



FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Disrupting food insecurity in Aotearoa

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Are foodbanks truly helping our people whānau and communities? Or are we creating more dependency? Why do we have these major food-related issues in such a wealthy and food-prosperous country, particularly for lower income people and whānau? These are just some of the questions that flood my mind when looking at issues around food insecurity and poverty in Aotearoa New Zealand.

This short advocacy paper tries to address some of these questions by offering ideas for policy and wider social and community change. To be honest, this paper will probably raise more questions and challenge the status quo of how we currently respond to these food challenges. In our Covid-19-influenced society—facing numerous other political, social, cultural, ideological and whānau-related uncertainties and issues—applying different, innovative and new thinking to complex problems like food insecurity is critical to ensure we do not settle in an unhelpful status quo. To do so would lead to these food problems continually swamping us.

We only need to look at our daunting housing issues to learn what happens when our innovation, legitimate alternatives and targeted activity do not keep pace with the problem. Therefore, this advocacy paper is an offering to explore how we can begin to think differently about disrupting and improving the state of food insecurity in Aotearoa.

PROPOSITIONS

There are many amazing innovations already happening in this space, which we call **sustaining innovations**. This progress is encouraging. However, this paper also calls for what we call **disruptive or catalytic innovations**. Specifically, this includes **proposing a national network of social enterprise supermarkets and more disruptive systems change** involving Māori-led and local community-led efforts, food havens and more effective use of technology to tackle food insecurity problems.

It's cliché, but there is no silver bullet or one answer to address these food insecurity challenges. But it is helpful to think of a range of alternatives, ideas and potential solutions—from existing and sustaining innovations through too big, audacious ideas—to help eliminate food insecurity in our wealthy and prosperous land.

WHAT IS FOOD INSECURITY?

The Child Poverty Indicators Report 2021 states that **'food insecurity means not having reliable access to sufficient safe and nutritious food to lead a healthy and productive life, and meet cultural needs'**.¹

Kore Hiakai Zero Hunger Collective expands this further by developing three separate concepts to provide a broader definition of food insecurity and food security, these are: temporary food insecurity (caused by sudden shocks), food insecurity (which they argue is based on systemic issues and is food-related poverty) and food security and food sovereignty (which they specifically define as adequate access to healthy, affordable, culturally appropriate food that allows people to self-determine what, how and when they eat).²

The Auckland City Mission adds simply that **food insecurity is not having enough appropriate food**.³ Other terms such as food welfare or food poverty have been used to describe similar issues. Most of the public discussion in policy and research in New Zealand in recent years has focussed on the impact of food insecurity on children, and the health and nutritional approaches to food insecurity.

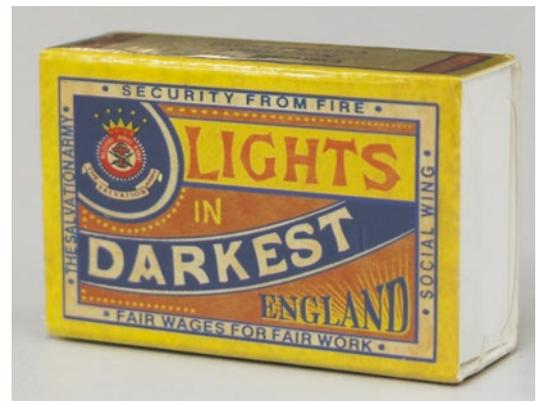
This is challenging given that most of the direct work, (eg, foodbanks) around food insecurity happens in the social services sector. However, this is changing quickly with recent research and advocacy from Kore Hiakai and specific providers of food assistance programmes, as well as the Ka Ora, Ka Ako healthy school lunches programme overseen by the Ministry of Education (MOE).

DISRUPTION, INNOVATION AND CHRISTIANITY

The mission of The Salvation Army is caring for people, transforming lives and reforming society by God's power. At the core of this mission is trying to live like Jesus. So, how did Jesus live? A good starting point to answer this question is Jesus' first recorded sermon in Matthew chapters 5 to 7. This was not a political speech, or a community activism rallying cry or even a poetic discourse meant to entertain people. This powerful and intricate sermon is a manifesto from the Son of God of what his Kingdom is meant to look like on the inside of the hearts, minds and lives of his followers. It was a clear and bold confronting of the worldly systems and ideas of happiness, success and truth. Jesus challenged these norms, as he offered a new way of living and spiritual regeneration so people could enter his Kingdom by acknowledging their sinfulness and spiritual poverty and accepting the grace, mercy, love and salvation he freely offers to all.

Disruption and The Salvation Army

These counter-cultural, non-conforming approaches that are based on Jesus' teachings have framed much of The Salvation Army's mission and ministry over the last 130 years. A famous example was the Lights in Darkest England matchstick factory started by The Salvation Army in 1891. Workers were paid fair wages and not exposed to dangerous chemicals, in stark contrast to the appalling work conditions, low pay and dangerous chemicals common in other matchstick factories.⁴ Some modern examples of this disruptive approach include the Salvos Legal Law firm established in Australia in 2010,⁵ and the Good Shop vans that started in 2018 here in Aotearoa.⁶



Explaining Disruptive Innovation

Disruption has always fascinated me. At its core, disruption innovation is a business theory developed in 1995 by Professor Clayton Christensen, of Harvard Business School. Disruption innovation is therefore a process where a smaller company with fewer resources can successfully challenge established incumbent businesses.⁷ These are innovations that make products and services more accessible and affordable through enabling technology, innovative business models and strong networks, thereby making them available to a larger population.⁸

The theory has progressed in recent years to look closer at empowering social change and the work of not-for-profit organisations. The Christensen Institute, formed to advocate for disruptive innovation, argues that the primary reason that truly transformational social change is not happening globally, despite the millions and billions of dollars thrown at these social issues, is misdirected investment:

Too much of the money available to address social needs is used to maintain the status quo, because it is given to organizations that are wedded to their current solutions, delivery models, and recipients. Many provide relatively specific, sometimes sophisticated offerings to a narrow range of people. While they may do a good and important job serving those people, and while their services may steadily improve, these organizations are unlikely ever to reach the far broader populations that are in need—and that would be satisfied by simpler offerings if only they were available. **What's required is expanded support for organizations that are approaching social-sector problems in a fundamentally new way and creating scalable, sustainable, systems-changing solutions.**⁹

They continue their argument by claiming more people, especially **organisations pursuing social change, should 'develop catalytic innovations which can surpass the status quo by providing good-enough solutions to inadequately addressed social problems'**.¹⁰

How does disruptive and catalytic innovation fit with this Christian stuff?

Throughout history, including the abolition of slavery and women's suffragette movements, Christians have frequently and broadly applied disruptive and catalytic thinking to specific social problems. Even The Salvation Army examples previously mentioned point to efforts to challenge the status quo and create scalable, sustainable and system-changing solutions. And looking at the problems related to food insecurity in Aotearoa, I affirm that disruptive and catalytic thinking is desperately needed before yet another social and economic issue bolts out of the proverbial barn door of our society.

SNAPSHOT OF FOOD INSECURITY IN AOTEAROA

The body of knowledge and policy development around food insecurity is growing quickly in New Zealand. But there is still insufficient data available to get a fuller picture of the food insecurity problem. With the massive impacts of Covid-19 and the resulting lockdowns, food insecurity and welfare are increasingly in the spotlight.

Using pre-Covid-19 figures from the 2019/20 New Zealand Health Survey, **Figure 1** shows that 20 percent of children aged 0–15 years lived in households reporting that food ran out 'often' or 'sometimes'.¹¹ In 2019/20, 40 percent of children from lower socioeconomic households experienced food running out 'sometimes' or 'often', compared with just six percent of those in the least deprived areas.¹²

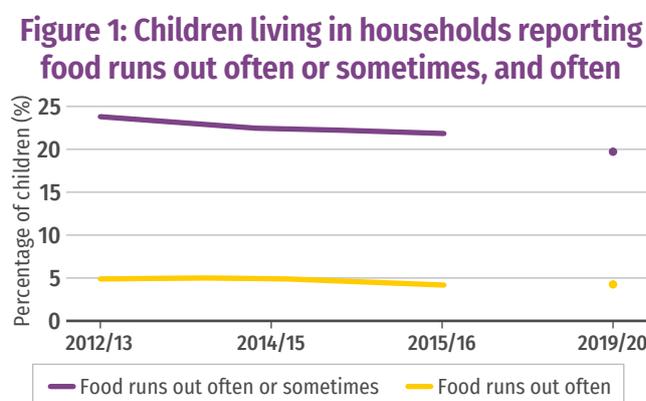
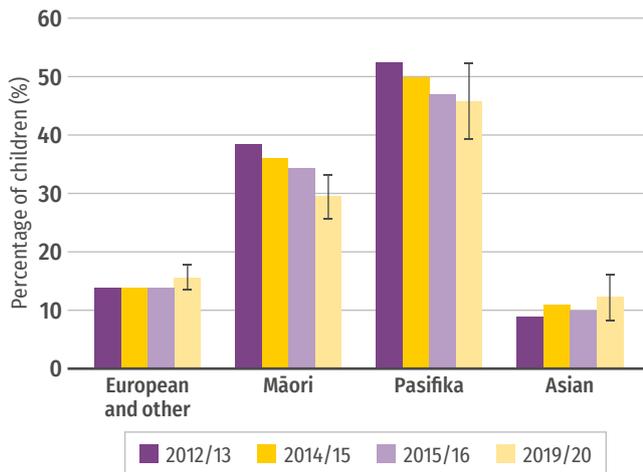


Figure 2: Children in households reporting food runs out often or sometimes, and often, by ethnicity



Māori and Pasifika children are disproportionately represented in food insecurity numbers. In 2019/20, over 45 percent of children in Pasifika households and nearly 30 percent of children in Māori households lived in households where the food runs out ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’. The proportion of European and Asian children in the 2019/20 survey, between 10–15 percent, are significantly lower than Māori and Pasifika children. In fact, food insecurity for European and Asian children increased between 2015/16 and 2019/20, while food insecurity decreased for Māori and Pasifika children from 2012 to 2020. This is illustrated in **Figure 2**. The Ministry of Health combined data from the 2014/15 and

2015/16 surveys to build a broader picture of the state of children in food-insecure homes and the impact of food insecurity on other child health and development indicators. The findings from this work are detailed in **Figure 3**.

Figure 3: Ministry of Health 2014/15 and 2015/16 Food Insecurity broader picture.

41% had unmet needs for primary care compared to 20% in food-secure households (2015/16 data only).	21% had medicated asthma compared to 15% in food-secure households (aged 5–14 years).
68% met the guidelines for fruit consumption compared to 75% in food-secure households (aged 2–14 years).	46% met the guidelines for vegetable consumption compared to 56% in food-secure households (ages 2–14 years).
27% were overweight compared to 20% in food-secure households (aged 2–14 years).	18% were obese compared to 9% in food-secure households (aged 5–14 years).
12% had learning, development or behaviour concerns based on the Parents’ Evaluation of Developmental Status compared to 5% in food-secure households (aged 4 months to 8 years, rated by primary caregiver).	16% had a concerning score on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, which screens for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, compared to 6% in food-secure households (aged 3–14 years, rated by primary caregiver).

As part of the Growing Up In New Zealand study, a 2020 report titled ‘Food Hardship and Early Childhood Nutrition’ had a specific focus on food insecurity facing Māori and Pasifika children.¹³ This report found that half (49.3%) of mothers at the nine-month interview stage reported that they had been forced to buy cheaper food so that they could pay for other things they needed in the past 12 months; one in eight (12.2%) had made use of special food grants or foodbanks in the past 12 months; and a similar proportion (11.5%) had gone without fresh fruit and vegetables to pay for other things. These realities are depicted in **Figure 4**.

But some of the most confronting food insecurity data came around Māori and Pasifika households. One in four Māori nine-month-olds, and almost one in every three Pasifika nine-month-olds lived in households that reported use of a special food grant or foodbank in the previous year,

compared with one in fifteen European infants.¹⁴ About 40 percent of Pasifika children and 35 percent of tamariki Māori lived in households that made use of special food grants or foodbanks at either 9- and/or 54-months of age.¹⁵ This data is in line with the over-representation of Māori and Pasifika children and households in food insecurity issues outlined earlier from the New Zealand Health Surveys.

Impact of Covid-19

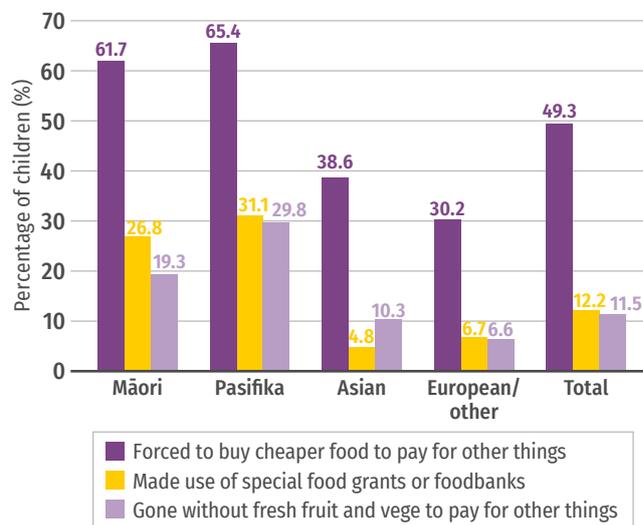
In 2020, more public attention was focused on food security issues in our nation as the various Covid-19 lockdowns impacted all parts of our families and society. During this period, we produced six Covid-19 Social Impact Dashboards,¹⁶ from April to November, to capture some of the social impacts of this pandemic. **Figure 5** is taken from our November Dashboard and shows the massive surge in food parcel provision between in April and May 2020. In the eight weeks of Level 3 and 4 lockdowns, The Salvation Army distributed over 37,000 food parcels nationally. By the end of 2020, over 113,000 food parcels were dispersed nationally, almost double the amount given in 2019. As of August 2021, our food parcel provision has essentially stabilised after last year's spike.

But with the current restrictions and future restrictions looming, we anticipate another surge in food insecurity and food parcel provision in the coming months.

Another good indicator of food insecurity is hardship assistance given by the Ministry of Social Development (MSD). **Figure 6** shows the number of hardship assistance grants since 2016. The amount of food-related grants given by MSD in 2020 follows a similar pattern to our own food parcel provision, with a significant spike in April/May 2020 and a levelling off since then. In the quarter to June 2021, over 290,000 hardship grants for food were given, costing about \$27 million. In the same period in 2020, over \$560,000 hardship grants were issued by MSD, amounting to over \$64 million.

Both indicators show the effects of a crisis on the wellbeing of people and whānau. These figures also suggest that food is both a critical need during these shocks on society, but also a symptom of other issues people or whānau are facing. With the high likelihood of more restrictions, we must draw clear lessons from these past experiences about how to address some of the acute food insecurity many members of our communities are facing. It is also clear from these indicators that Māori and Pasifika families are disproportionately represented in both our Salvation Army food parcel provision and the number of hardship grants for food from MSD.

Figure 4: Food deprivation for children at nine months old, by ethnicity, 2020



Source: Food Hardship and Early Childhood Nutrition

Figure 5: Salvation Army national weekly food parcel distribution total—2020

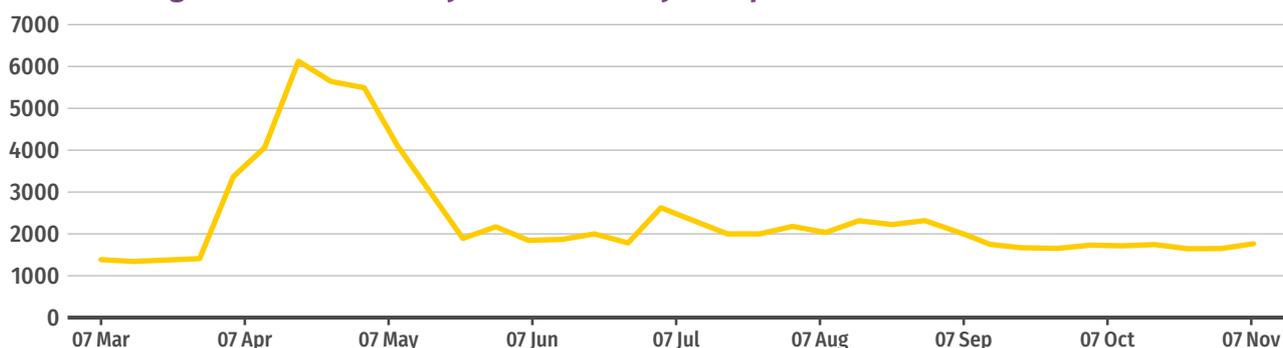
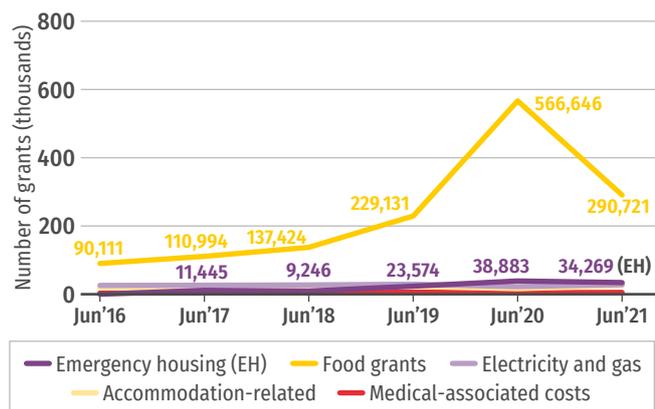


Figure 6: Number of hardship grants during the quarter for the last six June quarters



The growing body of knowledge about food insecurity in Aotearoa

It is encouraging to see the growing body of research knowledge and policy development focussed on food insecurity in our nation. There has been increased public policy focus, particularly with the NZ Health Surveys, Growing Up in New Zealand-based research, and the Child Poverty Indicators all reporting on food insecurity issues. However, there are significant gaps to these primary data sources used to measure and describe food insecurity, including no regular dataset developed to capture the social and

health impacts of food insecurity, and the absence of comprehensive Covid-19-related information with these statistics. For example, the Child Poverty Indicators Report 2021 information is pre-Covid-19 and based on 2019/20 NZ Health Survey data. Additionally, there is a rising amount of research on these issues from the public health sector, with a particular focus on nutrition and child and adolescent wellbeing.

NGOs are also contributing to the public discussion. Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) published a series of short food security papers beginning in 2019, looking at the available public statistics, related risk factors and making various policy recommendations.¹⁷ Providers of foodbanks, like the Auckland City Mission,¹⁸ are providing real-life snapshots of the impacts of food insecurity, and The Salvation Army¹⁹ through its annual *State of the Nation* reports is providing over 15 years of data of food parcel distribution nationally.

In 2019, the Kore Hiakai Zero Hunger Collective was formed by six NGOs to eliminate food insecurity in Aotearoa. Kore Hiakai has a partnership with MSD and is connected to over 300 foodbanks and community food organisations across the country, with a vision for a 'Food Secure Aotearoa'.²⁰ Kore Hiakai has three areas of focus: generating systemic change through collaboration, mana to mana practice of community food distribution and building relationships.²¹ Kore Hiakai is also producing a series of research reports and advocating for change in this area.

Policy responses to food insecurity in Aotearoa

In recent years, particularly with Covid-19, there have been major policy developments tackling food insecurity. As stated earlier, the MOE oversees the Ka Ora, Ka Ako healthy school lunches programme running nationally. In 2019, there was a two-year pilot aiming to deliver free and healthy school lunches for Years 1–8 (primary and intermediate aged) students in schools with high levels of disadvantage. The massive impact of Covid-19 on food security led to the expansion of this programme and it is expected reach around 215,000 students by the end of 2021, including secondary students.

An interim evaluation of the 2019 pilot programme was released which focussed on the Hawke's Bay and Bay of Plenty schools involved in the pilot.²² This evaluation concluded that in the first two to three months of the pilot, the programme 'often achieved more than what was expected ... excellent progress towards making nutritious food available and significantly improving lunchtime diets'.²³ While the findings are encouraging, some caution is needed. First, this interim report is only for two New Zealand regions and is based on the 2019 pilot. Secondly, it does not include Covid-19-related information from 2020. Finally, there have been some problems with the rollout of the programme, including hundreds of uneaten lunches,²⁴ students either declining or missing out on the lunches²⁵ and schools and parents not supporting the programme.²⁶ Teething problems are to be expected with these kinds of programmes. Consequently, robust and comprehensive evaluation and analysis is critical for this policy.

MSD has a major role in policy development and implementation to combat food insecurity. Hardship assistance for food was mentioned earlier in this paper. From the Covid-19 Recovery Budget in 2020, MSD invested \$32 million over two years (up to June 2022) to provide support for foodbanks, food rescue and other community organisations who are distributing food to vulnerable people and whānau and building community-led solutions for food security. MSD is providing various food insecurity funding streams for NGOs providing food parcels. They are also working with three national organisations—Kore Hiakai, the New Zealand Food Network (working to increase the supply of food to community food services by distributing bulk surplus and donated food from food producers, growers and wholesalers through to food hubs around New Zealand on an ‘as required’ basis) and the Aotearoa Food Rescue Alliance (national support for local food rescue organisations to reduce food waste and increase food security).²⁷

What does all this evidence point to?

In many ways, most of the data, research and policy development in Aotearoa is really trying to quantify and describe the food insecurity issues we have. There is lots of energy in this space, but also major gaps in data and huge Covid-19-related spikes in food insecurity. Still, there are numerous community ideas emerging, including the community-led Pataka Kai movement,²⁸ development of mana-enhancing models for foodbanks from Kore Hiakai²⁹ and a massive amount of community gardens, food rescue, community meals and other grassroots initiatives operating around the country. There is also more public policy development in the areas of food systems and supply chains. The status quo of food insecurity in Aotearoa is being established and also challenged at the same time. This is positive. But in my view, this is a great opportunity to see how and where disruptive and catalytic innovation could play a role in informing developments around food insecurity in our nation.

HOW DO YOU EFFECTIVELY DISRUPT FOOD INSECURITY IN AOTEAROA?

This final section of this paper offers some thoughts and ideas to contribute to the ongoing public discourse on food insecurity currently taking place in our nation. I would argue that there are **already** many disruptive and catalytic innovations happening in this space. After looking at much of the research, activities and policy development concerning food insecurity, I am still left wondering if these measures are truly transformative for the people and whānau actually facing and living in food insecurity. It is also worth noting that there are significant public policy ‘elephants-in-the-room’ when it comes to bringing effective change in food insecurity issues that are not discussed in this paper, primarily because a lot has already been written about these measures. These include increasing core welfare benefit levels and developing a national food strategy. There are currently cross-government and cross-sector groups looking at these critical issues, and the findings and actions of these groups will be crucial in addressing these ‘elephants-in-the-room’ issues. Such measures can greatly impact on food insecurity.

Is the status quo acceptable?

The Snapshot Section (starting page 3) basically outlines the status quo of food insecurity in Aotearoa. I would argue that this status quo is totally unacceptable, especially when shocks such as pandemics and lockdowns are becoming more common here. During the recent Level 4 lockdown in August 2021, The Salvation Army saw an 84 percent increase in national food parcel provision in the week ending 28 August 2021.³⁰ In our experience, food hardship is always a symptom of other issues facing that person or whānau. Providing food parcels is also a window into other challenges and hardship experienced by that person or whānau. This status quo must continually be challenged and disrupted.

Sustaining Innovations in food insecurity

Christensen et al, divide disruptive innovation into sustaining and truly disruptive innovations.³¹ They argue that most innovations are sustaining ones because they maintain the current systems and provide some improvements to this system, especially with technological innovation. They work towards better functionality for customers or clients, and, where organisations use their existing resources or funding to grow, they refine or revitalise their current offerings. These sustaining innovations are great and definitely help achieve social goals.

In a social service context, this could involve:

- organising the food security sector better to ensure supply and delivery lines are strong
- developing mana-enhancing frameworks to help to better engage with people and whānau using foodbanks
- conducting better research into food insecurity in Aotearoa
- pouring funding, staff and energy into making foodbanks more effective, streamlined and better.

In many ways, these initiatives reinforce food insecurity, particularly around the dependency of people and whānau on this assistance. These initiatives are clearly helpful, but they effectively become ways to reduce the impact of the underlying issues directly contributing to food insecurity. In my view, all of these innovations are already operating to some degree by government and social services providers, and they are achieving good outcomes. These are **sustaining innovations**.

What could truly disruptive innovation look like for Aotearoa?

As outlined earlier in this advocacy paper, truly disruptive innovations, or catalytic innovations, seek to change or disrupt the status quo with good enough solutions to address these food hardship issues. I offer these ideas or solutions that could be implemented in Aotearoa to disrupt the status quo further.

1. National network of Social Enterprise Supermarkets

There is growing momentum and popularity globally for social supermarkets. The Community Shop social enterprise in the United Kingdom has 16 company shops operating throughout the country, combining three distinct spaces—community hub, community store and community kitchen.³² The concept has also found roots in New Zealand with the Free Guys social supermarket in Avondale, Auckland, established in 2020 after the series of Covid-19 lockdowns.³³ Additionally, the Wellington City Mission operates their Social Supermarket in Newtown, Wellington, that tries to move away from the traditional food parcel model and allows people to choose their own groceries.³⁴ This has become a popular model used by many social service agencies and foodbanks around the world. Some of the other 'bones' of this model are already operating in Aotearoa, with companies such as Reduced to Clear, Bin Inn and Why Knot Outlet Shop. The Salvation Army in Baltimore, Maryland, USA, launched its own version in 2018 with the DMG (Doing the Most Good) Foods grocery store.³⁵ The store closed in early 2021, but is rebranding and changing direction in its fight against food insecurity.

Therefore, there are lots of variations of social supermarkets operating locally and globally. Many of these variations build off some of the more traditional models.

I believe there is great potential for a legitimate social enterprise supermarket model for Aotearoa. I propose that essential to this social enterprise approach is allowing people to actually purchase food from these supermarkets with money, commitments of time or volunteering, or even some sort of trade and barter system. For this social enterprise model to be effective, there must be a balance between affordable prices that lower-income New Zealanders can afford, and the ability to be creative in forms

of payment for struggling whānau. To make these financially viable, these supermarkets could attract middle-income New Zealanders to this model ‘for good’ and bring their patronage and money. This is an extremely difficult balance to achieve. But such an audacious approach could truly disrupt the existing food insecurity issues in Aotearoa. Some other key aspects of this model should also include the following.

- **Connecting with other good sustaining innovations**

This could involve existing community kitchens and community gardens to support and promote home cooking and healthy meals. There are numerous opportunities here.

- **Challenging the existing duopoly in the market**

This is a massive task requiring huge amounts of collaboration and capital investment (or redirection of funding). But the Commerce Commission, in their market study into the \$22 billion grocery sector, announced some key recommendations and insights, including:

- major concerns about the duopoly in this sector where many suppliers have few alternatives but to supply the major retailers
- recommending making it easier for new competitors to enter the market, or existing independent retailers to expand by increasing wholesale access to a wide range of groceries at competitive prices.³⁶ In late September 2021, Tex Edwards, the founder of 2degrees, which broke the Spark and Vodafone duopoly in the mobile market, announced a bid to break this grocery duopoly by setting up a third supermarket group, mobilising \$1 billion in capital to establish a new supermarket chain.³⁷ Clearly, there is some appetite for these kinds of courageous, disruptive innovations in this food space. A social enterprise supermarket chain aimed at disrupting food insecurity while still being financially viable would require even more ground-breaking thinking and cross sector, community and possibly even iwi-led support to become a reality.

- **Create true disruption**

To create real disruptive innovation for social change some major innovation is critical. But one key element would be to encourage and persuade non-traditional social enterprise supermarket shoppers away from the incumbent stores. This will ensure the financial sustainability of the enterprise, especially if middle-class New Zealanders are enticed away from the existing options towards a social enterprise supermarket focused on lower, fairer prices, accessibility and mana-enhancing models for lower income shoppers. Again, this would ensure the financial viability of this disruptive or catalytic innovation because the support and patronage of ‘middle New Zealand’ would, in effect, support and help poorer New Zealanders using this social enterprise supermarket.

- **Collaboration for social change**

There are great opportunities for more collaboration between private and not-for-profit stakeholders. This collaboration would be mutually beneficial for all parties in multiple ways. Other international examples of these social supermarket enterprises involve a mixture of these stakeholders working together around supply chains, healthy food, reducing waste and promoting environmentally sustainable practices. Imagine a system and social enterprise where fruit and vegetable growers were supporting and supplying social supermarkets to provide healthy options for both poorer New Zealanders and others who have shifted their patronage to this alternative option. Furthermore, imagine if local community gardens, Pataka Kai and other local initiatives, were feeding into a local social enterprise supermarket in an area of high deprivation. The opportunities for cross-fertilisation of ideas, innovation and action are huge. Also, the role of the social services sector cannot be underestimated here. Churches and organisations that have both strong local ties and a national reach—like The Salvation Army, Presbyterian Support and others—must also play a key role in any collaboration efforts, especially since they have the most direct and intimate connection with poorer and vulnerable New Zealanders who face food insecurity and other pressing social and spiritual issues.

2. Disruptive systems change

I believe there are real opportunities to connect an audacious idea such as a national network of social enterprise supermarkets to other critical elements of system change to disrupt food insecurity.

◦ Food sovereignty

One key element is the increasing focus on food sovereignty globally to address food insecurity challenges. In Aotearoa there is more active discussion, research, policy development and programme implementation of Māori food sovereignty models, as well as other generic models.³⁸ These developments are extremely exciting for many reasons, including the use of indigenous and sustainable food security measures, and the current over-representation of Māori people and whānau in food hardship numbers. Food sovereignty has been defined as ‘empowering people, as individuals and as groups, to make their own choices about the food they eat, where it comes from, how it is produced and their relationship to its production’.³⁹

◦ Role of Māori and local communities

This raises the potential of two extremely important elements. First, the vital role that iwi and Māori organisations can play in this aim for disruptive systems change. This is even more important because of the growing renaissance in indigenous food sovereignty models and growing techniques, as well the opportunity to develop innovations—including the social enterprise model proposed above—in communities with large Māori populations. Additionally, engaging urban marae and Māori organisations are critical for any success for the ideas posited in this paper. Secondly, these sustaining and disruptive innovations must be championed, focussed on and involve local communities. In fact, community-led innovations as a part of a national chain of social supermarkets and wider disruptive systems change are crucial.

◦ Food Havens

Furthermore, the body of New Zealand-relevant knowledge around food deserts and food swamps is growing. Food deserts are generally considered areas that have limited access to affordable and healthy food. Food swamps are commonly defined as communities with a high density of outlets selling high-calorie, unhealthy junk food. Auckland University of Technology (AUT) researchers released a paper in March 2021 calling for the establishment of food havens in poorer areas to ensure there is a high availability of healthy food that’s culturally accessible, ‘convenient, desirable and most importantly affordable’.⁴⁰ This recent work from AUT researchers is a good progression from the food desert and food swamp models, especially as they have used Māori and Pasifika concepts like papakainga (place) to inform their food haven model.

◦ Using technology to combat food insecurity

Another critical factor in this potential systems change is the active use of technology in enhancing food security and addressing food insecurity problems. Technological innovation could be a real game-changer to help bring systems change. How can technology help make community gardens more productive? How can technology map out people and families in food hardship and develop new provision or supply lines (eg, an Uber-Eats-type connection for isolated and vulnerable people to a social enterprise supermarket)? How can technology support Māori food sovereignty initiatives? These are the types of questions that should be asked to develop new ideas in addressing food hardship.

Much of the international efforts to use technological innovation to tackle food insecurity focuses on farming practices, improving food growing conditions and even better livestock management.⁴¹ But artificial intelligence and robust analytics can also aid greatly in improving supply chains, more efficient interface with consumers, contactless shopping options and, ideally, better information and data for a social supermarket chain to set prices, develop efficient systems and creatively promote this chain.⁴²

◦ Summary

All of these attempts to address food insecurity can, in my view, if connected effectively to a social enterprise supermarket, truly bring about meaningful and impactful systems change. Disruption is not going to happen with just one idea or innovation. It will take a suite of measures, policies and innovations to provide good-enough solutions. And it will take time. But combining daring ideas like a national network of social enterprise supermarkets with systems changes in technological innovation for food security, Māori food sovereignty, food deserts, food swamp and other sustaining innovations can surely bring legitimate disruptive or catalytic social change.

Is disruption even possible?

In conclusion, I wholeheartedly believe that effectively disrupting food insecurity is possible in Aotearoa. But it won't be easy. A combination of good sustaining innovations, mixed with disruptive ones, like a national network of social enterprise supermarkets, would contribute massively to making disruption a reality. I don't think we will ever get rid of foodbanks, or people requiring food hardship grants, or food hardship overall. Still, with these kinds of sustaining and disruptive innovations, and new innovations not even considered yet, transformative change for people and whānau is possible and attainable.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Retrieved from <https://dpmc.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2021-05/cpri-report-20210512.pdf>, page 14.
- 2 Retrieved from <https://www.zerohunger.org.nz/resources/food-insecurity-food-security>
- 3 Retrieved from <https://www.aucklandcitymission.org.nz/whakarongo-ki-te-korero-whanau-katoa-o-te-rangatiratanga/>, page 3.
- 4 Retrieved from <https://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/about-us/international-heritage-centre/international-heritage-centre-blog/matches-and-morals>
- 5 Retrieved from <https://www.lawyersweekly.com.au/careers/22171-how-a-dinner-conversation-made-one-man-the-boss-of-salvos-legal>
- 6 Retrieved from <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/406417/salvation-army-truck-shop-scheme-the-good-shop-van-set-to-expand>
Note: The Salvation Army has discontinued these vans because of the high financial costs of complying with the Government's new consumer credit regulations. But in our view, the Good Shop was always meant to be a short-term disruption to the predatory lending market. There have been significant changes to our credit laws since the Good Shop vans were launched in South Auckland and Porirua.
- 7 Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2015/12/what-is-disruptive-innovation>
- 8 Retrieved from <https://www.christenseninstitute.org/disruptive-innovations/>
- 9 Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2006/12/disruptive-innovation-for-social-change>
- 10 Ibid.
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Te Ope Whakaora

Social Policy & Parliamentary Unit

Working for the eradication of poverty in New Zealand

Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of facts and information in this report. Inaccuracies or errors in interpretation remain ours and we are happy to discuss any brought to our attention. The views are the authors', expressed in the name of The Salvation Army, Te Ope Whakaora.

We welcome your comments.

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