political consensus for the need to reduce poverty in the UK?

1. To what extent does stigma contribute to the experience of living in poverty in the UK, and what could be done to address this?
2. How do images of people in poverty influence policy debates in different countries?
3. What are the levels of awareness and understanding of the importance and effects of poverty among public service professionals (for example, psychiatrists, judges, youth workers, civil servants, teachers, doctors)?
4. What blocks are there to challenging institutional discrimination towards people in poverty?
5. To what extent do public and political discourses (in the media, for example) shape public attitudes to people living in poverty, and to what extent is it the other way round?
6. To what extent are attitudes towards people in poverty affected by the language and stereotyping used by politicians of the day, and how does this vary geographically?

7. What values, frames and narratives are associated with greater support for tackling poverty, and why?
8. What can be learned from interventions devised to challenge negative attitudes of other kinds (for example, racism, smoking, homophobia) that could be helpful for the design of interventions aiming to tackle negative attitudes towards people in poverty?
9. What evidence is there about the existence, nature and effectiveness of interventions designed to tackle negative attitudes towards people in poverty (targeting, for example, politicians, other elites, the media and specific groups of the general public)?
10. Do certain experiences (such as schooling or voluntary work) shape people's support for poverty reduction?
11. Do more affluent groups in society feel that they are entitled to the share of income and wealth they currently have, and if so, why?

Education and family

Growing up in poverty has a long-term scarring effect on a child's life chances. The gap in outcomes for children growing up in poverty compared to their more affluent peers already exists when they start school, and widens as children get older (see, for example, Morris et al, 2008). Narrowing this gap through educational means alone can be very problematic, given that (according to recent research) 80% of the difference in children's educational attainment is explained by family and environmental rather than school-level factors (Rasbash et al, 2010). The associations between poverty and education outcomes are, however, highly complex (Dickerson and Popli, 2012). Positive parenting and strong attachment can be important protective factors against the impact of poverty on child development (Center on the Developing Child, 2010), but the experience of living in poverty builds up pressures on parents that make parenting more difficult (Katz et al, 2007).

Poverty itself is associated with other factors, such as a greater likelihood of teenage pregnancy and lower levels of parental education and engagement with children's learning. Poverty can be the result of relationship breakdown (Jenkins, 2008) and is associated with living in lone-parent families (DWP, 2011). Family structure is implicated in teenage pregnancy rates, given that young women growing up with an absent father have significantly higher rates of teenage pregnancy (Ellis et al, 2003). Positive father involvement can have a significant impact on children's behaviour, and subsequently on their attainment in school (Bifulco et al, 2002). Many of the questions on education and family therefore focus on better understanding the relative importance of these complex links, and how they can be broken.

1. To what extent do families (including extended families) provide the first line of defence against individual poverty, and what are the limits and geographical variations of this support?
2. How can childcare be provided so that it is both affordable for parents and of high quality, with a proven positive long-term impact on child outcomes?
3. What evidence is there that youth work can have a positive impact on outcomes for young people in poverty?

4. If services for looked-after children were developed from scratch, so that their specific focus was on eliminating poverty, how would they be different, and what can be learned from other countries?

5. How, why and where have poverty rates among minority ethnic groups changed?

6. What are the most effective interventions for reducing the social gap in educational outcomes?

7. What works to radically improve the quality of underperforming schools in deprived areas?

8. What are the most effective methods of increasing involvement and support for the education of children among their parents or guardians?

9. What works in reducing the negative impact of growing up in poverty on a child's life chances?

10. Why is there a weaker link between family disadvantage and child outcomes for some children, families and communities (for example, among some minority ethnic groups)?

11. What are the key mechanisms through which poverty is translated into poorer life chances for children?

Employment

For those who are able to do so, entering and remaining in employment is presented as the best route out of poverty – whether this means adults being able to provide for themselves and their dependants, or earning enough to save for a decent pension. However, in reality in the UK an increasing percentage of households in income poverty have at least one person in paid employment (Aldridge et al, 2012). Furthermore, when someone from a household in poverty gets a new job, this only leads to an exit from income poverty in just over half of cases (DWP, 2010).

It is therefore vital to have a proper understanding of the links between employment and poverty in the context of the UK's changing labour market. For poverty to be substantially reduced, more jobs are required, and they need to be secure, better paid and have greater flexibility (Green, 2009). So although some of the objectives around the role of employment in reducing poverty are relatively straightforward, more research is needed on how to get a greater number of people from workless households into paid employment and how to raise job quality across different sectors. The questions below are mostly addressing these problems by asking what forms of intervention are effective and how these can be incentivised and targeted, as well as who is responsible for taking action.

1. What explains variation in wages as a share of GDP internationally?

2. What can countries do to combat low pay without causing unemployment in sectors that cannot move abroad?

3. Why are wages still low for traditionally 'women's' work?

4. What are the most effective and viable mechanisms for shifting responsibility from state to employer for reducing poverty?

5. How effective is the Living Wage at reducing poverty?

6. How could targeting and incentivising payment of the Living Wage make it more effective at reducing household poverty?

7. Is there evidence that different models of business or ownership are more inclusive to disadvantaged groups?
8. How can people be helped to progress out of low-paid employment into better-paid jobs (considering the roles of governments, employers and employees)?
9. How can policy incentivise the creation of high-quality jobs for people at risk of poverty?
10. What is an effective skills-based employment system for poverty reduction?
11. How can a coherent and effective system of back-to-work interventions for those furthest from the labour market be created?
12. What are the longer-term changing dimensions of employment, and what impact will these have on UK poverty?
13. What does effective worker representation look like for reducing poverty?
14. Compared with unemployment, what are the longer-term effects of under-employment and short-term, low-paid employment on later wages, employment and poverty?
15. Does setting up as self-employed or in a small business help to reduce poverty?
16. Is there evidence from other countries of mainstream initiatives that have effectively reduced the number of young people (aged 18–25) not in employment or training, and that have successfully reduced poverty in this group?

Health, wellbeing and inclusion

Poverty is about more than income. It is also about people's health, how they feel about themselves, the quality of relationships and the environment, and the extent to which people belong to and are included in society.

A great deal is already known. There are significant links between material, social and health inequalities (Hills et al, 2010), and between people's economic outcomes and their individual (household, group) characteristics and circumstances (for example, gender, ethnicity, disability, age, class, region, neighbourhood, housing tenure). There are deep-seated inequalities *within* social groups, however those groups are defined, even more than *between* groups (Marmot Review Team, 2010). Poverty also interacts with, shapes and is shaped by behaviours and experiences as diverse as migration, family formation, homelessness, substance misuse, work, lack of work and violence, as well as structural barriers and exclusion. Routes out of poverty and people's ability to manage are affected by their behaviours, characteristics and circumstances – and by those of the places in which they live and the resources available to them. All of these are dynamic, can be cumulative over the lifecourse, and intersect with one another in ways that are still not fully understood (Platt, 2011). The questions below embrace these complexities and seek clarity about causality, intersectionality and interventions.

1. What is the nature and extent of poverty among those who do not or cannot access the safety net when they need it?
2. What are the health risks associated with poor quality work (low paid, insecure, poorly regulated etc) for individuals or households in poverty?
3. What are the causal connections and intersections between poverty and wider social problems (such as homelessness, substance misuse, mental and physical ill health)?

4. What initiatives or assets can help people manage the experience of remaining in poverty?
5. What is an acceptable standard of living for people who are disabled/sick in a way that makes paid employment impossible?
6. What are the factors (local, global and other) that affect the ability of people in poverty to have a healthy diet?
7. How is poverty related to being a victim or perpetrator of crime or violence, and how can such risks be mitigated?
8. What are the causal links between poverty and low subjective wellbeing (including isolation and loneliness)?
9. What are the positive and negative impacts of digital technologies on poverty?
10. What are the implications of changing demography for people in poverty?

Markets, services and the cost of living

If poverty is a situation in which resources are insufficient to meet minimum needs and to ensure social participation, the extent to which it is experienced will depend not only on the amount of household resources but also on the cost of meeting those needs. There is a long-running debate (see, for example, Brewer and O'Dea, 2012) about whether measures of consumption would provide a better assessment of poverty levels than measures of income and, although specific questions are not included on this issue, the idea that the experience of poverty is dependent on the cost of accessing essential goods and services was central to the questions selected.

There are two key policy strategies for ensuring that people living in poverty can access essential goods. The first is through the provision of public services. However, there is debate over whether these services (as well as income transfers) are most effectively provided on a universal or targeted basis (see, for example, Horton and Gregory, 2010); about whether people living in poverty benefit as much from universal services as those on higher incomes (Le Grand, 1978); and about the impact of new delivery models within public services on provision for those in poverty. The second strategy involves using regulation (or other tools) to ensure that market-based provision of goods and services does not result either in a situation in which 'the poor pay more' (see, for example, Strelitz and Kober, 2007) or where they are excluded from accessing goods or services altogether. The questions also sought to focus on food markets, and on assessing the impact of market regulation on the prices paid by those in poverty.

1. What transport measures and interventions have the greatest negative/positive impact on poverty?
2. What is the impact of up-front charging in public services on people in poverty?
3. What interventions have been shown to improve the extent to which people living in poverty benefit from services, and why?
4. In which services could there be benefits from universalism in tackling poverty, and what are the trade-offs?
5. Does universalism build solidarity and make it easier to justify public expenditure on anti-poverty measures?
6. How can essential goods and services provided by the private and regulated sectors become affordable, accessible and inclusive to people in poverty?

7. How do environmental and social regulations or obligations affect prices for those in poverty?
8. How can consumer markets be made to work better for people in poverty?
9. How can better contracting within the delivery of publicly funded services lead to improved outcomes for people in poverty?
10. What are the most effective ways to improve the quality, affordability and choice of food on sale in disadvantaged areas?

Place and housing

It is well established that where you live matters for your experience of poverty. The spatial patterning of economic restructuring at national, regional and urban levels has put particular kinds of places – and the people living within them – at increased risk of poverty (Dicken, 2010). There is also emerging evidence that fiscal austerity in the UK will further intensify the problems of places that were already experiencing poverty (Beatty and Fothergill, 2013). Thus, the agenda developed within the 'Place and housing' category emphasises the need for future research to pay close attention to the role of spatial and housing processes in affecting the experience of poverty.

The two questions focused particularly on 'housing' reflect this emphasis. One indicates a very specific and urgent concern to understand whether and to what extent policy changes under way in relation to the housing benefit system in the UK may significantly impoverish sections of the population. The second question is much broader. It identifies the need for robust and holistic intelligence that could be used to reconfigure the housing system, to protect people in poverty rather than allowing it to operate as a source of risk and stress.

The broader range of questions identified in relation to 'place' suggest that there is a need to understand better what can be achieved in relation to poverty alleviation at distinctive sub-national spatial levels, from devolved administrations and regions to local authority intervention and as a result of local community leadership

1. What is the effect of housing-related welfare changes on people and places in poverty?
2. What can be done to ensure that enough homes are provided with sufficient security of tenure and at rent levels that will address the needs of those in poverty?
3. How can local authorities and other stakeholders integrate anti-poverty work into their approaches to housing, regeneration and economic development?
4. Are there examples of localities in the UK where poverty has significantly reduced/been reversed in the last 20 years, what caused this and was it sustained?
5. What evidence is there of successful community development practice in addressing poverty in the UK?
6. What are the possible solutions to poverty in parts of the country that have been in decline for a long time (often places that were formerly industrialised that have not recovered)?
7. What are the most effective classes of intervention able to be implemented by devolved administrations?
8. How can access to opportunities be improved in isolated or disconnected areas that can reduce persistent poverty?

Tax, benefits and inequality

The relationship between the tax and benefit systems, the distribution of income and the impact on equality are at the heart of debates about poverty. Analysis of the overall effect of recent changes to benefits and taxation identify a largely negative impact on the poorer half of the income distribution (Joyce, 2012), and raises questions about what models of tax and social security would achieve a more effective redistribution of income and resources.

The answers to these questions require a more complete picture of poverty through a greater focus on within-household inequalities and lifecourse trajectories, and a more informed analysis of the potential of other models of redistribution and social security. For instance, there have been calls for the UK to return to a more contribution-based social security system (see, for example, proposals for National Salary Insurance [Cooke, 2011]). So what would an effective contributory model for the UK look like, and what can be learned from international models and experiences? Proposals for more progressive and comprehensive tax measures have been countered by claims that higher personal and business taxes would result in disinvestment. Analysis of the evidence underpinning such assertions would contribute to a more informed debate on the potential contribution of tax policy to reducing poverty

1. What would be the impacts on poverty of different models of more contributory benefit schemes?
2. How can the effect on poverty of issues of diversity, such as ethnicity, disability, age, gender, sexual orientation or religion, be better understood and addressed?
3. What relevance does inequality in the top half of the income distribution have for the reduction of poverty?
4. The claim is often made that high personal and business taxation leads to disinvestment – for example, people and businesses leaving the UK for lower tax regimes. Taking into account international experience and evidence, how robust is this claim?
5. Would different policy conclusions be reached about reducing poverty if there were a focus on individuals and lifetimes rather than households and snapshots?
6. What could be the relative contribution of income, consumption and asset taxation to a successful anti-poverty strategy?
7. What is the relative importance of security of resources to people living in poverty, and what contribution could the tax/benefit system make?
8. What is the most effective balance between supply-side and demand-side interventions in meeting additional needs and costs (for example, in the provision of childcare)?
9. If the primary objective of Universal Credit were to tackle poverty, what changes would need to be made?
10. How can the social security system become more focused on achieving beneficial long-term outcomes for individuals?
11. What would be the impact on different individuals or households of being paid benefits in a restrictive way (for example, direct payment or benefit cards)?
12. What might social mobility look like if relative poverty were eradicated without addressing inequality in the top half of the redistribution?

Policy, power and agency

Understanding the relationship between policy, power and agency is a vital part of working to prevent poverty at all levels. Often subtle, sometimes invisible, occasionally overt, the role of power and agency in creating and applying policy is complex (Del Tufo and Gaster, 2002). Frequently, those who live in poverty are the furthest away from influencing the traditional power structures that shape their lives (Brock et al, 2001). Yet it is not just the relationship between political elites and citizens that should be considered when examining power, but also the way in which power is exercised through policy formation. A deeper questioning of how policy is formed, by whom and for whom, can reveal the wider attitudes and political ideologies that help determine responses to those living in poverty. Exploring who holds the power, and how responses to power are formed at a local and individual level, deepens understanding of social problems (Hunjan and Pettit, 2011). Practitioners hold power over clients too, and those in poverty are perhaps more at risk of not being able to 'co-produce' their own outcomes. There is little capacity for challenge within organisations, either state or non-state – so people in poverty are not able to hold practitioners or policy/political people to account. The questions below focus on understanding these links and how policy and power might be turned to reduce poverty rather than embed it.

1. What forms of institutional structures, processes and reforms enable people living in poverty to hold state and non-state actors to account?
2. Where are there effective examples of the redistribution of power within (labour or consumer) markets, and why are they effective?
3. What are the barriers to political participation (including, but not restricted to, voting) for people in poverty, and how are they best overcome?
4. What are the (political) barriers to implementing anti-poverty policies based on existing (and extensive) evidence?
5. To what extent do different ideologies within the governing institutions of the UK Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales shape poverty-reduction initiatives?
6. How can decision-makers and decision-making processes be made more responsive to the needs of people experiencing poverty?
7. In what ways can people experiencing poverty develop, deliver and evaluate policy and practice?
8. What is the quality of service received by people in poverty from professionals (such as teachers or GPs) and what are the effects of this?
9. Which poverty campaigns have been most successful at reducing poverty, and what can be learned from them?
10. What is the relative scope and capacity of different levels of government to affect poverty?

The bigger picture

By their nature, anti-poverty strategies focus on the specific. They address the obstacles that prevent people from realising sufficient resources to meet their needs and to participate, and the market conditions – labour, housing, childcare – that create these obstacles. They also focus on the groups of people particularly at risk

of poverty – young people, children, people with disabilities and those facing other forms of exclusion.

But there are bigger questions that determine the scope, nature and trajectory of anti-poverty strategies. The relationships between the structural determinants of poverty and individual agency are at the heart of these bigger questions, but so too is a need to understand more about the dynamic nature of poverty, and the way in which people who have lived in poverty come to do so again (Tomlinson and Walker, 2010). An understanding of these dynamics, alongside an informed and intelligent grasp of the major causes, helps to address the bigger questions that an anti-poverty strategy needs to deal with. Questions of public understanding and acceptance, alongside an analysis of the proper relationship between the individual, the market, the community and the state, provide the framework within which the vital questions about structure and individual agency can be addressed

1. What are the most cost-effective interventions to prevent poverty over the lifecourse?
2. What differentiates the effects of poverty on men and women in terms of the impact on both their own quality of life and that of their families?
3. Considering how much money has been spent on poverty alleviation, why has it not had more of an effect?
4. What are the costs of poverty to the individual, society and the economy, and who benefits most from reducing those costs?
5. Who benefits from poverty, and how?
6. What evidence is there that economic growth reduces poverty overall, and under what circumstances?
7. What are the current structural economic drivers of poverty?
8. What cost-effective measures would ensure that those who escape poverty stay out of poverty?
9. What are the dynamics of how people experience poverty through their lifecourse – for example, moving in and out of poverty, versus brief spells, versus living in poverty for a long time – and why?
10. Who is at risk of poverty in the UK, and why?
11. What are the implications of deep and/or widespread poverty for democracy?
12. What is the role of organisations outside central governments in tackling poverty, and how do they do it?

Discussion

Any approach of this sort has the inherent problem that its outcome depends on the group involved. In order to minimise the risk that single views could dominate, we invited a large group, including a wide range of people from different sectors. Furthermore, the process of voting before the meeting and at two stages during the meeting helped to make the process democratic. The process of trawling widely for questions, voting, reworking and selecting, followed by the entire group adjusting and selecting the final list of questions, was devised in order to encourage wide involvement and a transparent selection process, while keeping the project manageable.

The final list of 100 questions is a good reflection of the content of the original 470 questions put forward. It includes questions aimed at gaining a better understanding

of the experience of poverty in the UK today, about the causes and drivers of poverty, about potential solutions, and about attitudes to poverty and to policy responses. Some topics are in relatively new areas where little research has yet been done, while other areas already have a strong research base but workshop participants agreed that more work was needed. Some of the questions are small and self-contained and could be undertaken by a single substantial research project, while others are likely to require larger research programmes. The goal in all cases was to identify questions where new research still has a contribution to make to knowledge.

We envisage this work being used in a range of ways. Most directly, it will be an important input into the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's research programme (see below) that seeks to find the most effective means of reducing poverty across the UK. Even more importantly, we expect that practitioners, policy makers, researchers and funders will use it to help shape further research programmes across a range of social science disciplines. As the article is open access, we will ensure that it is widely distributed across organisations and researchers involved in working to investigate, prevent and/or reduce poverty. However, the 100 questions are very much the beginnings of a process rather than a finished product. The questions indicate areas of particular research interest and importance for policy that can, and need to, be developed further. This is especially so in terms of the likelihood that they will provide answers that are directly useful for policy and practice.

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Notes

[1] Conservation Science Group, Department of Zoology, University of Cambridge
[2] Joseph Rowntree Foundation
[3] Child Poverty Action Group
[4] University of Oxford
[5] Involve
[6] Scope
[7] Centre for Social Justice
[8] Champollion
[9] Lankelly Chase Foundation
[10] University of Bath
[11] NanoDTC, University of Cambridge
[12] Centre for Science and Policy, University of Cambridge
[13] Church Urban Fund
[14] The Social Change Agency
[15] Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion
[16] School of Criminology, Politics and Social Policy, University of Ulster
[17] School of Geographical Sciences, University of Bristol

[18] Knowledge and Analytical Services, Welsh Government

[19] Urban Studies, Social and Political Sciences, University of Glasgow

[20] Oxfam

[21] Faith in Community Scotland

[22] The Poverty Alliance

[23] New Policy Institute

[24] The Work Foundation

[25] Citizens UK

[26] Resolution Foundation

[27] School of Social Policy, University of Birmingham

[28] Church of England

[29] New Economics Foundation

[30] Social Research Unit at Dartington

[31] Consumer Focus

[32] Department of Social Policy, London School of Economics and Political Science

[33] Policy Exchange

[34] Institute of Ageing and Health, Newcastle University

[35] School of Computing Science, Newcastle University

[36] Scottish Government

[37] Department for Social Development in Northern Ireland

[38] Engineering Design Centre, Department of Engineering, University of Cambridge

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