



*Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference*  
**PARLIAMENTARY LIAISON OFFICE**



# **Realizing the Right to Food in South Africa**

**An Analysis of Available Frameworks and  
Strategies**



**A RESEARCH PAPER**

**BY**

**REBECCA BURNS**

**July 2012**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Abstract</b> .....	4
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	5
<b>2. Food Security and Food Sovereignty — the International Context</b> .....	7
2.1. Food Security — Origins of the Concept .....	7
2.2. Shifts in Global Thinking about Food Security .....	9
2.3. The 1996 World Food Summit and the Current Definition of Food Security.....	11
2.4. The Right to Food.....	12
2.5. Food Sovereignty — an Alternative Perspective .....	12
2.6. The 2008 Food Crisis — Causes and Outcomes .....	13
<b>3. Food Security and Food Sovereignty in Africa</b> .....	14
3.1. Magnitude and Explanations of Food Insecurity in Africa .....	14
3.2. A ‘Uniquely African’ Green Revolution.....	15
3.3. How Different is the ‘New’ Green Revolution?.....	16
3.4. The Agenda for ‘Agricultural Transformation’ in Africa .....	19
3.5. South Africa’s Role in Regional and Continental Food Security Strategies .....	20
<b>4. Food Security in South Africa — Existing Measures and Policy Contexts</b> .....	21
4.1. Magnitude and Measures — Challenges to Assessing Food Insecurity in South Africa .....	21
4.2. Historical Background and Root Causes of Food Insecurity in South Africa.....	23
4.3. Post-apartheid Policy Interventions.....	25
4.4. Recent Trends in Food Systems and Food Security in S.A.....	34
<b>5. Food Security and Food Sovereignty in South Africa — Key Questions and Challenges</b> .....	35
5.1. Food Insecurity and Development.....	35
5.2. Food Insecurity and Land Reform.....	36
5.3. Smallholder Production and Food Insecurity .....	38
5.4. Food Insecurity and Environmental Constraints .....	39
5.5. Genetically Modified Organisms: Food Security and Food Sovereignty Perspectives.....	42

5.6. Gender and Food Insecurity .....	43
5.7. HIV/AIDS and Food Insecurity.....	44
<b>6. Civil Society Initiatives for Food Security and Food Sovereignty.....</b>	<b>45</b>
6.1. Groups Working in Mobilization or Advocacy.....	46
6.2. Groups Working in Agricultural Support or Skills Training.....	47
6.3. Soup Kitchens and Feeding Schemes.....	47
<b>7. Findings and Recommendations.....</b>	<b>48</b>
7.1. Is food insecurity most usefully examined as a phenomenon in itself, or in conjunction with broader issues of poverty and marginalization? .....	48
7.2. Which types of approaches are most effective in addressing food insecurity? .....	49
7.3. Which types of actors and institutional avenues should be involved in addressing food insecurity? .....	52

## **Abstract**

Is food insecurity most usefully examined as a phenomenon in itself, or in conjunction with broader issues of poverty and marginalization? This paper examines this question, as well as the means available to address food insecurity and the types of structural factors and institutional role-players involved. It analyzes the frameworks of food security and food sovereignty at the international, regional, and national levels and summarizes key questions and challenges related to realizing food security and food sovereignty in South Africa. It concludes that interventions which aim primarily to increase agricultural production or facilitate market integration have a poor track record of promoting secure entitlements to food, and that state-level food security strategies must be comprehensive and inter-departmental, but should entail implementation that is distinct from more general poverty reduction and social assistance programs. It also recommends the passage of framework legislation and implementation of the Food and Agriculture Organization's voluntary guidelines to support the realization of the right to food, but cautions that there are limitations to a legal approach which appeals to the state for access to food but which stops short of pushing for greater autonomy over choices related to food production and consumption.

## 1. Introduction

The essential story of development over the past century has been one in which a succession of celebrated technological breakthroughs has failed to bring about the emancipation of human societies. Global hunger is perhaps the prime example of this fact. Despite numerous commitments and acknowledgements that the resources to feed the world now exist, starvation and hunger persist at unprecedented levels. 'Food security', in this sense, has always been an aspirational term, describing a state which has never existed in any part of the world. Nevertheless, the concept as it is defined and advanced by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and a number of other international organizations has, over the course of the past three decades, become the most prominent framework shaping thinking about the problem of global hunger.

In 2010, the FAO and the World Food Programme announced that there are 925 million people in chronic hunger worldwide. This represented a decrease of 98 million people from the previous year's estimate, but it fell short of targets for progress set as a part of the first Millennium Development Goal: to halve the proportion of people suffering from hunger by 2015.<sup>1</sup>

The task of quantifying the world's poor and hungry is by no means a straightforward one. Poverty and hunger are essentially relative and subjective concepts, and the apparent extent and nature of the phenomenon of hunger depends to a large degree on how it is defined and measured. The FAO estimate of the magnitude of hunger worldwide for example, does not speak to the extent of global malnutrition. A focus on intake of specific micro-nutrients, rather than calories, leads to the estimate that there are 2 billion iron-deficient people in the world, raising the question of whether nutritional security should be considered as a distinct concept from food security.<sup>2</sup>

Variations in these estimates do not indicate that hunger and malnutrition are in dispute as deeply entrenched global problems. Instead, such differences are important because they influence analysis of the underlying causes of these problems, as well as the best means of addressing them.

The right to food is an aspect of the right to an adequate standard of living and has been a part of international law since the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948. In addition to the UDHR, the right to food is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>3</sup>, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child,<sup>4</sup> and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Signatories to the latter treaty are required, according to article 2, to "undertake steps [...], to the maximum of [their] available resources, with a view to achieving progressively the full realization [...]" of the right to food. More recently, the commitment to halve hunger has formed a basic aspect of international efforts for development and poverty alleviation under the Millennium Development Goals.

---

<sup>1</sup> FAO Media Centre, "925 Million in Chronic Hunger Worldwide," U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, 14 September 2010, available at <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/45210/icode/>.

<sup>2</sup> Per Pinstrup-Andersen, "Food Security: Definition and Measurement," *Food Security* 1(2009):5-7.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 27.

<sup>4</sup> African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Articles 14 and 20.

The relationship between these types of efforts and those relying on food security as an orienting concept is not self-evident, however. Particularly, it is contested whether the realization of the right to food is most usefully considered a means to achieve food security or as an objective in itself.<sup>5</sup>

While food security has become a hegemonic term, there are a number of descriptive and operational limitations to it. Food insecurity may be characterized concretely according to its duration and intensity, but food security aggregates different forms of food insecurity and hunger into a positive concept describing a putative state. Food security's limitations as an operational concept derive from the fact that, unlike a right to food, it does not confer any specific obligations on states or other actors. While the aspirational state of food security is defined fairly specifically (see 1.4 below), the concept does not address itself directly to the task of realizing this state. Thus, food security has historically provided the justification for a wide range of technological, economic, and social interventions.

This paper's analysis will start from the global problem of food insecurity, which the FAO describes as existing "when people are undernourished as a result of the physical unavailability of food, their lack of social or economic access to adequate food, and/or inadequate food utilization." The paper will then proceed to consider which elements of differing perspectives are most useful in describing and analyzing this problem. Three framing questions will guide the paper's analysis:

- 1. Is food insecurity most usefully examined as a phenomenon in itself, or in conjunction with broader issues of poverty and marginalization?*
- 2. Through what means should food insecurity be addressed?*
- 3. Which types of actors and institutional avenues should be involved in addressing food insecurity?*

The paper will first examine the international context in which the concept of food security has gained prominence, and compare the food security perspective to rights-based and food sovereignty approaches. It will then consider the application of food security and alternative perspectives to the problems of hunger and malnutrition on the African continent, in the southern African region, and in South Africa specifically. With respect to the latter, the paper will contextualize the problem of hunger within broader historical and socio-economic dynamics and attempt to synthesize useful contributions from multiple approaches. Finally, it will identify some key questions and challenges with respect to the current policy context in South Africa, and offer some findings and recommendations regarding the three questions outlined above.

---

<sup>5</sup> K Mechlem, "Food Security and the Right to Food in the Discourse of the United Nations," *European Law Journal* 10(2004): 631–648.

## 2. Food Security and Food Sovereignty — the International Context

### 2.1. Food Security — Origins of the Concept

#### 2.1.1. *The 1974 World Food Conference*

The term ‘food security’ has its origins in the 1974 World Food Conference (WFC). The WFC was an emergency measure following a worldwide food crisis marked by food shortages, high prices, and inadequate emergency distribution measures. The crisis, which caused the deaths of an estimated 500 000 people, had initially resulted from a drastic drop in world production of staple foods in 1972. Largely as a result of this, the definition of food security that emerged from the conference was heavily focused on ensuring that there were adequate food supplies globally to stave off drastic price increases.<sup>6</sup> While some delegates proposed that lack of access to food was situated within broader social and economic dynamics, the major outcome of the conference was an emphasis on increasing food production.<sup>7</sup> D. John Shaw describes this as a fundamental shortcoming of the proceedings:

*“Ultimately, despite its achievements, the conference failed to agree that the world food problem was essentially a global political issue of the first magnitude that could neither be resolved by technicians or ministers of agriculture alone. . . And with its focus on “the world food problem and the need to increase production and stability of supplies, it failed to address adequately “the world food security problem,” including measures to ensure access of the poor to the food they needed.”<sup>8</sup>*

The conference nevertheless had several important legacies. That it was convened at a UN ministerial level under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) represented the extension of food and agricultural issues, which had previously been the domain of the FAO, as an area of concern for the broader UN. The conference also resulted in the establishment of a World Food Council and in the creation of guidelines for an International Undertaking on World Food Security, which called for governments to maintain cereal stocks that could be used during periods of crisis. However, while this entailed an acknowledgement that world food security was a global responsibility, it outlined voluntary measures that were to remain under national rather than international control.<sup>9</sup>

#### 2.1.2. *Legacies of the green revolution*

The emphasis on increased agricultural yields continued to guide most governmental and institutional interventions after the World Food Conference, and has remained integral to most understandings of food security. Although this focus was in some ways a natural outcome of world food shortages in the 1970s, efforts to increase production have also historically proved a profitable and politically convenient initiative for agribusinesses, development banks, and wealthy governments. The ‘green revolution’, a term coined by

---

<sup>6</sup> John Shaw, *World Food Security: a History Since 1945*, Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2007, 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

then-US Agency for International Development (USAID) secretary William S. Gaud,<sup>10</sup> introduced new seed varieties to Latin America and Asia in the 1970s at the behest of the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations and USAID<sup>11</sup>. The World Bank later became involved in providing credit to farmers for the purchase of machinery, fertilizers, livestock, and seeds.<sup>12</sup>

The longest-lasting initiative of the American foundations<sup>13</sup>, the green revolution combined an unshakable faith in scientific innovation with a willful disregard of broader socio-economic questions. Many analysts interpret the emphasis on modernization that underpinned the effort as a manifestation of the anti-communist ideology which tinged most political projects during the Cold War. The prevailing economic wisdom regarded overpopulation and a lack of modern technology in ‘third world’ countries as both a source of hunger and poverty and a potential catalyst for the spread of communism. The provision of adequate food was thus seen as suppressing social discontent and unrest, and historian Keith Griffin notes that “technical progress was regarded as an alternative to land reform.” According to investigative journalist Mike Dowie, the Ford Foundation’s decision to focus on India for agricultural development resulted largely from the personal determination of Foundation president Paul Hoffman to stymie China’s influence on the country.<sup>14</sup>

The green revolution was ‘successful’ in the sense that it rapidly increased agricultural production. Between the 1970s and 1990s, the total food available per person in the world increased by 11 percent. However, detractors point to the social and environmental costs of having largely replaced existing agricultural systems with new technologies. By the end of the 1970s, it was estimated that 40% of producers in the global south were using seeds introduced by the green revolution, creating dependency on the seed varieties themselves as well as the expensive fertilizers and pesticides that most of the new crops required.<sup>15</sup>

Increased yields did mean lower prices and an adequate supply of food, but they also led to widespread foreclosure on small farms that could not keep up with the input costs required to compete with larger counterparts. Increased landlessness, the breakdown of traditional livelihoods systems, and the destruction of crop diversity and soil health were thus also among the outcomes of the green revolution.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, even as countries such as India and Indonesia became ‘self-sufficient’, in the sense that they became net exporters of grain, death from hunger and malnutrition remained a persistent problem.<sup>17</sup> The green revolution did not solve the problem of hunger, and by many accounts it exacerbated it.

The failure of initiatives like the green revolution, although generally not acknowledged directly, helped constitute a growing recognition that a focus on food security at the global and national level was inadequate. Many social scientists, and some internal voices, had

---

<sup>10</sup> William S. Gaud, “The Green Revolution: Accomplishments and Apprehensions,” speech to the Society for International Development, Washington, D.C., 1968, available at <http://www.agbioworld.org/biotech-info/topics/borlaug/borlaug-green.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Qtd. in Mark Dowie, *American Foundations: An Investigative History*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001, 116.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Rosset, “Lessons from the Green Revolution,” Institute for Food and Development Policy, 8 April 2000, available at <http://www.foodfirst.org/media/opeds/2000/4-greenrev.html>

<sup>16</sup> *American Foundations: An Investigative History*, 118.

<sup>17</sup> “Lessons from the Green Revolution.”



criticized the green revolution while it was under way, but issues surrounding land rights, credit, and price controls continued to be more politically sensitive topics.<sup>18</sup> Although it was omitted from the most prominent conclusions of the World Food Conference, the issue of access to food increasingly came to be regarded as a crucial aspect of food security during the 1970s. The ILO World Employment Conference of 1976 advanced a concept of ‘basic needs’ which included food in this framework, and the FAO’s approach began to focus on the balance between demand for and supply of food.<sup>19</sup>

## **2.2. Shifts in Global Thinking about Food Security**

Noting that there have been close to 200 definitions of ‘food security’ over time, Maxwell concludes that the term has come to encompass many different and sometimes incongruent ideas. He finds, though, that rather than inhibiting policy formation, this situation reflects the complexity of the problem of food insecurity. While encouraging the continued acceptance of a plurality of perspectives, he traces several major shifts in international thinking about food security, including a first shift from the global and the national to the household and the individual, and a second from a ‘food first’ to a livelihood perspective.<sup>20</sup>

### ***2.2.1. From global and national food security to food access and entitlement protection***

Economist Amartya Sen’s groundbreaking work on famines attempted to show empirically that the existence of an adequate supply of food did not guarantee the ability of individuals to acquire it. Instead, food was generally obtained through an interlocking system of ‘entitlements’ in the forms of initial ownership of food or land, wages, or state-guaranteed provisions. It was the failure of these various entitlements, he argued, that most often led to famines. Thus, the prevention of famine required ‘entitlement protection’ involving broad-based employment, price stabilization, and social safety net provisions to mitigate the effects of shocks on the most vulnerable. The broader process of economic development, Sen said, should concern itself with such entitlement promotion, or – put another way – the institutionalization of citizens’ abilities to access food and participate fully in political and economic life.

With these conceptual developments, food security became situated more firmly within more general questions of economic policy.<sup>21</sup> This both expanded the range of consideration beyond the realm of agricultural issues and amplified the political significance of the definition of food security. The latter development, particularly, invited the involvement of a broader range of actors. The World Bank first publicly weighed in on the question of food security in a 1986 publication.<sup>22</sup> Drawing from Sen’s conceptual

---

<sup>18</sup> *American Foundations: An Investigative History*, 118.

<sup>19</sup> Tim Hart, “Food Security Definitions, Measurements and Recent Initiatives,” Centre for Poverty, Employment, and Growth, 31 March 2009, 9.

<sup>20</sup> Simon Maxwell, “Food Security: a Post-Modern Perspective,” *Food Policy* 21(1996): 155-170.

<sup>21</sup> *World Food Security: a History Since 1945*, 143.

<sup>22</sup> World Bank, “Poverty and Hunger: Issues and Options for Food Security in Developing Countries,” Policy Paper, 31 July 1986, available at [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/main?pagePK=64193027&piPK=64187937&theSitePK=523679&menuPK=64187510&searchMenuPK=64187283&siteName=WDS&entityID=000178830\\_98101901455676](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/main?pagePK=64193027&piPK=64187937&theSitePK=523679&menuPK=64187510&searchMenuPK=64187283&siteName=WDS&entityID=000178830_98101901455676).

approach and its own research in developing countries, it defined food security as ‘dependable access to enough food for an active, healthy life.’<sup>23</sup> The most important contribution of the report was a differentiation between chronic food insecurity, defined as ‘a continuously inadequate diet caused by the inability to acquire food,’ and transitory food insecurity, defined as ‘a temporary decline in a household’s access to enough food.’<sup>24</sup> The World Bank concluded that poverty, understood as a lack of purchasing power, was the underlying factor of food insecurity and recommended that poverty alleviation in conjunction with economic growth was the best way to relieve hunger and malnutrition.<sup>25</sup>

The engagement of the World Bank in the food security question illustrates the often contradictory nature of the conceptual debates and policy interventions taking place throughout the first half of the 1980s. Mackintosh notes that the Bank’s conclusion on the causes of food insecurity – that poverty causes hunger – is a tautology that misreads Sen in order to promote economic growth as a remedy. Instead, Mackintosh claims, Sen’s aim was to explore the causes of poverty and entitlement failure, and his findings suggest that these failures are often linked to periods of macro-economic growth. Moreover, the dominant economic paradigms promoted by the Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were undermining many of the measures that the Bank had alluded to in its report. Tim Hart notes on this issue that, “despite improved concepts of food security and increased food needs... structural adjustment resulted in the diverting of the resources required for practical action towards structural adjustment programmes.”<sup>26</sup>

### ***2.2.2. From food first to a livelihood/vulnerability perspective***

The World Bank’s 1990 *World Development Report* had the effect of re-focusing donor and practitioner attention towards the broader issue of poverty, and a second shift occurred in which food security began to be conceptualized in conjunction with household livelihoods. In this perspective, food, and the ability to obtain it, exists within a broader range of needs that a household has and a number of strategies that it can employ to obtain them.

The likelihood of experiencing food insecurity could then be described using the concept of vulnerability. Essentially, households may be vulnerable to food insecurity if they can obtain their food requirements under normal circumstances, but do not have surplus income or other means of acquiring food that would allow them to continue meeting their requirements if there were sudden changes in food prices or availability. Households unable to withstand shocks might also sometimes go hungry in order to avoid forfeiting or foregoing other basic needs or assets. Vulnerability also helped to clarify the World Bank’s concepts of chronic and transitory food insecurity, the latter of which was for some time regarded as the more serious. Instead, these concepts can most usefully be considered in conjunction with each other, as those who experience chronic food insecurity are most vulnerable to shocks and therefore to more severe food insecurity.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Qtd. in *World Food Security: a History Since 1945*, 259.

<sup>24</sup> Qtd. *ibid.*, 260.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>26</sup> “Food Security Definitions, Measurements and Recent Initiatives,” 10.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

### 2.3. The 1996 World Food Summit and the Current Definition of Food Security

The current definition of food security was codified at the 1996 World Food Summit and incorporates these shifts in thinking about food security. It reads:

Food security exists at the individual, household, national, regional, and global levels when all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for a healthy and active life.<sup>28</sup>

This definition encompasses four distinct dimensions of food security: availability of food; access to food; utilization of food; and stability of availability and access to food. The concept of food security as it is presently constituted has been criticized on several grounds, however, including its ambiguous treatment of ‘food preferences’, a lack of distinction between household and individual food security, and a failure to highlight the linkages between vulnerability to food insecurity and broader patterns of marginalization.

Pinstrup-Anderson emphasizes that contextual factors involving a household’s allocation of its resources towards different food commodities and individuals may determine whether all members of a household receive adequate nutrition. He asks, therefore, whether households in which several members are under-nourished should be considered ‘food insecure’, or whether a different concept would better describe households that have sufficient access to food but cannot or do not provide sufficient nutrition for all of their members.<sup>29</sup>

The definition has also been critiqued as engendering an inadequate conceptualization of vulnerability. Dilley and Boudreau have argued that the definition of food security functions to direct attention towards a potential outcome (food security, or, in the negative, food insecurity) rather than encouraging evaluation of particular populations’ susceptibility to known risks or shocks that could lead to food insecurity. Thus, the definition lacks the specificity that would allow it to translate its concepts into the practice of finding the causes and risk factors for food insecurity more successfully.<sup>30</sup>

This lack of specificity is also evident in the institutional response to food security. Shaw writes that food insecurity “is now being seen as the eye of the storm of interlocking national and global concerns to which it contributes and whose solution lies in tackling those concerns holistically.”<sup>31</sup> Such an approach attempts to situate food security as a global problem to be addressed through policies coordinated at the highest levels, but, as Shaw notes, “with so many multilateral, bilateral and non-governmental organizations and inter-national institutions involved, food security has tended to become everybody's concern and so, in reality, no one's concern.”<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>29</sup> “Food Security: Definition and Measurements,” 5.

<sup>30</sup> Maxx Dilley and Tanya E. Boudreau, “Coming to Terms with Vulnerability: a Critique of the Food Security Definition,” *Food Policy* 26(2001): 229-247.

<sup>31</sup> *World Food Security: a History Since 1945*, 383.

<sup>32</sup> *World Food Security: a History Since 1945*, 384.

## 2.4. The Right to Food

The pursuit of food security, therefore, involves an increasing number of international, regional, and national actors. When access to food is framed as a right, however, its fulfillment must ultimately be the responsibility of the state. The right to food in international law (see introduction) and in South Africa's constitution (see 3.3), forms part of a more holistic conception of food as an element of an adequate standard of living to which citizens are entitled. This idea of entitlement is the key distinction between a right to food and food security. While a rights-based conception of food access imparts on states a positive obligation to fulfill this right, food security does not imply such a concrete obligation, or imply the responsibility of any specific actor.

Food security and the fulfillment of the right to food are not mutually exclusive pursuits, however. Rather, the programming of the FAO and a number of international organizations treats these concepts as mutually reinforcing. The 1996 World Food Conference also articulated a commitment to the right to food which resulted in the adoption of an International Code of Conduct on the Human Right to Adequate Food that had been drafted by a coalition of non-governmental organizations.<sup>33</sup> As a result of these decisions, the FAO has drafted 'voluntary guidelines' to support the progressive realization of the right to food in the context of national food security. These non-binding guidelines provide a roadmap for states for the implementation of the right to food, and articulate a human rights approach to be used by agencies working on food and agriculture.<sup>34</sup> The FAO has also established an intergovernmental working group to assist states in implementing these guidelines, and national-level consultations have taken place in nearly ten states, including South Africa.<sup>35</sup>

## 2.5. Food Sovereignty — an Alternative Perspective

It is important to note that these efforts to realize the right to food are described as undertaken 'in the context of national food security.' This formulation creates ambiguity about whether the right to food is an objective in itself or merely instrumental to food security. It also establishes food security as the ultimate goal, which is potentially problematic for food rights campaigners who do not embrace the definition of or initiatives associated with food security.

Many groups find 'food security' an unhelpful or objectionable term because it frames food consumption primarily as a matter of survival, thereby under-valuing the social and cultural aspects of food and obscuring the significance of choices about food production and consumption to individual and societal dignity and well-being. 'Food security' also tends to obscure the fact that the autonomy needed to make such choices is dwindling in the era of neo-liberal globalization, which has seen declining involvement in agricultural production worldwide as this activity is increasingly assumed by large corporations that transport their products around the globe. At the 1996 World Food Summit, the

---

<sup>33</sup> Charlotte McClain-Nhlapo, "Implementing a Human Rights Approach to Food Security," International Food Policy Research Institute, 2004, available at <http://www.fao.org>.

<sup>34</sup> United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, "Voluntary Guidelines of the Progressive Realization of the Right to Food in the Context of National Food Security," Rome 2005, available at <http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/009/y9825e/y9825e00.HTM>.

<sup>35</sup> Charlotte McClain-Nhlapo, "Implementing a Human Rights Approach to Food Security," International Food Policy Research Institute, 2004, available at <http://www.fao.org>.

international peasant movement *La Via Campesina* introduced the term ‘food sovereignty’ into public debate, and since this time it has formed an important part of the platforms of movements and NGOs contesting neo-liberal policies that impact food and agriculture.<sup>36</sup>

Food sovereignty has been defined as “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.” It prioritizes trade and exchange within national and local economies and markets, emphasizes support for small-scale and family producers, and recognizes the importance of the preservation of a commons for future generations.<sup>37</sup>

These three approaches are not necessarily incongruent. *The right to food* is distinct from the other two concepts as a legal obligation which states must realize progressively as their resources allow. *Food security* and *food sovereignty* are descriptions of aspirational states that have no legal status and are in uncertain relation to the fulfillment of the right to food. There are many examples of both food security and food sovereignty campaigners using rights rhetoric, and the right to food could be conceived of as a process to realize either concept. A central limitation of food security, however, is that it has tended to lend itself to narrow, technical interventions that fail to address themselves to broader socio-economic questions. Food sovereignty, because it is situated in a wider critique of neo-liberal economic policies and forms part of a platform for wide-scale change, often proves a more holistic concept that more readily offers analysis of the root causes of food insecurity.

## 2.6. The 2008 Food Crisis — Causes and Outcomes

The utility of each of these perspectives can be further examined by applying them to the worldwide food crisis that occurred in 2008. Rapid spikes in food prices triggered riots in dozens of food-importing countries and pushed more than 100 million people into poverty.<sup>38</sup> Discussions of the crisis focused primarily on the effects of high energy costs and population growth on food production and consumption, and to a lesser extent the impact of bio-fuels and declining investments in the agricultural sector.<sup>39</sup>

While these causes are important, they do not adequately link present factors with the historical dismantling of small-scale food production capabilities in developing countries. Prior to the 2008 spike in food prices, the previous 20 to 30 years had seen a continued fall in food prices during which millions of small farmers were forced from their land. As government subsidies were redirected from small-scale producers to large commercial producers and agribusinesses on the advice of international financial institutions, agriculture in developing countries became increasingly focused on exports markets, and imports of basic staples increased. Food production globally became more dependent on oil for chemical inputs and transport, and the price of food commodities globally was thus

---

<sup>36</sup> Choike.org, “Agriculture and Food Sovereignty,” available at <http://www.choike.org/2009/eng/informes/1799.html>.

<sup>37</sup> “Definition of Food Sovereignty,” from *the Declaration of Nyéléni*, 2007, available at <http://foodsovereignty-org.web34.winsvr.net/FOOTER/Highlights.aspx>.

<sup>38</sup> Raj Patel, “Mozambique’s Riots: the True Face of Global Warming,” *Mail and Guardian*, 5 September 2010, available at <http://www.mg.co.za/article/2010-09-05-mozambiques-riots-true-face-of-global-warming>.

<sup>39</sup> See Anuradha Mittal, “The 2008 Food Price Crisis: Rethinking Food Security Policies,” G-24 Discussion Paper Series, UN Conference on Trade and Development, June 2009, available at <http://www.unctad.org>.

increasingly linked to energy costs. These factors, in combination with an increase in speculation in food markets, and diversion of food production for agro-fuels, triggered the rise that made basic food staples inaccessible to millions.

Responses to the crisis were met primarily with pledges of food aid and agricultural investment from donor governments. At the 2008 World Food Summit, the World Food Programme announced an additional \$1.2 billion in emergency food aid, and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon catalyzed proposals for research and development investment by asserting that agricultural production worldwide needs to increase by 50% by 2030. The summit failed to agree to changes on bio-fuel production or trade regulation.<sup>40</sup>

In response to these discussions, which located the problem in the levels of food production rather than the dominant mode of food production, *La Via Campesina* produced a document declaring:

The serious and urgent food and climate crises are being used by political and economic elites as opportunities to entrench corporate control of world agriculture and the ecological commons. At a time when chronic hunger, dispossession of food providers and workers, commodity and land speculation, and global warming are on the rise, governments, multilateral agencies and financial institutions are offering proposals that will only deepen these crisis through more dangerous versions of policies that originally triggered the current situation.

Since 2008, international attention to agriculture in the developing world has increased markedly. It is important to employ both food security and food sovereignty perspectives, however, in order to consider whether the measures being pursued represent a departure from the global practices that led to the 2008 crisis, or are merely a rehashing of them.

### **3. Food Security and Food Sovereignty in Africa**

#### **3.1. Magnitude and Explanations of Food Insecurity in Africa**

The effects of rising food prices have perhaps been felt most acutely in Africa, where the FAO has estimated that 24 million people were driven below the hunger threshold between 2005 and 2008.<sup>41</sup> In 2010, the organization estimated that out of the 925m food insecure people worldwide, 239m live in sub-Saharan Africa, a number that has fallen since 2009 but which is still higher than it was previous to the 2008 crisis.<sup>42</sup>

There exists a wide range of interpretations of why food insecurity is particularly acute in Africa. The explanations offered focus alternately on the dismantling of agricultural capacities through historical interventions, inadequate infrastructure to develop and

---

<sup>40</sup> “The World Food Summit: Only a Few Green Shoots,” *The Economist*, 5 June 2008, available at [http://www.economist.com/world/international/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=11502285](http://www.economist.com/world/international/displaystory.cfm?story_id=11502285).

<sup>41</sup> Anuradha Mittal, “Voices from Africa: African Farmers and Environmentalists Against a Green Revolution,” The Oakland Institute, 2009, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Economic and Social Development Department, “The State of Food Insecurity in the World: Addressing food insecurity in protracted crisis,” United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, October 2010, available at <http://www.fao.org/publications/sofi/en/>.

manage reserves, skewed ownership of resources and disruption of traditional land tenure structures, poor soil and irrigation, and inadequate technological capabilities.<sup>43</sup> While all of these factors must necessarily be considered in combating food insecurity, the latter in particular has captured the interest of international donors, who point to stagnant crop yields in Africa and champion the possibility of introducing some of the technologies that catalyzed agricultural production in Asia and Latin America.

### 3.2. A ‘Uniquely African’ Green Revolution

At a 2004 address to the UN Millennium Project, then-Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan, called for a “uniquely African Green Revolution.” Bolstered by the involvement of the Rockefeller and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations, as well as the growing interest of the private sector, investment in agriculture in Africa has begun to grow after a long period of fall-off during which analysts insisted that farmers need only be connected with markets in order to foster agricultural transformation on the continent.<sup>44</sup> Endorsed by UN member states at a 2005 summit, and by African heads of state at the 2006 African Fertilizer Summit, the concept of an ‘African green revolution’ has increasingly been promoted by political actors as part of a process of rural development. Institutions such as the World Bank have joined the chorus, framing agricultural development in Africa as a more proactive approach to chronic hunger than the provision of food aid and other emergency measures.<sup>45</sup>

The African green revolution has been spearheaded by such organizations as the Rockefeller and Gates Foundation-financed Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), and many of the key assumptions about scientific innovation thus continue to underpin the process. A key development in the ‘new’ green revolution, however, is the promotion of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) to increase crop yields. Prior to AGRA’s establishment in 2006, organizations such as the Yara Foundation, Millennium Promise, and the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) had been advancing use of genetically engineered (GE) crops in Africa.<sup>46</sup> Although the implications for human health are not yet widely known, GE crops have often been opposed on the grounds that their introduction often contaminates indigenous varieties, thus harming biodiversity and ensuring farmers’ dependence on patented seeds that often must be purchased every year. AGRA’s establishment, and Kofi Annan’s decision in 2007 to become the executive director of AGRA<sup>47</sup>, have lent momentum to this agenda and have situated a technology-led ‘revolution’ in Africa at the center of the development policy debate.<sup>48</sup>

The new green revolution has sought to emphasize that it is ‘African-led’ and thus distinct in important ways from the previous ones. That Kofi Annan’s initial appeal for agricultural transformation was made in conjunction with a review of the Millennium

---

<sup>43</sup> Viewpoints, “What Are the Most Important Constraints to Achieving Food Security in Various Parts of Africa?” *Natural Resources Forum* 32(2008):163-166.

<sup>44</sup> Pedro A. Sanchez, Glenn L. Denning, and Generose Nziguheba, “African Green Revolution Moves Forward,” *Food Security* (2009): 1.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> “Voices from Africa: African Farmers and Environmentalists Against a Green Revolution,” 2.

<sup>47</sup> Andrew Mushita and Carol Thompson, “Agricultural Biodiversity: African Alternatives to a ‘Green Revolution,’” *Development* 51(2008): 488-495.

<sup>48</sup> “Voices from Africa: African Farmers and Environmentalists Against a Green Revolution,” 2

Development goals has situated the African green revolution more firmly within a broader development framework, and entailed a greater rhetorical focus on poverty reduction. Many efforts have thus made reference to the need to improve the living standards of smallholder farmers, in addition to their production capacities, evidencing the significant changes in thinking about food security since the original green revolutions. In addition to the incorporation of livelihoods frameworks, this represents a more measured embrace of technological innovation as the catalyst for social change. In stating that its strategies draw from previous green revolutions, for example, AGRA acknowledges criticisms of these campaigns on environmental grounds and distinguishes its approach as “apply[ing] the power of knowledge and technology with an environmental touch” through an emphasis on crop diversity, soil health, and small-scale irrigation.<sup>49</sup>

Public investment in agriculture has also been a concerted focus of the wider agenda for agricultural transformation. NEPAD’s Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) was adopted by African leaders in 2003 and commits them to allocate at least 10% of their national budgets to agricultural development, with the goal of raising productivity by six percent annually.<sup>50</sup> Malawi, which is one of the only nations to have met this goal thus far, is sometimes cited as the first successful implementation of the new African green revolution. In 2005, the national government implemented a ‘smart subsidy’ program which provides subsidized fertilizer and maize seed to farming households. The 2006 harvest produced twice as much maize as the previous year, and Malawi, previously dependent on food aid, is now a net food exporter.<sup>51</sup>

There are four main pillars of the CAADP platform: expanding the areas under sustainable land and water management, improving infrastructure and trade-capacities for market access, increasing the food supply and decreasing hunger, and promoting agricultural research and the dissemination of new technologies. CAADP also forms the most important basis of the collaboration between NEPAD and the FAO. Thus the CAADP framework, which provides a broad agenda for agriculture and an institutional process for national implementation, represents a continent-wide platform for policy development that was thoroughly lacking from previously green revolutions. However, it also explicitly states a commitment to introducing improved technologies and promoting heavy infrastructure use and market-oriented agriculture, an orientation that is unsurprising given the African Union’s position in support of a ‘New Green Revolution’.<sup>52</sup> While improved institutional co-ordination and stakeholder involvement are an important shift, CAADP has been controversial insofar as it facilitates the entry of transnational corporations and their technologies into the policy debate over hunger and malnutrition on the continent.

### **3.3. How Different is the ‘New’ Green Revolution?**

Despite attempts to acknowledge and depart from some of the most notable failures of the green revolution and to recognize the value of indigenous agricultural systems, detractors

---

<sup>49</sup> AGRA, “Strategy for an African Green Revolution,” Nairobi, 2009, available at [www.agra-alliance.org/files/936\\_file\\_AGRA\\_Strategy\\_20090609.pdf](http://www.agra-alliance.org/files/936_file_AGRA_Strategy_20090609.pdf), 3.

<sup>50</sup> Aubrey Mchulu, “Malawi Hopes to Boost Agriculture with CAADP,” *IPS Africa*, 3 September 2010, available at <http://africa.ipsterraviva.net/2010/09/03/malawi-hopes-to-boost-agriculture-with-caadp/>

<sup>51</sup> “African Green Revolution Moves Forward,” 5.

<sup>52</sup> Elenita C. Daño, “Unmasking the New Green Revolution in Africa: Motives, Players and Dynamics,” Third World Service, Church Development Network, and African Centre for Biosafety, Penang, Malaysia, 2007, 48.



often emphasize that increasing agricultural production has remained the key focus of the African green revolution. With such a focus intact, allusions to smallholder livelihoods and environmental sustainability may be little more than symbolic, and efforts may remain insufficient to address the political and social problems that lie at the root of hunger and malnutrition. Joel Negin *et al* argue that efforts have thus far been concentrated on productivity and market access and should emphasize gender and nutrition to a greater degree in order to avoid repeating some of the mistakes of previous green revolutions. They note the harmful effects of the concentration of diets around maize, wheat, and rice that resulted in many areas from green revolution interventions, as well as the displacement of women from traditional agricultural roles. They also point to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and climate change as distinct challenges for an African green revolution that has not received sufficient attention.<sup>53</sup>

A deeper criticism concerns the historical roles of institutions such as the Rockefeller Foundation and the World Bank in creating the conditions that perpetuate hunger. While green revolution thinking has attempted to locate periodic food shortages in Africa in natural scarcity and poor domestic planning, many of the governments and institutions now involved in food security initiatives have in the past created the political and economic environment which has been partially responsible for such scarcity. Under-investment in agriculture on the continent, particularly, is a direct legacy of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) of the 1970s and 80s. During this period, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank urged African governments to eliminate subsidies for peasant farmers who were previously the main source of domestic food production.

SAPs involved a wide range of fiscal austerity and liberalization measures that were intended to promote export-led growth. This was premised on an assumption that removal of government subsidies would encourage private sector development. Private sector investment largely failed to materialize during that period, however, and the portion of overseas development assistance targeted to agriculture decreased from 17% in 1980 to 3% in 2005.<sup>54</sup> The impact of these interventions on agricultural production was overwhelming. While Africa had been a net exporter of food in the 1970s, it became heavily dependent on imports and emergency food aid.

This also reflected the growing dominance of an economic paradigm that regarded small-scale farming as pre-modern and inefficient. Developing countries were advised by international financial institutions and many donor agencies to focus on high-value commercial products for export rather than staple crops to be consumed domestically. Although much academic thinking about food security had progressed from a national to a household focus, and from a food-first to a livelihoods perspective, the ascent during this period of the neo-liberal 'Washington consensus' meant that policy interventions tended to regard food as a commodity that should be obtained as efficiently as possible. This led to a concept of food security that considered the cost of food as the primary factor in securing its access and thus linked improving food access with the opening of markets to cheap imports. According to journalist Martin Khor, US Agriculture Secretary John Block told a world trade conference in 1986 that "the idea that developing countries should feed

---

<sup>53</sup> Joel Negin et. al, "Integrating a Broader Notion of Food Security and Gender Empowerment into the Africa Green Revolution," *Food Security*(2009): 1-10.

<sup>54</sup> Michael Fleshman, "A Harvest of Hope for African Farmers: Malawi Subsidies Stimulate a Bumper Crop," *Africa Renewal* 22(2008): 3, available at <http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/afrec/vol22no3/223-harvest-of-hope.html>.

themselves is an anachronism from a bygone era. They could better ensure their food security by relying on US agricultural products, which are available in most cases at lower cost.”<sup>55</sup>

Now, as food rights group FIAN International points out<sup>56</sup>, the same international bodies and donors that discouraged domestic production throughout the 1980s and 90s have begun to explain the slow spread of a green revolution in Africa by pointing to low levels of agricultural investment and a ‘policy discrimination against agriculture.’<sup>57</sup> Akin Adesina, vice president of AGRA, acknowledges that “the end of government subsidies to African farmers because of structural adjustment programmes was an absolute disaster.”<sup>58</sup> A fundamental question, however, is whether a process that continues to be driven by many of the institutions which helped to create the detrimental conditions for African agriculture will repeal earlier policies or merely reformulate them. While much of the rhetorical emphasis of the African green revolution has been on smallholder livelihoods and public-private partnerships to support agricultural development, it also continues to pave the way for the introduction of new technologies, market-based policies, and the involvement of transnational corporations in local food systems.

Applying the food sovereignty framework is useful in considering the potential problems of this AGRA-driven process. A series of Via Campesina resolutions on food sovereignty in Africa emphasize local control of food systems through such measures as policies to encourage small scale production, decision-making processes controlled by producers and consumers, the removal of food and agriculture from WTO treaties and free trade agreements, and limits to imports of genetically modified organisms.<sup>59</sup> Critics of the African green revolution object, particularly, to the Gates and Rockefeller Foundations investments in GM seeds and the high-level involvement in AGRA of agronomists from multinationals such as Monsanto, which already controls much of the world’s seed market. For these reasons, Indian scientist and environmental activist Vandana Shiva has condemned the Gates Foundation as “the greatest threat to farmers in the developing world.”<sup>60</sup> The Canadian Action Group on Erosion, Technology, and Concentration (ETC) concludes that “despite assertions to the contrary, there is a real danger that the Green Revolution will turn into a corporate biotech boom and the destruction of rural resiliency - and diversity - in Africa.”<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> FIAN International, “Land Grabbing in Kenya and Mozambique,” Heidelberg, Germany: FIAN International Secretariat, April 2010, available at <http://www.fian.org/resources/documents/others/land-grabbing-in-kenya-and-mozambique>.

<sup>57</sup> World Bank Group, “World Bank Development Report,” 2008, available at <http://econ.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTRESEARCH/EXTWDRS/0,,contentMDK:20227703~pagePK:478093~piPK:477627~theSitePK:477624,00.html>, 55.

<sup>58</sup> “A Harvest of Hope for African Farmers: Malawi Subsidies Stimulate a Bumper Crop,” 3.

<sup>59</sup> Via Campesina, “Food Sovereignty for Africa: a Challenge at Fingertips,” Nyéléni, Mali, January 2008, available at [http://viacampesina.net/downloads/PDF/Brochura\\_em\\_INGLES.pdf](http://viacampesina.net/downloads/PDF/Brochura_em_INGLES.pdf).

<sup>60</sup> Qtd. in David Rieff, “A Green Revolution for Africa?” *New York Times Magazine*, 12 October 2008, available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/12/magazine/12wwln-shah-t.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/12/magazine/12wwln-shah-t.html?_r=1).

<sup>61</sup> ETC Group, “Green Revolution2.0 for Africa? This Time the Silver Bullet has a Gun,” Issue 94, March/April 2007, available at <http://www.etcgroup.org/en/node/611>.

### 3.4. The Agenda for ‘Agricultural Transformation’ in Africa

AGRA initiatives themselves have not yet had sufficient scope to bring about such consequences. What is particularly notable is AGRA’s apparently enormous influence on other government and non-government food security interventions and the resulting policy consensus around land and agrarian policy in Africa. ETC further notes that Bill Gates’ activities are hugely influential on government and that AGRA is thus “indicative of a growing trend toward privatisation of foreign aid, and the fusing of the private sector with governments.”<sup>62</sup>

AGRA has partnered with a number of U.N. agencies, and recent changes in U.S. development policy has precipitated collaboration between the U.N. World Food Programme, the U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation and AGRA. This, taken with Obama’s appointment of Rajiv Shah, who previously served on the board of AGRA, as administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has produced alarm at the increasing linkages between multi- and bi-lateral donor institutions, private foundations, and large agribusinesses.<sup>63</sup> President Obama has also expressed personal support for the introduction of a green revolution in Africa, and in 2009 successfully secured \$20 billion for agricultural research and development at the G8 meeting in L’Aquila.<sup>64</sup>

The convergence of public and private sector initiatives often goes by the broad term “agricultural transformation” or “agriculture-led growth.” While public investment in agriculture has been an important component of the green revolution, such investment often remains skewed towards investment in the production of food for export. This is based on the premise that declining involvement in the agricultural sector is one of the hallmarks of a growing economy.<sup>65</sup> In this way, food security becomes de-linked from access to land and premised instead on the ability of agricultural-led growth to create non-agricultural sector jobs.

When these jobs are not created, or are disproportionately in low-wage sectors, such a strategy leads to a dependence on food imports that consumers may not be able to afford. The distribution of land is a crucial factor in determining who has access to food, but it is one that is often minimized within the framework of ‘food security’ through an emphasis on who is able to produce the most food. Recent policy shifts on the continent are also

---

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Alex Bayden-Mayer, “Dupont, Monsanto, and Obama Against the World’s Family Farmers,” Organic Consumers Association, 7 July 2010, available at [http://www.organicconsumers.org/articles/article\\_19665.cfm](http://www.organicconsumers.org/articles/article_19665.cfm).

<sup>64</sup> Paula Crossfield, “G8 Promises \$20 Billion in Agricultural Aid: Real Change or Business as Usual?” *The Huffington Post*, 10 July 2009, available at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paula-crossfield/g8-promises-20-billion-in\\_b\\_229526.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paula-crossfield/g8-promises-20-billion-in_b_229526.html).

<sup>65</sup> The USAID “Feed the Future” implementation for Mozambique emphasizes, “productivity increases will likely be associated with a decline in both the share of the labor force devoted to agriculture and the actual number of people in the agricultural sector.” U.S. Government Working Document, “Mozambique: FY2010 Implementation Plan,” Feed the Future, U.S. Government Initiative, available at <http://www.feedthefuture.gov>.

friendlier to acquisition of land by foreign investors, a growing trend in Africa that is complicating land tenure systems and further dismantling smallholder farming systems.<sup>66</sup>

### **3.5. South Africa's Role in Regional and Continental Food Security Strategies**

The UN Conference on Trade and Development identifies South Africa as both the top importer and exporter of food in southern Africa.<sup>67</sup> As such, South Africa has an important impact on food security within the region.

This was evident in the deadly food riots that broke out in Mozambique in August 2010, when many citizens were no longer able to afford bread after its price was increased by 30%. Mozambique produces only about 30% of its wheat, and its status as a food importer is precisely what makes it so difficult to keep prices stable. A basic implication of a globalized food system is that a number of factors impact prices, and prices in turn determine who can access food, regardless of how much is available. Mozambique imports many of its staples from South Africa, and a recent strengthening of the South African rand against the Mozambican metical was most likely the key factor in the government's decision to increase bread prices.

Although agriculture as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) has been declining in South Africa, it has a highly developed infrastructure for commercial agriculture and a growing agricultural export economy. Its commercial seed market, the largest in Africa, is heavily dominated by multi-national corporations, with agribusiness giant Monsanto having gained control of about 40 percent of the country's market in maize seeds through gradual acquisition of local seed companies and establishment of research facilities throughout the country.<sup>68</sup> The South African fertilizer market is in a similar state, with about 70% of agrochemicals used imported primarily from three major corporations.<sup>69</sup> GMO use has also been most extensive in South Africa, which in 2009 ranked fourth in the world for number of hectares planted to GM maize,<sup>70</sup> and influential commercial farmers' lobbies such as AgriSA are supportive of expanded GMO use.

What this has often amounted to is increased 'buy-in' for the idea of an African Green Revolution among South African producers, businesses, and research centres. The country has been a hub for agricultural research, including field trials of GE crops, within Africa, and the flow of Green Revolution thinking and technologies has thus often proceeded from South Africa towards the rest of the continent. Monsanto's 'Seeds of Hope' campaign that is targeted towards subsistence-level producers promotes a 'combi-pack' of hybrid maize seeds, fertilizers, and herbicides that was first introduced in South Africa in the 1990s.<sup>71</sup> Until 2008, South Africa was the only African country with commercial plantings of GMO crops, but the extensive penetration of companies such as Monsanto into South

---

<sup>66</sup> See FIAN International, "Land Grabbing in Kenya and Mozambique," Heidelberg, Germany: FIAN International Secretariat, April 2010, available at <http://www.fian.org/resources/documents/others/land-grabbing-in-kenya-and-mozambique>.

<sup>67</sup> UN Conference on Trade and Development – Economic Development in Africa Report 2009.

<sup>68</sup> "Unmasking the New Green Revolution in Africa: Motives, Players and Dynamics," 40.

<sup>69</sup> Stephen Greenberg, "2010 Status Report on Land and Agricultural Policy in South Africa," Institute for Poverty, Land, and Agrarian Studies, Research Report 40, March 2010, 8.

<sup>70</sup> GMO Compass, "Global GM Planting 2009," 29 March 2010, available at [http://www.gmo-compass.org/eng/agri\\_biotechnology/gmo\\_planting/257.global\\_gm\\_planting\\_2009.html](http://www.gmo-compass.org/eng/agri_biotechnology/gmo_planting/257.global_gm_planting_2009.html).

<sup>71</sup> "Unmasking the New Green Revolution in Africa: Motives, Players and Dynamics," 40.

Africa has paved the way for introduction of similar technologies into neighboring countries.

The success of South Africa's commercial farming sector has also rendered it an attractive partner for channeling development assistance related to agriculture and food security in the region. Feed the Future, U.S. president Barack Obama's new 3-year, \$3.5 billion global food security program, names South Africa as a partner and critical stakeholder in the program's implementation plan for southern Africa. The plan expands an existing program in which the U.S. and South African governments co-fund assistance for agricultural research and development in the region in order to increase the utilization of South African expertise within the Southern African Development Community (SADC).<sup>72</sup>

This focus on South Africa as a potential model for the rest of the region has one glaring oversight, however: chronic hunger persists among poor and historically disadvantaged communities in South Africa at levels comparable to elsewhere on the continent. Explaining this contradiction, and its implications for South Africa's viability as a model for food security, requires an exploration of the historical and contemporary dynamics that impact access to food within South Africa.

## **4. Food Security in South Africa — Existing Measures and Policy Contexts**

### **4.1. Magnitude and Measures — Challenges to Assessing Food Insecurity in South Africa**

South Africa is generally considered a 'food secure' country at the national level—it was a net exporter of food until 2007, and its agricultural exports, particularly to the European Union and other countries in the Southern African Development Community, have continued to grow.<sup>73</sup> A number of different national studies have found significant levels of household food insecurity, however, indicating that access to food is a problem for many South Africans.<sup>74</sup> Roberts identifies three major challenges to accurately assessing trends in food insecurity in South Africa: a lack of recent national data, use of different measures and sample methodologies in national data collection, and the infrequent nature of national nutritional surveys. Roberts warns that the inconsistencies between the definitions and methodologies of different national surveys, as well as the different purposes for which they are undertaken, makes their usefulness in measuring progress towards the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG-1) on hunger dubious.<sup>75</sup>

The indicator used for MDG-1 is the occurrence of low weight-for-age ratios in children under five. Such anthropometric indicators were developed from the recognition that food insecurity is linked closely to undernourishment, and undernourishment often impacts on

---

<sup>72</sup> U.S. Government Working Document, "Southern Africa: FY2010 Implementation Plan," Feed the Future, U.S. Government Initiative, available at <http://www.feedthefuture.gov>.

<sup>73</sup> Sam Legare and Ezra Steenkamp, "South Africa's Agricultural Trade Performance: Quarterly Review," Department of Agriculture, Forest, and Fisheries, 2009, available at [http://www.nda.agric.za/doiDev/sideMenu/internationalTrade/docs/itrade/SA\\_AgricTradePerformanceQ1\\_2009.pdf](http://www.nda.agric.za/doiDev/sideMenu/internationalTrade/docs/itrade/SA_AgricTradePerformanceQ1_2009.pdf).

<sup>74</sup> "Food Security Definitions, Measures, and Recent Initiatives," 30.

<sup>75</sup> Unpublished paper, qtd. in "Food Security Definitions, Measures, and Recent Initiatives," 31.

physical health and growth, particularly in children. The heights and weights of children under five can be used as anthropometric indicators to identify chronic and transitory food insecurity, respectively, since chronically malnourished children are likely to have stunted growth and children who have lost weight recently are likely to have low weights for their height. The weight-for-age ratio used for MDG-1 is intended to give a composite indicator of the prevalence of underweight children in a population experiencing some form of interaction between chronic and transitory food insecurity.<sup>76</sup>

Most sources of national data for South Africa have not used such anthropometric indicators or attempted to capture the relationship between chronic and transitory food insecurity, however. The most common indicator employed is food expenditure, which is used as a proxy for food consumption but does not generally take into account the nutritional adequacy of food purchased.<sup>77</sup> The General Household Survey (GHS) and the Income Expenditure Survey (IES), both conducted annually by Statistics South Africa, provide nationally representative data on food expenditure, and the GHS also includes some subjective questions about experiences of hunger. The National Food Consumption survey, commissioned by the Department of Health in 1999 and 2005, has included questions about nutrient intake and anthropometric data for children<sup>78</sup>, but data from this survey is generally considered too infrequent and limited in sample size to give an accurate depiction of the broader state of food insecurity over time.<sup>79</sup>

The most recent data from the General Household Survey suggests that 2.8 million households experience chronic food insecurity, which is the figure quoted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forest, and Fisheries.<sup>80</sup> Different methodologies in national surveys have resulted in varying pictures of the extent, frequency, and intensity of food insecurity in South Africa, however. A study drawing from the 1995 IES found that 43% of households experienced 'food poverty,' meaning that they were not able to purchase or produce enough food to meet their requirements for a food basket that would be nutritionally adequate for a household of their size.<sup>81</sup> Analysis of the 2005 National Food Consumption Survey shows that 52% of households experienced hunger, and an additional 33% were at risk for hunger.<sup>82</sup>

In addition to the ambiguity resulting from variation between these different estimates, the adequacy of the quantitative indicators derived from these surveys has been contested. A particularly important concern is whether data on income and food expenditures is a sufficient substitution for socio-economic status, given that food security is also affected by the existence of factors that facilitate non-monetary access to food. Such factors would include social or kinship networks that may provide access to food and the production of food for own consumption. Put differently, studies in South Africa generally attempt to measure food insecurity by measuring poverty, but the two are not necessarily interchangeable.<sup>83</sup> Drawing from research in Kwa Zulu-Natal, Misselhorn argues that attempts to characterize and locate vulnerability to food insecurity should include "social

---

<sup>76</sup> "Food Security Definitions, Measures, and Recent Initiatives," 15.

<sup>77</sup> P.T. Jacobs, "The status of household food security targets in South Africa," *Agrekon*, 48(2009): 418.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 419.

<sup>79</sup> "Food Security Definitions, Measures, and Recent Initiatives," 31.

<sup>80</sup> "Millions of Hungry Households in SA," SAPA, 14 October 2010, available at <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Millions-of-hungry-households-in-SA-20101014>.

<sup>81</sup> "The status of household food security targets in South Africa," 416.

<sup>82</sup> "Food Security Definitions, Measures, and Recent Initiatives," 30.

<sup>83</sup> "Food Security Definitions, Measures, and Recent Initiatives," 33.

capital-related failures,” such as “a breakdown in two-parent families, divergences between religious groups, ambiguous leadership characterised by conflict, and changes in cultural norms.”<sup>84</sup> Estimates of the extent of food insecurity at the national level also obscure important intra-regional, district, and even household distinctions. The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries notes that 72% of the food insecure population resides in rural areas.

In a review of food insecurity studies undertaken since 1994, Hendriks concludes:

No effort has been made to standardize data sets, employ comparable and tried and tested methodologies as used by neighbouring SADC countries, or plan for longitudinal studies. Without knowing the true extent of food insecurity or the trends in food security over time, there is little hope of effective policies and targeted programmes to address food insecurity in South Africa.”<sup>85</sup>

Hendriks proposes that the lack of resources and effort around planning for food security initiatives may result, firstly, from an outside perception of South Africa as a food secure country, resulting in less availability of research funding than in other southern African countries; and secondly, it could also stem from a domestic ambivalence towards assessing the food insecurity situation, given that the constitutional right to food could result in more pressure for costly interventions were more reliable estimates produced.

## **4.2. Historical Background and Root Causes of Food Insecurity in South Africa**

### ***4.2.1. The historical development of South Africa’s commercial farming industry***

That South Africa is to some extent held up as a model for successful agricultural production on the continent overlooks several crucial historical factors in the country’s development of the commercial farming sector: in particular, that this process was tied to the dispossession of Africans from the country’s most viable farmland, and that it was heavily supported by subsidies from the apartheid government and the exploitation of black labor. Beginning with the 1892 Glenn Gray Act that abolished communal land rights, land legislation functioned to loosen the African peasantry’s hold on their land and weaken their ability to produce independently. The 1913 Land Act, which created black ‘reserves’ on 7% of the country’s land, both created a pool of employment for mining and urban employers and struck at Africans cash-cropping on white land by prohibiting black ownership of or residency on white land, except through labor tenancy or wage labor agreements.<sup>86</sup>

The white commercial farming class would become an important constituency of the National Party, which subsidized the agricultural sector through extension of credit and grants; investment in irrigation, fencing, and transport; and the establishment of marketing boards that provided guaranteed sales and high prices. This resulted in the growth of a

---

<sup>84</sup> Alison Misselhorn, “Is a Focus on Social Capital Useful in Considering Food security Interventions? Insights from KwaZulu-Natal,” *Development Southern Africa* 26(2009):189-208.

<sup>85</sup> Qtd. in “Food Security Definitions, Measures, and Recent Initiatives,” 34.

<sup>86</sup> South African History Online, “Our Land, Our Life, Our Future: a Land Dispossession History,” text adapted from TCOE exhibit, available at [http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/governance-projects/land-dispossession/04\\_control.htm](http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/governance-projects/land-dispossession/04_control.htm).

highly-developed infrastructure for commercial farming and the cultivation of a successful, large-scale agricultural sector.<sup>87</sup> The apartheid government had increasingly targeted ‘black spots’, or independent black farming communities, entailing the effective dismantling of the peasant class.

#### ***4.2.2. Apartheid-era food and nutrition initiatives***

Apartheid governments undertook several initiatives that were referred to as ‘food security’, with this term conceptualized mostly in terms of ‘supply side’ initiatives. In 1992, pressure from the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) produced a commitment to establishing a National Early Warning System for Food Security and a National Nutrition Surveillance System. That year, the Department of Agriculture undertook a study with the stated intention of developing a food and nutrition policy for southern Africa. Bernstein notes that the report sought to identify ‘target groups’ for intervention rather than to transform the structural conditions which prevented oppressed groups’ secure access to food.

Thus, when the study found that more than half of the black population lived below the minimum subsistence level (MSL), it concluded that the MSL used in the study was too high to be meaningful in identifying the undernourished. According to Bernstein, the initiatives to come out of the report were therefore “unable to envisage any restructuring of the relations of property and production of white farming, and in terms of production can only recommend a diversification from maize to oilseeds and soya.” The report also failed to recommend subsidies on basic food, instead endorsing a program of skills training, ‘small farmer upliftment’, and welfare schemes such as vegetable gardens.<sup>88</sup>

#### ***4.2.3. Food security and liberalization of the agricultural sector***

By the 1980s, massive state support for commercial agriculture was ending. A weakening of the rand meant that input costs began to exceed output prices, and the state’s artificially high purchase prices for agricultural products were becoming less and less viable. A struggle began over market-based reform of white agriculture, framed as ‘consumer choice.’ Bernstein emphasizes, however, that “any benefits to black (especially poorer) consumers from this all-white struggle over market-based reform of all-white agriculture are incidental. Enlarging ‘consumer choice’ can only benefit consumers positioned, in both income and spatial terms, to take advantage of it.”

The year 1987 marked a 50% decrease in the budget allocated to white farmers, followed by the abolition of price controls in many sectors and the deregulation of marketing. The commercial farming sector went increasingly into debt, with the value of its arrears standing at R11 billion and as many as 3 000 farmers on the verge of bankruptcy by the end of 1988<sup>89</sup>. At the same time, note Aliber and Hall, “dismantling Bantustan agricultural development corporations (for all their faults) in the 1990s left a vacuum in production

---

<sup>87</sup> M. Weideman, “Land Reform, Equity and Growth in South Africa: A Comparative Analysis,” *Doctoral Thesis*. Department of Political Studies, University of Witwatersrand, 2004, 66, available at [http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10539/275/15\\_chapter3.pdf?sequence=15](http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10539/275/15_chapter3.pdf?sequence=15).

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>89</sup> M. Weideman, “Land Reform, Equity and Growth in South Africa: A Comparative Analysis,” *Doctoral Thesis*. Department of Political Studies, University of Witwatersrand, 2004, 68, available at [http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10539/275/15\\_chapter3.pdf?sequence=15](http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10539/275/15_chapter3.pdf?sequence=15).



and marketing support for the now-estimated 200 000 commercially-oriented smallholder farmers and 2.5 million households practicing agriculture mainly for subsistence purposes.”<sup>90</sup> The viability of agricultural production in South Africa, then, was in serious jeopardy as the country prepared to examine questions of land and ownership as part of the democratic transition.

### **4.3. Post-apartheid Policy Interventions**

#### ***4.3.1. Debates over macro-economic policy and the developmental state***

The inherited context for thinking about food security was oriented heavily towards the question of deregulation of agricultural markets, on which most of the apartheid-era ‘consumer choice’ campaigns had focused. Du Toit has also suggested that this context was underpinned by a demand for inclusion and integration of marginalized groups into the market because “narratives of exclusion figure so prominently in the conceptualization of apartheid’s agrarian legacy.”<sup>91</sup> Because black farmers had been dispossessed of their land while white farmers were insulated by decades of support by the apartheid government, the preferred policy was to promote competition. This was based on the assumption that such a policy would drive out inefficient white farmers who had continued to produce only through exploitation of black labor. Du Toit further notes that this is based on the historical, pro-market interpretation that “racism is bad for business.”<sup>92</sup>

The 1993 ANC Policy Brief on Food Security and Food Policy thus echoes many of the recommendations of 1992 Kasser Committee of Inquiry on agricultural control schemes. The inquiry had primarily advocated deregulation and liberalization of agricultural marketing and pricing, and the ANC committed itself additionally to the exemption from VAT of basic foods, limited food subsidies, and increases to the value of pensions. The key premise of food security policy, however, was that access to food had been inhibited primarily by market distortions caused by the coddling of white commercial farmers, and that removing these distortions would both address food insecurity and begin the process of de-racializing agriculture.<sup>93</sup>

This premise was situated within the broader debates that were beginning to occur over macro-economic policy and the role of the developmental state. By the time that the ANC was preparing to take power, it had apparently decided against nationalization of farmland, instead embracing a commercial farming industry as the best means of ensuring sufficient food supplies for the nation. This also entailed a modernist bias in which an agrarian policy centered on small-scale farmers was deemed to inhibit the economic progress that South Africa needed at the moment of its entry into the world community. Particularly during the Mbeki era, consolidation of democracy and racial redress was imagined as linked to modernization and global integration, and the policies pursued towards these

---

<sup>90</sup> Ruth Hall and Michael Aliber, “The Case for Re-strategising Spending Priorities to Support Small-Scale Farmers in South Africa,” Institute for Poverty, Land, and Agrarian Studies, Working Paper 17, April 2010, available at <http://www.plaas.org.za/pubs/pb>, 3.

<sup>91</sup> Andries du Toit, “Adverse Incorporation and Agrarian Policy in South Africa,” *Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies*, February 2009, 1.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>93</sup> “Food Security in a Democratic South Africa,” 14-15.

ends emphasized trade liberalization, agriculture-led growth and the re-training of small farmers to use methods more like their commercial counterparts.<sup>94</sup>

These early policy directions exhibited a great deal of influence from the World Bank and its interventions elsewhere on the continent. Often-cited is the incorporation of the bank's recommendations for market-driven land reform into ANC policy. While the early direction of land reform was perhaps not as uniformly market-based as its critics have maintained, it did promote the 'rationalization' of land use and a particular type of linkage between land reform and food security. Bernstein highlights the section of the 1993 Policy Brief on Food Security and Food Policy which asserted that "there is little evidence to suggest that large numbers of the rural population would wish to produce food for their own consumption if alternative cash crop or other income-generating opportunities exist."<sup>95</sup>

Noting that the rural population was not meaningfully consulted on this question, Bernstein suggests that this indicates a misunderstanding of the purpose of land reform as it relates to food security. Land reform is not likely to be meaningful in terms of increasing the nation's total agricultural output, but it could constitute a more direct initiative in terms of increasing the incomes and food security of the rural poor. Instead, in the initial basis for ANC land and agrarian policy, Bernstein finds what he refers to as a "'welfare/efficiency' tension." This tension stems from the World Bank's supposed dual aims of addressing welfare objectives through the distribution of land and promoting the productive use of agricultural land.<sup>96</sup> This is a tension that has persisted throughout several iterations of land reform efforts in South Africa. Du Toit echoes this point, concluding that while land and labor law reform policies have been conceptualized as pro-poor, the basis of agrarian policy has been contradictory, "relying on pathways of market integration and models of farming inimical to these policy aims."<sup>97</sup>

#### ***4.3.2. The constitutional right to food***

Although its position in land and agrarian policy has often been ambiguous, food security does receive distinct treatment in South Africa's legal regime. The South African Constitution of 1996 recognizes both the right of access to food for all and the right of children to basic nutrition. The right of access to sufficient food is defined, however, such that the state's obligations are limited by the available resources. As is the case with many other socio-economic rights, the state is beholden to 'progressive realization', rather than immediate fulfillment, of this right.

Although cases involving access to food have not yet been brought to the South African Constitutional Court, precedent indicates that rights of 'access' in the Constitution will be treated as distinct from the concept of minimum core obligations. In this formulation endorsed by the United Nations Committee on Economic and Social Rights, governments must provide a baseline of services to their citizens while they work to realize rights progressively.<sup>98</sup>

---

<sup>94</sup> "Adverse Incorporation and Agrarian Policy in South Africa," 4.

<sup>95</sup> "Food Security in a Democratic South Africa," 17.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> "Adverse Incorporation and Agrarian Policy in South Africa," 4.

<sup>98</sup> Danwood Mzikenge Chirwa, "Child Poverty and Children's Rights of Access to Food and Basic Nutrition in South Africa: a Contextual, Jurisprudential and Policy Analysis," Research Series, 7, Socio-Economic Rights Project, 18.

Instead, the Constitutional Court has acknowledged in *Government of the Republic of South Africa and Others v Grootboom and Others*, a case concerning access to housing, that the state's obligations are differentiated according to whether or not certain citizens can acquire the means to fulfill basic rights for themselves. Thus, Brand puts forward that the right of access to food could be interpreted to mean that "the state has an obligation to provide an environment within which everyone is, within the limits of their abilities, able to acquire food for themselves."<sup>99</sup> This is supplemented by the obligation on the state to provide support, although potentially through empowerment of private individuals or organizations, to those who cannot afford sufficient food.<sup>100</sup>

The right of children to basic nutrition is not qualified by the availability of state resources in the South African Constitution. In *Grootboom*, however, the court determined that the children's right to basic shelter was not substantially different from the general right to housing. Therefore, the court's decision was that the state was not required to immediately provide shelter either to children or adults who could not otherwise acquire it. Chirwa recognizes that the general right to food and children's right to basic nutrition is structured similarly to these housing-related rights, but argues that food and nutrition are almost certainly distinct concepts. Children's rights to nutrition, moreover, are related to their minimum requirements for healthy development. This suggests the need for stronger institutional arrangements to fulfill children's right to basic nutrition.<sup>101</sup>

The more general *Grootboom* ruling also affirmed that State should "devise, fund, implement and supervise measures to provide relief to those in desperate need." The Court found that legislative measures that met the constitutional requirement of reasonableness would be ones that resulted in progressive realisation of the right within available resources and made provision for attention to crises and to short-, medium and long-term needs. Other rulings in cases of socio-economic rights have also found that reasonable programs must be made known and must be reasonable in both their conception and implementation.

The South African Human Rights Commission monitors implementation of the right to food along with the other social and economic rights entrenched in the Bill of Rights, and has raised in its reports to the National Assembly such issues as an insufficient focus on the scale of hunger and severity of malnutrition, unreasonable operational planning, low levels of participation by those who are directly affected, and the appropriateness of technology as an aspect of right to food interventions.<sup>102</sup>

#### **4.3.3. The 2002 Integrated Food Security Strategy**

Although the South African government has a comprehensive food security strategy, it is questionable whether it would meet some of these requirements of reasonableness, particularly those concerning transparency and implementation.

---

<sup>99</sup> D. Brand, "The Right to Food and Nutrition in the South African Constitution," in *A Compilation of Essential Documents on the Right to Food and Nutrition*, G Bekker ed., Economic and Social Rights Series, 3, Centre for Human Rights, 6.

<sup>100</sup> "Child Poverty and Children's Rights of Access to Food and Basic Nutrition in South Africa: a Contextual, Jurisprudential and Policy Analysis," 18.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>102</sup> South African Human Rights Commission, "The Right to Food," 5<sup>th</sup> Economic and Social Rights Report Series, 21 June 2004, available at [http://www.sahrc.org.za/home/21/files/Reports/5th\\_esr\\_food.pdf](http://www.sahrc.org.za/home/21/files/Reports/5th_esr_food.pdf).

Following the 1996 World Food Summit, the South African government became interested in creating a policy framework conducive to pursuing food security. This resulted in the Integrated Food Security Strategy (IFSS), which was adopted by cabinet in 2002 and reflects the definition and approach to food security developed at the World Food Summit.

The IFSS identifies maintaining a sufficient national food supply and enabling access to food at the household level as the two central and related imperatives of food security. The overarching goal outlined in the strategy is the eradication of hunger, malnutrition, and food insecurity by 2015. It proposes to accomplish this through the following strategic objectives:

- Increase household food production and trading
- Improve income generation and job creation opportunities
- Improve nutrition and food safety
- Increase safety nets and food emergency management systems
- Improve analysis and information management systems
- Provide capacity building
- Hold stakeholder dialogues

The IFSS situates its approach within broader development objectives, and thus identifies several types of entitlement promotion with respect to the food insecure: greater ownership of productive assets; greater access to income and job opportunities where this is not possible; improvement of levels of food safety and nutrition; and better short-to-medium term relief measures for the population unable to access any of these improvements. The IFSS also seeks greater public/private/civil-society co-ordination around food security improvement interventions and increased ability to monitor food insecurity trends and the impact of interventions.<sup>103</sup>

The Human Sciences Research Council notes that the formal institutional arrangements outlined for achieving these outcomes are consistent with international best practice.<sup>104</sup> The strategy consists of an inter-departmental set of programs that are to be informed by ‘food security forums’ occurring at national provincial, district, and local levels.

The inter-departmental Integrated Food Security and Nutrition Program Task Team was designed to undertake a host of complementary interventions at the behest of particular departments, depending on the type of expertise needed. Thus, the Department of Agriculture was tasked to oversee a project pertaining to food production and trading; the Department of Public Works a community development program; the Department of Health an integrated nutrition and food safety program; the Department of Social Development a comprehensive social security program; and Statistics South Africa an information and communication program. All departments were to be involved in a food security capacity-building program and a food security stakeholder dialogue program.

Meanwhile, food security forums at different levels would fulfill complementary tasks towards the designing and implementation of policy. A national food security forum would co-ordinate strategy at the national level, a provincial counterpart would prioritize

---

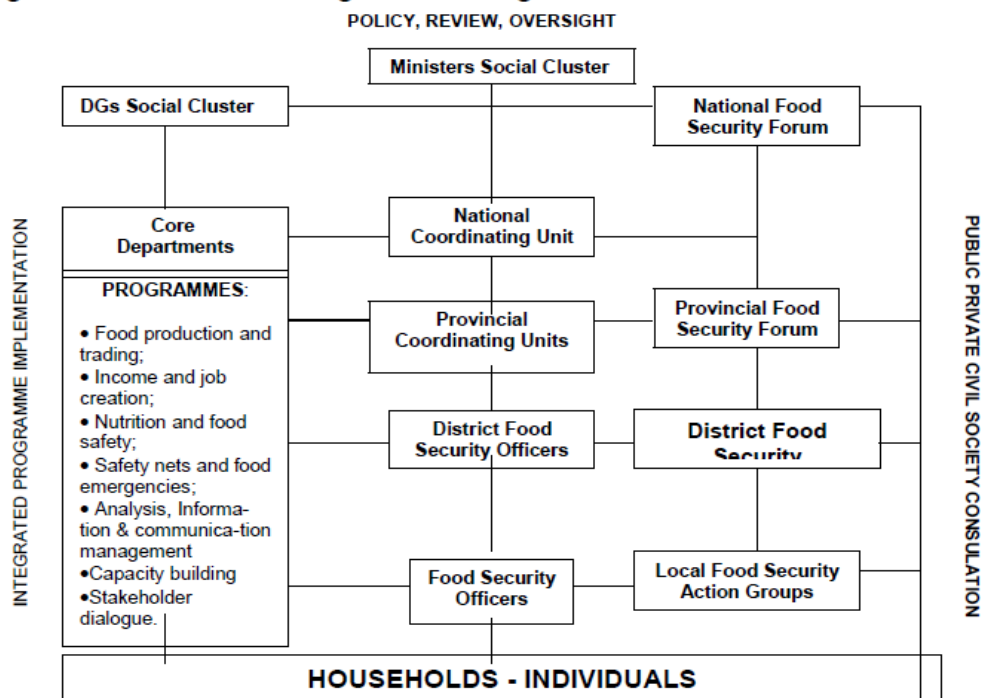
<sup>103</sup> “Food Security Definitions, Measures, and Recent Initiatives,” 37.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

projects and allocate funds, district food security committees would identify food-insecure areas and advise on project design and funding, and local food security action groups, consisting of local government and NGOs, would provide information on local household vulnerability to food insecurity. The departmental programs and food security forums are linked through co-ordinating units at each level, with a Food Security Directorate in what was then the Department of Agriculture taking an oversight role (see fig. 2).

What is outlined in theory, however, has not translated into reliable implementation in practice. Thus, the HRSC concludes that “the institutional structures currently designed to address food insecurity in South Africa are fraught with challenges that are severely constraining their effectiveness, and...are having deeply negative impacts on food security in the country.”<sup>105</sup>

**Figure 2. Institutional Arrangements & Organizational Structures**



From "Integrated Food Security Strategy, available at <http://www.info.gov.za/view/DownloadFileAction?id=70243>

The HSRC found in 2007 that while food security was widely perceived by other departments to be the domain of the Department of Agriculture, this department remained focused on commercial agriculture and, to a lesser extent, providing resources to emerging black farmers. The Department of Agriculture cited a number of broadly associated programs—including Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development, Natural Resource Management, and Land Care—as contributing to food security, but the indirect relationship between these initiatives and improved food security outcomes made it difficult to assess either the proportion of the budget allocated to food security or the impact that the Integrated Food Security Strategy has had.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>105</sup> Qtd in *ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Qtd. in *ibid.*

#### ***4.3.4. The Food Price Monitoring Committee and the Competition Commission***

Following rapid food price increases in 2002 that negatively impacted food security, the food price monitoring committee was established to investigate the extent to which prices were the result of excessive market powers, examine the length and degree of horizontal and vertical integration in major commodities' food chains, and make recommendations regarding the major drivers of prices and an appropriate environment for pricing. The committee's 2003 report noted that food retail prices had been initially influenced by rising commodity prices but had remained high even after commodity prices returned to pre-2001 levels. The report asserted that food price monitoring was important to the protection of consumer rights and recommended that the Department of Agriculture establish a permanent monitoring network.<sup>107</sup> Accordingly, the National Agricultural Marketing Council has established, in conjunction with the University of Pretoria, permanent Food Cost Review and Food Price Trends projects.<sup>108</sup>

The Competition Commission has also been used to investigate allegations of price-fixing, such as the 2007 investigations and prosecution of bread companies accused of price-fixing. Amendments made to the Competition Act in 2009 facilitate the investigation of complex monopolies, which occur when businesses engage in co-ordinated activities such as parallel pricing without specific agreements, and seek to impose stiffer criminal penalties on the directors of companies who knowingly assent to the formation of a cartel.<sup>109</sup>

#### ***4.3.5. Food security in the Medium Term Strategic Framework and the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme***

The Polokwane resolutions and the election rhetoric that brought President Jacob Zuma to power featured a much more concerted focus on rural development, in many ways a departure from the ANC's historic focus on its urban support base. Food security, together with rural development and land reform, was one of the five priorities outlined by Zuma in the 2009 ANC manifesto. These issues were identified collectively as the third strategic priority in the Medium Term Strategic Framework for 2009-2014, and the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP) was adopted to address them. The stated objective of the CRDP is "to facilitate integrated development and social cohesion through participatory approaches in partnership with all sectors of society," and it proposes to do this through a three-pronged approach involving agrarian transformation, rural development, and an improved land reform program.<sup>110</sup>

Food security figures into this framework in several ways. It is a stated objective of the overall vision of the CRDP, an aspect of agrarian transformation, and an outcome of land reform. The CRDP program was piloted in villages in Limpopo and the Northern Cape, and sites for subsequent pilot projects were identified in all provinces, except for Gauteng,

---

<sup>107</sup> Food Pricing Monitoring Committee, "Summary Report," 2003, available at [www.sarpn.org.za/.../P1030\\_FoodPricing\\_Summary2003.pdf](http://www.sarpn.org.za/.../P1030_FoodPricing_Summary2003.pdf).

<sup>108</sup> National Agricultural Monitoring Council, "Five Year Strategic Plan," 2006, available at <http://www.pmg.org.za/docs/2006/060309stratplan.htm>.

<sup>109</sup> Paul Coester, "Amendments Reduce Cartel Activities, Spur Economic Growth," Polity SA, available at <http://www.polity.org.za/article/competition-act-confuses-business-ventures-employee-status-2010-02-05>.

<sup>110</sup> Ministry of Rural Development and Land Reform, "Comprehensive Rural Development Programme," Presentations to the Ad Hoc Committee on Coordinated Oversight and Service Delivery, 2 February 2010.

according to community profiles. The CRDP is intended to be rolled out in 160 wards over a four-year period.<sup>111</sup>

Zuma's 2010 cabinet reshuffle also impacted on the new program. Particularly, what had previously been separate departments working on agriculture and land affairs were divided into new ministries of Rural Development and Land Reform; and of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries. It is the former that is now tasked with the co-ordinating role for food security within the framework of rural development. The actions that this ministry has proposed with respect to food security are the recapitalization of distressed farms; the development of community, institutional, and school gardens; and the establishment of 'agri-parks', or community-owned production and processing facilities. By 2014, the CRDP's targets stipulate that 60% of rural schools and 40% of public institutions will have gardens, all households in CRDP sites will have productive gardens, and each district across the country will have an agri-park.<sup>112</sup>

On the basis of this national strategy, provincial departments of agriculture are tasked with supporting subsistence food production through such activities as the distribution of starter seed and fertilizer packs to subsistence farmers. This approach is consistent with earlier programs such as the Ilima/Letsema campaign, which was rolled out as part of the Land and Agrarian Reform Programme and sought to increase production by 10 to 15% by encouraging home and backyard production.

This approach departs from the conception of food security that is concerned primarily with sufficient national food production, instead focusing more directly on food access and nutritional status. Encompassing food security within rural development also amends the post-1994 assumption that own production and small-scale farming are not viable paths to food security. The CRDP framework and Zuma's ministerial re-arrangement situate the issue of food security firmly within the field of rural development and afford recognition to the importance of small-scale and subsistence farming.

While this reinvigorated concern for rural areas is mostly welcome, the new approach has been criticized for creating separate policies for the commercial farming sector and rural development, in place of a more broad-based program of agricultural transformation. Ruth Hall of the Institute for Poverty, Land, and Agrarian Studies explains:

“While the newfound priority placed on rural development is welcome, its separation from the dynamic subsectors in the rural economy is not. . . What is needed instead is rural development that restructures the commercial sectors of agriculture, forestry and fisheries, and the exploitative class relations (with workers and small producers) on which they are based, and which breaks down the concentration of capital and market power in few hands.”<sup>113</sup>

---

<sup>111</sup> “Deputy Minister on Department of Rural Development & Land Reform Strategic Plan & Budget 2010,” Briefing by the Department of Rural Development & Land Reform on Budget Vote No 32, 13 April 2010, available at <http://www.pmg.org.za/report/20100413-department-rural-development-and-land-reform-briefing-budget>.

<sup>112</sup> Ministry of Rural Development and Land Reform, “Comprehensive Rural Development Programme.” Presentations to the Ad Hoc Committee on Coordinated Oversight and Service Delivery, 2 February 2010.

<sup>113</sup> Ruth Hall, “A Fresh Start for Rural Development and Agrarian Reform?” Policy Brief 29, Institute for Poverty, Land, and Agrarian Studies, July 2009, available at <http://www.plaas.org.za/pubs/pb/PLAAS%20Policy%20Brief%2029.pdf/>.

Hall goes on to emphasize that land reform's failure stems not only from its pace but its results. Rural and landless peoples' organizations have broadly criticized the inadequate support given to new farmers who have been resettled and small, struggling farmers who are driven out of business by larger producers. From this standpoint, the further separation of agriculture from land reform is counterproductive.<sup>114</sup> Such separation results in a bifurcated approach to food security, which is pursued through promotion of production for direct consumption on one end and an increase in total agricultural output on the other, without an emphasis on enabling land-based livelihoods.

Moreover, the Comprehensive Rural Development Program fails to address the fundamental problem of a skewed distribution of national resources between urban and rural areas. Attempting to integrate rural development and land reform without providing a substantially bigger budget for these activities is unlikely to mark a significant departure from the current situation in which rural areas are chronically under-resourced. Stephen Greenberg argues that the CRDP perpetuates many of the problems of previous iterations of rural development and agrarian policy:

The approach to planning and implementation is rushed, signifying a continuation of the 'immediate delivery at all costs' mentality so prevalent in government, which leads to poor quality and lack of sustainability. In addition, people remain bystanders in their own development, except for the select few who will be chosen to sit on advisory groups with poorly defined purposes. Policy-making structures remain dominated by agribusiness, which is able to wield a strong influence on the direction of government support to both land reform and agriculture.<sup>115</sup>

Ruth Hall and Michael Aliber argue that although the budget for agriculture has increased steadily over the past five years, the distribution of this investment is a significant problem. Drawing from Stats SA's Rural Survey and the Provincial Budgets and Expenditure Review, they find that about 58% of agricultural spending goes towards extension services, development through the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme, and loans through the Micro Agricultural Financial Institutional Scheme of South Africa, and estimate that at most 13% of black farming households receive direct support from these initiatives during a given year.<sup>116</sup>

#### ***4.3.6. Food security in social protection programs***

A further shortcoming of the focus on food security in the CRDP is that it apparently fails to advance the framework laid out by the 2002 Integrated Food Security Framework. The Integrated Food Security and Nutrition Programs Task Team (IFSNP-TT) has continued to operate, but generally without sufficient monitoring and reporting mechanisms or a consistent, over-arching vision for improving food security.

Since vulnerability to food insecurity is determined by multiple factors, many of the programs cited by the IFSNP-TT as food security initiatives fall into the broader category

---

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Stephen Greenberg, "2010 Status Report on Land and Agricultural Policy in South Africa," Institute for Poverty, Land, and Agrarian Studies, Research Report 40, March 2010.

<sup>116</sup> Ruth Hall and Michael Aliber, "The Case for Re-strategising Spending Priorities to Support Small-Scale Farmers in South Africa," Institute for Poverty, Land, and Agrarian Studies, Working Paper 17, April 2010, available at <http://www.plaas.org.za/pubs/pb>.



of anti-poverty measures. This is not in itself a shortcoming of the task team's work, as improved income security is linked strongly to improved food security, and the provision of social grants has been shown to be a key factor in increasing household food security in South Africa since 2002.<sup>117</sup> Grants given to child-headed households, disabled individuals, or as old age pensions, perform this task by providing an additional source of income to vulnerable groups which may not have secure access to food through their incomes, social networks, or own production. The effectiveness of grants as a food security measure has been enhanced by efforts to adjust the provision of grants to reflect extreme fluctuations in food prices. In 2008, as prices spiked worldwide, the Ministry of Social Development increased the social relief budget from R124-million to R624-million, to be distributed from November of that year until April 2009.<sup>118</sup>

A number of other programs managed by the Department of Health and the Department of Education focus on food security more explicitly. The National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP), housed in the latter since 2004, provides targeted schools with skills training and agricultural inputs so that they can produce food for learners on-site. The Clinic Garden Project (CGP) operates food gardens and skills training at public health facilities, primarily targeted towards those affected by HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. The Protein Energy Malnutrition Scheme (PEM) provides nutrient-rich meals to those who have been identified as malnourished. The social relief of distress grants also provides cash or food parcels for up to three months for households who are unable to meet their immediate needs because of a temporary crisis.<sup>119</sup>

However, while these initiatives have been crucial in improving the food security status of poor households, they have some significant limitations. Danie Brand has emphasized that fulfillment of the right to food is constituted not only by the articulation of a reasonable strategy but the implementation of this strategy.<sup>120</sup> With respect to social grants, Michael Aliber estimates that only about half of seriously hungry households access the grants for which they are eligible. One-third of this group is not receiving any grants at all, despite eligibility.<sup>121</sup>

A broader problem in the implementation of these food security strategies is that their relationship to rural development and agricultural initiatives remains poorly defined in current policy, and that the integrated approach outlined by the IFSS has not been developed. Because the IFSS is conceptualized as a highly complementary approach, the impact of one type of intervention may be significantly lessened by the failure of another to materialize. The IFSS vision of inter-departmental collaboration has been hindered by insufficient funds at the national level, the lack of personnel tasked with food security programs within departments, disagreement over which initiatives to prioritize, and inter-departmental rivalry.

---

<sup>117</sup> Miriam Altman, Tim Hart, and Peter Jacobs, "Food Security in South Africa," Human Sciences Research Council, 31 March 2009, 7.

<sup>118</sup> Gabi Khumalo, "Millions Benefit from Social Grants," South Africa.info, 6 July 2009, <http://www.southafrica.info/about/social/grants-060709.htm>.

<sup>119</sup> "Social Relief of Distress Award," CapeGov, <http://www.capegateway.gov.za/eng/directories/services/11585/47493>.

<sup>120</sup> Danie Brand, "The Right to Food," in *Socio-economic Rights in South Africa*, eds. Danie Brand and Christof Heyns, ABC Press: Cape Town, 2005.

<sup>121</sup> "Food Security in South Africa," 17.

Thus, in a 2008 review presented to Parliament's Joint Budget Committee, the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) identified the need for an approach to food security that is both part of an 'integrated anti-poverty strategy' and that also has its own dedicated funding and monitoring mechanisms.

#### **4.4. Recent Trends in Food Systems and Food Security in S.A.**

A 2009 HSRC review of research on food security in South Africa makes several important findings. First, as to the magnitude of food insecurity, there appears to have been a decrease in the experience of hunger after 2002 among those households which became food-insecure in the period from 1994 to 1998. This is consistent with findings that the intensity, if not the extent, of poverty has decreased since 2002.<sup>122</sup> Under-nutrition and chronic food insecurity remain prevalent, although there are still no reliable baseline estimates from which to monitor household food security statuses in South Africa.

Vulnerability to food insecurity remains difficult to locate geographically. While the issues impacting food access differ between rural and urban areas, it is often insufficient to focus food security initiatives on poor areas. Rural districts generally experience the most widespread food insecurity, but serious hunger is often present in equal proportions in rural and metropolitan areas.

It has been noted previously that food insecurity and poverty are related but distinct phenomena. However, the HSRC finds that widespread poverty and unemployment are the most significant proximate causes of food insecurity. While food security remains highly contextual and dependent on local factors, fluctuations in food prices continue to be a major driver of food insecurity nation-wide.<sup>123</sup>

Recent trends in the agricultural sector also impact on food security in a number of ways. Three such shifts are of particular importance: firstly, the concentration of food producers, retailers, and processors; second, increasing imports of staple foods and exports of niche products; and finally, declining employment in the agricultural sector. With respect to the former, Stephen Greenberg notes that 1.6% of commercial farmers generate one-third of the sector's gross income; roughly half of retailing is controlled by four companies; and the top 5% of manufacturing and processing companies dominate 75% of the market.<sup>124</sup>

These trends are part of a larger picture in which growth in the agricultural sector has actually been accompanied by the shedding of jobs, and South African agriculture has become increasingly intertwined with production and consumption patterns in the global economy. As South Africa has begun to import more processed foods, the agricultural sector has lost hundreds of thousands of low-paying farm-worker and processing jobs.<sup>125</sup> As noted previously, consolidation and commercialization of the agricultural sector throughout Africa has been based on the premise that declining involvement in the agricultural sector is a central requirement for a growing economy. This assumes that

---

<sup>122</sup> "Food Security in South Africa," 12.

<sup>123</sup> Human Sciences Research Council, "Agricultural Development & Research in the CPEG," Presentation to Parliament's Joint Budget Committee, 16 October 2008.

<sup>124</sup> Stephen Greenberg, seminar presentation, "The Right to Food: Strategies for Food Sovereignty and Agrarian Reform," Cape Town, 14 August 2010.

<sup>125</sup> Hopewell Radebe, "South Africa: Processed Food Imports Dent Jobs," *Business Day*, 2 September 2010.

agriculture-led growth will create non-agricultural sector jobs and that food security will be improved as consumers gain access to cheaper food.

Economic growth in South Africa, as well as in the rest of the continent, however, has been notoriously uneven, and jobs have generally not been created in sectors in which the poor are employed.<sup>126</sup> Meanwhile, the continued shedding of agriculture jobs, food price fluctuations, and the decreasing availability of local food sources contribute to food insecurity among society's most vulnerable populations. While this insecurity is tempered to some degree by social grants and assistance towards own production, these measures do not address the broader problems in the nation's economy generally, and in the agricultural sector more specifically.

This suggests substantial limitations in the current formulations of food security strategies in the international arena that remain focused on the commercialization of agricultural and agriculture-led growth. Food insecurity in South Africa continues to be concerned primarily with the relations of production and employment that structure the economy. The next two sections will consider some of the key intersections between food insecurity and broader social and economic questions in South Africa. While such questions often exceed the limits of what is easily expressed as a policy imperative, it is vital to link realization of the right to food to both clear anti-poverty objectives in the short and medium-term, and broader economic transformations in the longer-term.

## **5. Food Security and Food Sovereignty in South Africa — Key Questions and Challenges**

### **5.1. Food Insecurity and Development**

The Polokwane resolutions outlined a national shift towards a developmental state more centrally concerned with creating opportunities in historically marginalized areas. Rural and agricultural development were identified as key priorities, echoing the larger movement towards strategies for agriculture-led growth on the rest of the continent. The actual extent of the post-Polokwane shift has since been heavily contested, and Ruth Hall has noted that significant tensions remain regarding the direction that agricultural sector growth will take. Despite the continued influence of commercial farmers' groups, the overall share of agriculture in the country's economic activity has been declining since 1994. According to Hall, recent policy frameworks exhibit inconsistencies as to whether the purpose of agricultural growth is to maximize output, exports, or employment.<sup>127</sup>

These policy questions have substantial impact on food security. A number of historical examples have shown that increased output is not sufficient to ensure food security, and that trade growth has indirect impact, at best. More broadly, the question of development in South Africa, as in many post-settler societies, must also be concerned with how best to reverse the impact of colonialism and continued inter and intra-group inequities.

---

<sup>126</sup> Human Sciences Research Council, "Agricultural Development & Research in the CPEG".

<sup>127</sup> Ruth Hall, seminar presentation, "The Right to Food: Strategies for Food Sovereignty and Agrarian Reform," Cape Town, 14 August 2010.

Given that the phenomenon of food insecurity has roots in the country's legacy of dispossession and the establishment of rural homelands, any mode of development which seeks to improve food security must address this legacy by dissolving the spatial and economic boundaries that constituted the former Bantustans. While much of the policy discourse has focused on the idea of 'two economies' and 'exclusion' of the poor from markets, such an approach does not reflect that the two economies are connected through relations of power that have been historically constructed by dispossession and apartheid. Drawing from the concept of 'adverse incorporation', Andries du Toit emphasizes that such perspectives "fail to realise that poverty and disadvantage themselves can often flow not from exclusion, but from inclusion on disadvantageous terms, into a system that in itself is exploitative."<sup>128</sup>

This has broad relevance with respect to food security. Du Toit's study of de-agrarianization in the Eastern Cape examines the effect of supermarket chains in rural areas. He finds that while these chains provide access to cheap commodities, they also stifle local production, disrupt local social and credit networks, and ensure that a large proportion of resources flow out of the local economy. He finds that "in some ways the metropolitan centres are both too close and too far: too far because of the distance from job markets, and too close because of the omnipresence of the corporate giants of South Africa's retail sector, which crowd out local entrepreneurship from all but the least profitable sectors".<sup>129</sup>

## 5.2. Food Insecurity and Land Reform

Sen's framework of entitlement protection and entitlement promotion proves particularly useful for thinking about food security in South Africa. While a household's access to food at a given time can be protected through crisis response and medium-term welfarist measures, the broader patterns that determine secure access to food are incontrovertibly tied up with questions of economic policy and redress of the historical conditions that have created much higher levels of food insecurity among the African population.

Land reform is very much connected to these dynamics and relevant to food security in three inter-related ways. Most broadly, land ownership is an important determinant of patterns of employment and economic opportunity in society. Land reform and agrarian reform are also interlinked in the process of rural development, and the country's mode of agricultural production has significant bearing on how much food is available locally and how subject it is to price fluctuations. Finally, access to land-based livelihoods is also potentially a more direct determinant of food security for individuals and households.

Hall emphasizes that what is actually referred to as 'the land question' is at least four distinct questions: what land reform is for, who it is for, who is the agent of it, and how civil society participates in it.<sup>130</sup> With regard to the first two, she suggests that the land reform process has largely been geared towards replacing white commercial farmers with black counterparts, and that this expectation has set emerging black farmers up for failure. Instead, she suggests that the purpose of land reform should be not only to de-racialize

---

<sup>128</sup> Andries du Toit, *Adverse Incorporation and Agrarian Policy in South Africa* [http://repository.uwc.ac.za/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10566/65/duToit\\_Adverse2009.pdf?sequence=3](http://repository.uwc.ac.za/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10566/65/duToit_Adverse2009.pdf?sequence=3).

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

land ownership but to transform agrarian policy, address rural poverty, and create livelihoods<sup>131</sup>

The relationship between land reform and food security is at present most often discussed in terms of land reform's potential impact on national productivity. In 2009, the *City Press* and *Sunday Times* ran articles which linked declining productivity in the commercial farming sector with land reform and claimed that land reform was 'threatening' food security.<sup>132</sup> The article carried an estimation by Ann Bernstein, executive director of the Centre for Development and Enterprise, a policy think-tank, that 50% of land reform projects had failed, as well as anecdotal evidence of formerly productive farmland used for housing and recreation. A year later, Minister for Land and Rural Development Gugile Nkwinti acknowledged that 90% of farms on land that his department had bought for restitution or redistribution were failing.<sup>133</sup>

As Gilengwe Mayende points out, however, the failure of projects on the very small fraction of land that has thus far been redistributed does not provide a credible basis for assumptions about the broader project of land reform and its effect on national productive capabilities. Instead, such arguments are sometimes deployed by groups who oppose land and agrarian reform and overlook the negligible support given to new farmers as a factor in land reform's failure thus far.<sup>134</sup>

A focus on the link between land reform and the national food supply also obscures the impact that land reform may have on individual and household food security. This impact is quite difficult to measure, as the effects of land acquisition on food security depend on the demographic and socio-economic profiles of recipients, the support provided to them, the way that they integrate land access into their livelihood strategy, and a number of other highly contextual factors. Christine Valente has argued that land grant recipients are on average less food secure than non-recipients with similar profiles, largely owing to the costs of relocation and start-up on new land. Using data from the Labour Force Survey and General Household Survey, she estimates that the inputs required for land acquisition and own production would likely have led to greater food security had these resources been directed elsewhere.<sup>135</sup>

Valente's study draws from a host of literature indicating that land reform has disproportionately favored the relatively better off, has led aspirant farmers to go into debt to purchase unproductive land, and has provided insufficient skills training and credit to allow land recipients to succeed. Again, however, these problems do not establish that land reform necessarily has a negative impact on food security either at the national or household level. Instead, more research is needed to determine how land reform impacts the livelihoods of its recipients and how improved processes of reform, credit, and agricultural support can improve the impact that land reform has on food security.

---

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Bongani Mthethwa, "Farms Collapse as Land Reform Fails in South Africa," *Sunday Times*, 1 March 2009.

<sup>133</sup> Brendan Boyle, "Massive Farm Failure in S.A.," *Sunday Times*, 2 March 2010.

<sup>134</sup> Gilengwe Mayende, "Rural development under a 'developmental state': analyzing the policy shift on agrarian transformation in South Africa," in *the Zuma Administration: Critical Challenges*, eds. Kwandiwe Kondlo, Mashupye H Maserumule, HRSC Press, 2010, 56.

<sup>135</sup> Christine Valente, "The Food Insecurity Impact of Land Redistribution in South Africa: Microeconomic Data from National Data," *World Development* 37(2009):1540–1553.

### 5.3. Smallholder Production and Food Insecurity

Frequent reassurances by officials in the Department of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries that land reform will not jeopardize food security seem to suggest that the only potential relationship between food security and land redistribution is a negative one, and that the processes of promoting entitlements to food and deracializing agriculture are mostly un-related. Instead, food security can more usefully be situated within questions regarding modes of agricultural production in South Africa. This reflects Hall's assertion that while land reform has thus far been used primarily to integrate black farmers into the commercial sector, it could also be used to transition South Africa towards a less capital intensive, more labor intensive mode of agricultural production.

In this vein, there are three important questions with regard to smallholder production and food security in South Africa: first, whether it can be used as a strategy to promote household food security in rural areas; second, whether it is a viable system for production at the national level; and third, what kind of support would be required to develop and sustain such a system.

'Smallholders' are referred to often in the ANC's Polokwane resolutions and the Comprehensive Rural Development Plan, and it has been noted that promoting subsistence agriculture and own production has been an important part of the latter. Most land holdings in the former homelands are fairly small, and it is estimated that the percentage of arable land in these areas is a mere 11% - 16% of the total.<sup>136</sup> Data from South Africa's Labour Force Survey indicates that there are roughly four million subsistence farmers, but most of them also pursue non-agricultural sources of income in order to mitigate their risk. The vast majority of small household producers engage in agricultural activity in order to have extra food, and subsistence production may help promote both a sufficient quantity and quality of food, since own production may allow household income to be diverted towards ensuring dietary diversity. A number of studies have indicated that increased support for subsistence agriculture could allow both improved quality and quantity of subsistence production.

Improved support could also potentially allow some of these subsistence farmers to begin producing crops for extra income. A number of commentators have identified a 'dualism' in present agricultural policies, which consist of a bifurcated focus on Agri BEE schemes on one hand and food security gardens on the other. Hall claims that there is a 'missing middle' between these extremes: "the untapped potential for smallholder farmers who want to produce for their own consumption *and* for a market."<sup>137</sup>

The HSRC estimates that of the four million people engaged in own-production, between 300 000 and 400 000 of this group are full-time smallholder farmers who also produce to some extent for a market.<sup>138</sup> Most 'semi-subsistence producers' continue to be located in the former Bantustans, where they receive little agricultural support and investment.<sup>139</sup>

---

<sup>136</sup> M. Aliber and T. Hart, "Should subsistence agriculture be supported as a strategy to address rural food insecurity?" *Agrekon* 48(2009), 442.

<sup>137</sup> "A Fresh Start for Rural Development and Agrarian Reform?" 1.

<sup>138</sup> "Food Security in South Africa," 19.

<sup>139</sup> "Food Security in South Africa," 19.

Hall asserts:

Addressing direct consumption needs is an important and overdue response to poverty and hunger but, while it is likely to have popular appeal, it is ultimately limited. First, without redistributing land and water for agriculture, ‘own production’ by the poor via starter packs, particularly in urban areas, is unlikely to be at the scale required to be a workable solution to food insecurity. Second, the poor are to produce – but at the margins rather than in the commercial farming heartland. In no way will this change who profits from producing and selling food, or pose a challenge to the large players who dominate the market: the big farmers, the agribusinesses and supermarkets, as well as the oligopolistic agro-food processors and manufacturers that have been able to fix prices and raise food costs.<sup>140</sup>

Support for smallholder farmers elsewhere in Africa has increased yields of staple crops and insulated households from food price shocks. Investment in agriculture, largely through subsidies for smallholders, is being encouraged by the AU’s Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) and a number of donor governments. The most-touted example of success is Malawi’s Agricultural Input Support Programme (AISP),<sup>141</sup> through which the government began subsidizing seed and fertilizer in 2005. The program was implemented following a decade of declining productivity, and Malawi became a net exporter of maize within two years. The U.N.’s estimates suggest that the number of Malawians at risk of hunger decreased from about 5 million in 2005 to about 500 000 by late 2007.<sup>142</sup> A number of studies have emphasized that similar strategies hold significant potential for improving food security, but that far greater support of smallholder production, in the form of input subsidies and infrastructural development, is needed to achieve similar results.

## **5.4. Food Insecurity and Environmental Constraints**

Programs seeking to rebuild smallholder farming systems must also address several fundamental changes in today’s world that will have increasing impact on agricultural production and food security in the future.

### **5.4.1. Urbanization**

Urbanization has been proceeding apace throughout much of Africa, and this phenomenon is not expected to slow in the near future in South Africa. Thus, while focusing on support for smallholders in rural areas is an important aspect of improving food security and may contribute to slowing the pace of urbanization, it is not sufficient to address hunger in urban areas in the shorter term. Food security is a crucial question in the broader challenges that cities face in meeting rising population pressures. Available evidence is scarce, but urban farming appears to be on the rise in sub-Saharan Africa, and the

---

<sup>140</sup> “A Fresh Start for Rural Development and Agrarian Reform?” 3.

<sup>141</sup> Aubrey Mchulu, “Malawi Hopes to Boost Agriculture with CAADP,” *IPS Africa*, 3 September 2010, available at <http://africa.ipsterraviva.net/2010/09/03/malawi-hopes-to-boost-agriculture-with-caadp/>.

<sup>142</sup> Glenn Denning, “Agriculture Leads to the MDGs: Rural Development in Africa,” *UN Chronicle*, available at [http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/chronicle/home/archive/issues2007/themdgsareweontrack/agricultureleadstothemdgsruraldevelopmentinafrica?ctnscroll\\_articleContainerList=1\\_0&ctnlistpagination\\_articleContainerList=true](http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/chronicle/home/archive/issues2007/themdgsareweontrack/agricultureleadstothemdgsruraldevelopmentinafrica?ctnscroll_articleContainerList=1_0&ctnlistpagination_articleContainerList=true).

contribution of this activity to household food security is estimated to be anywhere between 33 and 80%.<sup>143</sup>

### **5.4.2. Climate change**

Any plan to address food insecurity must take seriously the toll that climate change is expected to begin to have on the world's eco-systems over the next two decades. Developing countries will be most negatively affected, as they are largely dependent on rainfed agriculture and have minimal levels of infrastructure that will allow them to cope with changes in the physical environment.

Agriculture in Africa stands at particular risk from declining rainfall, increasing desertification, and temperatures which some current crop species will not be able to tolerate. The International Food Policy Research Institute estimates that by 2050, rice, wheat, and maize yields will have declined by 14 percent, 22 percent, and 5 percent, respectively. The predicted impact of this is that food availability in the region will decrease by 500 calories per person by 2050.<sup>144</sup> The likelihood of decreasing local yields, in combination with rising commodity prices worldwide, poses a dire threat to communities that are currently vulnerable to food insecurity.<sup>145</sup>

Many of the efforts to mitigate these potential effects have focused on increasing crop yields, investing in agricultural research and development, and introducing known crop varieties and farming practices that are better able to withstand the effects of climate change.<sup>146</sup> By focusing attention towards the detrimental impact that climate change may have on agriculture, however, this approach tends to obscure the significant contribution of agriculture to climate change. Agriculture worldwide has been estimated to emit up to one-third of the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change.<sup>147</sup> To decrease the emissions that are attributable to agriculture, policies must promote models of food production that do not necessitate the clearing of forests for farmland or transport of basic food commodities around the globe. This entails smaller-scale, more labor intensive food systems that produce largely for a local or national market.

### **5.4.3. Water scarcity**

Climate change is also expected to lead to a decrease in the availability of irrigation for agriculture across the African continent. South Africa has been identified as one of the top 30 water-scarce countries in the world. Only two percent of South Africa's water supply is currently being held in reserve, and World Wildlife Fund South Africa's chief executive,

---

<sup>143</sup> "Food Security in South Africa," 19.

<sup>144</sup> International Food Policy Research Institute, "Climate change: Impact on agriculture and costs of adaptation," Washington, DC, 6 November 2009, available at <http://www.ifpri.org/publication/climate-change-impact-agriculture-and-costs-adaptation>.

<sup>145</sup> Molly E. Brown and Christopher C. Funk, "Food Security Under Climate Change," *Science* 319(2008):580 – 581.

<sup>146</sup> David B. Lobell,<sup>1,2\*</sup> Marshall B. Burke,<sup>1</sup> Claudia Tebaldi,<sup>3</sup> Michael D. Mastrandrea,<sup>4</sup> Walter P. Falcon,<sup>1</sup> Rosamond L. Naylor<sup>1</sup>, "Prioritizing Climate Change Adaptation Needs for Food Security in 2030," *Science* 319 (2008):607 – 610.

<sup>147</sup> Greenpeace Canada, "Agriculture's climate change role demands urgent action," 7 January 2008, <http://www.greenpeace.org/canada/en/recent/agriculture-and-climate-change/>.



Morné du Plessis, warns that demand for water could exceed the available supply by 2015.<sup>148</sup>

Irrigation for agricultural purposes is currently estimated to use more than 60% of South Africa's available water supply.<sup>149</sup> The National Water Act 36 of 1998 is the key piece of legislation governing water use for agriculture, mining, and industrial purposes. The Act attempts to separate ownership of land from ownership of water by requiring that large-scale water users register with the Department of Water and Environmental Affairs and pay for their usage. The criticism of this strategy, however, is that the system of registration stops short of changing existing patterns of water use, instead only requiring that they be sanctioned by the state.<sup>150</sup>

Patterns of access to water remain extremely unequal, with a lack of irrigation infrastructure continuing to pose an enormous challenge to small-scale and subsistence farming in the former homelands. The post-apartheid period commenced with water sources primarily in the hands of white commercial farmers. By 1996, less than four percent of irrigated land in South Africa was used for food plots or small-scale farming.<sup>151</sup>

Greenberg notes that there are two distinct approaches to addressing problems of access to water for agriculture. One is to invest in irrigation infrastructure for both commercial and subsistence farmers. Building such infrastructure is identified as a strategic priority in the Zuma administration's Medium-Term Strategic Framework. The greatest emphasis has been placed on large-scale irrigation schemes, such as the Mokolo River Augmentation Project, but the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Program also provides resources for smaller-scale irrigation development in most provinces. The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries has said that it intends to develop or rehabilitate 100 000 hectares of irrigated land by 2011.<sup>152</sup>

The other approach to altering patterns of water access is to link water provision to land redistribution. Greenberg acknowledges that this measure has been endorsed by both the National Planning Committee and the CRDP, but finds that its implementation has been limited to land transfers occurring in areas where an irrigation scheme is already underway. He argues that the availability of water is crucial to the land reform project itself.<sup>153</sup>

Although the development of irrigation infrastructure may help to relieve some of the pressures associated with climate change, current methods of large-scale irrigation are often inefficient and wasteful. Globally, only about 40% of irrigation water reaches the crops which it is intended to supply. Large-scale projects often displace communities, disrupt eco-systems, and further consolidate control of water resources. While there have been limited attempts to develop community capacities for rainwater harvesting, mitigating the threat to food security that is posed by climate change will require more

---

<sup>148</sup> "South Africa at Brink of Water Shortage," News 24, 13 August 2010, [http://www.health24.com/news/Enviro\\_Health\\_/1-1308,57769.asp](http://www.health24.com/news/Enviro_Health_/1-1308,57769.asp).

<sup>149</sup> Stephen Greenberg, "2010 Status Report on Land and Agricultural Policy in South Africa," Institute for Poverty, Land, and Agrarian Studies, Research Report 40, March 2010, 10.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 11.

concerted efforts to secure and expand the availability of water for small-scale and subsistence farming.

## **5.5. Genetically Modified Organisms: Food Security and Food Sovereignty Perspectives**

That unequal distribution of access to water for irrigation also impacts access to food again underlines the importance of situating the fulfillment of rights to food within broader questions of power and ownership in a society. For this task, a food sovereignty perspective potentially goes further in investigating the range of choices about food production and consumption that are available to South Africans based on their race, class, gender, and geographic location. These choices contribute not only to individual and household health but the health of the environment and the society, and a constrained set of choices therefore may lead to food systems that cannot sustain peoples' health, damage the environment, and deepen economic inequality.

One of the most important areas of choice that is often obscured by a food security perspective is the cultivation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). As noted previously, the health effects of GMOs are uncertain, but they run a risk of contaminating indigenous crop varieties, thereby compromising biosafety and damaging diversity.

The ability to produce seeds and make decisions about crop varieties is crucial to food production. The introduction of patented seed varieties, including those that are genetically engineered, often undermines these capabilities and makes farmers dependent on large agri-businesses for both seeds and the fertilizer or other inputs that are needed to grow their specific varieties.

Stephen Greenberg notes that in South Africa, state rhetoric about indigenous agricultural knowledge has not been born out, and seed production capacity has become increasingly consolidated among a handful of large companies. The seed and agrochemical sectors are regulated by the post-apartheid state, but this process of consolidation has resulted in a situation in which ten companies have the rights to nearly two-thirds of the registered seed varieties in South Africa.<sup>154</sup>

Penny Parenzee notes that while South Africa has primarily pursued a strategy of food security, such a strategy, “while acknowledging that a right of access to food is necessary, fails to acknowledge or critically assess ‘questions of power.’ By ignoring these background conditions, it can neither identify, nor critique, any exploitative practices or systematically unequal power relations that define food systems.”<sup>155</sup>

A number of land rights and farmer support groups, including the Church Land Programme, have documented the resentment of small-scale farming groups when they are given seeds that produce only one season of crops by government extension officers and agricultural support programs. Particularly when these seeds require oil-based inputs, shocks in oil prices can mean a windfall of profits for agrochemical companies while small-scale and subsistence farmers are unable to meet their basic needs for food production. Patented and genetically engineered seed varieties are thus another way in

---

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Penny Parenzee, “Obstacles Facing Emerging Women Farmers,” Surplus People Project, January 2010, available at [www.spp.org.za/reports/womens\\_report\\_exec.pdf](http://www.spp.org.za/reports/womens_report_exec.pdf).

which food security becomes more susceptible to shocks in the global economy and more removed from the control of vulnerable communities and individuals.

According to the African Centre for Biosafety (ACB), South Africa grows mainly GM maize, with some cotton and increasing quantities of soya. It imports GM maize primarily for animal feed, and until 2010 the only GM products it exported were seeds for planting. Since the beginning of 2010, ACB reports that the national body responsible for GMO permit approvals granted export permits for nearly 300 000 metric tons of GM maize to Kenya, Mozambique, and Swaziland. Public outcry led the Kenyan government to insist that it had not been sufficiently informed of the contents of the shipment. While South Africa has had biosafety legislation in place since 1997, neither Kenya nor Swaziland has sufficiently implemented such legislation, and ACB asserts that this makes them unable to adequately manage and mitigate the contamination risks associated with GMO planting and import.<sup>156</sup>

This example demonstrates the potential disjuncture between food security and food sovereignty perspectives. While imports of GMOs and other cheap staples are often promoted as a food security strategy, such measures may also undermine fundamentally the ability of communities to make decisions about their food production and consumption. By subjecting individuals' and households' access to food to an increasing number of factors outside of their control—including the dwindling global supply of oil, shocks to basic commodities, and changes to pricing and availability of inputs supplied by large corporations—such measures often prove unsuccessful in improving food security.

## 5.6. Gender and Food Insecurity

Examining food insecurity as one facet of broader patterns of unequal distribution of resources in a society also necessitates looking at the gendered dimensions of access to food. Generally speaking, women and girls may be considered to be among the populations more likely to be vulnerable to food insecurity because they have more limited control of resources in South Africa when compared with men. More specifically, the history of the Bantustans and the migrant labour system means that the majority of the poor and unemployed continue to be black African women living in rural areas.<sup>157</sup>

Poverty among female-headed households, while declining, continues to be a prevalent feature of post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>158</sup> Food price inflation has meant that the nation's poorest may spend more than 50% of their earnings on food. Price increases have hit hardest those who receive low wages or who are dependent on pensions or grants, and those who have few other forms of social capital or means for own production. Since gaps in the wages and resources available to women and men persist in South Africa, women, and particularly rural women, are likely to be among those spending higher portions of their income on food. A 2009 *Sunday Tribune* article calculated, for example, that a rural domestic worker earning a minimum salary of R1 097.40 per month would spend 34.61% of their salary on food.<sup>159</sup>

---

<sup>156</sup> African Centre for Biosafety, "A Good Neighbour? South Africa forcing GM maize onto African markets and policy makers," Briefing Paper 16, May 2010, available at [http://stopogm.net/webfm\\_send/184](http://stopogm.net/webfm_send/184).

<sup>157</sup> "Food Security in South Africa," 23.

<sup>158</sup> V. Reddy and R. Moletsane, "The gendered dimensions of food security in South Africa: a review of the literature," Human Sciences Research Council, March 2009, 11.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

In thinking about the importance of gender in determining food access, however, it is important not to elide ‘gender’ with ‘women’ and ignore the way that the social roles prescribed to both sexes impact food insecurity. It is also important not to imagine that women represent only a vulnerable population with respect to food security. According to the Human Sciences Research Council women also make up 61% of those involved in farming nationwide. Surveys show that they have many of the same reasons as men for participating in agriculture, but that they are two-thirds more likely than men to cite having an ‘extra source of food’ as the reason for production. Women are thus important contributors to household food security both in rural areas and in urban ones, where middle-aged and elderly women have been found to be the primary participants in urban agriculture.<sup>160</sup>

The HSRC has also shown that black farmers who produce for a market are equally likely to be women as men, however, and gender continues to have a significant impact on the support and opportunities available to small-scale and emerging farmers.<sup>161</sup>

In a report on the obstacles faced by emerging women farmers, the Surplus People Project suggests that women face particular difficulties in accessing and securing land, formalizing tenure rights or lease agreements, and receiving adequate support. Penny Parenzee asserts that land and food security policy exhibits an inadequate conception of the way that gender shapes access to basic resources and needs, and charges that a normative commitment to gender equality is not matched by specific interventions.<sup>162</sup> She suggests that the support for poverty alleviation on which much of land and agrarian policy is based has created a ‘false sense of hope’ within poor communities which expect that participating in the strategies advanced by government will better their situation. Instead, the participation of women in agriculture is often under-valued by their male counterparts and hindered by existing acquisition and support structures. Parenzee concludes that “due to the failure to understand and prioritise women’s needs in relation to the broader context which perpetuates women’s powerlessness, the conceptualisation of the land reform policies and food security strategy has merely perpetuated the discrimination which women face.”<sup>163</sup>

## **5.7. HIV/AIDS and Food Insecurity**

HIV/AIDS is another contextual factor that is vital to understanding vulnerability to food insecurity. HIV/AIDS is not merely an additional element of vulnerability to hunger however; the relationship between contraction of HIV and vulnerability to food insecurity is thought to be mutually reinforcing and inter-related with a number of other factors.

The HIV statuses of members of a household affect its short and long-term economic activity, as well as the way that household earnings and other resources are directed. In the short-term, an HIV positive individual is less likely to be able to seek employment, and providing care to him or her may decrease the availability of other members of the household to seek employment or engage in food production. The importance of adequate nutrition for infected persons, and the possibility that antiretroviral therapy may increase

---

<sup>160</sup> “Food Security in South Africa,” 23.

<sup>161</sup> “Food Security in South Africa,” 19.

<sup>162</sup> “Obstacles to Emerging Women Farmers,” 4.

<sup>163</sup> “Obstacles to Emerging Women Farmers,” 7.

the appetite of patients, may also lead other members of the household to divert food supplies towards HIV/AIDS positive family members.<sup>164</sup> In the longer-term, AIDS leads to an increase in widow and child-headed households and the possibility of loss of land-tenure, and forms of social capital that may be important to household food security.<sup>165</sup>

Food insecurity and gender dynamics also have important forms of impact on an individual's likelihood of contracting the HIV/AIDS virus. Food insecure individuals, particularly women and girls, are more likely to engage in transactional sex in order to acquire food or wages for themselves or their households. The poor nutritional status of individuals who are already HIV-positive also has the potential to quicken the progression of the disease to AIDS and make them more susceptible to opportunistic diseases.<sup>166</sup> For these reasons, a growing body of literature refers to 'HIV/AIDS food insecurity syndemic' and argues that interventions to address either issue must consider the other in tandem.<sup>167</sup>

## 6. Civil Society Initiatives for Food Security and Food Sovereignty

While the Integrated Food Security Strategy calls for representation of civil society and private sector actors in a National Food Security Forum, as well as in local 'food security action groups,' these provisions have largely not been implemented. Although provincial food security fora were established for all provinces in 2006, provincial co-ordinating units have not, and co-ordination remains a significant challenge at the provincial level.

The Kwa-Zulu Natal government has a number of food security initiatives at the provincial level. The Flemish International Co-operation Agency is funding an Empowerment for Food Security program that liaises with the provincial agriculture, health, and education departments<sup>168</sup>, and national and local civil society groups also run a number of programs. In a review of existing efforts, Kruger found that they often duplicate each other and that collaboration between government and non-governmental programs remains poorly conceived. Drimie *et al's* 2008 study of Malawi and Swaziland indicates that NGOs active in promoting food security at the community level can be more successful in the long-term by joining their efforts to state structures.<sup>169</sup>

Tim Hart of the HSRC also points to the need to develop a comprehensive list of organizations involved in food security "so that active civil society organizations can be co-opted into the national food security strategy."<sup>170</sup> Such attempts at co-option, however, would probably require far more consensus over a viable food security strategy than currently exists.

A large number of NGOs and community-based organizations in South Africa work directly or indirectly with the issues of food security. Because in South Africa the question

---

<sup>164</sup> "Food Security in South Africa," 24-25.

<sup>165</sup> David A. Himmelman, Nancy Romero-Daza, David Turkon, Sharon Watson, Ipolito Okello-Umo, and Daniel Sellen, "Addressing the HIV/AIDS-food insecurity syndemic in sub-Saharan Africa," *African Journal of AIDS Research*, 8(2009): 401-412.

<sup>166</sup> "Food Security in South Africa," 25.

<sup>167</sup> "Addressing the HIV/AIDS-food insecurity syndemic in sub-Saharan Africa," 401-412.

<sup>168</sup> Flemish International Cooperation Agency, "Food Security Empowerment Programme in Kwa-Zulu Natal," 2009, available at <http://www.fica.be/index.php?pid=1&sid=&sit=10>.

<sup>169</sup> Qtd. in "Food Security Definitions, Measurements, and Recent Initiatives." 40.

<sup>170</sup> "Food Security Definitions, Measurements and Recent Initiatives," 40.

of food access is very much situated in access to land, many groups working on food security or food sovereignty are also engaged with questions of land and agrarian reform more broadly. Some of the major organizations working on relevant issues are described below; this list is meant to be representative rather than exhaustive, however, and it is disproportionately focused on organizations in the Western Cape where the author was based. They have been divided according to the primary type of work that they do, although it should be noted that many organizations are engaged in multiple types of campaigns.

## **6.1. Groups Working in Mobilization or Advocacy**

The historical experience of dispossession, and the establishment of public law centres that sought to challenge it, have had significant impact on the character of post-apartheid civil society and its engagement with questions of land and agriculture. The strong tradition of land rights campaigning has translated into the existence of a number of organizations that have sought to secure and advance these rights in the post-apartheid era, working with landless people, farmworkers, and emerging farmers to facilitate their access to land and livelihoods, improve their material well-being, and amplify their voices in policy debates.

### ***6.1.1. The Surplus People Project***

The Surplus People Project (SPP) is one such organization that was established in the 1980s that documented forced removals and supported communities struggling to resist them. Since 1994, they have worked as both an advocacy and a development organization, organizing communities demanding land reform, spearheading a campaign called ‘agrarian reform for food sovereignty,’ and supporting and promoting agro-ecological farming practices.<sup>171</sup>

### ***6.1.2. The Trust for Community Outreach and Education***

The Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE) is a collective of six NGOs in the Eastern Cape, Western Cape and Limpopo provinces. TCOE facilitates the development of community-based organizations in rural and peri-urban villages that mobilize for the interests of the rural poor and pursue integrated rural development projects. As a broad-based organization that builds a platform for the voice of the rural poor, TCOE also holds events such as the Peoples’ Tribunal on Landlessness and co-hosted an August 2010 seminar entitled ‘The Right to Food: Strategies for Agrarian Reform and Food Sovereignty’, together with the Alternative Information and Development Centre.<sup>172</sup>

### ***6.1.3. Women on Farms***

Women on Farms began in 1992 as an initiative of Lawyers for Human Rights and was established in 1996 as an NGO working with women employed in the commercial agriculture sector. The organization emphasizes that “a strong organisation of women, led by women, in the sector is vital to bring about change,” and in 2003 began developing Sikhula Sonke, a member-based organization of women farmworkers. The organization

---

<sup>171</sup> Surplus People Project website, <http://www.spp.org.za>.

<sup>172</sup> TCOE website: <http://www.tcoe.org.za/>.

focuses on the areas of women's health, labour rights, land and housing, trade justice, and social security.

#### **6.1.4. *The Right to Food Campaign***

Following the bread price-fixing scandal that led to investigations by the Competition Commission in 2007, a coalition of civil society organizations formed the 'Right to Food Campaign.' Spearheaded by the Economic Justice Network and supported by COSATU, the South African Council of Churches, the Black Sash, and other organizations, the coalition's chief demands were legislative reform of the Competition Act, a VAT zero-rating of essential foods including white bread, the extension of the National Schools Nutrition Programme to secondary schools, and an effective food security policy in South Africa.<sup>173</sup>

### **6.2. Groups Working in Agricultural Support or Skills Training**

The lack of support and skills-training for resettled farmers, and the lack of access to credit or input subsidies among small-scale and subsistence producers, has hindered land reform and rural development and continues to threaten food security. A number of NGOs have sought to fill these gaps or to introduce more sustainable practices than those promoted by government extension officers and agricultural support programs. The increasing pressures of urbanization have also led to the establishment of a number of groups that teach micro-farming to city and township-dwellers who are vulnerable to food security but lack access to large plots of land.

#### **6.2.1. *Abalimi Bezekhaya***

Abalimi, formerly a project of Catholic Welfare and Development, provides start-up support and continued training for urban agriculture in the Cape Flats area of Cape Town. The organization estimates that it supports roughly 3 000 farmers, most of whom produce on municipal and school land. Participants in Abalimi's programs grow for the market but also for their own consumption and support of their immediate family and friends. Abalimi estimates that the crops produced in its projects directly feed about 15 000 people.

### **6.3. Soup Kitchens and Feeding Schemes**

A large and diverse group of organizations offers meals a certain number of times per week, sometimes to particular target groups or in combination with other programs.

#### **6.3.1. *Food Bank South Africa***

In 2008, the US-based charitable organization Global Foodbanking Network established the South Africa Forum for Food Security in response to the problem of poorly-coordinated hunger relief throughout the country. FoodBank SA, a national network dedicated to sourcing and distributing food and grocery items, was formed in 2009 and currently has locations in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Port

---

<sup>173</sup> Black Sash, "The 'Right to Food' Campaign Gains Momentum in the Western Cape," available at [http://www.blacksash.org.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=169%3Athe-right-to-food-campaign-gains-momentum-in-the-western-cape&Itemid=124](http://www.blacksash.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=169%3Athe-right-to-food-campaign-gains-momentum-in-the-western-cape&Itemid=124).

Elizabeth. The network works with government, food producers, and manufacturers and retailers to secure food donations and funding, and distributes this food through community and faith-based organizations and NGOs working directly with food insecure individuals. ‘Foodbanking’ is practiced in more than 40 countries worldwide and is promoted as a more efficient and reliable method of directing excess food to those in need.<sup>174</sup>

### ***6.3.2. The Peninsula School Feeding Association***

PSFA is one such organization that provides meals to children, in primary, secondary and special-needs schools and other educational institutions in the Western Cape. In addition to the reduction of short-term hunger, it includes in its goals the enhancement of children’s ability to learn and the promotion of vegetable gardens to reinforce household food security. The group reports that it feeds 275 500 children in 734 schools daily.<sup>175</sup>

## **7. Findings and Recommendations**

### **7.1. Is food insecurity most usefully examined as a phenomenon in itself, or in conjunction with broader issues of poverty and marginalization?**

#### ***7.1.1. Food insecurity is highly inter-related to, but not synonymous with, poverty.***

In situations in which households have access to productive resources or forms of social capital that allow them non-monetary access to food, incomes and expenditures are not reliable indicators of food insecurity. Nor is increasing incomes the only means of improving food security. While most available S.A. data relies on household food expenditure as a proxy for household consumption, there is a need to develop survey methodology and indicators that reflect the contributions of own production and that investigate the nutritional adequacy of food intake. Jacobs recommends the use of a composite indicator that calculates ‘dietary energy cost’ based on the price of a nutritionally adequate basket of food and then compares this with actual household expenditures on food to determine how many and which households can afford to meet their dietary requirements.<sup>176</sup>

#### ***7.1.2. Vulnerability to food insecurity is highest among groups that are marginalized from economic activity and lack access to productive resources.***

Most generally, food insecurity is highest among black African populations in South Africa. Women, particularly rural women, and HIV positive individuals are particularly vulnerable groups. Gender inequality and the marginalization of HIV positive individuals are not only factors contributing to vulnerability, however—they are often mutually reinforcing with food insecurity. It is important to match a normative commitment to gender equality with interventions that increase women’s access to basic resources, and to

---

<sup>174</sup> Food Bank SA website: <http://www.foodbank.org.za/>.

<sup>175</sup> PSFA website: <http://www.psfa.org.za/about>.

<sup>176</sup> PT Jacobs, “The Status of Household Food Security Targets in South Africa,” *Agrekon* 48(2009): 410-433.



combine HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention efforts with food security and nutritional education initiatives.

***7.1.3. It is necessary to have reliable baseline estimates, clear targets, and an adequate monitoring system to track the success of food security initiatives.***

That baseline estimates do not exist in South Africa makes it difficult to assess progress towards the first Millennium Development Goal on hunger. Different surveys continue to use various definitions, indicators, and methodologies for reporting on food insecurity. While the National Food Consumption Survey is by far the most comprehensive, it has been undertaken only twice since 1994 and has limited sampling. Hendriks argues that neighbouring SADC countries have developed and streamlined monitoring methodologies that could be useful for South Africa, but that there have been no efforts to adopt them.<sup>177</sup>

***7.1.4. It is also vital to link initiatives to reduce food insecurity to efforts for broader transformations in the national, regional, and global economies.***

In South Africa, there is still an inadequate conceptualization of the links between food security, rural development, and land reform. Hall asserts that the purpose of the latter two should not be merely to deracialize commercial agriculture, but to break down the boundaries of the former Bantustans. Without such a focus, food security efforts are likely to be too limited to sustain a significant reduction in hunger over the long term.

Within southern Africa, South Africa's dominance in trade is problematic for food security and food sovereignty in the region. The 2010 food riots in Mozambique demonstrate the way in which non-supply-related factors such as currency fluctuations impact the affordability of food in countries that import heavily from South Africa. Meanwhile, South Africa's position as an exporter of GMOs to neighboring countries and a frequent partner in Green Revolution initiatives threatens food sovereignty in the region.

Globally, there is a need to examine the impact of World Trade Organization (WTO) and other regulatory treaties which inhibit attempts to protect food sovereignty. The issue of agricultural subsidies in developed countries has been the object of much contention and will likely be discussed during the next round of WTO negotiations. The more radical demand of organizations such as La Via Campesina is that agreements on food and agriculture be removed from the jurisdiction of the WTO.

**7.2. Which types of approaches are most effective in addressing food insecurity?**

***7.2.1. Interventions that aim primarily to increase agricultural production or facilitate market integration have a poor track record of promoting secure entitlements to food.***

The first Green Revolution was wildly successful in increasing agricultural outputs, but in many instances actually increased hunger as landlessness and consolidation of production increased. Since this time, access to food has become widely accepted as primarily a

---

<sup>177</sup> Hendriks, S.L. 2005, "The challenges facing empirical estimation of household food (in)security in South Africa," *Development Southern Africa* 22(1): 103–123.

question of social and economic relations rather than available supply, but the new Green Revolution continues to regard increased production as its central focus. Much of the rhetoric around poverty reduction in South Africa focuses on ‘market integration,’ but as Andries du Toit emphasizes, integration on unequal terms holds the possibility of deepening poverty rather than reducing it.

***7.2.2. State-level food security strategies must be comprehensive and inter-departmental, but should entail implementation that is distinct from more general poverty reduction and social assistance programs.***

In South Africa, the Integrated Food Security Strategy (IFSS) can be effective only if it is given dedicated funding and implemented with a more specific focus on food security. As is, the IFSS outlines a highly complementary approach that is hindered by the failure of many types of interventions to materialize. Programs that are only broadly relevant to food security have in the past been listed by the Department of Agriculture as aspects of their food security activities, thus making it difficult to determine how much funding is allocated to food security or whether past initiatives have been successful. The Human Sciences Research Council emphasizes that it is necessary for the IFSS to have its own dedicated funding, departmental staff, and monitoring mechanisms.

***7.2.3. Beyond a policy commitment to food security, a rights-based approach to food insecurity can be supported through the passing of framework legislation and implementation of the Food and Agriculture Organization’s voluntary guidelines to support the realization of the right to food in the context of national food security.***

The enactment of a framework food security law is often discussed as a key element in realizing the right to food. Parliament held hearings on a National Food Security Bill in 2003, but the legislation has not advanced since then. If the Bill was passed, the Human Rights Commission could support its implementation and provide voluntary guidelines and monitoring.<sup>178</sup>

***7.2.4. However, there are limitations to a legal approach which appeals to the state for access to food but stops short of pushing for greater autonomy over choices related to food production and consumption.***

A rights-based approach is potentially very useful, but it primarily makes a claim on state resources and does not necessarily challenge patterns of private ownership. Placing responsibility for the realization of a right to food primarily on states emphasizes that food is a basic entitlement. However, this approach may overlook factors in the global economy that influence which states are most likely to have the resources to fulfill their obligations.

---

<sup>178</sup> Charlotte McClain-Nhlapo, “Implementing a Human Rights Approach to Food Security,” International Food Policy Research Institute, 2004, available at <http://www.fao.org>.

***7.2.5. Localization of economic activity has the potential to remedy structural poverty and food insecurity and increase food sovereignty, but a localized agricultural economy requires active intervention by national and local government.***

‘Localization’ here refers to an economic strategy in which the unemployed poor engage in production of the commodities in demand within their communities. Breitenbach and Slabbert, noting that “current policies and programmes are not an effective remedy for large scale structural unemployment and poverty,” investigate the potential economic impact of a policy of localization by comparing the demand for consumer goods and services in comparison with the skills possessed by residents of a particular locality. They find that while most residents of townships both seek employment *and* spend their wages outside of their community of residence, local production and consumption of the consumer items in demand could significantly reduce poverty. This would require intervention in the form of improved national statistics on needs and available skills within township economies; the establishment of co-operatives; and training and credit extension. With respect to agriculture, the authors’ study of a township in Gauteng found that a high proportion of the unemployed poor possessed farming and gardening skills, but were seeking work in other fields.<sup>179</sup>

Local production of basic commodities can be achieved without extensive infrastructural development, and can both improve food security and supplement the incomes of household producers. Growing participation in urban farming in South Africa’s townships indicates that this model is successful in improving food security and reducing absolute poverty where it is practised. In order to effectively reduce inequality, however, economic localization will also have to be accompanied by changes in the distribution of productive resources, particularly land and water. Localization is a strategy that can improve incomes and reduce poverty in areas with structural unemployment, but ultimately it should be focused towards breaking down the economic regions created by apartheid into a series of viable local economies with comparable access to services and opportunities.

At the national level, government subsidies for small-scale farmers can have significant impact on rebuilding capacities for sustainable production and empowering emerging farmers. Such subsidies should be conceived of as measures to improve self-sufficiency, rather than merely to manage food price swings, as the FAO currently recommends. They should also be designed with a focus on food sovereignty and avoid mandating agricultural practices by making patented seeds or oil-based inputs available at cheaper rates.

Despite government rhetoric around the promotion of indigenous knowledge, efforts to adapt and integrate this knowledge into production for a market have not been pursued. The HSRC has found that virtually all households engaging in subsistence farming practise traditional agriculture because they are not able to afford inputs. These methods are often unable to adapt to agro-ecological and socio-economic change, however, and the study found that “there is strong potential for collaboration between ‘indigenous’ and ‘scientific’ knowledge,’ particularly in areas of water harvest and soil conservation.”<sup>180</sup>

---

<sup>179</sup> Marthinus C Breitenbach and Tielman JC Slabbert, “Globalisation’s Ugly Stepsister: Estimating Some Economic Impacts of Localisation in South Africa,” *Global Studies Journal* 1(2008): 151-165.

<sup>180</sup> Human Sciences Research Council, “Agricultural Development & Research in the CPEG,” Presentation to Parliament’s Joint Budget Committee, 16 October 2008.

Another crucial element to food sovereignty, as Greenberg emphasizes, is the cultivation of an alternative seed production capacity that breaks up corporate dominance of the seed and agrochemical markets in South Africa.

***7.2.6. It is vital to design food security initiatives to mitigate the impact of climate change, but this should be done primarily through the promotion of agricultural methods that reduce agriculture's contribution to climate change and preserve biodiversity.***

Agriculture is an enormous contributor to climate change, but it is generally the impact of climate change on agriculture that is discussed and planned for. The best way to mitigate the effects of climate change, however, is to transition towards agricultural practices with lower impact, and to pursue cultivation of a wide variety of crops so that there is a greater likelihood of successful adaptation to climate change occurring within the food supplies. Projects such as Monsanto's 'Water Efficient Maize for Africa' that claim to be pioneering a drought-resistant maize crop overstate the ability of near-term scientific innovation to successfully plan for unpredictable changes in environmental conditions. The African Centre for Biosafety emphasizes that because as many as 60 genes may be implicated in a characteristic such as drought tolerance, it is still extremely difficult to engineer this trait. Such attempts divert attention from efforts to avert climate change in favor of overstating the possibility of successfully mitigating its effects.<sup>181</sup>

### **7.3. Which types of actors and institutional avenues should be involved in addressing food insecurity?**

***7.3.1. International donors and decision-makers are generally afforded pre-eminent roles in designing global responses to hunger and malnutrition.***

While this is true of most social problems that become subject to high-profile development commitments, it is particularly the case with hunger and malnutrition because these problems are still assumed to be technological ones. Such actors occasionally have a role to play, but it is important to move towards an understanding of hunger as primarily a socio-economic problem. The present situation, instead, is one in which agro-industry scientists are firmly in control of the scientific discourse on hunger, to the exclusion of consumers and small producers.

***7.3.2. International food aid and reserves are an important aspect of disaster management, but are often part of institutional arrangements that negatively impact food sovereignty.***

Food aid has often been inefficiently shipped from developed countries and used as an opportunity essentially to subsidize their domestic economies. While many donor countries, excluding the United States, have ended this practice of 'tying' food aid, it is still common for food aid shipments to contain genetically engineered crops and seeds.

---

<sup>181</sup> Shenaz Moola, "Africa's Green Revolution Drought Tolerant Maize Scam," African Centre for Biosafety, Briefing Paper 12, January 2010.

***7.3.3. Regional actors in Africa such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) could play a crucial role in promoting food sovereignty, but they have thus far been largely supportive of the New Green Revolution.***

NEPAD's Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP) is an important continent-wide platform for policy formation and co-ordination around issues related to agriculture. While CAADP is concerned with increasing public investment in agriculture, however, it also explicitly advocates development using heavy infrastructure, improved technologies, and market-oriented policies. It has also provided the occasion for African heads of state to request assistance from the FAO and the International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC) to revamp available fertilizer plants on the continent in order to make Africa an exporter of fertilizer by 2015. Elenita C. Daño notes, "It is ironic that while African governments are aiming for fertilizer self-sufficiency through the CAADP, there is no mention of food self-sufficiency anywhere in the document beyond the aim of increasing food supply and reducing the incidence of hunger."<sup>182</sup>

***7.3.4. Although it is crucial that hunger and malnutrition be regarded as multi-faceted problems, there is an international trend towards food security becoming 'everyone's and no one's concern.' It is necessary for a specific set of actors to be tasked with overseeing short-term food security initiatives at the national level.***

This is evident in the lack of implementation of many provisions of South Africa's Integrated Food Security Strategy. The HSRC notes that "despite an innovative institutional framework that is derived from international best practice, the IFSS appears to be challenged in actually carrying out its functions." A major problem is that there is no effective oversight structure to monitor and assess the contributions from the different departments involved. A 2006 Human Rights Commission report and a 2007 HSRC report both recommend that the Integrated Food Security and Nutrition Programme Task Team be located in the Office of the Presidency. A subsequent HSRC report suggested that the Presidency could house a structure that would provide co-ordination, allocate resources, and undertake monitoring of the different departments involved, but that the programmatic aspects of the IFSS should continue to be housed in the relevant individual departments.<sup>183</sup>

***7.3.5. Greater civil society participation in decision-making and implementation of policy related to food security and land and agrarian reform is crucial to achieving food sovereignty, but the IFSS may not be a sufficient platform for such participation.***

The IFSS is conceived of as a food security strategy targeted primarily at national, regional, and local dynamics within South Africa. As such, it already assumes a high degree of terminological and strategic consensus around issues of food and agriculture that does not reflect the range of positions that civil society groups take with respect to these issues. Moreover, the roles ascribed to civil society in the IFSS tend to be implementation and advisory rather than decision-making roles, and are mostly designed with the aim of

---

<sup>182</sup> Elenita C. Daño, "Unmasking the New Green Revolution in Africa: Motives, Players and Dynamics," Third World Service, Church Development Network, and African Centre for Biosafety, Penang, Malaysia, 2007, 45.

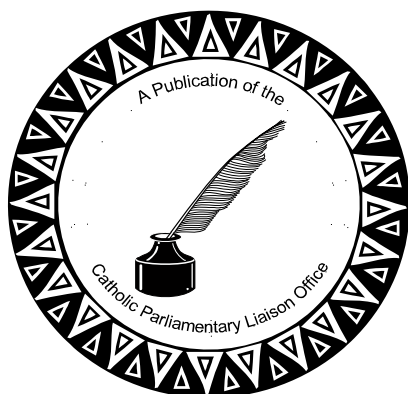
<sup>183</sup> Human Sciences Research Council, "Agricultural Development & Research in the CPEG," Presentation to Parliament's Joint Budget Committee, 16 October 2008.

improving information about the number and location of the food insecure in order to better target them with welfare programs. Thus, while the IFSS can serve as a useful platform for short and medium-term food security efforts, it does not allow sufficient space for participation in broader decisions about South Africa's mode of agricultural production, participation in trade relationships, or overall development strategy. It also restricts civil society engagement to the state level, rather than providing a platform for examination of the global and continental political and economic arrangements which impact food insecurity in South Africa.

---

**Rebecca Burns**  
**Research Intern**

This paper is based on research that Rebecca Burns conducted at CPLO during 2010. Rebecca holds bachelor's degrees in International Studies and English from Indiana University. Her research focuses on transnational social movements and globalization. She has worked previously as a community organizer in her home state of Indiana and is particularly interested in the role of media and communications work in social justice campaigns.



This research paper, or parts thereof,  
may be reproduced with acknowledgement.

*For any further enquiries, questions or to receive our regular publications, please  
contact our Office Administrator*

*Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference*  
**PARLIAMENTARY LIAISON OFFICE**

P O Box 2910  
Cape Town  
8000  
South Africa  
Tel: +27(0) 21 461-1417  
Fax: +27(0) 21 461-6961  
E-mail: [info@cplo.org.za](mailto:info@cplo.org.za)  
Website: [www.cplo.org.za](http://www.cplo.org.za)