

FOOD SECURITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ADEQ	Adult equivalent
CPEG	Centre, for Poverty, Employment and Growth
DoA	Department of Agriculture
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations
GHS	General Household Survey
HIV and AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus /Acquired Immune Disease Syndrome
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IES	Income and Expenditure Survey
IFSS	Integrated Food Security Strategy for South Africa
LFS	Labour Force Survey
OHS	October Household Survey
Stats SA	Statistics South Africa
NFCS	National Food Consumption Survey
PLWHA	people living with HIV and AIDS
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation

Executive summary

The Human Sciences Research Council led a project to review household food security status in South Africa. This project was aimed at “Ensuring affordable quality food for poor households: Considering the short- and long-term contribution of food security to the government’s poverty and unemployment reduction strategies”. This project was jointly funded by ComMark and the HSRC. This paper offers an overview of the main findings.

The project focused on three main themes, namely: the meaning and measurement of food security in South Africa; the possible role that smallholder production might play in addressing household food insecurity in South Africa; and the impact of gender and HIV and AIDS on food security at household level in South Africa.

The first question asked “What can be said about the food security status of South Africans?” and found the following:

- There is little certainty about household food security status in South Africa.
- There has been a dramatic fall in the experience of hunger since 2002.
- While the experience of hunger has fallen, under-nutrition remains a serious problem.
- Food insecurity can be chronic or transitory, and both can be experienced at a great intensity.
- Rural households spend more on food but less per person than their urban counterparts.
- Policies that focus on poverty nodes and rural areas will not necessarily reach the largest number of food insecure. A large proportion of hungry people live in the metropolitan areas.
- About half of households who are often or always hungry are eligible but do not receive grants.

The second question asked “Can small scale agriculture production contribute meaningfully to household food security in South Africa?” and illustrates the following dynamics relating to small scale production:

- Home production does not necessarily imply improved food security. There are very different outcomes across the country. We need to learn why.
- Increasingly small household producers do so for extra food
- Policy focuses primarily on commercially oriented production, but there are millions of active households that could benefit from appropriate support.
- The neglect of existing small scale farmers has a serious gender bias
- The majority of small scale farmers are in fact young people
- Most small black farmers are concentrated in a few areas located in former homelands

The third and final question asked “How do contextual features such as gender and HIV and AIDS impact on food security in South Africa?” drawing to our attention that:

- There is a gap in our knowledge about the gendered dimensions of food security which limits our household level understanding of gender relations and their impact on food security
- Women are playing key roles in achieving household food security along with numerous other roles and responsibilities
- Food security policy interventions are often generic rather than engendered, reducing their focus and impact
- HIV and AIDS interact negatively with food security, an interaction that acts as a double-edged sword

The paper concludes with some ideas for the way forward with regard to future research and policy interventions.

Given the seeming depth of household food insecurity, it is urgent that a food security target be identified within the overall objective of reducing poverty, with clear policy directions in support. Similarly, an affordable and regular national system needs to be established to monitor food security status. The most efficient immediate approach would involve the inclusion of a special food security module in the General Household Survey.

Small-scale and subsistence agriculture might be one option to contribute to incomes and/or savings, as well as to encourage food diversification. While household production of food is prevalent, opportunities and threats need to be better understood and appropriate interventions developed to support household-level production.

An improved system of social protection that stabilises food consumption is needed. Some aspects of a social protection system could involve ensuring receipt of social grants where households qualify, strategies to reduce and/or stabilise food prices, education for poor families to better plan their food purchases, and food gardens and ‘soup kitchens’ for the most destitute. Extending social grants to eligible households is likely to considerably improve the food security status of hungry adults and children. The present context of economic recession and uncertainty about the future may reduce the potential impact of market-based solutions to improve food security.

Lowering the cost of food and better consumer education should enable households to consume more diverse and nutritionally adequate foods. This requires a clearer understanding of food value chains and other structural constraints is required in order to formulate appropriate interventions.

Gender needs to be more strongly foregrounded as a feature of the policy framework; more targeted programmes focusing on female-headed households require attention.

At household level South Africa’s food security strategy must consider the bidirectional and negative interactions between food security and HIV and AIDS.

1. Background

South Africa ranks among the countries with the highest rate of income inequality in the world. Compared to other middle income countries, it has extremely high levels of absolute poverty. The South African government has committed to halving poverty between 2004 and 2014. Achieving household food security is a critical component in meeting that objective. Access to food and water is perhaps unlike other areas of delivery, since they are *essential* to well-being and human development.

The link between poverty, incomes and household food security is not at all clear. While South Africa may be food secure as a country, large numbers of households within the country are food insecure. To understand household food security status in this country, it is necessary to investigate how the workings of the food distribution system and resources of a household determine its access to food. There are distributional and accessibility problems that need to be understood. Ideally, poverty and food insecurity would be addressed by **expanding employment** opportunities thereby enhancing household incomes. Employment has expanded substantially since the mid-1990s, but not enough to meaningfully address income poverty. Income security is an essential ingredient to address food insecurity. The evidence shows that **social grants** have played an important role in improving household food security since 2001, but that improvements in employment status are also important (see Aliber 2009, Van der Berg 2006). In the context of large scale poverty and unemployment, as well as the present economic downturn, it is probable that reliance on grants will continue, if not increase. In a highly unequal society with high unemployment, this redistribution through income transfers is essential. However, it makes poor households vulnerable to national policy choices and politics. It is essential that creative and meaningful solutions are found to drawing marginalised work-seekers into economic participation as part of a long term poverty reduction and food security strategy. As part of this effort, a third potential contributor to food security might be **small scale agricultural production**. It seems counter-intuitive to promote subsistence or small scale agricultural production in a semi-industrialised economy like South Africa. However, many countries have successfully supported small scale production in Europe and in Japan and Indonesia, often as partial contributors to household food baskets and livelihoods. Because South Africa has invested so little in this area, it deserves investigation. However, the potential contribution of small scale farming to household food security is the subject of some controversy (see Aliber 2009).

The meaning of food security (or insecurity) is not as obvious as it may seem. There is no specific and accepted measure of food security in South Africa, and currently there are no regularised ways of monitoring it. This is not an acceptable state of affairs in a middle income country that has such a high proportion of food insecure households.

There are numerous challenges in identifying targets and strategies for household food security. Food security is multidimensional in nature and changes over time, making accurate measurement and policy targeting a challenge. There is sometimes confusion between national food security and the actual experience of households of obtaining food. Access to adequate food at a household level increasingly depends on

how food markets and distribution systems function rather than only on total agro-food output. Moreover, there is no clear composite measure that defines food security to enable the setting of food security goals and monitoring systems.

As stated above, food security cannot be understood in isolation from other developmental questions such as social protection, sources of income, rural and urban development, changing household structures, health, access to land, water and inputs, retail markets, or education and nutritional knowledge. Livelihood patterns and sustainable asset accumulation along with structural dynamics are increasingly important determinants. The multiple factors that influence access to food are not well understood, and this impacts negatively on the ability to identify appropriate policies to improve individual and household access.

These gaps restrict the ability of policy makers to address food insecurity. Policy makers are constrained in their ability to identify interventions appropriate to different situations and needs. There are also deep institutional barriers to successfully translating policy into implementable programmes. This is exacerbated by weak links between government, the private sector and civil society organisations.

The problem of household food insecurity is further exacerbated by a range of additional factors that have recently come into play and drive the cost of food. Domestic electricity supply constraints and rising oil prices are examples of important factors in this regard. The price of electricity is set to rise by at least 100% between 2008 and 2011. Even if the oil price declines for a period, the advent of peak oil is expected to cause a long term rise in prices. This will affect the supply of fertiliser because petroleum is an input for chemical fertiliser, and agro-food transport costs. Other factors that are increasingly affecting food prices are bio-fuel production (which results in the reallocation of resources and outputs to the supply of feedstock), speculation in commodity markets and the power of agents within the agro-food chain, namely supermarkets, processors and distributors.

Rising food prices, particularly of maize and wheat which are the staple diet of the poor in South Africa, pose serious problems for the urban and rural poor as most are net buyers of food. Recent information from the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO 2009) supported by independent sources (Heady & Fan 2008) suggest that food prices will increase steadily over the next decade even if there are some fluctuations and the occasional drop in prices (Evans 2009). Given increasingly strong linkages between the local level and national and international commodity chains and economic networks, even remote rural households in South Africa are affected by changes in these networks. Unless there are new policy directions, poor households will increasingly be forced to allocate a greater proportion of their expenditure to food, with the result that diets will become less diverse, lower in quality, and energy intake (calories consumed) will drop as people try to cope with the situation. Most severely affected will be the chronically urban and rural poor, the landless and female headed households (FAO 2009).

The Centre for Poverty, Employment and Growth (CPEG) at the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) was established to identify approaches to halving unemployment and poverty between 2004 and 2014 on a sustainable basis. Achieving household food security is a critical focus area as part of this contribution.

South Africa faces a structural household food insecurity problem, the prime causes of which are widespread chronic poverty and unemployment (HSRC 2007). Numerous underlying causes have been explored in the body of research produced by CPEG and others. Real solutions to household food insecurity lie in growth and structural change; the population cannot wait for that to happen. People are hungry today and must eat today, they cannot wait until tomorrow. The future growth and development trajectory depends on an inclusive path based on effective human development. Access to sufficient nutritious food and clean water underpins human development.

In 2008 and 2009, the Centre for Poverty Employment and Growth drew together a team of researchers to frame a research and policy agenda on household food security. This follows earlier work by the HSRC which focused on land, agriculture, poverty reduction and food security predominantly at the macro-level. The current project has a specific focus on household food insecurity. The first step in this project was to identify what is already known and available data to enable monitoring and evaluation. The purpose was to look at what has been done and what still needs to be done to ensure that it is possible to design effective policy, and to monitor and evaluate the food security situation. This initial project was funded by the HSRC and the ComMark Trust.

Eight papers were prepared covering the following topics:

- Food Security definitions, measurements and recent initiatives in South Africa and Southern Africa – Tim Hart;
- Food security and subsistence agriculture – evidence from the official national household surveys – Dr Michael Aliber;
- Identifying a target for food security – Dr. Peter Jacobs
- A comparison of national surveys of food consumption, incomes and poverty - – Prof Demetre Labadarios, Yul Derek Davids, Zandile Mciza & Gina Weir-Smith;
- The contribution of subsistence production to food security in SA – Mompoti Baiphethi and Dr Peter Jacobs;
- The contribution of subsistence-production to food security: evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa – Dr. Innocent Matshe;
- The gendered dimension of food security in South Africa – Dr. Vasu Reddy & Dr Relebohile Moletsane;
- The impact of HIV and AIDS on food security and nutrition in South Africa – Dr Rendani Ladzani.

2. Overview of the papers

This paper offers an overview of the key insights from the Human Sciences Research Council's review of household food security in South Africa. The first set of articles focus on the meaning and measurement of food security in South Africa. Tim Hart highlights the very real challenges associated with the numerous developments and diverse understandings and assumptions underpinning the concept of food insecurity in the international and South African contexts. Although changes and diversity in the conceptualisation of food security have increased our understanding of the multi-dimensional nature and causes of food insecurity this has implications for measurement and the implementation of food security strategies. Michael Aliber analyses the official data to show what is known about food expenditure and hunger, making particular use of Statistics South Africa's Income and Expenditure Survey (IES) and the General Household Survey (GHS). Analysing recent Statistics South Africa's Labour Force Survey (LFS) data, he considers the potential contribution of smallholder production to food security. Peter Jacobs deepens the analysis of food expenditure and hunger, with a greater emphasis on under-nutrition. He explores what different data sources reveal about the access households have to a nutritionally adequate diet. Demetre Labadarios, Yul Derek Davids, Zandile Mciza and Gina Weir-Smith take a technical approach in examining a broad range of national datasets used since 1994 to determine food and nutritional security. Their paper introduces the nutritional dynamics of food security and reveals the implications that the use of different indicators and sampling frames has on determining food security levels in South Africa.

The second set of papers considers the possible role that smallholder production might play in addressing food insecurity in South Africa. This is an unusual question in the context of a middle income country. However, smallholder and particularly subsistence producers have largely been neglected by South African policy makers. The authors explore whether there might be untapped potential to support livelihoods of low income households. Mompoti Baiphethi and Peter Jacobs look at the links between small holder production, market access and food security. Innocent Matshe considers regional experiences in promoting smallholder production in sub-Saharan Africa and identifies a number of important lessons. Michael Aliber's paper, as noted above, also contributes to this discussion, specifically looking at the reasons for engaging in smallholder production and the composition of this sector.

The final set of papers considers the prominent contextual issues of gender and HIV and AIDS, and their impact on food security at household level. Vasu Reddy and Relebohile Moletsane focus on the gendered context of food security. They generate a focused understanding of local meanings and contextual issues that impact on and influence the relations between gender, policy, and food insecurity. Highlighted areas include the socio-political context of gender and food insecurity and the policy context. Rendani Ladzani examines food security in the context of HIV and AIDS in South Africa. In particular, she focuses on the associations amongst HIV and AIDS, food security, nutrition and the immune system, emphasising their interrelationships and dependencies.

3. Insights

What can be said about the food security status of South Africans?

To answer this question this paper draws the reader's attention to several key insights on the food security status of households in South Africa that emerge from these papers on household food security.

There is little certainty about household food security status in South Africa

We can say with some certainty that a large proportion of South African households are food insecure. But we cannot precisely determine a baseline estimate, and therefore it is currently not possible to monitor progress towards greater food security. Despite numerous indicators of food security status evident in various national datasets, sampling and methodological constraints render cross-dataset comparisons unworkable. The same constraints prevent any determination of household level food security. This is an unacceptable state of affairs, since sufficient, nutritionally adequate food is a core basic human need, and a critical success factor for human development of any kind.

As an example, the General Household Survey indicates that in 2007 10.6% and 12.2% of adults and children, respectively, were sometimes or always hungry. In stark contrast, the National Food Consumption Survey (NFCS) of 2005 found that 52% of households experience hunger (Labadarios et al. 2008, Labadarios et al. 2009). It further reports that another 33% of households are at risk of hunger, which means that food inflation and the loss of income might push them into hunger. The GHS is a large household survey accorded official status, while the NFCS is a much smaller survey, not accorded official status. Nevertheless, the findings of the NFCS require further exploration. The GHS asks a very basic question about whether household members were hungry. The NFCS collects deeper information about nutrition, height and weight, as well as household choices made in a context of limited income. How the respective surveys define hunger (or food insecurity and poor nutritional intake) and then translate this into information gathering questions, therefore, formed a major focus of the papers produced as part of this study (see specifically the papers by Aliber, Hart, Jacobs and Labadarios et al.).

Jacobs considers whether the level of household food security is more accurately represented by the statistics of the GHS or those of the NFCS. He uses a number of composite measures to determine what proportion of the population could afford a very basic nutritionally adequate food basket.

In tracing the numerous developments and diverse understandings and assumptions underpinning the concept of food insecurity, Hart shows how these are understood at policy level and are subsequently translated into interventions to address fluctuations in food security status. Assumptions can lead to misunderstandings and consequently inappropriate or delayed interventions (see Devereux 2006, 2009). Labadarios et al

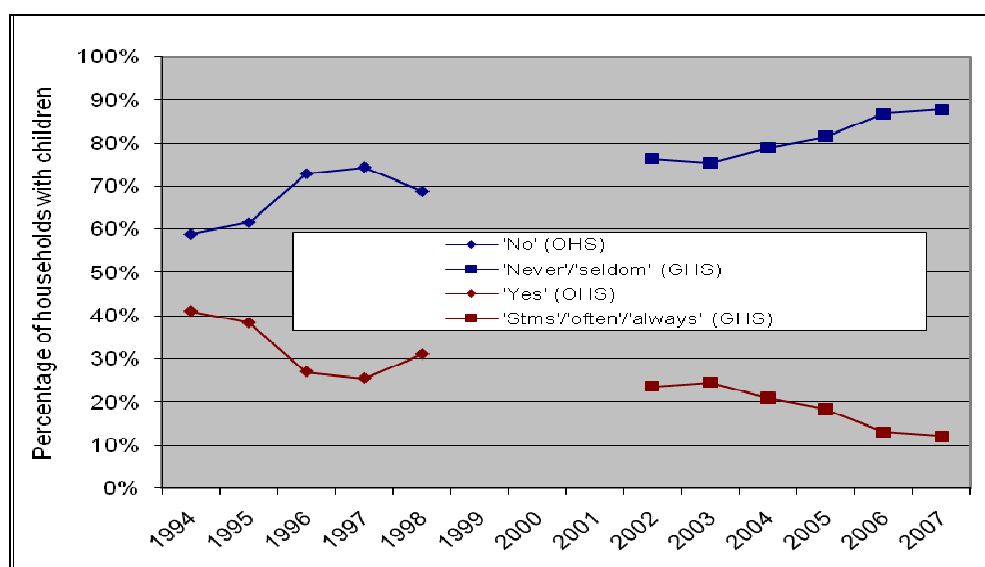
demonstrate how different understandings lead to different conceptualisations of proxy indicators to measure experiences and outcomes of food insecurity.

There has been a dramatic fall in the experience of hunger since 2002

Aliber uses the GHS to trace the incidence of child hunger from 1994 to 2007. For the period 1994 to 1998, there seems to have been an increase in the share of children-inclusive households whose children experienced hunger. However, during the period 2002 to 2007, there was a striking decrease in child hunger in the same households. It echoes – or perhaps, rather, amplifies – post-2001 trends in poverty reduction detected in the work of Van der Berg (2006).

Figure 1 traces the incidence of child hunger from 1994 to 2007, with a gap for the years 1999 through 2001 (owing to the absence of a comparable survey for 2000 and 2001, and of a comparable question in the 1999 OHS).

Figure 1 - Households with children experiencing hunger (%)



Source: Aliber 2009 calculated from Stats SA, OHS (1994-1998) and GHS (2002-2007)

Aliber offers more nuanced information about the experience of hunger for children under the age of 17, and adults aged 18 and above, between 2002 and 2007. Experiences of both groups were essentially the same. All four ‘intensities’ of hunger (i.e. ‘never’, ‘seldom’, ‘sometimes’, ‘often’ and ‘always’, but excluding ‘not applicable’) appear to be shrinking simultaneously. However, at the same time, while the number of households who experience hunger ‘often’ or ‘always’ is declining, hunger appears to be enduring, especially as the improvements recorded between 2006 and 2007 have been less impressive than those in preceding years. Some reversal can be expected in 2009 as result of the economic downturn.

While the experience of hunger has fallen, under-nutrition remains a serious problem.

Hunger and under-nutrition are both outcomes of inadequate food intake but their meanings differ. Hunger is commonly associated with 'not eating enough food'. Under-nutrition, on the other hand, refers to the lack of sufficient micro-nutrients—such as key vitamins, iron, and zinc. In children, a severe and/or chronic lack of adequate nutrition can manifest in underweight and stunting. Outcomes can include irreversible changes in child development: poor cognitive development, weak educational performance, increased risk of morbidity and impaired immune functions. The 2005 NFCS, revealed that one out of every five children aged 1-9 years is stunted. This is only marginally better than the 1999 survey findings (Labadarios et al 2008). Frequent tiredness among adults might also be symptomatic of under-nutrition, such as iron deficiency. More importantly, visible signs of micro-nutrient deficiencies usually appear after a considerable period of inadequate food intake (food insecurity). Faber and Wenhold (2007) emphasise the way micro-nutrient deficiencies interact. The distinction between the feeling of hunger and under-nutrition appears to be the main explanation for the wide gap between the statistics of the GHS and the NFCS. South Africa features as one of the top 20 countries with the highest burden of undernutrition, therefore it is worth paying closer attention to poor nutrition which results from the lack of well-balanced or diversified diets. However, Jacobs' analysis indicates that few people would be able to afford a food basket that is diverse and high in essential macro- and micronutrients.

Jacobs finds that approximately 80% of households could not afford to buy a basic nutritional basket of food costing an average of R 262 per person per month (at 2005 prices), at current prices and levels of fortification. This finding is least surprising if it is compared to the NFCS finding, that only 20% of South Africans can be considered food secure (Labadarios et al 2008). As incomes fall a rising proportion of households are unable to afford the average nutritionally adequate food basket. Of this 80%, one in every four additional households would achieve an acceptable level of nutrition with R 200 more expenditure on nutritious food per month.

Food insecurity can be chronic or transitory, and both can be experienced at a great intensity

The depth of food insecurity varies within and between households. The food security status of a household and its members is very sensitive to livelihood shocks (short duration) and stressors (long duration), and thus changes over time. Rapid food price inflation during 2007-2008, for instance, considerably increased the number of food insecure people globally— from 900 million to more than 1 billion (FAO 2009). Chronically food insecure and low income households are more vulnerable to food price shocks because they spend a higher share of their incomes on food. In this context, households which might be marginally food secure before a shock might fall into severe transitory or severe chronic food insecurity afterwards, placing increased pressure on social protection regimes (including emergency relief programmes) to counter the spread of hunger (see Hart's paper).

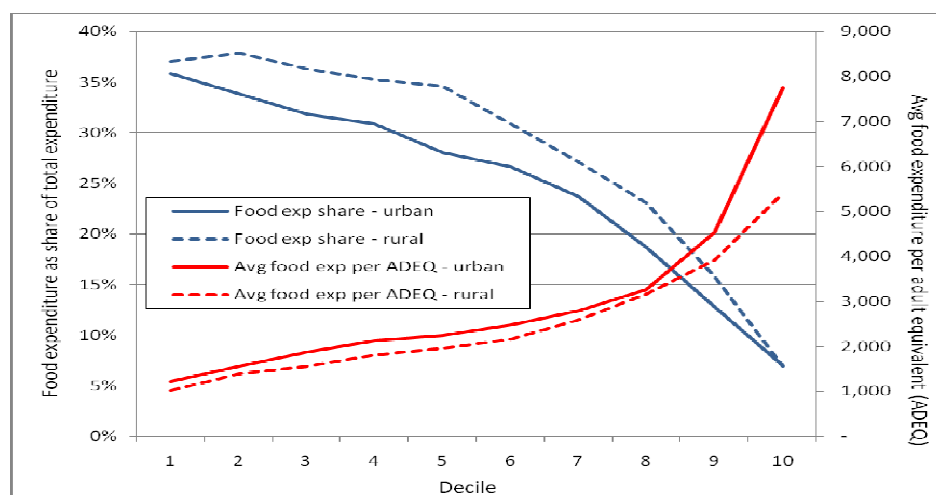
Although there has been a general reduction in national food insecurity, measured in terms of food availability in recent years (Labadarios et al. 2008, Aliber's paper), there is more flux into and out of hunger than might have been expected. Many

households which are not hungry in one year may well experience hunger in the next. Aliber's analysis of the GHS shows that key determinants of households whose situation diminished from not being hungry in 2006 to being hungry in 2007 included: an increase in the average number of children per household, a decline in the average number of elderly, a decrease in the average number of adults in employment per household; and a moderate increase in grant income per capita (that did not cover costs of additional dependents). Household food expenditure per capita in this group fell by 7.6%.

Rural households spend more on food but less per person than their urban counterparts, by expenditure decile.

From his analysis of the Income and Expenditure Survey of 2005/06, Aliber (see Figure 2) shows that poor rural households spend a larger share of their total expenditure on food than their urban counterparts, with the exception of the poorest deciles. One possible interpretation is that rural households tend to pay higher prices so they must spend more to acquire a comparable food basket. However, rural households spend 15% less in Rand terms on each household member than their urban counterparts. Higher food prices typically point to the direct expenditure on food. But this excludes transport costs rural households need to cover if they shop at supermarkets in nearby towns where food prices are presumably relatively lower.

Figure 2 - Food expenditure patterns



Source: Aliber 2009 sourced from Stats SA, IES 2005/06

Jacobs uses the IES 2005/06 to deepen the analysis and asks whether existing levels of household food expenditures enable them to cover the cost of nutritionally adequate food baskets. This is done by costing average and below average dietary energy costs. Nationally, 1 in 5 households spend enough on food to afford a nutritionally adequate food basket. However, a rural-urban breakdown shows that a substantially smaller number of rural households can afford such a food basket: 1 in 10 rural households compared to 1 in 4 urban households.

There are a number of ways of making sense of why rural households in the same expenditure group spend less on food per adult equivalent (ADEQ). The first and

most obvious reason is that there are more people in the average rural household. It is also possible that own-production partly explains lower ADEQ expenditure in rural areas, although this hypothesis would need to be tested. In principle, the IES was meant to capture information about own production. In reality however the IES captures far too little own production information to be credible. Palmer and Sender (2006), suggest that perhaps the best way to appreciate the significance of production for own consumption in South Africa might be to measure the difference in ADEQ expenditure between farming and non-farming households. However, given that the IES of 2005/06 does not distinguish between farming and non-farming households, the distinction between rural and urban households serves as a sort of proxy. If own-production accounted for the 15% gap in ADEQ spending, this would ascribe to small-scale agricultural production a gross imputed value of about R2 billion. Given that this emanates from less than half of rural black households (i.e. those involved in farming as elicited from Aliber's analysis of the LFS), this is significant. If one quarter of this value were consumed by the higher income groups, and two households were engaged in own-production, it would mean that poor households saved an average of R750 per annum (or R 62.50 per month) accounting for an in-kind contribution to their budget. This is not completely implausible, but further research would shed more light on this important issue.'

The differences between urban and rural food expenditure patterns can also be traced to particular food types. It is surprising that rural households spend a larger share of their food budget on grain products, fruit and vegetables and a lower share on meat, than urban households in the same decile. Tentatively, these differences could be explained by the fact that, in recent decades, arable land resources in former homeland areas have been increasingly under-utilised, effectively allowing more space for livestock. Had this not been the case, the situation in respect of food shares between urban and rural households might be reversed. Another, complementary explanation, is that to the extent some rural households are net suppliers of meat, that much of this tends to be marketed locally through informal abattoirs, and that the impact may be that rural dwellers who would otherwise have to purchase meat in town are able to buy it locally at a lower price. In the worst case scenario, this may simply reflect that higher rural food prices force poor households to reduce consumption of meat to make it possible to buy staples.

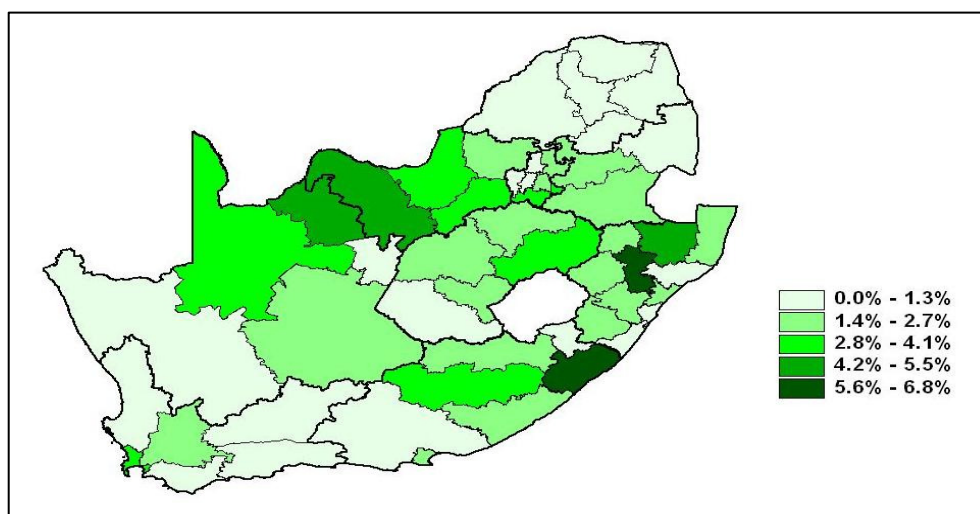
It is critical that an understanding be reached about why rural households spend less per adult equivalent on food than their urban counterparts in each decile. If this is the result of own production, it may free up money for spending on other items. If it is due to higher prices or higher dependency ratios, there are serious negative welfare implications.

Policies that focus on poverty nodes will not necessarily reach the largest number of food insecure. This poses challenges for policy aiming to immediately lift households out of deep food insecurity

There is often a policy tension between focusing on poor people or on poor areas. It is sometimes assumed that low-income households are concentrated in generally poor municipalities. Michael Aliber shows why such assumptions can be contradictory. Data from the 2007 GHS shows that serious hunger is widespread and is found in similar proportions in rural districts and metros (see Figure 3). While the worst districts in 2007 were Umzinyathi in KwaZulu-Natal and OR Tambo in Eastern Cape,

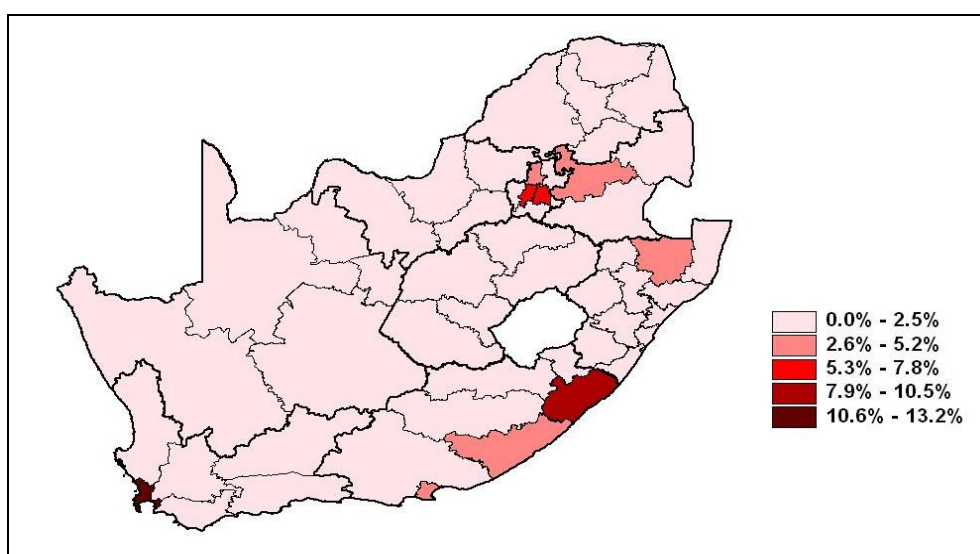
this may change over time. It is also important to remember that an assessment of what constitutes the very worst-affected districts depends in part on which year's data is under consideration. Michael Aliber shows that had one looked at the 2006 and 2005 datasets, Zululand in KwaZulu-Natal and Bophirima in North West would have had the highest proportions of seriously hungry people. This can vary a little from time to time, partly because of changing conditions, but also because the estimates are random variables that are not completely accurate at this scale of analysis.

Figure 3 - Proportion of households per district municipality who experience hunger 'often' or 'always', 2007



Source: Aliber 2009, calculated from Stats SA, General Household Survey 2007

Figure 4 - Share of all households experiencing hunger 'often' or 'always' located in each district municipality



Source: Aliber 2009, calculated from Stats SA, General Household Survey 2007

Furthermore, a very large share of seriously hungry households live in a few urban districts (see Figure 4). Counter-intuitively, more than 30% of all seriously hungry households lived in Cape Town, Ekurhuleni and Johannesburg in 2007. Over 50% of the seriously hungry could be reached by focusing intervention in these three densely populated urban areas, plus an additional five district municipalities mostly located in the same vicinities.

About half of households who are often or always hungry are eligible but do not receive grants

Social grants appear to have been the most important contributor to reducing poverty and food insecurity in the poorest households (see van der Berg 2006). By 2007, 12 million people were receiving grants, rising from 4 million people in 2002. Using the 2007 GHS, Aliber's analysis shows that 51% of seriously hungry households appear to be eligible for social grants that they do not receive. Of these, about two-thirds receive some grants but in principle are eligible to receive more than they do, while the other third are not receiving any grants at all, despite apparent eligibility for at least one.

He further proposes that if eligible age of children to receive the child support grant were immediately raised to 18, then a further 13% of seriously hungry households would be receiving grants for which they are eligible (This modification to the child support grant has been introduced into policy since the writing of Aliber's article).

Improving access to social grants for those who are eligible could dramatically reduce the experience of serious hunger that still remains.

Greater economic participation will be an essential part of sustaining and building on those gains. But for now, job creation is too slow to reach the millions of people in need. More intense strategies to strengthen non-grant livelihoods are needed to transition marginalised work-seekers into economic activity.

Can small scale agriculture production contribute meaningfully to household food security in South Africa?

The second question we asked was if smallholder agricultural production might potentially offer a sustainable strategy to addressing food insecurity and hunger. Six key insights emerge from the study.

Home production does not necessarily imply improved food security. There are very different outcomes across the country. We need to learn why.

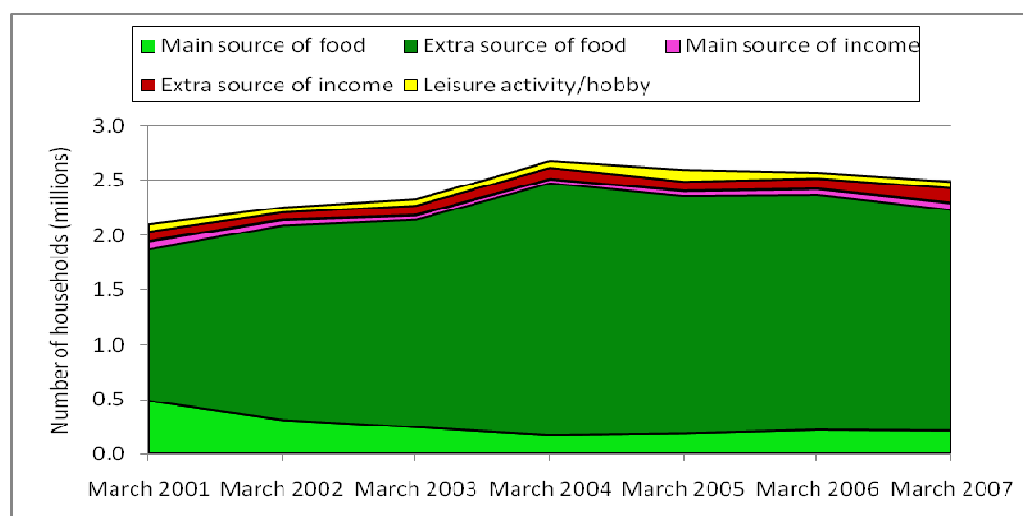
Poor households that engage in own-production are not necessarily more food secure. Households may engage in own-production as an additional livelihood strategy, or even for recreation. Alternatively, it may indicate deep poverty and the implementation of a survival strategy. For example, Aliber looks at two equally poor but otherwise contrasting district municipalities, namely Vhembe in Limpopo and OR Tambo in the Eastern Cape. Both districts have a high concentration of people who engage in agricultural activity. However, Vhembe has a very low incidence of hunger, and OR Tambo very high. While household food production is an extremely

important activity for residents of a village in Limpopo, a recent study by Hart (forthcoming) shows that 49% experienced hunger during a twelve-month period, largely due to their inability to purchase sufficient food at various times. Access to appropriate extension and research support availability, access to input and output markets and the quality of natural resources available can be important contributors to food production outcomes.

Increasingly small household producers do so for extra food

The analysis of the LFS shows that there was a marked increase in black households who practiced agriculture between 2001 and 2004, and thereafter a modest tapering off (see Figure 5). There was an absolute and relative increase up to around 2004 in the number of households for whom agriculture represented an ‘extra source of food’, and at the same time a decline in the number of those relying on agriculture as a ‘main source of food’. These would need further exploration to determine the reasons for the changes.

Figure 5 - Involvement of black households in agriculture (2001 - 2007), by main reason



Source: Aliber 2009, calculated from Stats SA, Labour Force Survey, 2001-2007

There is considerable movement into and out of agriculture, suggesting that many households treat agriculture as a sort of residual activity from which they can seek benefit when it suits them, but abandon when it is inconvenient. We imagine this might especially arise when more remunerative opportunities surface. Un- or underemployment, and therefore the availability of labour in the household seems to be a key factor as do changing household sizes, although these cannot be confirmed by the existing datasets. Transitions out of agriculture are clearly associated with declines in household size, while transitions into agriculture are associated with increases in household size. It is possible that increased household size and the associated demand for more food encourage engagement in subsistence production as

a way of feeding a larger group of dependents. It is however more likely that household food production depends on the presence of an able bodied member.

Policy focuses primarily on commercially oriented production, but there are millions of active households that could benefit from appropriate support.

Already, about four million people (or about 2.5 million households) are engaged in some kind of own-production, of which approximately 300,000 to 400,000 are full time smallholder farmers, sometimes with helpers with whom they exchange wages and foodstuffs for labour services. For the others, the predominant reason for engaging in agriculture is to procure an 'extra source of food'. Aliber's paper suggests strong continuity of household participation in farming, notwithstanding some flux of individual household members.

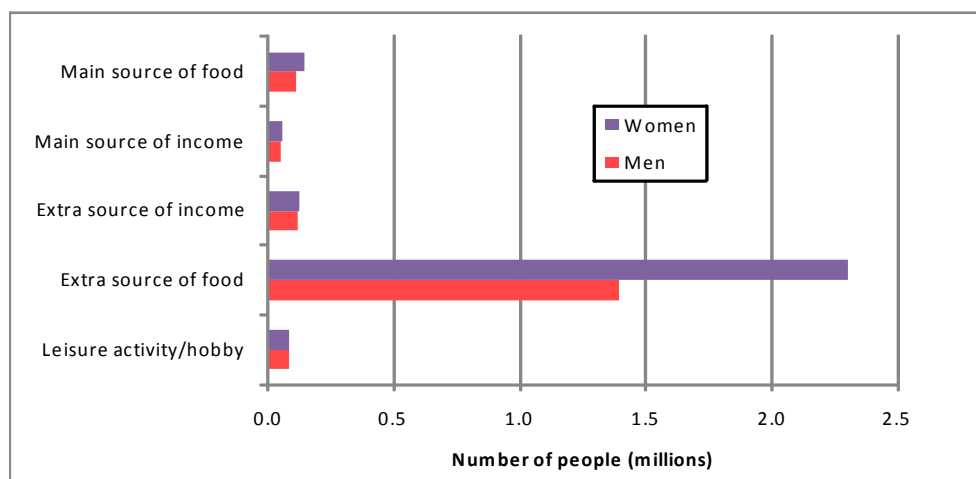
Lessons from elsewhere in Africa suggest input support targeting smallholders can boost production and food security (see papers by Baiphethi and Jacobs, and Matshe). In Malawi, as Baiphethi and Jacobs show, the Agricultural Input Support Programme (AISP) has raised yields across a large number of staple foods produced by smallholder farmers. Higher yields further enabled more households to withstand or cope with food price shocks. Farming on urban food gardens appears to be on the increase, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. Based on the available evidence, which is incomplete, the addition of urban agriculture to household food security could be as low as 33% and as high as 80%. In South Africa, the pace of urbanisation is not expected to slow down. How this rising population of city dwellers access nutritionally adequate food is bound to become a major concern. Investigating the potential of urban farming to address food insecurity around the cities must be on the food policy agenda (see recent study by Cloete et al. 2009).

All the papers on smallholder and subsistence production argue that appropriate support is required to improve the current levels of smallholder production. Appropriate support is dependent on the specific contexts under which smallholder farming is practised.

The neglect of existing small scale farmers has a serious gender bias

Women make up 61% of all those involved in farming. They mostly have the same reasons for participating in agriculture, except for the 'extra source of food' reason, in which case they exceed men by two thirds (see Figure 6). Insofar as women outnumber men as subsistence producers, this is consistent with the prevalent stereotype of homeland agriculture; what is perhaps surprising is that commercially-oriented black farmers are equally likely to be women as men. The high prevalence of women in agriculture and particularly in terms of those engaged in semi-subsistence production (as an extra source of household food) to supplement household food requirements demands an increased focus on this group and the specific and often gender determined constraints they face.

Figure 6 - Sex of black farmers



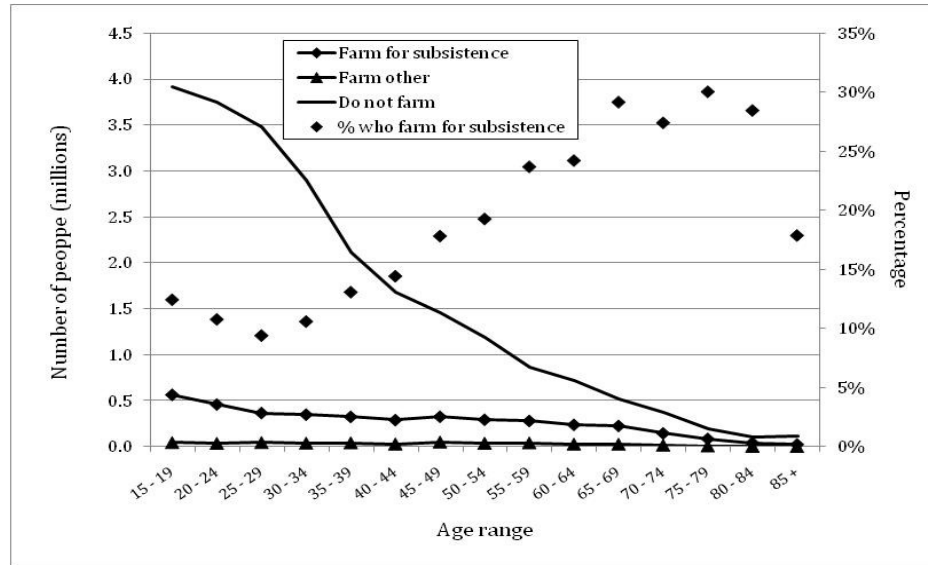
Source: Aliber 2009, calculated from Stats SA, Labour Force Survey, March 2006

The majority of small scale farmers are young people

There is a perception that young people are not interested in farming, and that small scale production is mostly the preserve of older people. However, Aliber shows that the majority of small farmers are young (see Figure 7). It is true that a larger proportion of older people farm, however they are a smaller section of the population.

For example, 12% of 15-19 year-olds are involved in subsistence farming as compared to 24% of 55-59 year-olds according to the March 2007 Labour Force Survey. However, there are twice as many 15-19 year-olds (more than 500,000) involved in subsistence agriculture than there are 55-59 year-olds. Approximately 1.9 million subsistence farmers are aged 15 – 29 years.

Figure 7: Participation in agriculture by age



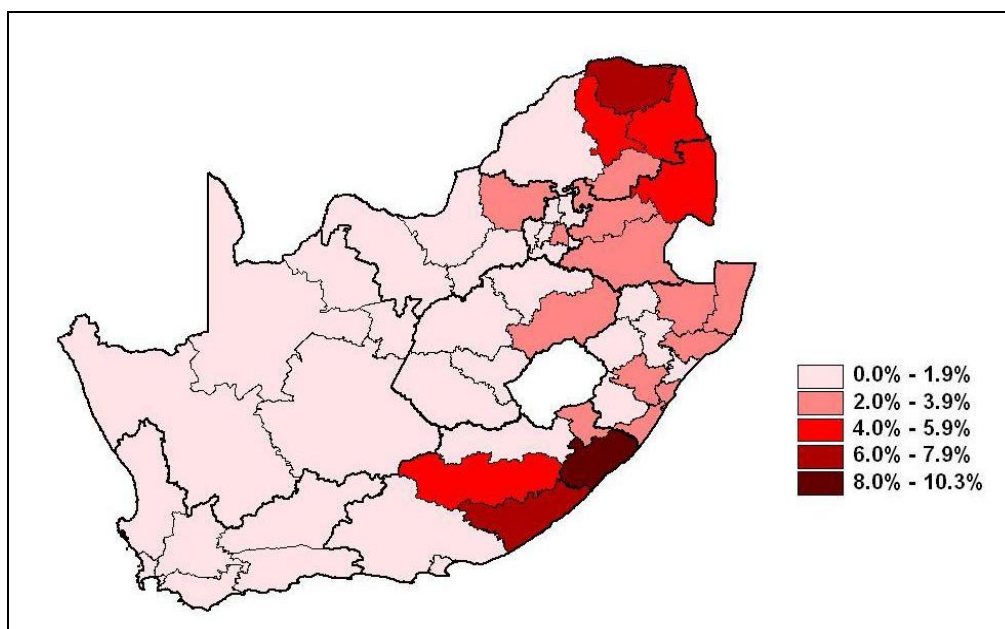
Source: Labour Force Survey, March 2007 (Stats SA 2007)

Most small black farmers are concentrated in a few areas located in former homelands

Most black farmers are located within district municipalities which encompass territories belonging to former homelands, meaning that most black farmers are located within former homelands themselves. If the aim of policy is to reach large numbers of small black farmers, it is worth noting that they are highly concentrated. For example, a quarter of all black small farmers can be found in Vhembe, OR Tambo, and Amathole municipalities (see Figure 8).

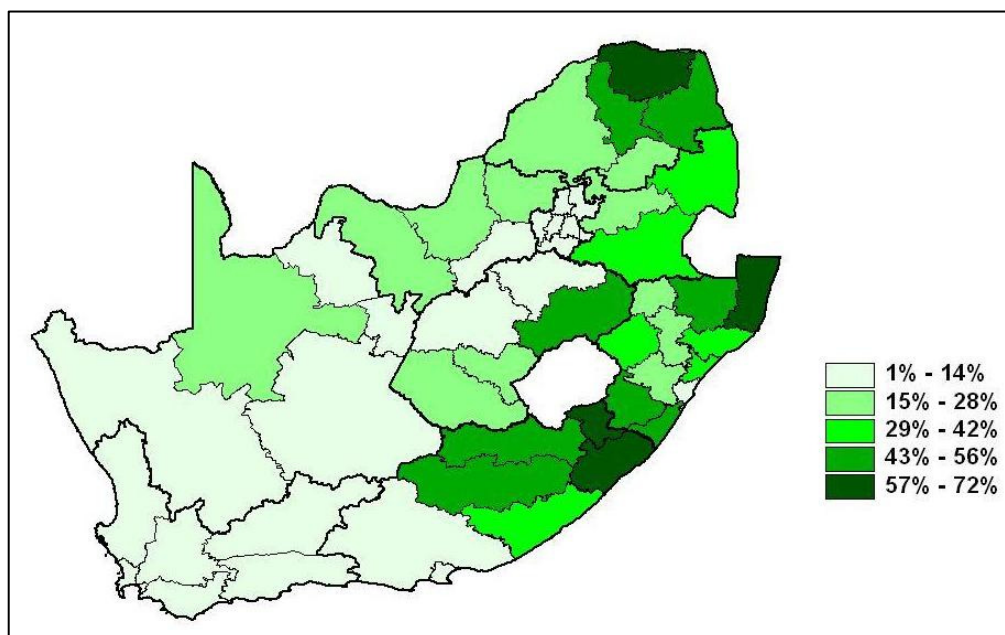
Aliber reveals that in four district municipalities, 57% to 72% of black households are engaged in farming at some level: Vhembe in Limpopo, Umkhanyakude in KwaZulu-Natal, and both Alfred Nzo and OR Tambo in Eastern Cape. However, there are a further eight district municipalities in which the share is between 43% and 56% (see Figure 9). In other words, although the 2.5 million black households who practice at least some agriculture represent a fifth of the 11-million black households in the country, in a number of predominantly rural municipalities – especially those incorporating former homeland areas – the share is very much higher. Therefore this activity is very important to people living in those areas.

Figure 8 - Proportion of all black households involved in agriculture, by district municipality



Source: Aliber 2009, calculated from Stats SA, Labour Force Survey, March 2007

Figure 9 - Share of black households per district municipality who are involved in agriculture



Source: Aliber 2009, calculated from Stats SA, Labour Force Survey, March 2007

Access to land is often considered a determinant of people's involvement in agriculture and this is explored by Aliber. The GHS reports that 7% to 13% of black households have some access to land for agricultural purposes. This corresponds closely to the proportions of people involved in own-production reported by the Labour Force Survey. The Rural Survey of 1997 focusing only on the former homelands estimated that 71% of black households had access to land for agricultural purposes. Again, this corresponds to the concentration of own-producers in the former homelands. However, this information does not communicate what sort of access there is, the quality of the land, or how it is used. Almost nothing is really known about own-production in any of these respects, nor do we know how much more own-production there might be if resources and access to these were improved.

How do contextual features such as gender and HIV and AIDS impact on food security in South Africa?

The final question asked by the study relates to the impact of gender and HIV and AIDS, on food security at household level. Four insights emerge from the papers.

There is a gap in our knowledge about the gendered dimensions of food security

The majority of unemployed are black African women, often those living in rural areas. In addition, working women tend to earn less than their male counterparts, so the depth of their working poverty tends to be greater. Alongside this, about one-third of young women have HIV, which means their nutritional needs must be urgently met if they are to actively participate as mothers and breadwinners. It is therefore surprising that there remains a marked absence of empirical studies addressing women and gender in the food insecurity arena. As a result there is a mismatch between policy and programmatic work to curb the gendered dimensions of food insecurity. However, preliminary evidence suggests that women and girls are to be considered most-at-risk-populations (and therefore vulnerable to food insecurity) because they have limited access and control of resources (be it income, land, water, and failing support systems) when compared to men.

To overcome the knowledge gap, issues such as natural disasters, education, poverty, ageing, technology, genetically modified foods, etc.), should be prioritised in future policy that addresses the multidimensionality of food security to ensure a grounded understanding that could alleviate potential problems related to the position of women and gender more broadly in relation to food security.

Women are playing key roles in achieving household food security

In rural areas participation in small-plot agriculture is important to food security, with women taking major responsibility for it as one aspect of a multiple livelihood strategy (see Aliber's analysis of the LFS). However, women also have other roles and responsibilities; namely food selection, food preparation, care and feeding of children, collection of water for hygiene and firewood for fuel. These activities impact on their time available for household agricultural production. Any intervention that enables them to increase the productivity of their time spent on farming activities, and to

spend less time on routine household tasks is likely to be most effective in increasing agricultural output.

Urban agriculture is often done mainly by middle-aged and elderly women and is limited to the production of crops in home gardens, open urban spaces and group gardens. Thus, interventions that promote urban agriculture should be geared especially to addressing the needs of women. Interventions may serve different functions to assist in socialisation and the building of social networks; this is extremely valuable for the women involved in these projects.

Food security policy interventions are often generic rather than engendered

The vision of the Integrated Food Security Strategy (IFSS) reflects noble intentions, but also reflects a gap in relation to the role played by gender in ensuring such access. On the one hand, the IFSS (DOA 2002: 16) acknowledges that “within the household, food insecurity often affects the more vulnerable members of the family, namely children and women” and that the “costs associated with food-insecurity at the intra-household level relate to slow educational development (often of female children), stunting, etcetera”. On the other hand, the programmatic and policy interventions it recommends do not particularly use gender as a tool for analysis and development. For example, while the IFSS recommends improving household food production, trade and distribution, the policy interventions it suggests are generic in nature, and do not take into consideration the complex ways in which gender, together with race and class and other social identities, interact to impact on women’s (and girl-children’s) access to safe and nutritional food in households and communities; as such, they do not outline ways in which programmes might address the challenges created by gender inequality in food production, distribution and access. In addition, while it refers to universal access to resources and to the need to eradicate inequalities, unless the gender dimension is explicitly spelled out and a clear link is made to the Gender Policy Framework, these concerns cannot be assumed to include addressing gender inequality.

HIV and AIDS interact negatively with food security

South Africa is reported to have the highest number of HIV-infected persons in the world, with about 5.5 million people living with HIV (UNAIDS & WHO 2007). The combination of HIV and AIDS and food insecurity is a double edged sword.

At one level, affliction with HIV and AIDS can increase vulnerability to food insecurity. HIV and AIDS exacerbate food insecurity by acting as a long-term stressor that typically affects the economically active household members. It directly reduces their inability to seek employment or remain employed, thus negatively affecting household income and the means to purchase food. Afflicted people may be ostracised with the result that they and/or their families food security status is negatively affected as social support networks fail to function. The ability of afflicted persons to work in household food gardens is often reduced as the disease progresses. Caregivers within the household may need to reduce the time they spend on food production or in employment as the demands for care increase over time. HIV infection occurs amongst parents and working age adults before children and can thus erode the ability of households to provide adequate food and nutrition for children. Antiretroviral therapy may increase the appetite of the patient and result in other

members of the household consuming less food, thereby worsening an already precarious situation.

At another level, food insecurity has the potential to increase one's exposure to HIV and AIDS and to decrease the ability to cope with the disease in a variety of ways. Females from food insecure households appear to be more vulnerable to infection, as food insecurity may increase the likelihood that women and girls engage in transactional sex in order to generate an income to purchase food for their families. This activity increases their risk of exposure to HIV.

Food insecurity is associated with the consumption of poor-quality diets, and lower macro- and micronutrient intakes. Nutrient inadequacies are responsible for numerous health problems as they compromise the immune system. A weakened immune system and malnutrition not only increases fatigue and decreases physical activity in HIV-infected persons but can increase the progression from HIV to AIDS.

Food and nutrition security are important for ameliorating the effects of HIV infection. A nutritionally balanced diet can enable HIV-infected persons to live longer and healthier lives and continue to be economically active. Such diets are important for the effectiveness of antiretroviral therapy.

4. Conclusion

The papers produced as part of this project review what is known about household food security status nationally. Some clear directions for further research emerge.

Given the seeming depth of household food insecurity, it is urgent that a food security target be identified within the overall objective of reducing poverty, with clear policy directions in support. The future development path depends considerably on the achievement of an acceptable level of human development.

It is urgent that an affordable and regular national system be set up to monitor food security status. There is a need for more reliable nationally representative data to monitor and evaluate household food security status at the national level. There is also a need for more localised studies to interpret the causes and implications of household food insecurity in different contexts and at different levels. Such studies will contribute to a better understanding of the national data and permit evidence-based policy decisions. The most efficient immediate approach would involve the inclusion of a special food security module in the General Household Survey. This would offer a low cost approach to drawing together data on food consumption, consumer choice, aligned to other household information in a large annual population survey.

Very little is known about household food producers. While the Quarterly Labour Force Survey offers information on the number of producers, it does not offer information that would contribute to an understanding of why producers succeed or fail, what policies are assisting, and whether it makes a meaningful contribution to household nutrition and/or cost savings. Opportunities and threats need to be better

understood and appropriate interventions developed to support household-level production.

Some initial policy ideas emerge from this initial work, with implications for future research.

An improved system of social protection that stabilises food consumption is needed. Deep chronic hunger must be eradicated, and we believe this is mostly experienced by households without any wage earner. However, under-nutrition is a very serious, widespread but under-recognised national challenge. This can be chronic, or transitory. A large proportion of the population live in poverty, even working families. The loss of a job or financial pressures from funerals and other family commitments can easily throw a family that is near the poverty line to a position that is on the breadline. Some aspects of a social protection system involves ensuring receipt of social grants where households qualify, strategies to reduce and/or stabilise food prices, education for poor families to better plan their food purchases, and food gardens and 'soup kitchens'.

Lowering the cost of food and better consumer education should enable households to consume more diverse and nutritionally adequate foods. Households evidently purchase 70–90% of their food supplies from supermarkets and major retailers. While supermarkets dominate agro-food value chains, some of their practices might be sustaining high food prices rather than ensuring food is affordable. A clearer understanding of food value chains and other structural constraints is required in order to formulate appropriate interventions. This could involve a political-economic analysis of the systems involved in ensuring food access at multiple scales.

Extending social grants to eligible households is likely to considerably improve the food security status of hungry adults and children. This might reduce distress in the medium term, but the underlying issues can only be addressed through longer term sustainable solutions based on enhancing the prospects of employment and strengthening livelihoods. The present context of economic recession and uncertainty about the future may reduce the potential impact of market-based solutions.

Small-scale and subsistence agriculture might be one option to contribute to incomes and/or savings, as well as to encourage food diversification. Although 2.5 million households engage in this activity, they do not receive much attention from policy makers. More context-specific support is required to strengthen own production of food, ideally low-cost, low-input and of high nutritional value.

In order to meet the household food gaps, a combination of factors are employed by women and girls. These must be supported by the policy framework and subsequent interventions. Consequently, gender needs to be more strongly foregrounded as a feature of the policy framework; more targeted programmes focused on female-headed households require attention. This can be achieved if the gendered roles in achieving household food security are better understood.

The negative interactions between food security and HIV and AIDS are a serious concern. At household level South Africa's food security strategy must consider the bidirectional impact of these interactions. Understanding these interactions will determine the context-specific support required and the effectiveness of programmes

to reduce the spread of HIV, support people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA) and address food insecurity in such household.

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