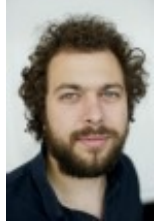


Centrally designing policies that neglect the perspectives of people living in poverty is not a good strategy

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Daniel Silver argues for a shift in the model of governance and public policy that currently exists towards one that draws more upon the experiences of people living in poverty. He urges for recognition that public services are a collaborative project between citizens and the state. This requires more evidence concerning the efficiencies gained through involving the people who are the target of interventions in the development of policy.



Many organisations lobby for changes in redistributive policy to reduce poverty, but it is the very model (or business) of policy-making that requires transformation. With figures recently released that [austerity is increasing child](#) poverty (fifty percent of children in the central Manchester constituency are already living in poverty) and studies showing a decline in civic engagement, an alternative approach to policy-making is necessary to tackle the complex problem of social disadvantage that persists in our communities.

The damaging disconnection between policy makers and communities runs far deeper than the Eton dominance of Number Ten. As the [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) argues, existing anti-poverty strategies often lack an evidence-based link between policy aims and implementation. This is because they reflect centrally designed policies that neglect the perspectives of people living in poverty, which means policy often fails to address the complexity of interventions that are required. It is rare that people who live in poverty are included in debates in the media, let alone within the corridors of power.

But what better way to understand the impacts of policy implementation than by drawing on the knowledge of those people who are the subject of decisions made by politicians? This requires a shift in the model of governance and public policy that currently exists, which privileges statistical data and economic performance management, towards a model that draws more upon the experiences of people living in poverty.

Co-production is based on recognition that public services are a collaborative project between citizens and the state. Co-production to create policy increases the capacity for learning about complex issues and supports a broader range of perspectives, creating public services that have enhanced knowledge about the interventions that are being delivered. Increased adoption of co-produced knowledge within the policy-making process has significant potential to address poverty by bringing in both experiential expertise and local knowledge into the policy-making process.

Quantitative evidence draws out systemic patterns, and can convey powerful messages. However, it forms the basis of technocratic and target-driven approaches that dominate the production of public policy. This is rooted in the inequalities of power that are inherent within existing policy-making structures in which marginalised communities have little influence.

This ultimately leads to public policy that fails to understand the complexity of social life and so therefore ultimately fails to address deep-rooted problems, such as poverty. Furthermore, as we have recently seen, statistics are not always used honestly. And as Nick Cohen states: [“When the powerful lie with statistics, they do so in the cynical knowledge that the public is more likely to believe them.”](#)

So-called experts often dismiss the experiences of communities as too anecdotal and value-driven, placing it outside of the realm of what is considered to be reliable evidence as it does not fit within the dominant framework of efficiency and performance management. But surely citizens are experts on how policy directly impacts on their lives?

Research suggests that credibility and the way things are framed are important conditions of attempts to influence

policy. Therefore in order to increase the use of evidence presented by communities within the policy-making process, co-production needs to integrate aspects of the dominant rational scientific mode of knowledge more effectively. This can be done in a way to supports progressive social change – as the academic [Radical Statistics Group](#) *advocates*. There also needs to be more evidence of the efficiencies gained through involving the people who are the target of interventions in the development of policy.

In order to truly address poverty, we need to transform the very nature of public policy by locating technocratic and citizen knowledge on a more equal footing – beyond redistribution towards a fundamental recognition of the considerable value of the knowledge that is held by our communities and an end to divisive approaches to ‘deal with feckless scroungers.’ It is about changing not just the substance of policy, but the very way in which it is made. If our society had more of a connection between those concocting policies and the people who experience its impacts a little more, perhaps we would not be so violently unequal.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the British Politics and Policy blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please read our [comments policy](#) before posting.

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