

OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT FOOD SECURITY CRISIS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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1 Introduction

NALEDI is aware of various initiatives to identify and track livelihood strategies within South Africa, including through the use of:

- Large panel data surveys (e.g. Roberts, 2001)
- Community-based rehabilitation after hospital treatment for severe malnutrition (e.g. Sanders et al, unpublished)
- District surveillance systems (e.g. Wittenberg and Collison, 2001)
- Qualitative interviews and focus groups (e.g. ILO, 2001)

The mammoth, but worthwhile, task of assembling a coherent and comprehensive picture of livelihood strategies and the impact of shocks from these and other sources is a major research exercise that goes beyond NALEDI's capabilities. NALEDI is also not a specialist in analysing the socio-economic impact of HIV/AIDS. While the HSRC paper (Aliber and Modiselle, 2002) focuses on detailed aspects of household food insecurity in South Africa and other reports focus on the impact of HIV/AIDS (e.g. Booysen and Bachmann, 2002), this report takes as its starting point that affordable quality food is one of South Africa's key short-term problems, with long-term structural dimensions. This report therefore focuses on policy and implementation issues related to food security in South Africa under three headings:

1. The origins of present day food security interventions
2. Existing policy, its implementation and impact
3. Mobilising toward the 'right to food'

2 The origins of present day food security interventions

Tables 1 and 2 show a set of indicators of poverty and malnutrition at different points in South Africa's history. The following issues are worth noting upfront:

- the scale of the measured food security (and poverty) problem is so large that there has been an on-going disagreement about the extent to which food insecure households should be targeted with support programmes as opposed to using macro-economic price controls or general consumer subsidies
- under apartheid, the state legitimised targeted programmes by arguing that the sheer magnitude of the indicators demonstrated that the measures did not reflect reality accurately (see Bernstein, 1994)
- few of the indicators have been monitored consistently over time, however, there appears to be an increase in absolute poverty when this has been done (see NIEP, 2002)

¹ NALEDI is a non-governmental organisation, which undertakes labour and economic research (see www.naledi.org.za).

- micro-nutrient deficiencies are widespread amongst children which raises questions about food quality, sanitation, parasitic infections and diet (see Sanders and McLachlan, 1997)
- Attempts to improve targeting through identifying the chronically poor are still in their early stages (see Aliber, 2003)

Table 1: Food insecurity and absolute poverty indicators

Poverty measure	Period 1	Period 2	Source
<i>Individuals (millions)</i>			
MSL	1989 – 16.3		RSA, 1992a
2000 kcal/day	1994 – 14.8		PSLSD, 1994
BMR (MLL)	1994 – 17		ANC, 1994
Food poor	1995 – 18.2	1999 – 19.2	NIEP, 2002
Orshansky poor	1995 – 23.8	1999 – 25.3	NIEP, 2002
UNDP poor	1995 – 21.1	1999 – 22.2	NIEP, 2002
World Bank poor	1995 – 14.2	1999 – 16.7	NIEP, 2002
Traditional poor	1995 – 31.8	1999 – 32.4	NIEP, 2002
Chronically poor migrants	2000 – 0.25 to 0.5		Aliber, 2003
Street homeless	2000 – 0.02 to 0.1		Aliber, 2003
AIDS orphans	2000 – 0.371	2010 – 1.9	Aliber, 2003
R401 per adult eq	2001 – 21.1		Taylor, 2002
<i>Households (millions)</i>			
Chronically poor rural	2000 – 1		Aliber, 2003
Female-headed	2000 – 0.767		Aliber, 2003
Disabled	2000 – 0.038		Aliber, 2003
Elderly	2000 – 0.378		Aliber, 2003
AIDS families	2000 – 0.06	2010 – 0.54	Aliber, 2003

Table 2: Child malnutrition indicators

Malnutrition measure	Period 1 1994	Period 2 1999	Source
Wasting	2.6% of 6-71 months	3.7% of 1-9 years	SAVACG, 1995 and NFCS, 2000
Stunting	22.9% of 6-71 months	21.6% of 1-9 years	SAVACG, 1995 and NFCS, 2000
Micro-nutrients		% of children 1-3 Years < 2/3 RDA	NFCS, 2000
Energy		45	
Zinc		86	
Calcium		65	
Iron		79	
Vitamin C		70	
Vitamin A		65	

It is necessary to understand that South Africa's food production and marketing system changed fundamentally in the late 1980s as producer subsidies were gradually withdrawn, price controls removed, consumer subsidies scrapped and Value Added Tax added. The key turning point between the two systems was in 1990/1991 (see Figure 1).

- a) In the era of subsidies and price controls, food price inflation was more stable and consistently below non-food inflation (as much as 8% below in the late 1980s).
- b) However, after imposing VAT and withdrawing consumer subsidies in 1991, the 1992/1993 drought and then further deregulation, there was a dramatic and volatile upswing to the point that, in December 2002, food price inflation exceeded overall inflation by almost 10%.
- c) Even with comparatively good weather since complete deregulation in 1997, there have only been measured food price decreases of less than 0.5% in 7 out of 70 months.

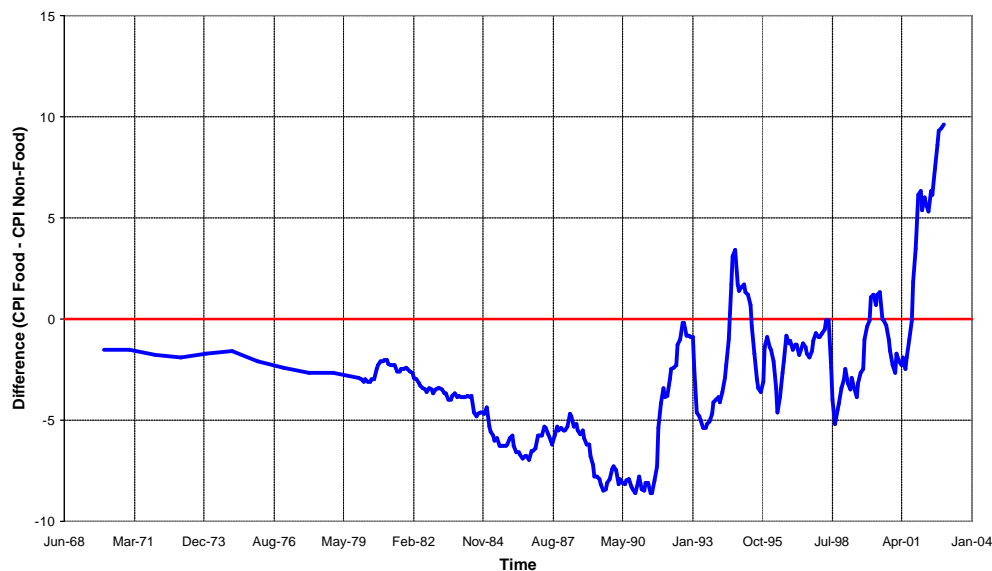


Figure 1: The difference between food and non-food price inflation, January 1970 – December 2002

Source: StatsSA Time Series Data

Related to the changes in agricultural policy, in the late 1980s, the NP government initiated several investigations into nutrition and poverty, which eventually culminated in a treasury allocation of R220 million in 1990/1991. This programme was then expanded into the National Nutrition and Social Development Programme, with an annual budget of R400 million mostly being spent on food assistance (see McLachlan and Marshall, 1995).

As mentioned earlier, the figure of 16.3 million black people below the poverty line in 1989 was not taken seriously by the former government. The then Department of Agriculture (see RSA, 1992a) developed a food and nutrition strategy that steered clear of generalised consumer subsidies and fundamentally restructuring white farming in favour of a range of other targeted supply-side measures as follows:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Major restructuring of property and production relations in white farming | X |
| 2. Diversify out of maize into oilseeds and soya | √ |
| 3. Reduce concentrated ownership and control of big food distribution companies | ? |
| 4. Target groups for nutrition interventions | √ |
| 5. Fortify staple foods | ? |
| 6. General consumer subsidy on staple foods | X |
| 7. Skills-training and asset-creating employment generation | ? |
| 8. DBSA type farmer-support programmes | √ |
| 9. NGO schemes (e.g. vegetable gardens) | √ |

The targets that were set included 2.3 million children and pregnant and lactating women and a proportion of the 1.15 million persons receiving state aid in 1989, of whom 580 000 were black pensioners (Bernstein, 1994).

Other reports that formed part of the suite of investigations (RSA, 1992b and RSA, 1992c) emphasised the efficiency gains that may result from deregulating agriculture. Deregulation, it was argued, would ensure that ‘sufficient supplies of food at affordable and internationally competitive prices are available at the household level’ (RSA, 1992b). A limited investigation of major food industry chains and rising food prices failed to identify specific guilty parties and argued that deregulation would increase competition and lower food prices (see RSA, 1992c). The emphasis at the time was on increasing supply-side efficiency through liberalisation without much attention to boosting the purchasing power of poor households.

As Bernstein (1994) pointed out, this emphasis on efficiency did not match the sentiment of the 1992/1993 ‘drought relief’ package, where 70% of R3.4 billion went into supporting white farmers by easing their debts and propping up large co-operatives before they converted to companies (see Amin and Bernstein, 1996).

In the 1992/1993 context, the Mass Democratic Movement played an important role in policy-making on food security. Three successes deserve attention:

1. the 1992 VAT campaign which succeeded in zero-rating some basic foods
2. the Consultative Forum on Drought and Rural Development’s (CFDRD) role in pushing for an early warning system for food security and a national nutritional surveillance system
3. the CFDRD’s role in evaluating the National Nutrition and Social Development Programme

The Marketing of Agricultural Products Act of 1996 formalised the fundamental change in the way that food industries were expected to operate. Previously, subsidies taken from the tax system were provided to a limited number of large-scale producers. The new 1996 marketing system removed subsidies to producers and proposed a shift to consumer subsidies instead.

However, through GEAR, the reduction in producer subsidies was matched by a proportionate increase in consumer subsidies (despite the old-age-pension and other social security payments). Indeed, since the 1996 Act was passed, statutory levies have been collected from consumers to pay for several business driven research and development projects with questionable benefits for lower income consumers.

In the decade following the late 1980s, the South African government accepted most of the agricultural policy advice from agricultural economists from South Africa, Britain and the United States (Jones, 1998; Duncan, 1999). Until recently, most statements about the effects of market based agricultural reform have been upbeat. The South African experiment has even been held up as a model that the rest of southern and eastern Africa should replicate (Bayley, 2000).

However, now that the region has experienced drought conditions and the exchange rate has been given a shock, the behaviour of South Africa's market-based food production, distribution and pricing system has become more transparent. It is already clear that in times of adverse regional weather and exchange rate depreciations food prices rise well beyond the point at which they are affordable to the working poor and destitute (in South Africa and SADC states). Furthermore, food insecurity can increase very rapidly as negative exchange rate movements or predictions of adverse weather get translated into increased retail food prices very soon after the news breaks. When the exchange rate appreciated again, all sorts of reasons are provided for why retail prices remain sticky-upwards.

In the past, government absorbed a large measure of the price risk resulting from adverse weather, adverse macro-economic conditions and export losses. It used taxes to maintain producer prices and write-off debts incurred by the control boards and the co-operatives (who were the boards' sole agents). The new marketing system is designed to leave the private sector to 'manage its risk' without government interference (or risk). If 'managing price risk' results in increased consumer prices, the government envisaged that it would deliver adequate social security support to desperate households.

However, in the absence of a robust and speedy social security system and any implementation of available mechanisms to keep food affordable², levels of hunger and malnutrition have undoubtedly increased from the outrageously high levels inherited in 1994 (see Makgetla and Watkinson, 2002). In the immediate-term, it is has been left up to charity, religious and welfare organisations to address the worst effects of the current crisis³, while the state tries to moves more quickly to increase

² One major legal instrument available to the state in terms of current law is a provision allowing for export levies in the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act of 1996. As a PHD conducted by an employee of the National Chamber of Milling has demonstrated, it may not make sense to introduce an export levy without re-introducing final retail and wholesale price controls. In other words, if the export levy is imposed, maize grain will cost less for grain buyers, but there is no obligation on millers or sales outlets to pass on this cost decrease in the final maize meal price, hence the logic for re-introducing price controls along the entire industry chain.

³ The reach and content of programmes run by faith based organisations, charities and other non-governmental organisations could not be fully assessed. In the last year, many groups that organise food parcels and soup kitchens have had to raise additional funds to deal with increased food prices (e.g. one programme cost R1700 a year ago and now costs R5000). Should prices remain as high as

access to social security.⁴ Given the increase in government scrutiny of the food and retail industry, there has also been some scope for ‘moral suasion’. Tiger Brands made an early commitment to supply maize meal in the Eastern Cape and were followed more recently by Premier and Metcash.⁵

However, as COSATU and NALEDI have argued in various reports, since food makes up such a high percentage of expenditure of lower income groups (see Figure 2), to address poverty and inequality, a new comprehensive social security system must be accompanied by an increased role for the state in regulating the food industry. Otherwise, increased social security payments leak into firms with an ability to accumulate abnormal profits. This implies increasing the resources and accountability of those parts of the state that deal with the industry chain. In turn, this ties into the government’s stated objective of prioritising agriculture and food processing as major job creating industries as well as the need for agrarian reform.

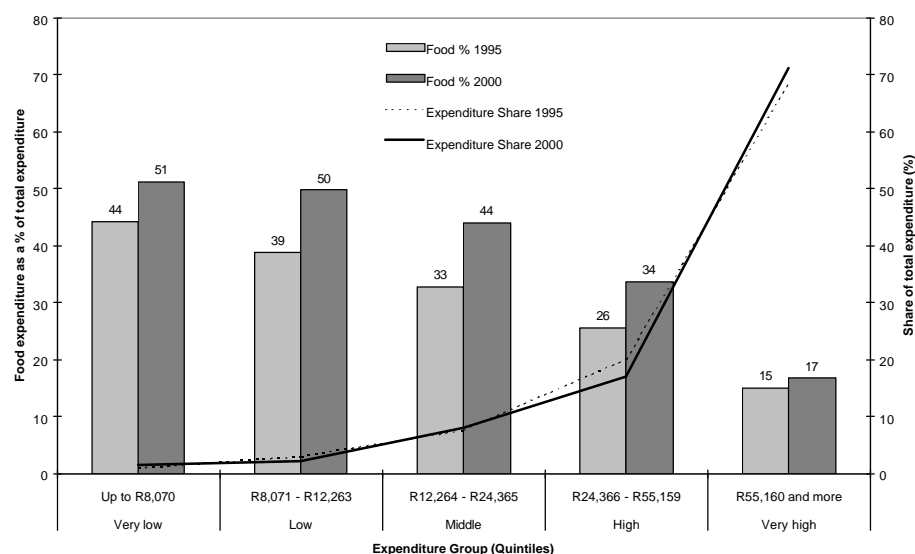


Figure 2: The percentage of annual household expenditure spent on food, 1995-2000

Source: Stats SA, 2002a (CPI, Metropolitan and other urban areas)

they are or increase further, many organisations may be forced to cut down the reach of their programmes or reduce the content of the food parcels they provide.

⁴ Research work performed in the Eastern Cape has highlighted some of the problems bedevilling access to the social security system. In areas where government departments are badly under-resourced (i.e. transport and basic office equipment problems) access to the social security system is much worse. At NEDLAC, COSATU recommended that all social partners take urgent steps to increase awareness of social security grants, especially the child support grant. However, since identity books and birth certificates present the biggest constraints limiting access in all areas, attention should be focused on the Department of Home Affairs.

⁵ On the 26th of October super maize meal cost R3.90 per kg and special maize meal cost R3.50 per kg. On the 10th of October, Premier Foods and Metcash announced that 80 000 bags of 12.5kg ‘Yiyo Lena’ sifted maize meal would be made available at R25.99 or R2.10 per kg. For those who literally can’t afford to care about quality, and can make it to Metcash’s rural stores this looks like a fair deal for the poor. However, if you compare prices for the same quality of maize meal, the poorest of the poor are still paying 45% more for sifted maize meal than they did one year ago. According to Statistics South Africa, in October last year, 12.5kg of sifted maize meal cost R17.95 (i.e. you can buy a bag of sifted maize meal for about R8 extra now). Furthermore, the Metcash sacrifice of 80 000 bags only amounts to 0.34% of all white maize processed for human consumption in an average month.

3 Existing policy- its implementation and impact

A reasonably comprehensive list of food security initiatives currently operated by the South African government is shown in the table below:

Programmes of different government departments with a major impact on food security

Department	Programme/Function
Department of Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated Nutrition Programme • HIV/AIDS related food programmes • Food fortification • Regulation of Food Quality, Safety and Labelling
Department of Agriculture and Land Affairs (including its agencies the ARC, NAMC and Land Bank)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various agricultural credit and production programmes • Land reform programme • Regulating Agricultural Products Standards • Monitoring the effects of deregulation • Monitoring food prices
Department of Trade and Industry (including its agencies the BTT, CSIR, SABS and IDC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trade policy and tariff regime • Supply side-measures for food enterprises • Trade metrology • Consumer protection
Department of Social Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grants and pensions • Social insurance • Job creation projects
Department of Labour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum wage determinations • Enforcement of labour laws
Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental regulations • National Action Plan to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought
Department of Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VAT • Other taxes
Department of Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Port and rail tariffs • Rural roads
Department of Water Affairs and Forestry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catchment management and water pricing • Dams and irrigation schemes • Sanitation and waste-water systems

The fragmentation of food security interventions has led the National Department of Agriculture to propose that the activities of different government departments should be integrated. The first draft Food Security Bill attempts to achieve a greater degree of integration between government departments on the issue of food security through:

- reporting of food security related activities by all relevant departments to a lead department (understood to be Agriculture and Land Affairs);
- establishing a food security project proposal, evaluation and disbursement system using funds in the Agricultural Debt Management Account.⁶

Some of the direct food security interventions that already exist include Value Added Tax (VAT) zero-rating, trade policy and tariffs, support for food production, food quality control and standards, food fortification, the integrated nutrition programme and state pensions and grants. Key lessons related to these initiatives include:

1. VAT zero rating affords some benefit to low income households, but these benefits have been eroded by a lack of compliance by business and shifts in consumption expenditure (i.e. the VAT zero-rated basket has stayed the same since 1994, while consumption patterns have shifted significantly)
2. Trade and tariff policy has an important impact on domestic food prices by delivering real increases in protection to producers at the same time as encouraging a large-scale shift to food exports. Trade and tariff policy institutions should reconsider the dispensation for basic foods.
3. Although support for sustainable production by resource poor farmers has increased, overall government support for food production continues to be heavily biased in favour of large-scale commercial farming. A private sector driven approach to land and agricultural development will further entrench this pattern.
4. Deregulation has led to a decrease in the state's capacity to control food quality and ensure that food standards are met by the private sector
5. The impasse on food fortification is creating scope for problematic nutritional claims and pricing by different food companies
6. The School Food Programme is suffering from an inadequate budget and a lack of coherence when it comes to procurement policy
7. State pensions and grants are not keeping pace with food price inflation. While the proposals for expanding and re-orienting the current social security system are valid, additional state intervention is required to prevent consumer subsidies from being eroded by increased food prices

Given the a large number of people in South Africa that continue to secure a livelihood through agricultural production (see Table 1) and the sensitivity of SAFEX to weather reports, the starting point of South African agricultural and food policy should be an analysis of climatic uncertainty and climate change. The attention of government and a broad range of stakeholders should be drawn to the way in which climatic uncertainty and climate change affects access to water and sustainable production by micro through to very large agricultural producers.

⁶ In January 2002, the official in charge of drafting the Bill, put the figure in the account at R1.2 billion. In June this year, the South African Human Rights Commission held a workshop where a second draft of the Food Security Bill was discussed. The Bill is officially embargoed.

Table 1: The percentage of households that farm in order to supply food for the household

<i>Province</i>	<i>Total number of households</i>	<i>Number of households farming for main source of food</i>	<i>% of households farming for main source of food</i>	<i>Number of households farming for supplementary food</i>	<i>% of households farming for supplementary food</i>
Western Cape	1,067,117	3,241	0%	12,900	1%
Gauteng	3,082,113	17,338	1%	51,329	2%
Northern Cape	191,287	4,569	2%	8,291	4%
North West	784,633	14,591	2%	52,544	7%
Free State	693,196	30,219	4%	65,450	9%
KwaZulu-Natal	2,047,498	111,249	5%	315,062	15%
Mpumalanga	643,221	54,511	8%	85,550	13%
Eastern Cape	1,434,280	169,765	12%	277,322	19%
Limpopo	1,001,423	195,402	20%	272,568	27%
Total	10,944,768	600,885	5%	1,141,016	10%

Source: StatsSA Labour Force Survey, 2000:2

Once the boundaries of favourable and unfavourable climate scenarios have been established for the short, medium and long term, the scale and character of the budget can be established in a way that will enable government to meet its obligations in terms of the ‘right to food’.

Our analysis of structure and conduct in the food industry suggests that South Africa’s free market approach to food production and distribution will be a dramatic failure in a time of drought. The current system provides the mechanisms for government and the private sector to displace their risks onto the urban and rural poor.

In this context, basic options for increasing food security include:

1. Amplifying the voice and power of those who are directly affected
2. Income redistribution to households in need
3. Regulating the private sector to ensure adequate production levels and affordable quality food
4. Ensuring household food security directly through promoting sustainable food production and land reform
5. Ensuring household food security through protecting and creating jobs more generally (and improving their quality)

There are two approaches that may assist in bringing these options to life and ensuring that they do not become mutually exclusive:

- **Increasing awareness of the right to food:** ensuring that the state meets its constitutional obligations in terms of the ‘right to food’ through legal representation and contestation
- **Increasing awareness of political economy dynamics:** ensuring that food policy formulation and implementation is inclusive

The lessons learnt by the Consultative Forum on Drought and Rural Development should be revisited.

The main changes in budget and government capacity that follow from the analysis presented in above include:

IN THE SHORT-TERM

On the demand side:

1. Substantially increasing the value of state pensions and grants through expanding the number of people that qualify. The government's proposal to extend the reach and quality of the school-feeding scheme will be supported, but there is also a need for targeted community feeding schemes in hotspot areas within villages and townships. Programmes and projects that assist child headed families and people with HIV/AIDS to access food should also receive increased support. Support measures should be indexed to consumer price inflation **for low-income groups and take account of prices in rural areas.**

On the supply side:

Government proposed investigating strategic grain reserves, expediting tariffs, and has established a food chain monitoring committee. While these proposals are welcome, there is a need for the following additions:

2. The Competition Commission should be enabled to: a) monitor SAFEX and investigate allegations of big trader dominance / violations of rules, b) investigate market imperfections within key food industry chains (from farming through to retail), and c) conduct special investigations of companies reaping abnormal profits.
3. Government should intervene directly to limit hoarding and profiteering in the food chain. This requires the establishment of a regulatory framework to track prices, ownership, control, profits and storage of staple foods.
4. Increasing support to producer and consumer co-operative type organisations at a community level
5. Revising trade and tariff policy for basic foods
6. In order to review key strategies on food and agriculture, and to ensure broad public support, NEDLAC agreed in 2002 to prioritise a Food Security and Jobs Summit. This process should be initiated as soon as possible.

IN THE LONGER TERM

Food-price stability and household food security require substantial improvements in national and regional maize production, with much broader structures of ownership and control throughout the value chain. A critical step is agrarian reform, increasing the access of the rural poor to land as well as other inputs, including water. Co-

operatives provide an important way to support smallholders and enhance their access to capital and markets. In more detail this could include:

1. Urgently re-orienting the agricultural research and development system to support small scale producers and the land reform programme
2. Rapidly scaling up the production of seeds and other appropriate technologies for distribution through a mobilised extension service
3. Increasing the budget to support land reform beneficiaries and **urgently** building capacity through skills development and the construction of storage and marketing infrastructure/system
4. Initiating a substantial public works programmes related to combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought
5. Increasing the budget devoted to ensuring food safety and food quality and urgently improving co-ordination between different government departments

4 Mobilising toward the ‘right to food’

A broad based campaign is required to raise awareness of the ‘right to food’ and clarify the roles and responsibilities of government, donors, civil society and regional institutions. Although there have been recent improvements in the coherence of the programmes of a diverse range of civil society organisations at a national level, this needs to be extended to provincial and local levels with the support of donor organisations. This will result in the voice and power of those who are directly affected being amplified.

In terms of the constitution, the state is required to respect, fulfil, promote and protect the rights of the poor to access food, which in turn requires access to land, social security, water, shelter, health care, education, decent jobs and spiritual sites. However, in terms of a legal approach to ensuring the ‘right to food’:

“... As a rule (but subject to the reasonableness criterion), the court will not consider whether other more desirable or favourable measures could have been adopted or whether public money could have been better spent” (Taylor, 2002, Page 52)

Civil society, therefore has an essential role to play in the implementation of support programmes by:

- a) demonstrating how sustainable support can be delivered in practice
- b) offering suggestions on how to improve government policy, strategy, budgets and delivery

Support for a campaign on the ‘right to food’ should be accompanied by further research on food security and livelihood strategies at a local level, especially in health districts and areas where disease prevalence and malnutrition have reached chronic proportions. In selecting areas, due regard should also be given to the plight of farm-workers, especially on farms where they are threatened with strategic evictions and face serious occupational health and safety risks.

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