



# HIDDEN HUNGER IN SOUTH AFRICA

THE FACES OF HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION IN A FOOD-SECURE NATION

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**YOLISWA PEGGY STEMELE**  
BUYS BREAD FROM LOCAL SPAZA SHOP

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## FRONT COVER

A MEMBER OF THE DIMBAZA AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE, EASTERN CAPE

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

South Africa is considered a 'food-secure' nation, producing enough calories to adequately feed every one of its 53 million people. However, the reality is that, despite some progress since the birth of democracy in 1994, one in four people currently suffers hunger on a regular basis and more than half of the population live in such precarious circumstances that they are at risk of going hungry.

The numbers of people facing hunger can be estimated at some 13 million in total. These numbers are disturbing, but behind every statistic is a face with a story about what it is like to face hunger in a nation where the few have plenty. This paper is based on the testimonies of women and men, urban and rural, and elucidates what it feels like to face hunger on a regular basis or to be constantly afraid of this threat.

*'[It is] genocide of the mind ... because it affects the mind (fosters negative thoughts), the spirit (state of hopelessness) and the physical being (hunger).'*

- **CHIEF OF KHOISAN**, Bloemendal, Eastern Cape

Hunger, as described by participants in this study, means more than physical sensations of emptiness or pain, more than incessant cravings that cannot be satisfied. It is described by those interviewed as a phenomenon that creates 'genocide of the mind', inducing hopelessness and despair, depriving hungry individuals of dignity and demeaning them as social beings. Hunger is a personal and a communal malaise that crushes the potential of people to get out of poverty and to prosper. It is a manifestation of, and helps to perpetuate, damaging social inequality: poor households have to spend nearly half of their income on food but have to suffice with cheap, expired and non-nutritious food, creating a society that has 'good access to bad food and bad access to good food'.

*'We have to buy the cheapest of the cheapest. We are rated as the cheapest of the cheapest.'*

- **ELZETTA**, youth headed household, Bloemendal

The following factors leading to food insecurity and hunger were identified by the people interviewed, either individually (key informants) or in focus group discussions (FGDs), and in the literature reviews:

## LOW INCOME AND UNEMPLOYMENT

With unemployment levels at 25% nationally and over 15 million people receiving social grants, people do not have enough money to buy food. People in employment or who have casual jobs indicated that they are food-secure in the first week after their wages are paid but are often food-insecure for the remaining three weeks in the month. Low-paid and irregular work reduces stability of access to food. Social grants provide a crucial safety net to many.

*'We go hungry on a regular basis, mainly because of a shortage of money. We spend days and sometimes even weeks without proper nutritious food in our homes.'*

- **MEMBER OF COASTAL COMMUNITY**, Ocean View, Western Cape

## **GENDER INEQUALITY**

Women face hunger more often than men, due to disparities in income, limited access to employment or means of production and cultural practices that put them last or allow them smaller portions when food is in short supply. Women in the communities covered by this study are still largely responsible for feeding their families and are further burdened when family members are suffering from diseases such as HIV or AIDS, with time and money needed for food spent on caring for the sick.

*'There are times when I think it would be better to die than to live like this, but then I tell myself that I must persevere.'*

- **YOLISWA PEGGY STEMELE**, Ngobozana, Eastern Cape

## **ACCESS TO LAND, WATER, TOOLS AND INFORMATION**

Fewer than 2% of households grow the majority of their own food, and the majority of small scale producers in rural areas are unable to feed their families. Nevertheless, as one informant put it, 'land is life' for many rural communities and a core asset in addressing hunger and malnutrition – though access to land alone is not seen as sufficient. Inadequate access to water, equipment and extension services means that even if rural communities have access to land, they cannot be productive enough. For subsistence fisher folk, restrictive fishing quotas mean that they are legally restrained from collecting enough food for their families. Communities also reported cases of corruption and maladministration blocking their access to productive resources.

## **THE MARKET STRUCTURE OF THE FOOD INDUSTRY**

The food industry plays an important role in perpetuating hunger through its influence on the accessibility and pricing of food. Five large food retailers control 60% of the market, and outlets are concentrated in towns and cities, which many cannot afford to travel to. The supermarket revolution has in some cases brought a greater variety of food, but supermarkets can be more expensive, tend to promote low-quality processed foods and can push smaller retailers and informal traders out of business. A handful of food manufacturers dominate the market, and some of them have been found guilty of fixing the prices of basic foods such as milk and bread.

*Community members in Fetakgomo, Limpopo province have to travel for an hour to reach the nearest market, at a cost of R200 (\$20) (FGD).*

## **THE PRICE SQUEEZE**

Rising prices are pushing people into hunger, with the poorest income groups spending nearly 50% of their incomes on food, and another 19% going on housing, electricity and transport. Commodity prices for maize have increased by 50% in a year and electricity prices have rocketed by over 200% since 2010, forcing people to make stark choices between food and energy.

*'Whenever the budget is announced, our lives take a turn for the worse, because the prices of basic goods just go up.'*

- **COMMUNITY MEMBER**, Eastern Cape

## POOR ACCESS TO QUALITY AND NUTRITIOUS FOOD

Poor communities have 'bad access to good food and good access to bad food' (key informant, December 2013). The lack of nutritious food is borne out in health and productive capacity. Childhood stunting in South Africa has increased to 26.5%, obesity levels are amongst the highest in the world at 42% for women, and children are unable to concentrate at school. Spaza shops (informal convenience stores) usually stock low-quality produce that is often past its expiry date, and almost no fresh fruits or vegetables. The supermarkets in townships are also reported to stock food with short or expired shelf-lives, of low-quality and poorly labelled, making healthy choices difficult.

*For child-headed households in Bloemendal, Western Cape, the daily diet consists of white bread and a carton of cheap juice or sugar water (known locally as the 'poppie water diet').*

## CLIMATE CHANGE IS A RISK MULTIPLIER

Changes in the climate are also threatening to increase hunger. Communities reported increasing occurrences of extreme weather such as heavy rains and flash floods, frosts and blistering morning temperatures, as well as creeping changes in rainfall patterns, a blurring of the seasons and changes in planting/harvesting seasons. The changing climate is already reducing people's ability to produce, store and access nutritious food. More extreme weather as well as creeping changes are predicted, with temperature increases of up to 8°C in interior regions if no action is taken to stop climate change.

*'Some time back we used to eat fresh food from our gardens, but now it's not possible because of the high temperatures that make it impossible for us to work our gardens.'*

- **COMMUNITY MEMBER**, Ngqushwa, Eastern Cape

Hunger adds fire to a society that is feeling increasing frustration at the slow progress towards equality of income, services and opportunity 20 years after democracy was introduced. The rising number of protests around the country are a clear manifestation of this frustration, with hunger high on demonstrators' lists of grievances.

## THE WAY FORWARD

Oxfam believes that it is time to eradicate hunger and malnutrition in South Africa once and for all, and that this can be achieved through decisive action taken in a coordinated way across society. The country's Constitution enshrines the right to sufficient food and water under Section 27, which obliges the State to take reasonable legislative and other measures to achieve the progressive realization of these rights.

To date the range of government policies created to address food security, hunger and malnutrition have been poorly implemented, uncoordinated and unaccountable to people who are facing hunger. The government's Integrated Food Security Strategy of 2002, coordinated by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF), was supposed to set a framework for a coordinated approach; however, both literature and communities say that this is not working. The National Development Plan (NDP) identified food insecurity as a core component of poverty and inequality, following which a new Food and Nutrition Security policy was developed in 2013, but it has significant gaps.

The following recommendations are based on the findings of this research particularly the testimonies from communities, while recognizing that more work needs to be done to develop each area.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Introduce national legislation to eradicate hunger and malnutrition in South Africa. A National Food Act should be developed in a bottom up process with communities who are facing hunger. It should be adequately resourced and should include mechanisms for accountability.
2. Take action to improve local level coordination and policy implementation to address hunger and malnutrition, including better targeting of initiatives towards people who are facing hunger.
3. Create a fair, accountable and sustainable food industry that ends bad practices such as price fixing and food waste, and does more to enable small-scale producers and informal traders to prosper.
4. Prioritize decent employment and income generation for people facing hunger with targeted government work schemes that provide reliable income as well as training, alongside reviewing living wages and social grants.
5. Improve rights to land and the means of production, such as water, seeds, fishing equipment, finance and skills training, for small-scale producers facing hunger.
6. Create climate change adaptation plans with the full participation of people who are vulnerable to hunger and climate change with input from better-skilled local government actors.
7. Step up action to reduce carbon emissions that contribute to climate change and transition to a low-carbon economy that invests more in renewable energy sources that could produce cheap energy and sustainable jobs.
8. Create a national conversation about ending hunger and malnutrition, exposing more people to this scandal and proposing alternatives that put ordinary people at the centre of defining a more equitable and sustainable food system.





# INTRODUCTION

South Africa is supposedly a 'food-secure' nation, producing enough calories to adequately feed every one of its 53 million citizens. The reality is that, despite some progress since the birth of democracy in the country in 1994, one in four people currently suffers hunger on a regular basis and more than half of the population live in such precarious circumstances that they are at risk of going hungry. The South African National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (SANHANES) revealed in 2013 that 26% of the population was actually facing hunger and a further 28% were at risk.<sup>1</sup>



Hunger as discussed in this study is more than the physical sensation of emptiness or pain, more than incessant cravings that cannot be satisfied. It was described by those interviewed as a phenomenon that creates 'genocide of the mind', inducing hopelessness and despair, as something that deprives hungry individuals of dignity and demeans them as social beings. Hunger is a personal and a communal malaise that crushes the potential of citizens. It is caused by, and perpetuates, poverty that is more than merely material. It is a manifestation of, and helps to perpetuate, damaging social inequality: poor households have to spend nearly 50% of their income on food<sup>2</sup>, but they are forced to buy low-quality produce. As key informant put it, they have 'good access to bad food and bad access to good food'.

The concept of food security has approximately 200 definitions<sup>3</sup>, but the definition most often quoted is that of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), which describes food security as 'a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life' (FAO, 1996). This definition covers four dimensions: availability of food, access to food, utilization of food, and stability of both availability and access. A household is considered food-insecure if it fails in one or all of these dimensions.

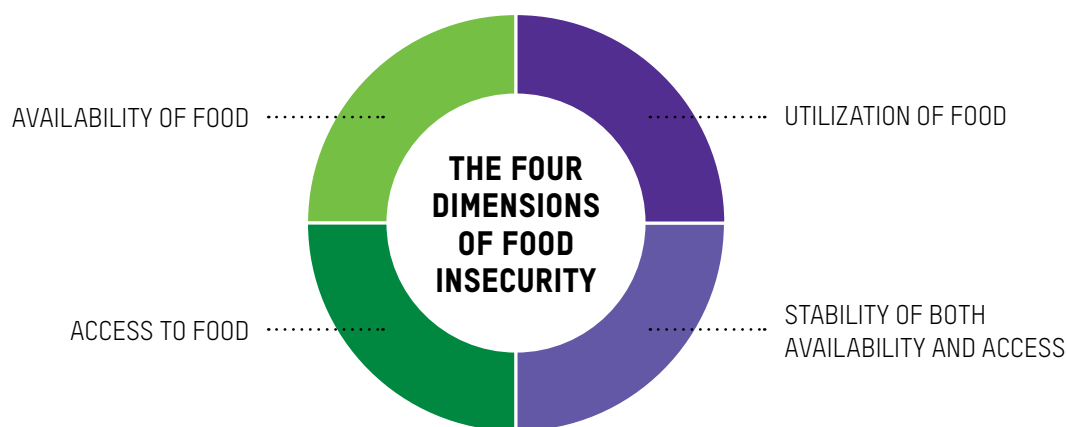
1. Hunger (food insecurity) was assessed by means of the Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project (CCHIP).

2. Authors' calculations from National Income Dynamics Survey, 2013.

3. Key informants.



However, approaches to address hunger tend to focus on technical solutions, such as increased crop production, price monitoring or food subsidies, but not on the broader social, political and rights-based causes of the problem. Hunger often results in malnutrition and prevents people doing physical or mental work, from learning, from recovering from illnesses and even from growing – it is a key cause of childhood stunting. Although malnutrition is commonly associated with people being underweight, it can also lead to them being overweight or obese.



Hunger is more than a physical feeling: it creates both physical and physiological barriers to people reaching their full potential, which in turn perpetuates inequality. Even if every child has access to education, they cannot learn well if they are hungry. South Africa is plagued with both hunger and malnutrition, with one in four of all its citizens facing hunger, 26.5% of children stunted and 70% of adult women overweight (SANHANES, 2013; Lancet, 2014). In some provinces the figures are a reflection of high levels of inequality, with 36% of people in the Eastern Cape facing hunger (Stats SA, 2012).

These figures should be a national scandal, but hunger and malnutrition rarely make the headlines in South Africa and are not at the top of decision makers' agendas. The stories and faces behind statistics that talk of a loss of dignity or despair are not well reported. This study attempts to go beyond technical terms such as 'food security' to terms that people use in their everyday lives.

The right to food is enshrined in Section 27 of South Africa's Constitution, which states, 'Everyone has the right to have access to sufficient food and water', and continues, 'The state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of each of these rights'. While some gains have been made since 1994, when South Africa gained democracy, half the population still live precariously, with hunger on their doorsteps. The realisation of the right to food requires a greater appreciation of the drivers of hunger and malnutrition and how these connect to wider processes of social, spatial, political and economic exclusion.

Against this background, this study used the FAO framework and definition of food insecurity as a starting point in understanding the realities of food insecurity in South Africa. It also embraced the ability of people facing hunger and malnutrition on a daily basis to define their situations in their own words and on their own terms. The voices, realities and aspirations of food-insecure citizens have been missing from the debate about food insecurity and hunger, and the contribution intended by this study is to deepen understanding of hunger based on the realities of the ordinary citizens who experience it, supported by statistics and reviews of available literature.

# RESEARCH METHODS

This study used an adapted version of the 'Poverty Hearing Methodology' (see Annex C). This tailored approach allows the telling of stories, through focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews, of the human face of food insecurity, climate change and inequality.

With the aim of understanding hunger and malnutrition in specific locations, research was undertaken in nine different municipalities in three provinces: Thulamela, Fetakgomo and Polokwane in Limpopo Province; Ngqushwa and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan, including Bloemendal and KwaNobuhle, in Eastern Cape; and Cape Town Metropolitan, Langeberg and Swellendam in Western Cape. The choice of province was based on national poverty statistics (Stats SA, 2012) and on the South African National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (SANHANES, 2012). These three provinces can be considered reasonably representative of the country as a whole in terms of demographic, economic, geographic and political characteristics; municipalities were chosen based on structured (purposive) sampling. However, the scope of this research is to provide a snapshot of what is happening in these localities, without claiming to be nationally representative.



Ngqushwa is the poorest municipality in rural Eastern Cape and among the poorest in South Africa. It is generally dry and has experienced a number of droughts. Bloemendal is an urban area within Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality. KwaNobuhle is a peri-urban area in the same municipality that has relied on the car manufacturer Volkswagen for employment.

Langeberg in Western Cape is a rural municipality and is largely dominated by commercial farms. Swellendam is a peri-urban municipality, with a strong element of commercial and subsistence farming, but it is quite dry and prone to the impacts of climate change. In Cape Town residents the FGDs were held in Ocean View where fishing has traditionally been the main source of livelihoods.

Fetakgomo in Limpopo is a rural municipality where livestock is the main livelihood activity. Thulamela is a former tribal area and depends on agriculture. Both municipalities have been identified by the Financial and Fiscal Commission as being vulnerable to climate change. In Polokwane, the FGDs were conducted in Nobody township.

Each selected location was visited twice: the first time to conduct FGDs to elicit ideas, stories, concepts and testimonies on hunger and climate change, the second time to conduct a rapid appraisal survey to address the research questions, including the why, who and when of climate change-induced food insecurity (the results of these surveys will be released in a separate report). In addition, key informant interviews were conducted at both local and national levels. At the local level, interviews were conducted in each community and province with municipal officials, ward councillors and ward committee members, representatives of community-based and faith-based organizations (CBOs and FBOs) and other non-state actors. At the national level, key informants included leading academics, policy makers and civil society organization (CSO) activists.

The study consulted secondary sources widely but has relied mostly on well recognized sources such as the General Household Survey and SANHANES, while also consulting others where additional or more recent information was available.





# STUDY FINDINGS

## 3.1 WHAT IS HUNGER IN SOUTH AFRICA?

For the purposes of this study, the FAO definition of food security provided a general context against which hunger in the nine locations selected could be viewed, but the researchers were more interested in how food-insecure people themselves define their situation, in their own words and experiences. It is also important to note that food insecurity is not a binary concept (i.e. limited to whether someone is food-insecure or not), but should be viewed within a continuum that captures different levels and intensities.

With this understanding, engagement during the poverty hearings and FGDs defined food insecurity in terms of lack of food to meet daily dietary requirements, as well as the limited variety and poor quality of the food available. One participant from Langeberg municipality in Western Cape captured this by noting, 'It's not that there is nothing to eat, but we eat poor-quality food that keeps us hungry.'

*'At times food insecurity makes us eat food that we never thought we would eat. Nowadays chicken feet and chicken offal have become our specials.'*

- **COMMUNITY MEMBER**, Langeberg, Western Cape

Also noteworthy from the FGDs was a general belief that food insecurity goes beyond immediate hunger and has lasting impacts on individuals and communities. For example, the Chief of the Khoisan in Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality equated food insecurity to 'genocide of the mind ... because it affects the mind (fosters negative thoughts), the spirit (state of hopelessness) and the physical being (hunger)' (FGD, Bloemendal). Another participant noted that 'hunger has destroyed our mindsets so that we can't even think of our own initiatives and are too dependent on the government'. Others pointed to the dignity-stripping effects of food insecurity; one person said, 'It reduces a person's dignity. We have cases of 40-year-olds who are still living with their parents because they are food-insecure' (FGD, Bloemendal).

In the Western Cape, a household talked about their children not being able to concentrate at school when they were hungry. It is stories and perspectives like these from people at the local level that can help us to understand hunger and malnutrition in a supposedly food-secure country.

## BOX 1: WOMEN BEAR THE BRUNT OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR FEEDING THE FAMILY

Yoliswa Peggy Stemele lives in Ngobazana, a village in Eastern Cape province. She is not formally employed, but picks aloe leaves to extract juice, which she sells. She explains, 'I live off picking aloe, doing washing and cleaning for people so I can go to bed with something to eat. We wake up in the morning and make porridge if there is mealie meal to make it with. If there isn't any, we get leftovers to eat. I feel like I have lost my dignity because I think that people look down on me because I'm poor. When I am picking aloe, I feel like people are laughing and gossiping about me.'

She explains. 'When the bus comes in the morning at 5.30 we go out into the forest to get the aloe. We come back at around 6pm and we have had nothing to eat all day. It is mostly women who cut aloe. We extract the sap and pour it into buckets. Five litres of sap are worth R60. When I have made some money, I can go to the shop to buy mealie meal and other things. Sometimes the prices have gone up, and then I have to leave some of the items I wanted to buy and come back another time. There are times when I think it would be better to die than to live like this, but then I tell myself that I must persevere.'

While Yolisa receives just R60 for five litres of sap and struggles to feed her family, a 500ml bottle of aloe vera juice (diluted in water with colour and preservatives added) costs R38.99 at a mainstream retailer – a mark-up of 500%.<sup>4</sup>



**YOLISWA PEGGY STEMELE**  
ALOE PICKER FROM NGOBOZANA, EASTERN CAPE

4. Price for Nature's Choice Aloe Vera juice, from Dis-Chem Pharmacies online, 14 July 2014.

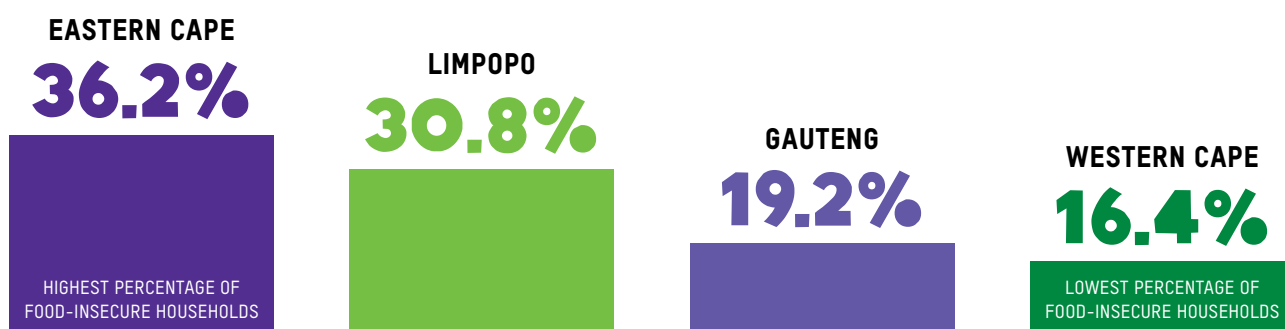
## 3.2 MORE THAN HALF THE POPULATION ARE AT RISK OF HUNGER

At present 26% of South Africa's population regularly experiences hunger, and an additional 28.3% are at risk of hunger (SANHANES, 2013). Food insecurity affects formal and informal settlements in both rural and urban areas. According to the SANHANES survey, the largest groups actually experiencing hunger live in urban informal (32.4%) and rural informal (37.0%) areas. The same areas account for the biggest percentages at risk of hunger: 36.1% in urban informal areas and 32.8% in rural informal areas. The lowest prevalence of hunger, at 19%, was reported in urban formal areas.



Source: SANHANES, 2013

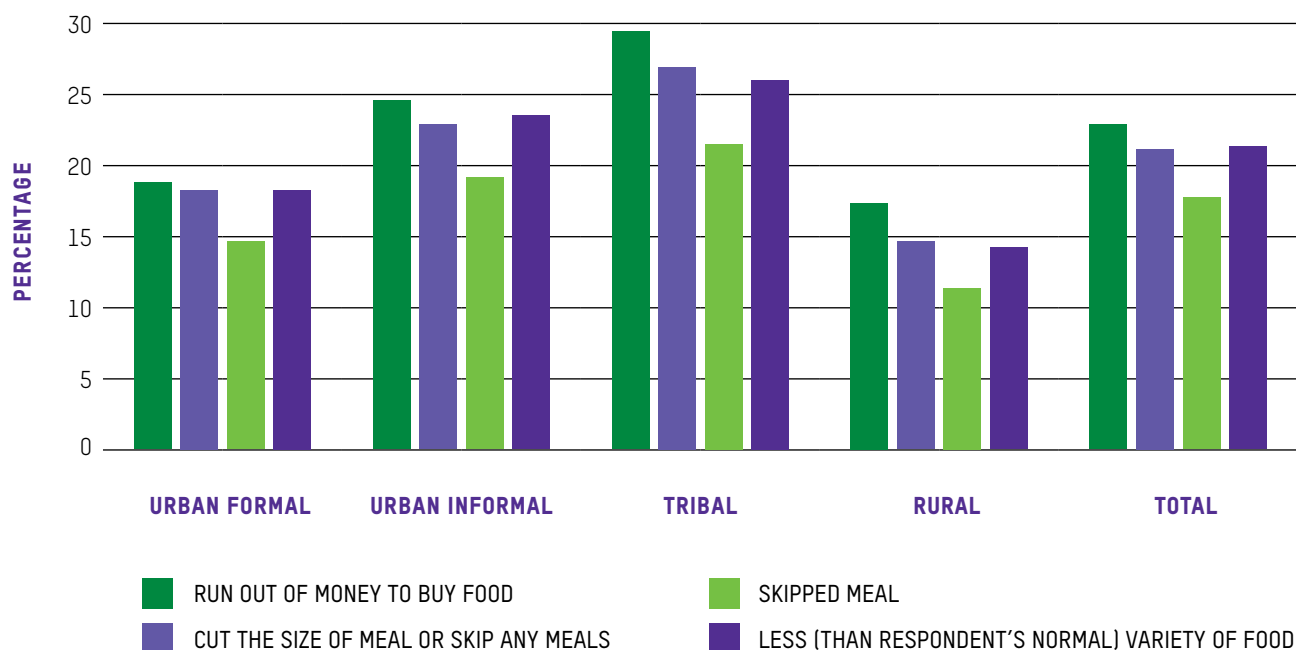
Both literature and the FGDs identified the unemployed urban poor, the landless rural poor and unemployed youth as being particularly vulnerable to food insecurity. Some key informants made the point that it is a myth that rural people are more food-secure because they engage in subsistence farming. On the contrary, most people in rural areas of South Africa buy their food from shops. Key informants also pointed to rural poverty replicating urban poverty due to dependence on a cash economy. They added that rural-urban migrants are increasingly prone to hunger and malnutrition.



Source: Stats SA, 2012

According to the General Household Survey (GHS), levels of food insecurity are highest in Eastern Cape province (36.2% of the population), followed by Limpopo (30.8%). Western Cape has the smallest percentage of food insecure households at 16.4%, while Gauteng has 19.2%. Nearly 23% of households nationally have at some point run out of money to buy food while 21% have to skip meals or reduce their size (Stats SA, 2012).

**FIGURE 1: THE EXTENT OF FOOD INSECURITY**



Source: Extracted from GHS data, Stats SA 2012

Figure 1 also shows that for too many people running out of money, skipping meals and cutting the size and variety of food eaten are regular occurrences: nearly 10% of people in tribal authority areas had to cut the size of meals on at least five out of the past 30 days. The figures suggest that hunger and the frequency of hunger are experienced more by people living in tribal authority areas and urban informal settlements, going against the popular perception that this is just a rural phenomenon.

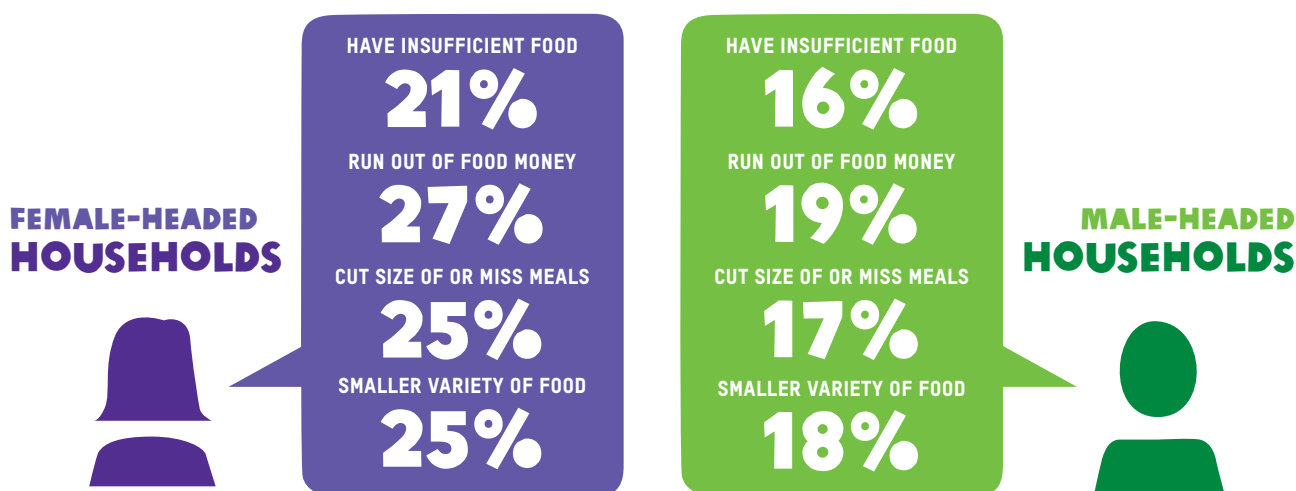
In Western Cape, farm workers described how their food supplies were exhausted by mid-week, forcing them to skip meals on Thursdays until they got paid again on Friday. During this period they eat porridge twice a day and some rely on food parcels from the government. Respondents in Eastern Cape said that they relied on bread and fruit juice to stretch the budget. Respondents in a coastal community related, 'We go hungry on a regular basis, mainly because of a shortage of money. We spend days and sometimes even weeks without proper nutritious food in our homes' (community member, Ocean View).

It is difficult to determine how the nature of hunger has changed since 1994, since there are no consistent measures of hunger and malnutrition from that period to now. FAO has measured the prevalence of food inadequacy,<sup>5</sup> which looks at the percentage of people who have sufficient calories for physical activity. This stood at 23% of the population in 1994 and declined to under 10% in 2012, but this measurement does not cover all the aspects of food insecurity or hunger. The SANHANES research from 2013, which is used by the government, suggests that food insecurity, or hunger, has halved since 1999, but that the level has stagnated since 2008 and remains at 26%. What it also highlights is that the proportion of people at risk of hunger may actually have increased and now stands at 28% (SANHANES, 2013).

5. Measures the percentage of the population at risk of not reaching the food requirements associated with normal physical activity, and therefore includes those whose economic activity leads to them having insufficient food.

### 3.3 WOMEN AND CHILDREN ARE THE HUMAN FACE OF HUNGER

According to the GHS (2012), female-headed households are more likely to have insufficient food (21%) than male-headed households (15.8%) and are more likely to run out of money to buy food (27.2% compared with 19.29%). They are also more likely to cut the size of meals and to skip meals (25.1% compared with 17% for male-headed households) (Stats SA, 2012). However, women are still generally responsible for food security, health and tasks related to running the household, including fetching water and fuel (key informants).



Source: Stats SA, 2012

Inequality is entrenched by the fact that 46% of South African men receive salaries compared with 32% of females, while more women (27%) rely on grants than males (15%). These statistics were corroborated by the FGDs: female workers in Langeberg municipality said that they were paid a lower rate than men for similar work, and because of their household responsibilities they also work fewer hours than men. In coastal communities (FGD, Ocean View), gender inequality is prevalent since fishing is seen as a male-dominated activity (see Box 3).

Under normal circumstances, food allocation within the household favours male members, or the breadwinner or sometimes children. In all FGDs it was noted that the male head of household gets a bigger portion of food, sometimes at the expense of other household members. However, participants in Swellendam and Bloemendal noted that when food was short, children ate first, then the husband and the rest of the household, and finally the wife. Participants also said that women often give up their meals to ensure that their children and husbands have something to eat.

For women who depend on social grants, usually for their children, survival is even more precarious if they also have to cope with diseases such as HIV or AIDS, which means spending precious money on medicines for themselves or family members. One woman from the Nobody district of Polokwane said, 'Even as I am speaking to you now, my husband is sick. From the social grant, I have to use money to buy tablets for him.' A ward councillor for the area agreed that it was mostly women who bore the brunt of food insecurity as men often found selfish ways to escape, including abandoning their families. He quoted a Pedi proverb that recognizes the resilience of women: 'A woman is brave enough to hold a knife even on the side where it cuts.'

In all nine locations, FGD participants said that young people and the elderly were affected differently by food insecurity. For young people, the challenge was to get something to eat for themselves, while elderly people were concerned with feeding the whole household. In some cases, young people resorted to solutions that older people would not consider, such as stealing.



According to data collected for the GHS (2012), 19% of South African children do not have access to sufficient food. Compounding this situation is the phenomenon of child-headed households, with young people facing serious dilemmas in their quest to provide for their siblings. They have to make a choice between looking after their siblings or engaging in low-paid work, and in most cases end up choosing the latter. They are often exploited by other community members, being underpaid for casual manual labour such as washing or hairdressing, and sometimes they are not paid at all. Young wage earners face particular challenges when a sibling falls sick; they are often forced to give up their low-paid job to take care of them. Some are even forced drop out of school, and this feeds into the vicious cycle of food insecurity.

## BOX 2: YOUTH AND CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE

*'We have to buy the cheapest of the cheapest, and we are rated as the cheapest of the cheapest.'*

Elzetta is an unemployed 23-year-old who lives in Bloemendal, in Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality in Eastern Cape. She has one child and lives with her twin sister, who has her own child. They depend on donations from neighbours and friends in order to survive. However, they find it difficult to ask for help from neighbours, due to stigma, discrimination and their own sense of pride and dignity. The two sisters work as a team; one looks after the household while the other does odd jobs such as cleaning, washing clothes or doing people's hair in order to earn some money. They get paid very little for doing these jobs, and sometimes do not get paid at all.

Elzetta told an FDG, 'Our lives are very difficult. People say that we have chosen this life, but I do not know how we could have chosen this. I did not choose to have a baby at 23 years old. My mother is lost. My father is very sick. I lost my job as I could not leave my sister and father alone at home. We have no money. The last time my sister and I ate was on Sunday (FGD conducted on Tuesday), but we made sure our children ate. We rely on a budget of R6 a day for four people. We buy four potatoes for R3 and a cup of rice for R3, and this makes a meal for four. Bread and cheap juice is our daily staple food; we live off others. Tea, coffee, sugar and milk are luxury items. We buy cheap bread that goes hard because of the heat. R100 normally stretches for two weeks because we don't know where the next R100 will come from.'

*'Due to the poor quality of food the children wake up hungry in the middle of the night and this bothers us. At times we feel it would be better if someone adopted them so as to give them a chance in life.'*

There is no support from the Department of Social Development to help them run their household. They would like to have a food garden, but there is no fencing around their house, which makes this difficult. However, the girls still have dreams in life: one of them wants to be a pathologist and the other dreams of being a nurse one day.



### BOX 3: BATTLING GENDER STEREOTYPES

Charmaine Daniels is a middle-aged fisherwoman and boat owner who lives in Ocean View in Western Cape. She is one of the few women working in the male-dominated artisanal fishing industry, and finds gender issues a big problem.

According to Charmaine, 'Years ago, when food was in abundance, women could stay at home to look after the children and see to the household duties. Today, however, everything has changed dramatically and men alone cannot provide adequately for the whole household, as the cost of living had spiralled out of control. There are high unemployment and racist labour policies, and big businesses have been allowed to invade our inshore waters and we have seen a rapid increase in industrialized harvesting. Overfishing as well as the large quotas held by big business fishing corporations, who can spend as much as a month at sea and overfish their allocated quotas, are contributing directly to the rapid decline in marine stocks.

'Today, women have to earn something to contribute to the household. Our community lives on the doorstep to the sea: we could take food from the rocks on the beach, but by law we are not allowed to do so. It is not easy for a woman to find a job on a boat. Men argue that the conditions on small fishing vessels are not suitable or safe for women. I realize that, but how do we feed our families if there is no alternative? The only time a woman can work at sea is on her own boat or her husband's when a male crew member is off sick.

'What I have also observed is, that when a woman earns something, she will take it home rather than use it on drugs or alcohol, because women are the ones who must answer to the children when there is no bread or anything to eat. If men can change this mentality of no woman at sea, we will have a different society and a better community. Women always think outside the box or they make a plan.'



WOMEN ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR FEEDING THE FAMILY

### 3.4 JOBS AND LIVELIHOODS DO NOT PROVIDE ENOUGH TO BUY ADEQUATE FOOD

Low wages and unemployment increase vulnerability, but research for this study showed that factors also includes rising food prices, larger households and lack of access to productive assets such as land, water or fishing permits (for coastal communities). An FGD participant in Polokwane, Limpopo province, stressed, 'The accessibility of food has worsened because there is a high rate of unemployment, our households are large and we mainly depend on social grants for survival.'

According to some key informants, food insecurity is not perceived so much as a failure to produce enough food nationally, but rather as a failure of livelihoods to provide adequate cash to purchase food at the household level. In that regard, in designing policy there should be a greater focus on employment and economic opportunities and not just on agricultural production.

High levels of unemployment and low wages, compounded by limited household food production, constrain household budgets and limit people's access to food. The unemployment rate currently stands at 25.4% nationally (23% for men and 27% for women),<sup>6</sup> but at the local level some FGD participants reported it to be as high as 80%. Participants cited losing a job as an important cause of hunger, and in the past few years there have been numerous job losses in key industries such as agriculture and manufacturing (Stats SA, 2013a).

The situation is exacerbated by increasing income inequalities between rich and poor, and between skilled and semi-skilled workers. According to the authors' calculations, based on the National Income Dynamics Survey (NIDS, 2013), the median income for South African households is R3,100 per month. Among those South Africans who earn less than the median, salaries, wages and commission account for 32% of all incomes, social grants 42% and remittances 12%. 32% of such households run out of money to purchase food on more than five days each month (Stats SA, 2012).

Soaring inequality means that people at the bottom of the income ladder are more vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition as they spend a greater proportion of their income on food and electricity (Oxfam, 2013). In relative terms, the top 10% income group in South Africa earn 52% of total income (World Bank, 2014) and spend only 10% of their total income on food, whereas households in the bottom 25% income group spend nearly half (47.7%) of their earnings on food. In addition, households in the bottom income group spend 19% of their income on housing, electricity and transport (authors' calculations using NIDS and Masemotal et al., 2012). With prices increasing at a faster rate than wages, households at the bottom are pushed into either spending less or buying poorer-quality food.

In terms of value, the top 10% of households spend on average R28,944 on food each year compared with just R8,664 for the bottom 25% of households, that is over three times more.

Participants in all nine study locations emphasized the importance of social grants as a safety net. The most common forms of grant are child support grants and old age grants. While the government says that these contribute to the monthly incomes of over 15 million people (Treasury, 2014), most participants in this study relied on them as the only reliable source of income, in effect making children and the elderly breadwinners. Female participants in an FGD in Langeberg declared, 'We depend on child grants to put food on the table.'

*'We are a family of seven and rely solely on social grant money for four kids. This amounts to R1,200, which does not come close to buying basic food for the family.'*

- **COMMUNITY MEMBER**, Polokwane, Limpopo

Many farm workers earn around R375 a week, which is significantly lower than the stipulated minimum wage of R558.60.<sup>7</sup> Without any additional source of income or food, such workers are very vulnerable to hunger (see Box 4).

6. Official rate, Statistics South Africa, 2014.

7. The minimum wage for farm workers is set by the Department of Labour.

#### BOX 4: THE PLIGHT OF FARM WORKERS

In the rural municipality of Langeberg in the Western Cape, which is largely dominated by commercial farms, FGD participants highlighted the plight of farm workers, who face hunger due to low wages and unemployment. There are many instances where farm wages are lower than the R105 per day minimum wage set by the government. Farm workers are also vulnerable to unfair labour practices. For example, in some cases workers approaching retirement age have been laid off and evicted from the farms they work on without any alternative accommodation.

Daniel Loli Sambou is an unemployed farm worker with a wife and two children, who lost his job during a farm workers' strike in 2013. His story is typical of the challenges facing farm workers. He recounts, '2013 was very bad after the owners dismissed us because of the strike. I am the breadwinner in my family, but I do not have a job. The farm owners and labour brokers will not employ me as I am blacklisted as a union member. Sometimes I get a job which requires me to leave my house on a Sunday and come back the following Sunday. If we get [a] casual job, we have to leave our houses secretly.'

Daniel Loli Sambou continues, 'The money we earn is not enough to support our whole family, and so we have borrowed from friends and neighbours. I have a lot of debt at the bank and I cannot pay it back. The only help we get is from South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) food parcels, but that is only for a few months and we don't know what will happen if the food parcels stop. I depend on child grants for survival. The situation has affected my children, as I cannot send them to school. Every day our lives are becoming more difficult and we do not know what will happen next.'

Similarly, a female farm worker in Langeberg testified, 'I am an unemployed mother of two children. I get support from my boyfriend, who comes home on Friday. He earns R300 a week, but It is very difficult to put food on the table.'



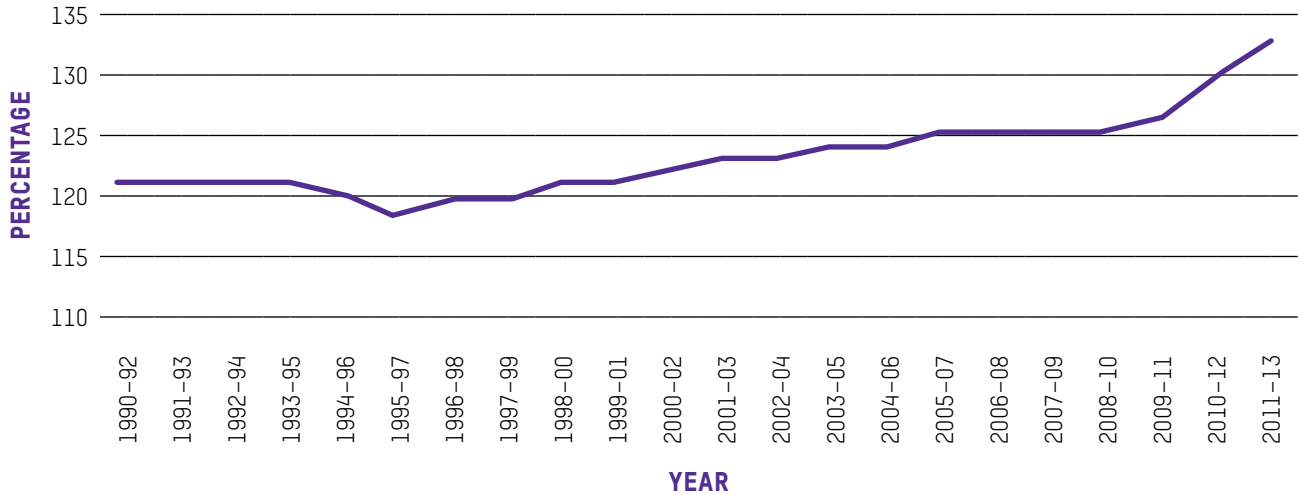
**DANIEL LOLI SAMBOU**

FARM WORKER FROM WESTERN CAPE

### 3.5 FOOD IS AVAILABLE BUT INACCESSIBLE

At national and country levels, South Africa exceeds most global benchmarks for amounts of food produced and exported, as well as average average dietary indicators. However, national figures hide the reality at the household level.

**FIGURE 2: NATIONAL AVERAGE DIETARY SUPPLY ADEQUACY OF NATIONAL IN SOUTH AFRICA**

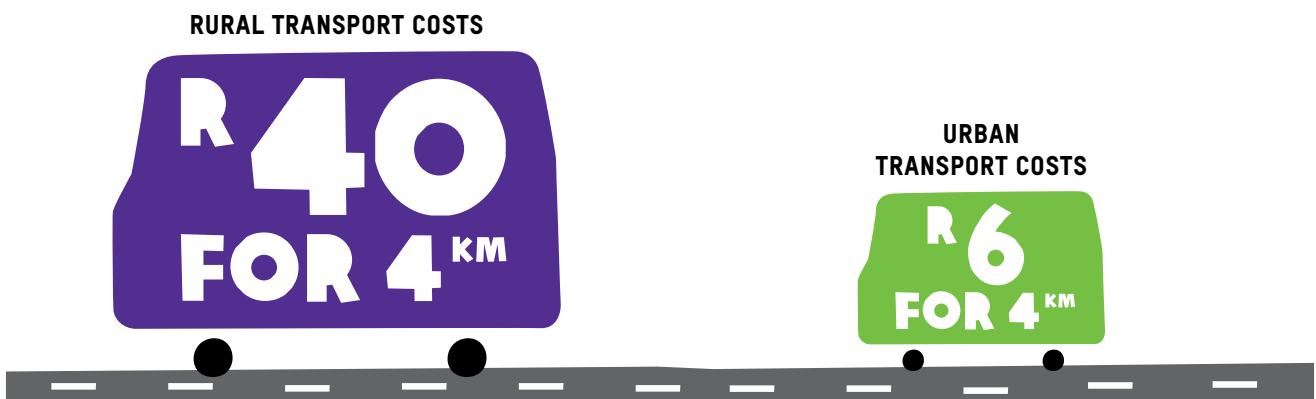


Source: FAO, 2013

Note: The indicator expresses the dietary energy supply as a percentage of the average dietary energy requirement. A figure of 100 means that a person gets enough energy from food to cover their energy needs.

The availability of food varies between urban formal and informal areas, rural and tribal authority areas. Urban hubs usually have adequate food availability as they have well stocked food retailers in both the formal and informal sectors. However, low-income informal settlements, rural areas and tribal areas usually lie outside the main food distribution networks, and here the food retail environment consists of small general dealers, spaza shops and street vendors, which stock a limited variety of food. FGD participants in the nine locations and key informants reported that spaza shops usually stock low-quality and out-of-date food and almost no fresh food or fruits and vegetables. Goods sold in township supermarkets were also reported to have a shorter shelf-life and in some cases poor packaging, obscure origins and virtually non-existent labelling.

Long distances from rural settlement and tribal areas to town centres and market hubs limit accessibility and are a source of inequality. Participants in FGDs in Eastern Cape and Western Cape indicated that they have to spend a considerable amount (on average R40) on transport to get to the nearest supermarket. In Swellendam, a round trip taxi fare to the nearest shops, a distance of 4km, costs R40, compared with R6 for a similar distance in urban areas.



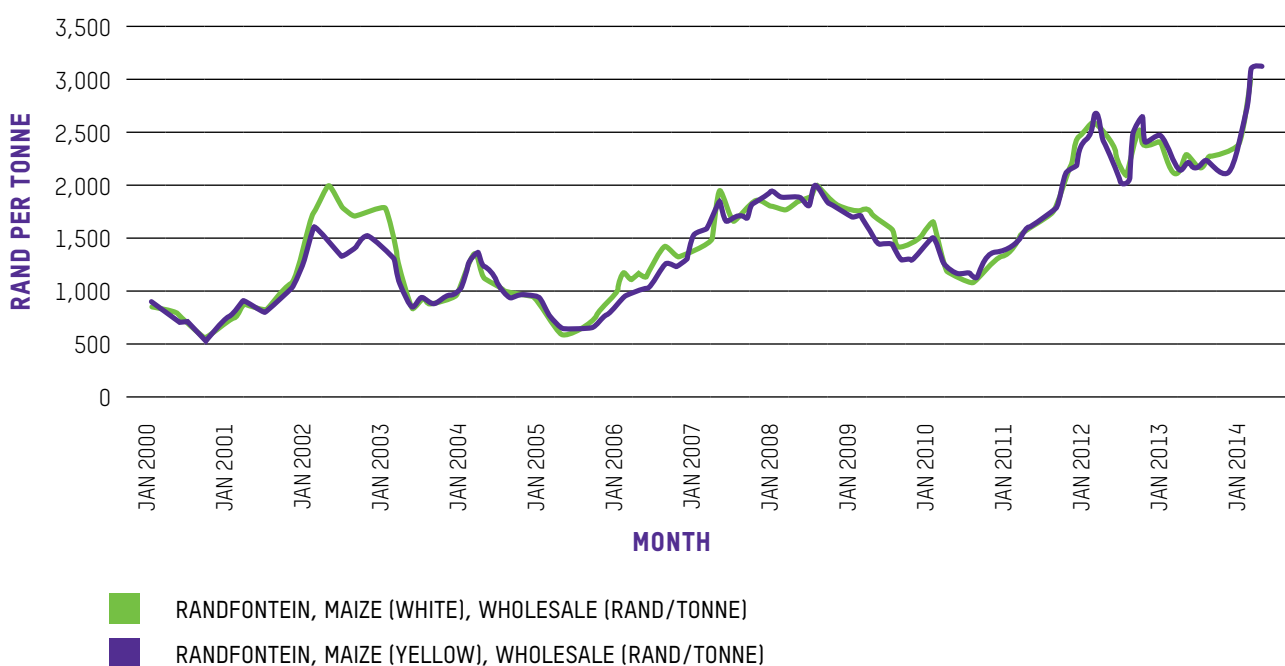
FGD participants in Ngqushwa said that they had to travel as far as 58km to the nearest town, King William’s Town, to buy food. Others in Fetakgomo said that they sometimes had to travel for almost an hour to get to the nearest market and had to pay over R200. Farmworkers in Langeberg usually buy food from farm owners, who charge them extra. They only have Saturdays to go to a nearby market, which is a considerable distance away and is costly. Sometimes public transport is simply not available. Physical access is clearly a challenge and is very much tied to economic access, meaning that people who do not have the money to travel to buy food are more likely to have limited access to safe and nutritious food.

### 3.6 RISING FOOD PRICES HAVE WORSENERD HUNGER

A look at the price increases described below as well as the General Household Survey (GHS) (2012) shows that increases in food prices have worsened the threat of hunger for people living in poverty, both directly as household incomes have lagged behind and indirectly as families are forced to allocate more money to essential non-food items such as transport and electricity.

Most of the key informants believed that rising food prices were a result of fluctuations in the value of the rand, particularly for maize and wheat. The commodity price of maize provides a rough indication of how food prices will behave in the coming year. From February 2013 to February 2014, the commodity price of this staple food increased by 50% (see Figure 3): in the short to medium term, this increase will affect the retail price of maize meal, increasing food insecurity. It will also affect meat and poultry producers, as maize is used as an animal feed.

**FIGURE 3: COMMODITY PRICE OF MAIZE (WHOLESALE PRICES, RAND/TONNE, 2000–14)**



Source: FAO, 2014

The price of maize determines grocery shopping patterns for 64.5% of women and 35.9% of men (SANHANES, 2013), and rising prices pose serious problems for people living in poverty in both urban and rural areas, as most are buyers of food. As prices become more volatile, vulnerable households find their consumption decisions affected by higher prices in the markets and reduced spending power. Participants in FGDs in Western Cape and Eastern Cape related similar experiences: ‘Whenever the budget is announced, our lives take a turn for the worse, because the prices of basic goods just go up.’

### 3.7 ACCESS TO LAND AND RESOURCES IS LIMITED

Most South African households in both rural and urban areas buy most of their food from shops and markets. Only 1.74% of households grow their own produce as their main source of food; however, 17% of all households cultivate some crops to supplement their food purchases, and in tribal and rural areas this figure increases to nearly 42% (see Figure 4).

**FIGURE 4: THE ROLE OF AGRICULTURE AT THE HOUSEHOLD LEVEL**

USE OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS AND STOCK KEEPING	TOTAL (%)	URBAN FORMAL (%)	URBAN INFORMAL (%)	TRIBAL (%)	RURAL (%)
Not applicable	76.83	92.07	93.89	47.67	75.49
As a main source of food for the household	1.74	0.55	0.36	4.06	1.59
As the main source of income/earning	0.43	0.11	0.05	0.45	4.96
As an extra source of income	1.33	0.32	0.31	3.08	2.62
As an extra source of food for the household	17.20	4.71	4.36	41.62	12.16
As a leisure activity or hobby e.g. garden	1.37	1.03	0.15	2.04	2.62
Unspecified	1.11	1.20	0.87	1.07	0.56

Source: Extracted from GHS data, Stats SA, 2012

Only 15% of households overall have access to backyard gardens (35% in tribal areas, 7.5% in rural areas, 5% in formal urban areas and 4.2% in informal settlements) (Stats SA, 2012). Most subsistence farmers live in the former Bantustan tribal authority areas, which account for only 13% of the country’s land area,<sup>8</sup> while fewer than 40,000 farming units cover 67% of the country (DAFF, 2012; Stats SA, 2009). Commercial farmers make up the smallest number of agricultural households yet they own the majority of the land. A number of key informants indicated that the majority of producers in rural areas were unable to feed their families from their narrow production base. However, there was a clear chorus of voices citing access to land as an important issue in improving livelihoods and hence tackling hunger.

#### BOX 5: ‘LAND IS LIFE’ (COMMUNITY MEMBER, KING WILLIAMS TOWN, EASTERN CAPE)

FGD participants in Ngqushwa municipality defined poverty and food insecurity in terms of lack of access to land, which they traced back to historical dispossessions and forced removals; attempts to regain lands lost in Ngobozana have yielded few results. Most participants would agree that ‘land is life’ and provided a means of food security. Families whose land claims have been approved have been encouraged to take money instead of the land itself, but this was seen as providing only temporary income and not long-term security.

However, access to land is not enough on its own. FGD participants in Ngqushwa, Thulamela and Langeberg also pointed to inadequate support from local and national government in terms of agricultural inputs, tractors, extension services, etc. They added that support is not targeted and is bedevilled by a lack of transparency and by corruption. Households produce food in their backyards mainly for their own consumption, but the lack of support means that this is a marginal activity that is often abandoned when household members get work such as on neighbouring farms during the harvesting season.



8. Bantustans were territories set aside for black inhabitants under the apartheid regime. There were 10 such areas: Ciskei, Gazankulu, Kangwane, KwaNdebele, KwaZulu, Lebowa, Qwaqwa, Transkei, Venda and Bophuthatswana.

The loss of assets is also a problem; in the drier municipalities such as Fetakgomo and Thulamela, livestock theft was noted as a key issue affecting livelihoods. At the time of the visit in Fetakgomo, there were protests at inaction by police to arrest and prosecute thieves even when the communities apprehended suspects themselves.

Participants in Ngqushwa traced the loss of their livestock back to improvement schemes introduced in 1960/61. This programme resulted in forced reductions in land size and livestock, and the loss of these assets left people more dependent on government for their survival.

A common issue that emerged in most of the nine locations, and especially in Ngqushwa, was access to water: the high cost of water in urban areas and prohibitive use rights affecting rivers in rural areas. With the added burden of drier weather conditions, community members in Bloemendal and KwaNobuhle urban areas said that the high cost of water made it difficult for them to sustain food gardens. In Ngqushwa and Langeberg, communities have limited access and rights to water from rivers, and this is negatively affecting their ability to grow crops. Poor maintenance of infrastructure and misgovernance of water supply were noted as key issues affecting livelihoods in Thulamela and Fetakgomo municipalities (see Box 6).

### **BOX 6: ACCESS TO WATER IS RESTRICTED BY POOR GOVERNANCE**

Farmers from Tshiombo in Thulamela municipality in Limpopo complained that water scarcity in this already dry area is being worsened by maladministration of irrigation schemes, lack of maintenance of irrigation canals and a lack of extension services. An FGD participant said, 'Some years ago the water was rationed so that everyone along the canal could access it, but nowadays there is no one to properly regulate this, meaning people upstream capture the water for their own use at the expense of everyone else.' Local people have urged the government to introduce more controls to ensure smooth governance of the canal, but they feel that the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) is not doing enough to help them.

Michael Neluonde, a participant from Tshiombo, concurred. 'Our canals do not hold catchable water due to floods in 2000; the contractor hired by the government did not fix them properly. Our canals and bridges are broken, our roads eroded. The government is not maintaining the canals as it used to; we farmers tried to address the government, but we did not get any response.'



**TSIOMBO CANAL**  
RESIDENTS STRUGGLE FOR ACCESS TO  
WATER FROM THE LOCAL CANAL  
IN TSIOMBO, LIMPOPO



Meanwhile, fisher folk were very vocal about lack of transparency in the allocation of permits and about what they perceived as DAFF's naked bias towards commercial fishers. They claimed that sometimes their subsistence fishing quotas were slashed without warning while those of commercial fishers were unaffected or even increased (see Box 7). They are unable to produce sufficient food for their households because for six months of the year there is no work at sea. Catches are often small, and half of the catch goes to the skipper. They sell some of their fish to commercial buyers for next to nothing and keep some for their own consumption.

### BOX 7: IN AT THE DEEP END – CHALLENGES FACING FISHING COMMUNITIES

A fisherman from Ocean View – middle-aged, married and unemployed – described the daily struggles faced by a typical fisherman to put food on the table.

'My family and I go hungry on a regular basis, mainly due to lack of money. We spend days and sometimes even weeks without proper nutritious food in our home. In the morning we need to think what are we going to do for the day and we have to resort to many alternative means to get something to eat. When it is a good fishing day, the money we earn is just enough to survive that day – tomorrow must support itself. Cheaper and less healthy foods are now the food of choice, because we can stretch the money further.

'We haven't got enough money to buy food from the market, because we have to travel around 5km outside Ocean View, a 25–30-minute journey that costs R20 for a one-way taxi fare – whereas we can buy two loaves of bread with that R20. Our families and friends are facing the same dilemma so we need to share what we have to eat, and as a result all of us get less and mealtimes are stretched ever further apart.

'Factors worsening access to food are the fact that it is very expensive, high unemployment, terrible fishing policies and changes in the climate. We are seeing rising sea levels, strong currents, floods, storms and irregular changes in the temperature. We normally used to get south-easterly winds blowing in the summer, but now we experience these winds in the winter too. Strong currents mean that the fish stocks are moving south, and we can't fish outside our zone due to the government's permit system. All this has affected our livelihoods tremendously. We have fewer sea-going days, which puts more pressure on our incomes and opportunities.

'We ask the government to make land available so that we can look for alternatives to feed our families. Some fishermen try to grow vegetables in their backyards, but lack of space means there is just enough of a crop to support one family. If we did it as a community, we could feed more. There are fishermen and women who have the knowledge to grow vegetables, and fish farming must also be permitted and be taught to our fishers. Government policies do not favour poor fishers, but tend to favour the big industrial fishing companies instead.'



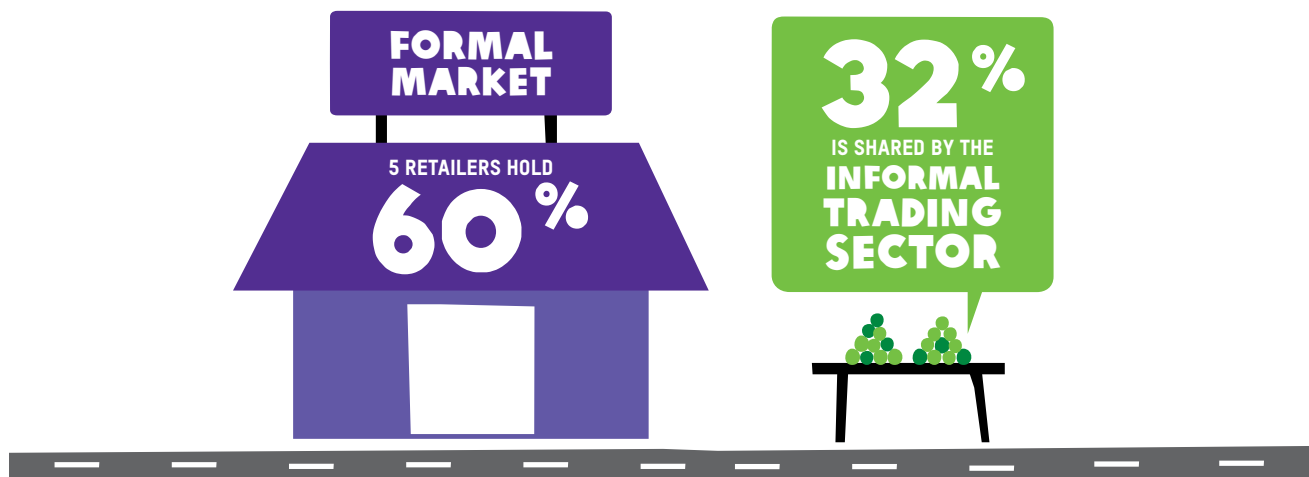
**A FISHERMAN PRAYING**  
FROM KALK BAY, WESTERN CAPE

In 2013 the Office of the Public Protector accused DAFF and its minister of mismanagement in the awarding of contracts for fishing patrols, with allegations of corruption in the tender process. The coastline was left unpatrolled for over 20 months, raising concerns both about overfishing and the conflict of interest in DAFF's dual role in awarding licences and being responsible for monitoring fishing (*Mail & Guardian*, 2013a).

### 3.8 THE FOOD INDUSTRY IS DOMINATED BY LARGE FIRMS THAT CONTROL FOOD ACCESS AND AVAILABILITY

The food industry is dominated by large commercial farmers and by a handful of corporate giants who drive the availability, price, quality, safety and nutritional value of food consumed by all South Africans. On the production side, there are approximately 40,000 large-scale, capital-intensive commercial producers and an estimated 1.3 million small-scale, labour-intensive farmers. The commercial farmers account for 91% of agricultural production (Greenberg, 2010; Vink and van Rooyen, 2009) and are supported by a powerful lobby group that actively influences government policy.

In manufacturing and processing, a few large corporations dominate the industry, among them Foodcorp, Pioneer Foods, Tiger Brands, Premier Foods and Nestlé SA. Major milling and baking producers Tiger Brands, Pioneer Foods, Foodcorp and Premier Foods were found guilty following a series of investigations by the Competition Commission of fixing the price of bread, wheat and maize through cartels operating over a number of years (Competition Commission, 2010). The dairy industry was also investigated and some of the largest dairies in South Africa - Clover, Parmalat, Ladismith Cheese, Woodlands Dairy, Lancewood, Nestlé SA and Milkwood - were accused of anti-competitive behaviour including price fixing (*Mail and Guardian*, 2009; *New Age*, 2014). In the fishing industry, the Oceana Group admitted before the Competition Commission to fixing prices of canned fish (a major source of protein for poor households), as well as entering into a non-competition agreement with rival Sea Harvest, and was fined nearly R35m (SAPA, 2009). Oceana also had price fixing deals with companies including Foodcorp, Premier Fishing, Pioneer Fishing and Tiger Brands (*Mail & Guardian*, 2012). Price fixing keeps the cost of food artificially high for people already struggling to afford it.



In the retail industry, just five retailers hold 60% of the formal market - Shoprite, Pick 'n Pay, Spar, Massmart and Woolworths (*Mail and Guardian*, 2011) while around 32% is shared by the 'informal' trading sector, which ranges from general dealers to spaza shops<sup>9</sup> and roadside vendors (Greenberg, 2010). The supermarket revolution is seeing stores open in smaller town centres and shopping malls, which can bring a greater variety of food to localities. However, such stores also tend to be more expensive, promote low-quality processed foods and can push smaller retailers and informal traders out of business (Crush and Frayne, 2011a). In 2013, a number of major retailers were exposed in the media for selling processed meats that were incorrectly labelled, which raised both ethical and health concerns (*Mail & Guardian*, 2013b). Some supermarkets are attempting to include some local sourcing in their business models but there is a long way to go (Sustainalytics, 2012); farmers in the focus groups observed how difficult it was to find local markets for their produce.

9. Spaza shops are informal trading posts or convenience stores in townships or remote areas, often run from a person's home as a means of supplementing income.

While supermarkets can offer more choice, they do not guarantee quality or affordability. Study participants in Eastern Cape and Western Cape criticized the supermarket system as unjust, based on their experiences of high prices and poor-quality food. In Swellendam, participants questioned the quality, safety and nutritional value of food sold by a large retailer's discount outlet, which allegedly sold out-of-date and unbranded foods. Some key informants commented on the negative impact the food industry has on hunger and climate change, saying that it was characterized by unfair pricing structures and centralized manufacturing and distribution that lead to heavy transportation costs and increased carbon emissions.

Furthermore, almost a third of food production in South Africa is wasted across the food chain. Research has shown that over 9m tonnes of food (177kg per capita), or about 30% of local agricultural production, goes to waste every year (CSIR, 2013), nearly 10 times the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF's) annual projected expenditure for 2014/15. Nahman and de Lange (2013) estimate the associated cost to society at R61.5bn per annum. The largest costs of food waste occur in distribution, with losses in consumption costing R6.1bn. The highest costs of waste are associated with fruit and vegetables (R22.4bn), followed by meat (R17.3bn) and fish and seafood (R7.8bn). A report by FAO's High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE) (2014) says that food waste is not an accident and so can be resolved. It states, 'Food losses and waste are consequences of the way food systems function, technically, culturally and economically.'



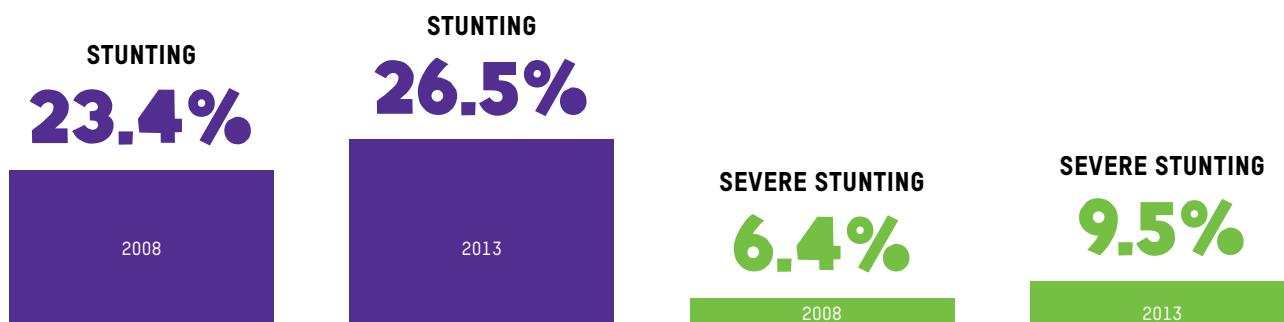
Source: Nahman and de Lange, 2013

### 3.9 POOR HOUSEHOLDS HAVE GOOD ACCESS TO BAD FOOD BUT BAD ACCESS TO GOOD FOOD

Key informants believed that issues of access should also address issues of food quality, especially the nutritional value of food. Some informants observed that the nutritional value of some food produced in South Africa was very poor – high in starch and carbohydrates and highly processed, which contributes to problems such as obesity. Highly processed food has long been commonly available in urban areas but is increasingly also spreading to rural areas. According to some key informants, the biggest problem is 'bad access to good food and good access to bad food', and there is therefore a need to tackle the phenomenon of 'nutritional insecurity' in South Africa.

Some key informants argued that many people do not fully understand food nutrition, and that it tends to be those with a good income who have the best understanding. This observation also emerged in the FGDs in the five locations in Eastern Cape and Western Cape. Participants pointed out that perceptions of adequate and healthy food were mainly shaped by the media, which determined which foods were 'cool' to eat and which often promoted junk food (FGD, KwaNobuhle).

Nutrition is a key dimension of hunger, and recent findings indicate that it has worsened. The National Food Consumption Survey of 2005 indicated that 23.4% of children aged 1–3 years suffered from stunting and 6.4% suffered from severe stunting (Labadarios, 2008). The SANHANES survey in 2013 indicated that stunting rates had risen to 26.5% and severe stunting to 9.5% over the period 2005–12, and that obesity had also increased. Obesity is one manifestation of a lack of proper nutrition and an unbalanced diet. Recent data published in *The Lancet* (2014) indicates that 68.3% of South African women over the age of 20 are overweight, and of these 42% are obese; for men, the rates are 35% overweight and 12% obese.<sup>10</sup>



Source: SANHANES 2013

Such findings were corroborated by the FGDs. Participants in KwaNobuhle said, ‘Malnutrition is caused by the environment we were raised in, in terms of what we were fed and we grew up with. The same goes with the obesity that we are facing – it’s a matter of the habits and foods we got used to eating growing up.’ In Bloemendal, participants said that they ate the same food every day, a cheap type of bread and concentrated juice or sugar water they call the ‘poppie water diet’. Participants in KwaNobuhle said that for them food was bread and flavoured sachets. One noted, ‘We know that vegetables, seafood and fruits are the “ideals” of healthy food. But that is not the reality in our community: we don’t consider the nutrients in what we buy, only whether we can afford it or not.’

Households in all the FGDs – in urban, peri-urban and rural municipalities – face challenges in preparing nutritious food both because of the limited variety of ingredients available (oil, salt, onions and tomatoes) and limited access to electricity. Some 73.8% of people in South Africa use electricity for cooking, while 14.6% rely on wood (Stats SA, 2012). In urban and peri-urban municipalities, increases in electricity prices have hampered food preparation and forced households to resort to less nutritious processed food that requires little preparation. For child-headed households especially, this is often bread and cheap juice (the ‘poppie water diet’). This illustrates the tough choices that food insecurity imposes on poor people.

***‘Beans and samp are our normal food but we cannot cook this because it uses too much electricity. The wood that was freely available in our area is no longer there, we have to buy it.’***

***- CHILD-HEADED HOUSEHOLD PARTICIPANT IN FGD, KwaNobuhle, Eastern Cape***

As hunger is ever present, a number of respondents said that it was difficult for them to easily detect malnutrition unless it had reached the chronic stage. One respondent in Limpopo related, ‘My child was sick and I never realized that it was malnutrition until I took him to the hospital. Even adults are being affected by diseases of malnutrition because some of the food we eat is not nutritious.’

Members of coastal communities in Cape Town Metropolitan (e.g. Ocean View) observed that their access to nutritious food had changed dramatically over the past couple of years. A discussion amongst participants revealed that many are forced to buy inferior-quality (pre-cooked, parboiled and frozen) processed foods, because they cannot afford the more expensive healthier foods.

10. See: <http://www.healthdata.org/data-visualization/overweight-and-obesity-viz>

### 3.10 CLIMATE CHANGE IS AFFECTING POOR PEOPLE'S ABILITY TO COPE

A 2013 report by the Department of Environmental Affairs states that between 1960 and 2010, 'Mean annual temperatures have increased by at least 1.5 times the observed global average of 0.65°C (Department of Environmental Affairs, 2013). Maximum and minimum daily temperatures have been increasing annually, and in almost all seasons. High and low temperatures (i.e. hot and cold extremes) have respectively increased and decreased in frequency in most seasons across the country.'

There has been high variability in rainfall from year to year, with a decrease in the number of rain days in most zones. The report further notes, 'Climate projections (rainfall and temperature changes) up to 2050 and beyond ... include very significant warming, as high as 5–8°C, over the South African interior by the end of this century.'

While the impact of climate change on food insecurity in South Africa is not yet extensively documented, conservative projections indicate that high temperatures and lower rainfall levels will worsen hunger. It has been estimated that subsistence farmers could suffer revenue losses of up to 151% and commercial farmers 111% by 2080 due to climate change, making agriculture unprofitable for all farmers, but disproportionately affecting subsistence farmers (South Africa Fiscal and Financial Commission, 2012). A UNICEF report on the impact of climate change on children (2011) notes that it is likely to have a severe impact on hunger and malnutrition levels in Eastern Cape, Free State and North West provinces.

Participants in the focus group discussions in the nine study locations spoke of increasing occurrences of weather phenomena that are not typical of their areas, such as heatwaves, increasing drought and water scarcity that make food gardens unviable (Bloemendal, Ngqushwa, Fetakgomo and Thulamela municipalities), frosts that destroy crops and reduce employment on farms (Swellendam and Langeberg) and blistering morning temperatures of 30°C compared with a previous average of 17–25°C (Fetakgomo and Ngqushwa). They also reported changes in rainfall patterns, including heavy rains and flash floods that cause soil erosion, especially in drier municipalities such as Fetakgomo, Thulamela and Ngqushwa. There is an increased blurring of the seasons, with fruit trees such as mangoes bearing fruits 'off-season' and an increase in cactus-type vegetation. Seasonal fluctuations are affecting planting and harvesting times, and participants in all nine locations said that they no longer knew when to plant their crops. Subsistence farmers said that changes in the climate meant that they either had to plant more seedlings to allow for those that perished or they had to plant twice, but they did not have sufficient income to afford this.

In rural areas, women spoke of changes in the way they preserve food. They used to prepare 'African salad' (a mixture of mealie-meal and milk) for consumption the next day, but this is no longer possible as increasing heat causes it to go bad (Ngqushwa, Fetakgomo and Thulamela). This increases energy usage and time spent preparing food. In Ngqushwa municipality, participants related the changing climate to changes in the availability of fresh food. One woman participant said, 'Some time back we used to eat fresh food from our gardens, but now it's not possible because of the high temperatures that make it impossible for us to work our gardens' (FGD, Ngqushwa). Others reported that reduced milk output from their cows was due to the climate because cows no longer graze properly (FGD, Ngqushwa). In Fetakgomo, participants said that changing weather patterns had distorted the traditional knowledge passed on to them by their forefathers, who could accurately predict when to plant and when it was most likely to rain and for how long.

### 3.11 HOW HUNGRY PEOPLE STAY AFLOAT – SOME COPING MECHANISMS

As already discussed, skipping meals, cutting the size of meals and using a smaller variety of food are some of the immediate coping strategies for hungry households. At least 17% of South Africans skip meals and 20% cut the size of meals for at least five days each month (Stats SA, 2013b). Other coping strategies include behavioural changes at the household level and adapting livelihood practices.

According to FGD participants, households often buy smaller quantities of food, rely on expired foods, ask neighbours or relatives for food, borrow money from loan sharks, share their resources or trade labour for food. Buying in bulk is also an important coping strategy. As well as missing meals, they may cut down on meat or use less desirable cuts such as chicken heads and feet. Some grow food in gardens, while others rely on soup kitchens and nutrition programmes to provide food for their children. Many have to ration food in the household and make difficult trade-offs between buying food or paying for other necessities such as electricity; some rely on neighbours for energy for cooking. Some people are even driven to engage in crime in order to put food on the table.

However, such strategies do not guarantee adequate food. It was clear from the FGDs that very few people like to ask neighbours or relatives for food because of their sense of pride and the stigma attached: participants concurred that people do not want to be seen to be begging for food from neighbours. Social pressures mean that some households prefer to be food-insecure during the week but ensure that they have enough to eat on Sundays.

*'I would rather go hungry the whole week and manage to eat meat on Sunday. Eating good food on Sunday is important for us in the coloured community.'*

- **COMMUNITY MEMBER**, Langeberg, Western Cape

Where nutrition programmes and soup kitchens are working effectively – as in Bloemendal and KwaNobuhle – they have reduced food insecurity for children, as parents have to prepare just one meal a day in the evening. In Ngqushwa and Bloemendal, however, some parents admitted that they dreaded the school holidays as they did not have food to give their children. FGD participants in Limpopo said that they used to dig pits and bury maize and sweet potatoes to cater for times of scarcity, but nowadays children would not eat such food. Borrowing from loan sharks to buy food runs the risk of ending up in bigger debt and losing property, bank cards or household items if the loan is not paid back.

For child-headed households, solidarity can be an essential coping mechanism. Child heads of household in Bloemendal said that they often took care of friends who were in an even worse situation than themselves and shared the little food that was available.

Opinions were mixed on food gardens as a coping strategy. The government is encouraging poor families to grow their own food in small gardens; however, some key informants argued that urban gardens are insufficient to guarantee long-term food security as they are high-risk – they require inputs and are labour-intensive. A significant number of FGD participants said that they did not grow food because water was too expensive. However, several others were eager to start food gardens but did not have the information they needed or seeds, equipment or fences to protect the produce from animals and thieves.

Overall, FGD participants were inclined to see producing their own food as the most sustainable coping mechanism. An FGD member in Langeberg pointed out, 'The reason we are food-insecure is that we buy everything, so we need to produce and sell stuff and then use the money to buy what we need.' This was echoed by participants in other locations.



PEOPLE FACING HUNGER HAVE LESS VARIETY OF FOOD



# PREVIOUS POLICIES HAVE NOT WORKED

Government policies do exist to tackle hunger but there are severe gaps with piecemeal implementation and lack of coordination at local level, and such policies are failing the 13 million people who face hunger. The country's Constitution enshrines the right to sufficient food and water under Section 27, which obliges the State to take reasonable legislative and other measures to achieve the progressive realisation of these rights. This section offers a limited summary, within the scope of this study, of some policies that focus on food and hunger.

## **THE INTEGRATED FOOD SECURITY STRATEGY (IFSS)**

The IFSS was introduced in 2002 with the goal of eradicating hunger by 2015 - which it is a long way from achieving. The strategy attempts to coordinate a series of programmes across departments under the leadership of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF). Its objectives cover a range of food security factors and include initiatives such as the Comprehensive Agriculture Support Programme (CASP) to support vulnerable groups, school feeding programme, social grants and a public works programmes. However, communities in this study lamented the lack of coordination, maladministration and poor targeting of initiatives at local level. In Tshiombo, FGD participants claimed that schools often did not receive food, leaving children who rely on school for a daily meal hungry. The strategy has been criticized by others for poor leadership and lack of coordination (Drimie and Ruysenaar, 2010) and for containing a number of gaps such as accessibility, gender, comprehensive support to small-scale producers, environmental sustainability, climate change and the role of the food industry.

## **INTEGRATED FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION**

This programme was introduced in 2006 and aims to increase production. It is run by DAFF.

## **THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (NDP)**

The NDP identifies food and nutrition security as a key element of addressing poverty and inequality. It sets a goal to achieve food security by 2030, with proposals including the expanded use of irrigation, security of land tenure, especially for women, and the promotion of nutrition education.

## **ZERO HUNGER PROGRAMME**

The Zero Hunger Programme of 2012 was based on the successful Brazilian model and included a programme for government institutions to procure from local small-scale producers. However, it never became policy and lacked support. While its Masimbambisane Rural Development Initiative was dogged by political controversy due to the President's personal involvement.



## FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION POLICY

Following the NDP, DAFF and the Department of Social Development created the Food Security and Nutrition Policy in 2013, to replace the IFSS but with a reduced ambition to ensure ‘the availability, accessibility and affordability of safe and nutritious food at national and household levels’. Another attempt at coordinated policy, it has been approved by Cabinet but not gazetted, with no clarity on its status at the time of writing. While it starts off well, the policy paper reveals severe gaps in both analysis and proposed solutions, particularly in terms of income and jobs, distribution, access, gender, food prices, volatility and fixing, the retail industry, climate change and the environment, standards and nutrition.

## FETSA TLALA (END HUNGER)

The Fetsa Tlala food security programme was approved by Cabinet at the same time as the FSNP in 2013 to support subsistence and smallholder farmers to put one million hectares of land under production by 2018/19, along with the Household Food and Nutrition Security Strategy to provide access to food for vulnerable groups through distribution and supporting households to become self-reliant. There is limited information available about its progress on these goals to date.



**THIDZIAMBI SINGO**

PLANTING SWEET POTATOES IN THULAMELA MUNICIPALITY, LIMPOPO



# CONCLUSION

Today, more than half of all South Africans are either facing hunger or are at risk of going hungry. If they obtain food that is sufficient in quantity to assuage their hunger, it does not supply the essential elements that make it nutritious, and it may not even be safe.

These people, and the reasons why they face hunger, are often hidden from view. Yet efforts to address other socio-economic challenges, especially education, health and crime, will not be effective while millions are going hungry in this way. Food insecurity and hunger destroy human potential, strip away human dignity and foster inequality throughout society. This should be a national scandal.

The faces of food insecurity, so often unseen, are the faces of people in child- and female-headed households; the unemployed and those in precarious employment; people living in poverty in poor housing in rural and urban informal settlements; the landless and marginalized. Entrenched attitudes and gender discrimination mean that women and girls are disproportionately disadvantaged.

If government bodies or the better-off strata of South African society think of hunger or food insecurity, they tend to imagine it exists mainly among the rural population or the occasional beggar at the traffic lights. Yet food insecurity is a growing urban phenomenon. A key to understanding hunger and food security in South Africa is to reflect on how the market has become the main source of food for households. Much needs to be done to move to a more efficient and fairer system that puts forward alternatives that will work better for people living in poverty, women, children, small-scale producers and marginalized communities who are facing hunger and malnutrition. At the moment prohibitive transport costs and long distances to markets mean that many people must buy their food from spaza shops and local traders, often with limited access to good, nutritious food. The poverty hearings held for this study described the food sold at spaza shops as being of low quality and expired, and there being almost no fresh food.

Over a quarter of South Africans find themselves squeezed between inadequate source of livelihood and income (unemployment, low wages and lack of other economic opportunities) and an unfair, expensive and wasteful food system dominated by a few large companies. Hunger adds fire to a society that is feeling increasing frustration at slow progress towards equality of income, services and opportunity 20 years after democracy. The rising number of protests around the country are a clear manifestation of this frustration.

However, what is equally clear is that millions of people rise to these challenges every day in ways that are determined and resourceful. The story of Elzetta and her sister (see Box 2) shows how so many South Africans cope with the daily burden of hunger.

Amid the hardship, Elzetta and her sister have dreams of more fulfilling lives. Elzetta wants to become a nurse and her sister a pathologist. Their dreams may never be fulfilled, but in their aspirations they are not untypical of thousands of South Africans whose potential is being dampened and who are being deprived of the chance to prosper.

Hunger and malnutrition play important parts in perpetuating the cycle of poverty and inequality. The causes are many and complex, which is why a coordinated and comprehensive approach is needed to tackle these causes, and not the somewhat simplistic and piecemeal approach taken thus far that concentrates only on alleviating the effects and has no accountability to people who are facing the scandal of hunger every day. It requires an integrated legislative response based on the State's constitutional mandate to ensure that no one goes hungry.

Perhaps a start in addressing hunger is to call it by its name and describe what it means for real people, and not disguise or distance it behind technical terms such as 'food insecurity'. This is what this report has sought to do.



**PEACH FARMING**  
IN WESTERN CAPE



# RECOMMENDATIONS

Oxfam believes it is time to end the scandal of hunger with a wide-reaching and coordinated approach. The following recommendations have been drawn from the findings of this research, particularly the testimonies of people facing hunger. It is recognized that more needs to be done to flesh out some of these recommendations, but they are a basis to begin the conversation.

## 1. INTRODUCE A NATIONAL FOOD ACT TO ERADICATE HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION

- The government should put in place a national Food Act that has been developed via a bottom up process with communities who are facing hunger, is adequately resourced and puts the goal of eradicating hunger and malnutrition at the heart of all government policy. An Act would have greater legal force than existing piecemeal policies to incentivize better coordination and implementation.
- An Act could include a mechanism to hold government and stakeholders accountable, including businesses and other institutions, local or national.
- The government should open the latest Food and Nutrition Security policy paper (August 2013) for consultation with all stakeholders, with a view to addressing gaps.

## 2. IMPROVE LOCAL-LEVEL COORDINATION AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

- Local government and municipalities must, with the support of national government, improve targeting of households and individuals who are facing hunger; coordinate between policies; include communities and civil society in local planning; and support local markets to flourish (e.g. by supporting infrastructure, transport, storage facilities).

## 3. CREATE A FAIR, ACCOUNTABLE AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD INDUSTRY

- The food industry must do more to stop bad practices such as price fixing and cartels, food waste and environmental damage, while the government should strengthen regulation to enforce compliance and support the role of watchdogs such as the Competition Commission.
- The food industry and government must do more to ensure that small-scale farmers can prosper by innovating away from exclusionary supply chains, supporting cooperatives, investing in rural infrastructure, improving access to credit and making certification and quality control more accessible.
- Government and local planning authorities should ensure that the growth in supermarkets does not threaten the livelihoods of small informal traders and the important social role that they play.

#### **4. PRIORITIZE DECENT EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME GENERATION FOR PEOPLE FACING HUNGER**

- Local job creation should be targeted at those who are vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition and government work programmes should be better implemented, ensuring that wages are paid on time and that they improve the skills of those involved.
- Both government and private sector actors working in the food system should ensure that employment can provide *quality* jobs with living wages.
- The government should review social grants to reach the most vulnerable and take into account rising living costs.

#### **5. IMPROVE RIGHTS TO LAND AND MEANS OF PRODUCTION**

- The government should expedite ownership and access to land for the most marginal and vulnerable groups, alongside post-settlement support: water, equipment, access to credit, marketing and training for new farmers coming out of a post-apartheid era where agricultural skills were lost.
- The government should increase the allocation of fishing rights and support alternative livelihoods, building the resilience of fishers to climate change and changes in fish stocks.

#### **6. CREATE ADAPTATION PLANS WITH THE FULL PARTICIPATION OF THE PEOPLE WHO ARE MOST VULNERABLE**

- A National Adaptation Plan and local adaptation plans must be created with the participation of small-scale producers, women and vulnerable communities, backed with financial resources, to ensure that they are appropriate and sustainable.
- Municipalities must be supported by national government to build local capacity to understand climate change and work with local communities to build resilience to it, including better access to early warning systems and weather information.
- Government should give special attention to rehabilitating local environments and infrastructure that support access to water sources.

#### **7. STEP UP ACTION TO REDUCE CARBON EMISSIONS**

- While rich country governments should take the biggest responsibility for tackling climate change, South Africa also has a part to play in moving away from high-emission fossil fuels and increasing investment in renewable energy that could reduce energy costs, create new jobs and build the resilience of poorer communities.

#### **8. CREATE A NATIONAL CONVERSATION TO END HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION**

- Society - at the national, local and individual levels - needs to better understand the extent and causes of the scandal of hunger if it is to be eradicated.
- This conversation must include movements and ideas such as food sovereignty and agro-ecology, which place ordinary people who produce, distribute and consume food, as well as the protection of the environment, at the centre of defining a just and equitable food system.

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# ANNEX

## ANNEX A: GLOSSARY

(Definitions from FAO unless otherwise stated)

**HUNGER:** The body's way of signalling that it is running short of food and needs to eat something. Hunger can lead to **malnutrition**.

**MALNUTRITION:** Defined as a state in which the physical function of an individual is impaired to the point where he or she can no longer maintain natural bodily capacities such as growth, pregnancy, lactation, learning abilities, physical work and resisting and recovering from disease. It can lead to being underweight, stunted or overweight/obese.

**RIGHT TO FOOD:** The right to have regular, permanent and free access, either directly or by means of financial purchases, to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food corresponding to the cultural traditions of the people to which the consumer belongs, and which ensures a physical and mental, individual and collective, fulfilling and dignified life free of fear (UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food).

**STUNTING:** Reflected by shortness-for-age; an indicator of chronic malnutrition and calculated by comparing the height-for-age of a child with a reference population of well nourished and healthy children.

**UNDERNOURISHMENT:** Describes the status of people whose food intake does not include enough calories (energy) to meet minimum physiological needs.

**UNDERWEIGHT:** Measured by comparing the weight-for-age of a child with a reference population of well nourished and healthy children (Comparative Quantification of Health Risks, 2004).

## ANNEX B: LIST OF KEY INFORMANTS INTERVIEWED

### ORGANISATION

1. SAHRC
2. Resource Centre on Urban Agriculture and Food Security
3. Environment Monitoring Group (EMG)
4. Foodbank South Africa
5. Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE)
6. Zingisa Educational Trust
  
7. Mawubuye Land Rights Forum
8. Section 27
9. HSRC
10. Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies

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13. Western Cape Province: Agriculture and Rural Development	Mr. Mogale Sebopetsa, Acting Chief Director
14. Nkuzi Development Association	Ms. Motlanalo Lebepe
15. Councillors in Bloemendal, KwaNobuhle, Thulamela, Polokwane City, Cape Town Metropolitan, Langeberg Municipality	

## ANNEX C: POVERTY HEARINGS METHODOLOGY AND SURVEY

This is a qualitative rapid appraisal method that brings policy makers and other stakeholders into communities to understand community realities and aspirations, it has been employed by researchers in the formulation of grassroots opinion on the post-MDG process and extensively in South Africa, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique and Sierra Leone. For this research, it involved the following steps:

**SCOPING:** This was done at provincial level by drawing community representatives from the various wards and districts, and was further refined through interactions with CBOs in consultation with other stakeholders.

**COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS WERE IDENTIFIED AND ENGAGED:** Community champions included activists, community leaders, elders, traditional leaders, village heads, councillors and members of parliament. Their role was to support community involvement and buy-in and facilitate group discussions and follow-up.

**VOICELESS GROUPS WERE MAPPED FOR TARGETING:** The greatest care was taken to ensure that the voices of target groups were captured. Purposeful sampling was employed in each area or ward. In order to generate variations in responses, each group had a maximum of 10 participants from the community, structured according to gender, age, locality, etc. Participants were selected after meeting with stakeholders in the community to understand the gender and age dimensions of hunger.

**FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS:** Participants were asked to focus on the top 3–5 priority issues concerning hunger and to provide feedback based on their experiences. A neutrally phrased focus statement was posed in local languages and elaborated by facilitators (e.g. ‘What are your experiences and aspirations regarding food security and climate change?’) in order to allow them to relate their experiences in their own words. Sufficient time was allowed for community members to generate and connect narratives, and to capture issues and stories.

**TESTIMONIES AND ‘HUMAN’ STORIES WERE ELICITED:** One or two people from each group volunteered to provide a testimony of their experiences. Some volunteers were chosen at random and some were selected because their stories were particularly powerful or representative.

**TESTIMONIES WERE RECORDED, VALIDATED AND DOCUMENTED:** Testimonies were digitally recorded, either as audio or video depending on the comfort level of the participants.

The emerging raw data was then analyzed, synthesized and documented.

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Please write to any of the agencies for further information, or visit [www.oxfam.org](http://www.oxfam.org)



A WOMAN FROM DIMBAZA AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE STANDS NEXT TO HER CROPS BEFORE HARVESTING IN NGOBOZANA, EASTERN CAPE



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