

**PILOT STUDY ON METHODS TO MONITOR
HOUSEHOLD-LEVEL FOOD SECURITY**

for the

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1 Background and Terms of Reference

Food prices in South Africa have increased so substantially since the second half of 2001 as to warrant focused attention from government, especially regarding the effects of price increases on low-income households. Currently, government is pursuing a number of initiatives, including measures to mitigate the price increases, increasing levels of social security grants, and monitoring the supply chain to establish what are the factors that most contribute to food price inflation. In addition, the National Department of Agriculture (NDA) has proposed to develop a system of monitoring the impact of food price volatility on household-level food security, and in particular for gauging the consequences of food price volatility for low-income households. The Human Sciences Research Council was approached to assist in the design and piloting of such a monitoring system.

The terms of reference for this project, accordingly, are to begin to identify and develop methods for conducting an assessment of the impact of food price changes, and to recommend alternative strategies for how such assessments could be undertaken on a regular basis. A by-product of this work is a set of initial results from the pilot exercises as to the impact of food price changes on low-income households. All told, the methodology, with slight variations, was tried in six different locations. However, it must be stressed that the overall sample was too small to draw statistical inferences, nor were respondents chosen according to a proper random sampling scheme. Therefore the results, however engaging, must be interpreted with caution.

2 Methodological Approach

The methodological approach adopted for the study consisted of three main tools. First and foremost was the household survey based upon a structured questionnaire. The other two tools included focus group interviews and data collection from shops. These are presented in turn below, following brief discussions on: the general themes of observing change over time, distinguishing food price effects from other influences on low-income households, and sampling.

2.1 Detecting Change Over Time

A key aspect of the study design was to ascertain the impact on low-income households of the *change* in food prices. This presents a certain challenge, in that the study was undertaken at a single point in time rather than at different points in time. The approach therefore was to establish the situation both at the present time, and to rely on recall either to establish the situation at some previous time or to elicit an observation about how a situation has changed up to the present. Even though in most cases the past point of reference was only six months ago, this raises the usual concern about the accuracy of recall. We might suspect that the concerns about recall would be especially valid for questions of a quantitative nature, whereas for those inquiring as to qualitative changes over time, there would be little or no reason for concern.

Even so, it is important to stress that if the methodology presented below is adapted for regular monitoring, many of the retrospective questions can be dropped, because change over time will be tracked directly. Strategies for how this might be accomplished are discussed in Section 5.

2.2 Distinguishing the Effects of Food Price Changes From Other Influences

Change in food prices as experienced by households can be established relatively easily. However, it does not follow that all changes recorded in terms of quality and sufficiency of diet are a result of these price changes. Other influences could include change in employment status of household members, changes in household composition, availability of food from household production, etc.

The more that is known about these other possible influences, the more certain one can be about the actual impact of food price changes. This suggests that one tries to collect information about these other eventualities. Unfortunately, the number of possible alternative influences is almost infinite, and it is not possible to try to allow for all of them directly. Therefore, the approach adopted is two-fold. First, an attempt is made to capture two of the more significant alternative influences on diet/consumption, namely change in the household composition and own production. Second, a handful of open-ended questions are strategically placed to try to get explanations for changes that have been experienced. Answers to these open-ended questions should (and indeed do) reveal what is the proximate cause of the change in diet/consumption being experienced.

2.3 Sites and Sampling

Six sites were selected in all, three each in North West /Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, with two rural and one urban. The selection of sites was such as to ensure a diversity of conditions for the testing of the methodology. In Gauteng/Northwest, the urban site was Mamelodi, specifically Extension 11 of the 'Mandela' informal settlement, comprised largely of shack dwellings. The rural sites were Jericho and Stinkwater, moderately poor communities in different parts of former Bophuthatswana. In KwaZulu-Natal, the urban site was Umlazi township, a well-established township in Durban with good access to services and transport, and largely aligned with the ANC. One of the rural sites was Ntambanana, possibly the most impoverished community among all six sites, with a very high incidence of unemployment, no electricity or running water, and very poor transport links to other points. The main form of employment is as farmworkers on nearby commercial farms. By contrast, the other rural site in KwaZulu-Natal, Umzinto, is relatively close to Durban, has a high proportion of educated households, and generally good infrastructure and access to services.

For the purposes of this exercise no attempt was made to implement a rigorous sampling procedure (e.g. random sampling or stratified random sampling) for the selection of respondent households. The reason for not following a rigorous sampling procedure was that in any event the sample aimed for was far too small to allow for any sort of statistical inference. Moreover, this study introduces nothing new or different in terms of how to draw a sample. Many research organisations in South Africa are able to draw random samples at community level, thus the onus of this exercise was not to test a sampling methodology. Nonetheless, we return to the issue of sampling in section 5 on recommendations.

2.4 Primary Data Tool – The Household Survey

The approach developed for the purposes of assessing the impact of food price changes at the household level, is based in large measure on the literature on monitoring household-level food security and diet. According to the literature¹, there are five principal approaches to measuring/monitoring dietary sufficiency, household-level food security or impacts on household-level food security:

- Food intake – Measures of food intake attempt to accurately and comprehensively measure the consumption of calories and nutrients by an individual or members of a household over a finite period of time, usually 24 hours. This presumes an accurate quantification of all foods and beverages that are consumed, followed by a conversion into the calories and other nutrients by means of conversion tables. Strict application of this approach typically is usually taken to mean that the researcher spends the full period with the individual or household in order to observe and measure exactly what was consumed. However, a slightly less stringent alternative relies on recall, which over a 24-hour period is not necessarily too onerous.
- Anthropometry – Anthropometry uses weight, height, and other measures to determine if individuals – usually but not always infants and children - are appropriately developed for their age. This largely translates to a measure of adequate nutrition but

¹ Drawing especially on Hoddinot (1999), Labadarios *et al.* (2000), and Nel and Steyn (2002).

is also influenced by other factors that affect physical development, e.g. disease and parasites. Anthropometric studies typically require a high degree of skill to conduct and are often conducted within controlled environments such as clinics.

- Household caloric acquisition (also called the Quantitative food frequency approach) – This method also measures consumption of calories and nutrients over a finite period of time, but relies on the memory of the person principally responsible for preparing meals over a longer period of time. The period of recall is usually one or two weeks where actual amounts are sought, or up to six months where the respondent is prompted only to relate the 'average amounts' consumed. In either case the aim is to establish the levels of consumption of the main foodstuffs, which are then translated into intake data for calories and nutrients by means of conversion tables. This method is less exacting than the previous two because it relies more on communication and recall about principal foodstuffs and less on direct observation or precise recall about a large number of different items.
- Dietary diversity – The value of measuring dietary diversity is that, generally speaking, the more diverse a diet is, the more nutritious it is likely to be.² Measuring dietary diversity can therefore be a relatively inexpensive way of ascertaining the relative quality of an individual's or household's diet, and in fact can be as simple as counting the number of different foods consumed by household members, say over a period of one week. This method also relies on recall, but at most requires that respondents recall the frequency with which different foods are consumed, rather than the exact quantity. An obvious problem with this method is that some foods may be consumed of little nutritious value, but still be counted in the overall measure.
- Household coping strategies – Household coping strategies are those strategies adopted by households in reaction to an inability to acquire a satisfactory diet. The word "coping" may be not altogether appropriate, in that some of these strategies may not be positive so much as merely necessary, and the measurement may be of the nature of hunger rather than of ways of avoiding hunger.³ Questions about coping strategies probe whether households are compelled to substitute less-savoured foods for more-favoured foods; whether meals are reduced in size or are skipped; whether the household relies more or less on neighbours, relatives, and credit; etc. There are two over-riding advantages of this approach. First, it is very quick, because it hinges mainly on qualitative questions which can easily be posed in a multiple-choice format. And second, it directly explores issues of inherent importance, i.e. the extent to which the household is or is not able to cope, sometimes lending direct insights for policy (e.g. the importance of social networks and institutions, etc.). Some applications of this methodology involve the construction of an index, i.e. by assigning values to different answers, and then aggregating these values into a composite number which can be compared to that of other respondent households. As with other such indices based on qualitative information, the problem with this approach is that the weights are entirely arbitrary, and thus the inter-household comparisons are in fact difficult to

² There is also a strong correlation between the diversity of one's diet and one's socio-economic status, though this relationship is clearly attenuated in cases where the household engages in significant subsistence production.

³ The National Food Consumption Survey of children in South Africa employed a tool called a "Hunger Scale", which is essentially a list of questions about reducing and skipping meals.

justify. The index approach was not adopted for the present exercise, though in principle it could be explored.

As suggested, the various approaches have different strengths and weaknesses. The table below, based on Hoddinot (1999), summarises these for all except anthropometry, where the different methods are indicated in the columns, and the criteria according to which they are being compared are indicated in the rows.

Table 1 - Comparison of methods of monitoring household food security

	Food intake	HH caloric acquisition	Dietary diversity	Coping strategies
Data collection costs	High	Moderate	Low	Low
Time required for analysis	High	Moderate	Low	Low
Skill level required	High	Moderately high	Moderately low	Low
Susceptibility to mis-reporting	Low	Moderate	Low	High

Hoddinot goes on to say that the food intake method in particular is rarely feasible in the context of monitoring the impact of development projects, because of the high data collection costs and skill level required. Studies that include either food intake or anthropometry are usually undertaken by experts in health sciences who are likely to be able to make use of such detailed information (often looking for specific nutrient deficiencies, for example.) In developing countries, such studies are typically large-scale initiatives sponsored by national health departments and/or international organisations.⁴

For our purposes, both the food intake method and anthropometry were considered too onerous from the perspective of cost and time, and therefore only the other three methods were used. These were adapted and developed as follows:

- Household caloric acquisition – In the pure application of this approach, the consumption of main food stuffs is recalled over a one or two week period, and translated into the per capital consumption of calories (and sometimes other nutrients) by means of food tables. For the purposes of this exercise, the period of recall was changed to one month on the grounds that, in many if not most South African communities, purchase of major foodstuffs tends to be undertaken on a monthly basis. Second, there was no attempt to convert back to calories, on the grounds that this would have in itself constituted a large amount of work that could not be justified by the small size of this project.⁵ The basic consumption data, however, were captured, and this additional work could still be done.

Because the present study calls for information about change over time, questions about consumption of major foodstuffs (in particular, mielie meal, sugar, rice, and bread), was asked both for the present time and for six months ago. This part of the questionnaire was

⁴ The National Food Consumption Survey of children aged 1-9 in South Africa, which was conducted in 1999, involved a consortium of 9 South African universities and was sponsored by the Department of Health as well as UNICEF, USAID, and the Micronutrient Initiative.

⁵ In short, the food tables would have to be constructed, and the norms established. There is a fair amount of secondary data in South Africa from which both of these steps could be done, but even so the amount of work involved would be non-trivial.

also used to capture changes in the prices paid for these foodstuffs over time, as well as changes in the pattern of purchase (i.e. frequency of purchase and quantity of purchased) and quality. These features are of great importance to discovery if, as prices increase, households are forced to purchase in smaller quantities more frequently, which usually means paying a higher unit cost even apart from general price increases. This part of the questionnaire is part 4.

- Dietary diversity – Dietary diversity can be captured in different ways. One way is to ask the respondent to indicate how many times different foods were consumed over a given period, say one or two weeks. The way in which dietary diversity was initially approached in the present study was to simply ask which foods had been consumed in the previous week by any household member, and then to try to record whether this food was consumed at home, at school, at work, or elsewhere. The reason for this approach was to try to understand the importance of meals provided at work or at school for support the diets of household members. However, this turned out to be excessively time consuming and complicated, and did not for example allow one to determine in any event whether food consumed at work or school, was provided by the employer or school, or merely consumed there. Therefore, the part of the exercise was amended to only ask what had been consumed, and then to indicate whether this food had been grown or produced by the household at home.

A long list of possible foods was compiled drawing on the list of foods indicated in the *Abstract of Agricultural Statistics*, and then supplemented with suggestions from the research team. Because of the length of the list, it is not practical to ask the respondent directly about each and every food, but rather to lead in which questions about kinds of foods (e.g. vegetables, meats), and then to encourage the respondent to identify any foods in this category that have been consumed in the previous week. Some foods were listed in more than one category on the questionnaire, for example potatoes, on the grounds that it was not known *a priori* whether respondents would consider them to belong to "vegetables" or "staples".

It was obviously not practicable to ask about dietary diversity to the same degree of detail for six months ago. Therefore, following completion of the dietary diversity questions that pertain to the present, three broad qualitative questions about change over time were posed, e.g. "Does your household eat more different kinds of vegetables or fewer than six months ago?" The dietary diversity part of the questionnaire is part 5.

- Household coping strategies – This part of the questionnaire drew heavily upon the food security module developed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for inclusion in various US-based surveys (Bickel *et al.*, 2000). In this module, questions are of three general types: those that interrogate the household's sense of uncertainty about its food security; those that examine dietary quality; and those that examine sufficiency of food consumption. In addition, the module asks questions both at the general level of the household, and again for children for those households who have children.

These basic elements were retained, however a number of adaptations and additions were made. First, the phrasing of the USDA module questions was changed significantly. The USDA questions were generally structured indirectly, i.e. the respondent is read a statement such as "we do not have enough food" and then asked to indicate the extent to

which the statement is true. This style of posing questions turned out to be cumbersome, and thus questions were posed in a more direct fashion (e.g. Does your household have enough food?). Second, a number of change-over-time questions were added, usually as follow-up questions to questions that asked about the situation at the present time.⁶ Third, a number of open-ended questions were added. These questions add depth to the entire survey exercise, but apart from their inherent value are important for determining whether the more numerous closed-ended questions are achieving their purpose. (The issue of whether or not open-ended questions should be included in any regular monitoring system is taken up in section 5.) And fourth, a number of additional questions relevant to the South African context were added, such as questions about relying on neighbours, buying food on credit, and collecting wild plants from the veld for consumption. The household coping strategy part of the questionnaire is part 6.

In addition to parts 4, 5, and 6 of the questionnaire, which more or less correspond to the household caloric intake, dietary diversity, and coping strategy methodologies, respectively, the household questionnaire has three other parts. Part 1 establishes basic household information, including the composition of the household, how many people in the household earn an income, and the composition of the household six months previously. This latter is critical because changes in quantities of household consumption over time might be influenced by changes in the household composition, and it is critical that this effect is not confused with other influences, e.g. changes in food prices.

Part 2 of the questionnaire pertains to the economic wealth or wellbeing of the household. This is critical because one would expect that wealthier households are less apt to be severely affected by changes in food prices. It is therefore important that one can at least approximately distinguish well off from poor households. An obvious way of attempting to do this would be to establish total household income or expenditure. The argument against this approach, however, is that *accurately* establishing either total household income or expenditure is extremely time-consuming. Accuracy of these measures typically requires that one ascertain all of the income streams or all of the household expenditures, and then aggregating, which to do well requires a great deal of time. An alternative approach is to rely on proxies for household wellbeing. This was done in two ways. First, a number of objective measures are recorded, including the materials from which the home is constructed and ownership of various assets. And second, the household is asked to rank itself relative to other households in the community (i.e. better off, worse off, or average), and then to explain in words why it ranked itself as it did. This latter technique, called "self-assessment", is known to be only moderately correlated to objective measures such as total household income, which is not to say that it is less accurate in any meaningful sense.

Finally, part 3 of the household questionnaire asks questions about the household's own production. The purpose of this part is two-fold. First, it is important to know whether the household produces any of its own food so that one can properly interpret the information about household purchases. In other words, one would not want to interpret a decline in quantity of food purchased as due to food price inflation, if in fact the underlying reason is that the household has harvested produce from its own fields. The second, related purpose of this part of the questionnaire is to examine to what extent household food production

⁶ "Is the household sometimes unable to afford to feed your child/children enough food?" followed by "Does this happen more or less often than 6 months ago?"

contributes to household food security. The present formulation of part 3 is minimalist, but it could in principle be made more elaborate. The costs of doing so are obvious, in that covering household production in detail could itself be the subject of a full questionnaire. It should be recalled that the dietary diversity checklist in part 5 of the questionnaire is also designed to capture information about household production, albeit only at the present point in time.

2.5 Secondary Data Tools – Focus Group Interviews and Data Collection from Shops

In addition to the household survey, two other data collection exercises were undertaken. In each of the six study sites, one or more focus group interviews were conducted, and two shops were selected for data collection.

There are two main rationales for conducting focus group interviews (FGIs). First, FGIs can help corroborate information collected through the household survey, or alternatively may point to weaknesses in the household questionnaire. And second, FGIs can be a potent source of information in their own right, especially in so far as they provide an opportunity to engage community members in their own analysis of the situation or problem at hand. There is a huge literature on the art of conducting FGIs. The approach adopted for the present exercise was to assemble a group of 8 to 15 community members, generally with the assistance of the traditional authority, and to gently lead the group through a discussion by posing open-ended questions. The 'discussion path' is shown in Appendix C. In the case of the urban sites, the strategy was to enlist the assistance of a leader of well-established government or civic institutions, such as a clinic or a community centre.

One of the key design issues for FGIs is whether their participants should be homogeneous or heterogeneous. The most frequent consideration in this regard is whether or not one can combine women and men in the same focus group, with the fear being that, rather than promoting fruitful dialogue, the presence of members of one gender (generally men) may inhibit the member of the other (generally women) from voicing their views. The extent to which this may happen depends in some measure on the issue being discussed, but also owes a lot to chance. For the purposes of this exercise, some focus groups were constituted of women only or men only, and others combined both men and women.

A typical FGI involves two researchers, a 'main moderator' who leads the discussion, and a 'scribe' who takes notes. However, for the study sites in KwaZulu-Natal, only one researcher conducted the FGIs, on the grounds that the researcher in question is highly experienced and is competent to perform both functions. (Notes taken during the interview are usually just mnemonics to assist the researcher write out more detailed notes following the interview.) A more purist but expensive alternative is to record the FGI with a cassette recorder, and then to translate and transcribe the entire interview. This method was not deemed necessary for the present exercise.

The purpose of collecting information from shops was to establish a more objective database about food price change, which could in turn be compared to information collected in the household survey. In addition, the interviews with shops were designed to elicit other sorts of trends, for example the frequency of selling on credit and changes in the predominant commodities sold. As the following section will discuss in some detail, the data collection

from shops proved far more problematic than expected, and the format of data collection changed substantially.

3 Findings Regarding Methodology for Monitoring Household Food Security

3.1 Household Survey

On the whole, the household survey worked very well and it is felt that it could form the core of any future monitoring exercise, although with some modification and adaptation. Before discussing some of the problem areas and suggestions for change, we touch on principles of questionnaire design. Specific recommendations for how to change the questionnaire are discussed in section 5.

Principles of good questionnaire design and performance in respect of

There are any number of textbook explanations of what constitutes good questionnaire design. For our purposes, we focus on four main principles and assess what did and did not go well with the household questionnaire (or parts of it) in light of these.

- Elicit differentiation – In order to be instructive, a questionnaire must elicit areas of differentiation between respondents. If the questionnaire is such that most respondents appear to be the same and think the same in most respects, then the researcher has learned very little, and cannot know for certain if in fact respondents *are* the same, or if the questionnaire is simply poorly designed. A corollary is that the subjects in the sample cannot be too homogeneous.
 - The questionnaire was largely successful in eliciting differentiation, as will be evident in the presentation of results in section 4.1.
 - The section on coping and coping strategies was especially successful in picking up a large degree of differentiation, as was the food diversity section.
 - An important exception was the set of questions about materials used in the construction of the house, which were meant to be proxies for household wealth. In practice these questions were of little value, because they did not in fact help distinguish respondents by wealth or well-being.
 - The set of questions about food prices is however rather different, in that the purpose of this section was to be able to calculate averages across respondents as to changes in food prices over time, which are not expected in any event to be person-specific.
- Demonstrate a meaningful degree of consistency – A questionnaire must build in a measure of redundancy so that there is minimum ambiguity as to the respondent's opinions or situation; i.e. it is important to ask things in more than one way. This also allows the respondent an opportunity to contradict himself. Except in cases where there may be deeper reasons for these contradictions, their presence is usually an indication that the questions are not being properly understood, implying that the quality of the information captured on the questionnaire is poor.
 - The results of the questionnaire indicate a large degree of consistency. This is evident in the relationships observed, for example, between the asset ownership questions and the subjective welfare self-ranking; among the

multiple choice questions in the coping and coping strategy section; and between the welfare questions and questions about dietary diversity.

- There is one glaring area of inconsistency, namely in the open-ended questions in the coping and coping strategy section. An example is between question 6.6a and the two questions which follow. Question 6.6a reads, "Are members of the household sometimes hungry, but don't eat because you can't afford enough food?", to which 57% answered 'never', 11% answered 'once this past month', and 25% answered 'at least once per week'. When asked whether the present situation in respect of hunger was better or worse than six months ago (6.6b), 48% said this occurred less often than six months ago. Among those who indicated that they experience hunger at least once per week, most indicated that the situation was better than six months ago, but the open-ended questions to 6.6c, which asked the respondent to explain this change, indicated that there was in fact much confusion, for example the person who simply answered "cannot cope". It would appear that the questions about change over time were often misinterpreted, whether because of inadequate training of enumerators or for some other reason is not clear.⁷ Specific recommendations for how to remedy this situation are given in section 5.
- Non-prejudicial sequencing and framing – Part of the success of a questionnaire in eliciting non-contradictory information from respondents lies in the manner in which questions are sequenced and framed. "Context effects" occur when the putting of a question or string of questions, predisposes the respondent to interpret subsequent questions in a different way than she would have had the sequence been different.
 - The main question in respect of how well the questionnaire was sequenced, is whether having the section of food prices prior to the section of coping and coping strategies, might have the effect of predisposing respondents to blame price changes as the reason for increased anxiety over food security. It is not possible to tell from the results of the survey whether this in fact happened, but in retrospect it would have been wiser to have reversed the sequence in which these sections occur in the questionnaire.
- Efficiency – Notwithstanding the need for a certain measure of redundancy, a questionnaire should not collect information greatly in excess of the end-user's needs. Sometimes however, this cannot be seen except in retrospect, because one is unsure in advance exactly how the information will be used. The pilot nature of this particular exercise is such that it is now much clearer what information one could dispense with in a future monitoring system.
 - There are three areas in the questionnaire that could almost certainly be shortened without reducing the value of the exercise. These could simply be reduced and thus render the questionnaire briefer to administer, which would mean less respondent fatigue and allow an enumerator to complete more interviews in a given period of time.

⁷ This also demonstrates the value of the open-ended questions, at least for the pilot phase.

- The first of these is the 'household table', which prompts the respondent to provide biographical details about each member of the household. While knowing the composition of a household is part and parcel of most surveys, in fact it is doubtful that this survey benefits from having nearly as much detail as was collected. It would probably suffice to ask the number of children and adults, now and six months ago.
- The 'food calendar' in the section on own production did not appear to be very successful or illuminating. The idea of having the food calendar was to ensure that one would not confuse the effects of changes in availability of home-produced food with other effects such as food price changes. In practice the food calendar did not assist in sorting out this confusion. Rather it turned out to be sufficient to distinguish households that cultivated from those that did not, and not try to capture detail on production over time.
- As mentioned above, it should be possible to slim down the section on coping and coping strategies, in particular by asking fewer open-ended questions, but perhaps also by reducing the questions about the household's ability to feed its children.

Miscellaneous problems and observations

In addition to the above, we note the following miscellany of problems and other observations:

- Early drafts of the questionnaire were such that the dietary diversity list was a separate document.⁸ This proved to be too cumbersome and confusing, thus the questionnaire was amended so that the list was then integrated directly into it.
- Some respondents interpreted the question about relative household welfare as being narrowly about the quality of the *house*. This related in part to insufficient training of enumerators, and was corrected as soon as the problem was detected.
- Some respondents declined to answer the question about relative household welfare, presumably on the grounds that the question was too sensitive.
- One respondent appeared to be incensed by the questions relating to the household's ability to provide for its children.
- A few respondents found the questionnaire too long and repetitious. This was particularly the case in the last section on coping and coping strategies, which we now conclude should be shortened and have fewer open-ended questions asking the respondent to explain perceptions about change over time.
- As is common with such exercises, some respondents felt frustrated that answering the questions did not result in some immediate, tangible benefit to them.⁹ (On the other hand, at least as many respondents seized on the interview as an opportunity to 'send a message' to government, and appreciated the opportunity as such.)

⁸ The purpose of doing this was that the same dietary diversity list could then be used to capture data from all 5 households to be interviewed at a given study site. Thus in principle this would allow one to economise on paper and printing costs.

⁹ The question whether respondents should be rewarded for their co-operation is discussed in section 5.

Logistical issues

The household questionnaire took on average 50 minutes to complete. In the authors' experience, this is brief enough not to usually cause fatigue or resentment. The maximum time taken among all 30 household interviews was 95 minutes, which is unacceptably high and probably relates to insufficient experience or training of the field worker. Generally, enumerators were capable of conducting six interviews in one day. Even so, there is scope for reducing the questionnaire. The average cost per interview, taking into account wages and transport costs, was about R60-R70. Data capture (using MS Access) took approximately 20-30 minutes per questionnaire.

The enumerator was instructed to interview the household member who is most commonly responsible for preparing meals, on the grounds that she/he would be most knowledgeable about both food prices and household consumption patterns. No households refused to be interviewed, and in most cases the enumerator succeeded in interviewing the correct person.

Conclusion

Some of the problems that were observed with the household questionnaire are virtually inevitable (e.g. disgruntlement that not immediate benefits are forthcoming), while others can be corrected, or at least ameliorated, through changes to the questionnaire. Overall, the questionnaire was successful in capturing households' experience of food insecurity from different perspectives (including both subjective and objective perspectives), and relating these to the households' other circumstances, such as location (urban/rural) and welfare status. Specific recommendations for changing the questionnaire are made in section 5.

3.2 Focus Group Interviews

The focus group interviews also proved valuable, mainly in validating the findings from the household interviews. Specific recommendations will be made for the focus group interviews in section 5.

The following are observations about the process of conducting the focus group interviews:

- Organising focus group members was more easily when done in areas where the process was facilitated by active community organisations rather than by the chief local authority. While the local authority (at the rural sites) was paid a courtesy visit before proceeding with anything else in the community, relying on the local authority for tangible assistance tended to result in bureaucratic delays.
- When organising focus group participants for a study of this kind one must guard against the participation of prominent people who sometimes wish to involve themselves for mainly political motives, or who in any event may be prone to dominating discussion. This was the case in one instance where a local counsellor joined a focus group although not having been specifically invited.

- The moderator has to be prepared to return the focus participants to the topic at hand, because participants have a tendency to want to express their burning issues even though these frequently go beyond the scope of the research topic. On the other hand, a focus group interview should not be government too rigidly, as it is important for the research to gauge how important the issue at hand is relative to participants' other concerns, which cannot be done if they do not have an opportunity to voice these other concerns.
- Generally, male focus group members were stingy with information. There were some men who did not want to comment unless prompted to do so. That was not the case with female groups.
- Mixed groups sometimes worked well but often did not. The problem was, as anticipated, that male participants tended to dominant and female participants to be demur, even if the latter were in the majority.
- Despite being clear with participants from the start about the aim of the focus group interview, some participants had high expectations, in particular those that wanted to be given food aid or a job. Some men were particularly demanding. This is the same problem as with the household interviews, but worse because usually an intermediary is requested to make the invitations to community members to participate. Even though the intermediary may be very clear when making these invitations, it appears that because people have 'got the word' that there is a meeting being called by government, which is frequently interpreted as a time to make demands if not expect some tangle result.

3.3 Data Collection from Shops

The collection of data from shops turned out to be the most problematic aspect of the exercise, and the overall conclusion is that there is little rationale for maintaining it in any future monitoring exercise. The problems encountered were as follows:

- Shop owners or managers tended to be suspicious of the survey and the enumerator, and declined to be interviewed or required that an appointment be made long in advance. (This happened twice.)
- Interviews with owners/managers were difficult to conduct because of frequent interruptions by customers.
- Shop owners/managers could not produce paperwork to show past prices, or were reluctant to try to do so.
- A large number of different brands renders the process quite laborious, even where the shop owner/manager wishes to be co-operative. Asking for information on only one arbitrarily selected brand is of doubtful value. Also, prices are not necessarily fixed, particularly for customers who purchase on credit or require delivery. For some shops, this is the majority of clients who purchase mielie meal.¹⁰

¹⁰ For smaller, independent shops operating in rural locations, prices of most commodities are more or less dictated by the supplier, with a typical mark up on cost is 5%.

- It is difficult to determine which shops should be approached. The household survey reveals that households have a number of different shops on which they rely for food. For example, some households purchase mielie meal from local shops, some from shops in other towns, and some directly from agricultural co-operatives. Some shop owners who were interviewed also indicated that a growing source of competition is illegal sellers who sell mielie meal but who are not necessarily licensed as vendors, do not have proper premises, and presumably do not pay tax.

Following initial difficulties with the capture of data from shops, it was decided to experiment with the format, in particular by placing more emphasis on open-ended qualitative questions. While the information collected via these questions is indeed rich and interesting, it does not add greatly to the insights available from the other tools, and therefore it is recommended that this particular aspect be excluded from any future data collection exercise.¹¹

¹¹ It should be stressed that documentation of price trends for foodstuffs is a regular responsibility of Stats SA, and thus need not be duplicated.

4 Findings Regarding Household Food Security

4.1 Summary of Findings from the Household Survey

Key results of the household survey are reported below. Some more detailed results are reported in the appendix, and the full results are available in the data set, which is furnished together with this report.

Number of households by study site

The number of respondent households from each site was as follows:

Table 2 – Respondent households by site

Site	Number
Jericho	4
Mamelodi	6
Ntambanana	5
Stinkwater	6
Umlazi	4
Umzinto	5
Total	30

The rural/urban breakdown is therefore two thirds rural and one third urban.

Poverty and relative poverty

As indicated above, it was decided at an early phase not to attempt to determine household income. Instead, some objective proxy measures were used together with a subjective measure. The questions about materials used in home construction and home size turned out to be rather unrevealing, because the vast majority of households interviewed lived in homes with corrugated roofs, regardless of the household's general condition. Information about wall construction was more variable, but is not always so much an indication of well-being as it is whether the household lives in an urban or rural area, and what materials are at hand.

Far more revealing were the questions about household possessions as well as the question subjectively asking the respondent to compare her own household to other households in the area. One third of respondent households indicated that they were worse off than most other households, another third indicated that they were average, about one fourth classified themselves as relatively well off, and a handful declined to answer. The respondent was asked to indicate whether the household owned various different assets/objects, and for each one to say whether it was in good, fair, or poor condition. At one extreme, one household claimed to own 9 out of the 12 assets/objects listed, all in good condition, whereas at the other extreme two respondents reported owning only one of the 12 possessions, in both cases in poor condition. Of course, not all objects are of equal value, but the distribution of ownership is clearly related to the households' overall prosperity. Moreover, there was a clear correspondence between answers to subjective relative welfare question and the extent of household possessions, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 – Relationship between household welfare self-ranking and possession of assets/objects

Subjective welfare self-ranking	Number	Average count of assets in good condition	Average count of assets in fair condition	Average count of assets in poor condition
Better-off	7	4.7	1.3	0.1
Average	9	1.6	1.6	0.3
Worse-off	10	0.5	1.1	0.7
Don't know/refuse	4	1.7	0.7	1.0

What this suggests is that the subjective relative welfare measure is a useful, albeit crude, measure for making broad distinctions between households, and as such is used in the rest of this analysis when one wishes to disaggregate by 'household well-being'.¹²

Cultivation

Twelve of the 30 respondent households engaged in production in the last season, all but one of whom was a rural resident. Only 7 out of the 30 kept livestock, all of whom were rural. Limited our attention to rural households, the relationship between the likelihood of cultivating and welfare is shown in Table 4, though it must be recalled that this is not a large, systematically drawn sample from which to make inferences. It would appear that households of average and below-average welfare are more likely to cultivate than those above-average, presumably because the latter are less likely to see the need to cultivate.

Table 4 –Relationship between household welfare self-ranking and cultivation, rural households only

Subjective welfare self-ranking	% cultivating
Better-off	33.3%
Average	62.5%
Worse-off	60.0%
Don't know/refuse	50.0%

Near the end of the questionnaire, the respondent was asked, "How much does the household's own ploughing and gardening make to the household's ability to get enough food?" All of those who do cultivate¹³ selected the answer "a lot", as opposed to "none", "a little", and "it makes all the difference".

¹² The relative virtues of money-metric versus other measures of household well-being, is the subject of an eternal debate.

¹³ Except for two respondents in Jericho, who did not answer the question because at that point in time the question had not been included.

Price changes and changes in purchasing patterns

The following table summarises the prices and changes in price for mielie meal according to different bag/package sizes. It can be seen that the 12.5 kg bag is the most common, despite the fact that its unit price is far higher than those for the 50 kg and 80 kg bags. It can also be seen that, with the exception of the 50 kg bag, average prices increased greatly for each package size. The data for the 50 kg bag seems unreliable, perhaps owing to the small number of people buying in this category. It should be noted that the comparison does not take into account that some quality substitutions took place between April and October. In fact one finds that between April and October about 15% of households started purchasing lower-quality mielie meal than what they were purchasing before.

Table 5 – Price changes between April and October 2002, mielie meal

Package size (kg)	Number, October	Number, April	Avg. price, October	Avg. price, April	Avg. unit price, October	Avg. unit price, April	% price increase
5	1	1	19.95	15.9	3.99	3.18	25.5%
12.5	14	14	44.00	34	3.52	2.72	29.4%
25	2	0	85.00	na	3.40	na	na
50	4	6	92.67	92.2	1.85	1.84	0.5%
80	7	5	182.67	136	2.28	1.70	34.3%

It does not appear that there is a discernible relationship between price and income/wealth standing of the household. Looking only at the households that typically purchase the 12.5 kg mielie meal, the average price paid by 'better-off' and 'worse-off' households are within R1 of one another. Nor is it the case that poorer households are less likely take advantage of lower prices by shopping outside of their immediate area. There is however a bias whereby worse-off households are more likely to purchase in smaller quantities, and to be under-represented among households that purchase in larger quantities – e.g. of the 11 households that purchased the 50 or 80 kg bag in October, only two were from worse-off households. There is also evidence of an urban bias in terms of mielie meal prices: the six rural households purchasing the 12.5 kg bag pay on average R46.17, versus the 8 urban households who on average pay R42.38 for the same size bag.

One might expect that spiralling food prices would force households to buy maize meal in smaller bags because of liquidity constraints. The surprising finding however is that between April and October only one household switched from larger to smaller quantities, whereas three household switched form smaller to larger bags. Presumably this is because with the price increases the cost savings associated with buying in bulk became ever more important.

Turning now to other foodstuffs, we look to see what the major price trends have been as found by the household survey. The following two tables show the findings for sugar and rice, respectively:

Table 6 – Price changes between April and October 2002, sugar

Package size (kg)	Number, October	Number, April	Avg. price, October	Avg. price, April	Avg. unit price, October	Avg. unit price, April	% price increase
2.5	15	14	11.81	9.94	4.72	3.98	18.8%
10	1	1	39.00	32.00	3.90	3.20	21.9%
12.5	13	13	49.00	40.08	3.92	3.21	22.3%

Table 7 – Price changes between April and October 2002, rice

Package size (kg)	Number, October	Number, April	Avg. price, October	Avg. price, April	Avg. unit price, October	Avg. unit price, April	% price increase
0.5	1	1	7.00	5.00	14.00	10.00	40.0%
1	2	2	5.00	3.00	5.00	3.00	66.7%
2	3	3	13.75	9.49	6.88	4.75	44.9%
5	4	4	28.00	22.67	5.60	4.53	23.5%
10	14	14	48.71	38.86	4.87	3.89	25.3%

Among those households that purchase rice, most purchase in bulk where the unit cost is significantly less than for smaller quantities. Although high, the percentage price increase for bulk rice also appears to have been lower than that for smaller quantities.

For bread, the average price per loaf rose from R3.42 to R4.15, an increase of 21.0%. This was notwithstanding the fact that 8 out of the 28 households who regularly purchase bread reported switching to an inferior brand during this period.

Changes in partial food budgets

Given knowledge of the price, quantity, and frequency with which maize meal, sugar, rice, and bread are purchased, partial food budgets can be calculated for each household for both April and October. These are necessarily "partial" in that they capture only a handful of foodstuffs, albeit usually the most important ones. Overall, between April and October the average partial food budget increased from R156 to R201 per month, with respective maxima of R313 and R583. Table 8 shows the percentage change by subjective welfare self-ranking:

Table 8 – Average percentage increases in costs of 'partial food budgets', by welfare self-ranking

Subjective welfare self-ranking	Average % increase in partial food budget
Better-off	26.2%
Average	21.6%
Worse-off	22.0%
Don't know/refuse	46.9%

Disaggregating by subjective welfare self-ranking, it can be seen that the percentage increase for average and worse-off households is less than for better-off households, probably implying that better-off households are more easily able to absorb the price increases, and thus change their diet less in response to them. It must be recalled that the "don't know/refuse" group comprises only four of the 30 households.

Food Diversity

The food diversity part of the questionnaire comprised two parts. In one part, each household was asked to indicate all the foods its members had consumed in the previous week. In the other part, the respondent was asked to make a qualitative generalisation as to the change over the past six months in the household's vegetable, meat, and general diet.

Table 9 reports average 'food diversity counts' by different categories of food (vegetables, meat, etc.) as well as for all foods. The 'food diversity count' for a household is simply the number of different foods that were consumed by any household member in the previous week, regardless of the quantities consumed. These are then averaged over all households or over different sub-sets of households.

Table 9 – Average food diversity counts overall and for different sub-groups

	Vegetables	Meat	Fruit	Staples	Other	All foods
All households	4.5	2.5	1.7	3.0	1.1	12.8
Urban	5.2	3.6	2.9	2.9	2.1	16.7
Rural	4.2	2.0	1.1	3.1	0.6	10.9
Better-off	5.7	3.3	3.4	2.9	2.1	17.4
Average	4.2	2.4	1.4	3.1	0.8	12.0
Worse-off	4.3	2.2	1.3	3.2	0.9	11.9
Don't know/refuse	3.8	2.0	0.3	2.8	0.3	9.0
Those who cultivate*	4.8	2.5	1.0	3.6	0.7	12.6
Those who do not*	3.4	1.3	1.2	2.6	0.3	8.9

* Calculated only for rural households.

The results are quite revealing. First, urban households have a significantly more diverse diet overall, and for all food categories except staples. Second, better-off households (according to the subjective welfare self-ranking) have significantly more diverse diets than poorer households, with surprisingly little distinction between average and worse-off households. Third, among rural households, cultivation clearly contributes to dietary diversity, especially in respect of vegetables, the importance of which for food security is obvious. This third point can be elaborated upon, because the food diversity part of the questionnaire was structured so as to capture not just whether a food was consumed, but whether or not it was also produced by the household. On this basis it can be determined that about 23% of the average food diversity count for rural households for vegetables is directly explained by own production. If one restricts oneself to households that undertook some home vegetable production, then the share of dietary diversity in vegetables owing to own production is 40.0%.

Table 10 summarises the results for the qualitative questions bearing on change of dietary diversity over time. There are three questions, one for change in dietary diversity of vegetable, one for dietary diversity of meats, and the third for dietary diversity of all foods. The questions in quotes are as they appear in the questionnaire.

Table10 – Summary results for qualitative questions on change in food diversity over past six months

"Does your household eat more different kinds of vegetables or fewer than six months ago?"	
More than 6 months ago	13.8%
Fewer than 6 months ago	41.4%
About the same as 6 months ago	34.5%
DK or Refused	6.9%
Don't eat then or now	3.4%
"Does your household eat more different kinds of meat or fewer than six months ago?"	
More than 6 months ago	17.2%
Fewer than 6 months ago	44.8%
About the same as 6 months ago	27.6%
DK or Refused	6.9%
Don't eat then or now	3.4%
"Does your household eat more different kinds of food or fewer than six months ago?"	
More than 6 months ago	10.3%
Fewer than 6 months ago	48.3%
About the same as 6 months ago	34.5%
DK or Refused	6.9%

Speaking generally of the different categories of food, between one quarter and one third of respondents indicated that there had been no change in dietary diversity over the previous six months, while between one third and one half indicated that the household diet had declined in diversity of the previous six months. Between 10% and 20% of respondents had indicated that dietary diversity had improved over the previous six months. Probing deeper, it emerges that only average and better-off households reported an improvement in dietary diversity, whether in vegetables, meats, or all foods.

Coping and coping strategies

The concluding section of the household questionnaire is the section on household coping/non-coping. These are qualitative multiple-choice and open-ended questions that ask the respondent about the sufficiency and quality of the household's diet, both at the present moment and in terms of a trend over time. Table 11 below summarises the results for only 7 multiple-choice questions, excluding those that bear on perceived changes over time on the grounds that these appear not to have been consistently interpreted correctly (see section 3.1). The complete summary results are included in the appendix, together with answers to two of the open-ended questions, including for the 'change-over-time' questions.

Table 11 – Summary results for the first 5 qualitative questions on household coping patterns

	Number	Percent
"Do you worry whether the household will run out of food before it gets money to buy more?"		
Never	5	17.2%
Once this past month	10	34.5%
At least once per week	2	6.9%
All the time	11	37.9%
DK or Refused	1	3.4%
<i>Sum</i>	29	100.0%
"Can the household sometimes not afford to eat balanced meals?"		
Never	13	44.8%
Once this past month	2	6.9%
At least once per week	3	10.3%
All the time	11	37.9%
DK or Refused	0	0.0%
<i>Sum</i>	29	100.0%
"Does the household ever have to cut the size of its meals because there isn't enough money for food?"		
Never	10	35.7%
Once this past month	5	17.9%
At least once per week	5	17.9%
All the time	8	28.6%
DK or Refused	0	0.0%
<i>Sum</i>	28	100.0%
"Are members of the household sometimes hungry, but don't eat because you can't afford enough food?"		
Never	16	57.1%
Once this past month	3	10.7%
At least once per week	7	25.0%
All the time	1	3.6%
DK or Refused	1	3.6%
<i>Sum</i>	28	100.0%
"Does the household sometimes rely on only a few kinds of low-cost food to feed the child/children because of lack of money?"		
Never	7	31.8%
Once this past month	5	22.7%
At least once per week	1	4.5%
All the time	7	31.8%
DK or Refused	2	9.1%
<i>Sum</i>	22	100.0%
"Do you sometimes receive food from neighbours or friends to help feed the family?"		
Never	19	65.5%
Once this past month	6	20.7%
At least once per week	2	6.9%
All the time	1	3.4%
DK or Refused	1	3.4%

<i>Sum</i>	29	100.0%
"Do you sometimes buy food on credit from the shop?"		
Never	20	69.0%
Once this past month	5	17.2%
At least once per week	3	10.3%
All the time	1	3.4%
DK or Refused	0	0.0%
<i>Sum</i>	29	100.0%
"Do members of your household sometimes collect wild plants from the veld for food?"		
Never	26	89.7%
Once this past month	3	10.3%
At least once per week	0	0.0%
All the time	0	0.0%
DK or Refused	0	0.0%
<i>Sum</i>	29	100.0%

The answers are quite revealing, demonstrating the power of these types of questions. Collectively, the results show that a high proportion of respondent households experience food insecurity across a variety of dimension (anxiety about future diet, dietary quality, dietary sufficiency, etc.), and even engage in coping strategies of various degrees of desperation (relying on neighbours, taking food on credit from shops, and collecting wild plants).

An interesting (and disturbing) pattern that emerges is a sort of bimodal distribution, whereby a significant share of households never experiences the sorts of food security problems described, and a similarly high proportion experience these problems chronically. Between the two peaks is a smaller number of households that experience these problems with lesser frequency.

4.2 Summary of Findings from Focus Group Interviews

Below is summarised the main points covered in the focus group interviews. The results overwhelmingly confirm the findings of the household survey.

1. Perception about what characterises a poor household as poor

The following are some indicators of a poor household:

- Many focus group members considered the house structure to be a distinguishing factor for a poor household. They regarded a shack as a sign of poverty, but that differed from places to places, for example, a community whose neighbourhood had beautiful big houses referred to the people occupying shacks as poor. In the communities where many people lived in shacks, a household structure was not an important determination of poverty.
- Inability of a household to afford burial costs of its family member.
- Unemployed family members.
- Inability to provide school kids with school uniforms and fees.
- Inability to provide enough food, especially to children.

2. Perception of food prices

All the participants agreed that food prices had gone up. They compared prices now with those from late last year or early this year, and they made reference to prices of foods like mielie meal, beans and cooking oil.

3. Impacts of higher food prices

All the participants agreed that high food prices had tended to force households to reduce the number of meals per day and change their food composition; they had opted for cheaper foodstuffs of low quality or substituted their normal foods with inferior ones. Many participants spoke of the emergence of new, cheaper brands whose safety they doubted. In general participants seemed keenly aware of the importance of getting enough protein in their diets, and many substitutions were aimed at ensuring protein in the diet given that meat and eggs were no longer affordable. Important substitutes for meat included tripe, bones, tinned fish, and even vegetables.

Poorer diets were often cited as having an especially negative impact on children, who for lack of sufficient nourishment often had difficulty concentrating in school.

4. Role of crop production and livestock keeping

They acknowledge both activities as contributing to household food security. What would otherwise be called 'subsistence agriculture' was considered an important aspect of the household's survival strategy, and harvest time was considered a time of joy. Respondents in urban areas bemoaned the lack of land for gardening and sometimes also problems of theft. A major problem as well is the high price of seeds.

5. Credit arrangements made with local shop owners

Shop owners were willing to give credit to households who can offer some kind of guarantee that they will be able to repay. There were three different ways of convincing a shopkeeper of ability to repay: i) having a secure, regular job, or alternatively a pension; having assets one can put up as collateral (e.g. livestock); and being a good, repeat customer of the shop in question. Pensioners were seen as a big source of repeat business for local shops, and concern was raised about their being exploited by ruthless shop owners and moneylenders.

6. Food price increases in context

The harsh impact of food price increases was commonly understood within the broader context of increases unemployed and general inflation. The impact of unemployment is obvious. Among other (non-food prices) of particular importance are paraffin and transport.

7. Higher food prices contribute to poverty, poverty damages dignity

The overall impoverishing impact of higher food prices came up over and over again. Less overt but nonetheless strong, was the sentiment that poverty attacks one's dignity as a person and as a provider. The unrelenting increases in food prices were sometimes interpreted as part of a conspiracy to keep down blacks and/or poor people.

8. Government's responsibility for taking action

Participants frequently asserted that government was not doing enough to counter the rises of food prices, and questioned whether at some point government would step in and do something.

4.3 Summary of Findings from Data Collection from Shops

As mentioned in section 3, the collection of data from shops proved to be more difficult and tedious than expected. The idea of comprehensively covering mielie meal, sugar, rice, and bread, was therefore abandoned in favour of focusing only on mielie meal, and then posing a few qualitative questions.

As Tables 12 and 13 reveal, however, even focussing on mielie meal alone resulted in incomplete data of dubious quality. The strategy was to ask the shopkeeper or manager which brand of mielie meal was most popular, and then to ask about prices of this brand for different quantities, first for the present time and then for six months ago. Respondents varied greatly in how patient they were in answering these questions. Stating the present prices of different quantities of mielie meal did not generally present a problem, however recalling prices from six months ago often did. Many of the gaps in the tables below, however, relate to the fact that most shops stock only a few bag sizes of mielie meal.

Table 12 – Percentage price increases of mielie meal, North West/Gauteng

Site	Jericho 1	Jericho 2	Stinkwater 1	Stinkwater 2
Brand	Tafelberg	Cup Final	Cup Final	Cup Final
size (kg)				
80	51.7%		12.5%	10.0%
50			18.6%	10.9%
25			20.3%	31.5%
12.5		50.1%	20.0%	10.5%
5			53.8%	30.0%
2.5			25.0%	19.0%

Table 13 – Percentage price increases of mielie meal, KwaZulu-Natal

Site	Ntambanana 1	Ntambanana 2	Umzinto 1	Umzinto 2	Umlazi 1	Umlazi 2
Brand	Impala	Nyala	Nyala	Nyala	Nyala	Nyala
size (kg)						
80						
50	56.5%	9.1%	25.0%	32.0%		
25	28.6%			37.5%		
12.5	0.0%	25.0%	37.5%	11.1%	14.3%	21.6%
5		31.6%	33.3%	31.6%	29.4%	13.6%

The percentage price increases reported above were calculated by comparing the present and past prices as reported by the respondent. There is reason to suspect that the reported past prices are not accurate, resulting in widely different magnitudes of price increases, not just between shops but between different sized bags in the same shop. This is a case where, if one were to incorporate this exercise into a regular monitoring system, one would prefer to ask only about present prices, and then by virtue of doing this at different points in time one would not rely on shopkeepers' recall.

The qualitative questions put to shopkeepers and shop managers were limited to three areas. First, there was a general question about trends in food prices. Second, an attempt was made to find out if over time the shop's clients tended to start buying mielie meal in different quantities. And third, there were two questions bearing on the requesting and giving of credit for food purchases.

In respect of the general question about food price trends, all respondents agreed that there were significant increases over the past six months. The question about changing patterns of mielie meal purchases did not generally pick up anything. For some reason, respondents were not able to remark any qualitative changes in this respect.

As for the giving of credit for food purchases, most respondents indicated that they are unwilling to give credit for food purchases, except where the person requesting has a regular job. However, it is rather those who are unemployed that are most in need of credit, so in practice little food is actually sold on credit, especially relative to the number of requests, which have noticeably increased over the past six months. The notable exception is pensioners, to whom shopkeepers are usually willing to extend credit, on the condition that the pensioner promises to repay immediately on pension pay-out day.

5 Recommendations Regarding a Monitoring System for Household Food Security

This concluding section has two main parts. The first part makes specific recommendations as to modifications of the main research tools employed in this pilot study. The second part makes recommendations at a broader level, for example on the possible overall strategy for a future food security monitoring system.

5.1 Tools

The household survey

- ◆ The household survey should remain the core of any future food security monitoring system. The survey should be based on a modified version of the structured questionnaire that was employed in this pilot exercise, combining different strategies for gauging household food security, i.e. a modified version of household food intake, dietary diversity, and coping and coping strategies.
- ◆ The questionnaire can be shortened in several ways:
 - The set of questions about household composition can be shortened, and some of the questions about the respondent's own background can be omitted;
 - The questions about the materials of which the house is constructed can be omitted;
 - The food calendar can be omitted;
 - The section on coping and coping strategies can be shortened by reducing the numbers of both multiple-choice and open-ended questions.
- ◆ The section of the questionnaire on food prices should come after the coping and coping strategies section. This will help eliminate any 'context effects' that might overly influence respondents' answers to the questions on coping and coping strategies.
- ◆ The questions in the coping and coping strategies section that ask about change over time should be rewritten so that they are more easily understood by respondents.

Focus group interviews

- ◆ FGIs should be retained as part of any overall methodology, as an important measure of 'ground-truthing'.
- ◆ FGIS should be conducted in more or less the same fashion as they were for this pilot.
- ◆ The main modification would be to omit doing mixed focus group interviews.

Data collection from shops

- ◆ Data collection from shops should be dropped, as it adds little valuable information to what is collected through other means.

- ◆ In terms of tracking price changes, the collection of data from shops would be more successful in the context of periodic surveys, which would dispel the need to ask shopkeepers or shop managers to recall past prices. However, one could fairly ask whether it would not make more sense to leave this to Stats SA, which collects such information on a regular basis anyway.

5.2 Overall Strategies for an Ongoing Monitoring System

There are two broad options for creating a monitoring system to track the impact of changes in food prices on household level food security. These are: i) repeated cross-sections and ii) panel studies.

By 'repeated cross-sections' is meant doing a survey at one point in time, and then after the prescribed interval, undertaking another survey without reference to where or with whom the earlier survey was conducted. Each survey is a cross-sectional survey, and by using the same survey instruments (i.e. the same household questionnaire and the same approach to focus group interviews) both times, it then becomes a repeated cross-sectional survey. Of course this would not have to be limited to two cross-sections, but could be repeated over and over again.

In a panel study, by contrast, there is a deliberate effort to return to the same households for the household survey, and the same groups for the focus group interviews. Panel studies are in principle much more powerful in terms of the depth of information about change that one can obtain, for instance by being able to summarise exactly why households' circumstances have got better or worse over time. The downside of panel studies is that they are more expensive and complex to conduct. They are more expensive because of the effort required to keep track of the same households, which tends to consume as much effort as actually administering the questionnaire. They are complex because, over a number of subsequent waves, the sample tends to shrink in size as some households move away or fracture. A third problem is that if the same respondent is visited over and over again, she may experience fatigue and/or learn better to adapt her answers to what she suspects the researchers want to know.

Each of these broad strategies has a variation which is worth considering. For repeated cross-sections, the variation is that, although the same households would not be tracked, one could focus the subsequent surveys on the same geographical areas (e.g. community, cluster of communities, or magisterial districts). The analogy would be the 'sentinel sites' that are used to track changes in HIV prevalence. While the analogy is not perfect, the rationale is the same, i.e. that tracking change over time would be easier because one would be comparing the extent of food security in the same community over time rather than trying to understand changes in food security among disparate communities. The limitation is only that one would have to argue why the communities or areas chosen could be considered to be more broadly representative.

For panel studies, the main variation relative to the approach described above is that one could adopt a 'rotating panel' approach. Unlike the straight panel, where one revisits the same households repeatedly until the study or monitoring exercise is halted, one would revisit the same households only a limited number of times before replacing them with new households.

This is the approach used for example in Stats SA's *Labour Force Survey* that began in 2000. Every six months the same respondents are re-interviewed, but only up to three times, after which a new respondent will be selected for a subsequent three rounds. As with the *Labour Force Survey*, rotating panels are typically staggered, so that not all respondents are retired from the panel at the same time. The advantage of a rotating panel is that it addresses the problem whereby the panel tends to shrink over time. The disadvantage is that it remains relatively costly, and is also relatively complex to interpret once the results are available.

For the purposes of monitoring changes in household food security over time, the best option is probably repeated cross-sections at consistent sites, i.e. the sentinel site model. Presumably one could establish a few sentinel sites in each province which one would revisit after regular intervals. The geographical unit comprising a site would have to be thought through – a village might be too small in the sense that one might end up re-interviewing the same households some of the time, which would mean inconsistency in approach between sites of different size.

A few questions remain regardless of which overall option is chosen. These are addressed below:

- *If one is conducting the survey repeatedly over time, is there still a need to ask about change in the household questionnaire itself?* The idea behind this question is that perhaps the fact that one is repeating the data collection exercise means that it is sufficient to ask households about their situation at the current moment, and then the analyst can establish trends by comparing the results from the sequence of surveys. This would have the advantage of allowing the questionnaire to be shortened, since one would no longer ask the respondent to state how things had changed over time, which in any event required the respondent to rely on memory.

The answer to this question is that one could easily drop some of the questions in the questionnaire that deal with change over time, but that it would be unwise to remove all of the questions that bear on change over time. The questions that could be dropped with little consequence would be those that ask the household to recall food prices from the past. However, the questionnaire is enriched by having at least some questions that ask how the household's food security status has changed over time, because this information can be confidently interpreted in light of other household characteristics, which is not necessarily possible with repeated cross-sectional data sets that only ask about the situation at the present moment.

- *At what intervals should the survey be re-done?* There is clearly a trade-off between cost-effectiveness and amount of information – one might like having the surveys done close together, but this has obvious cost implications. It depends to some extent on the resources of whomever is financing the monitoring system, and how great a priority the initiative is.

As with the *Labour Force Survey*, a good compromise is for the survey to be conducted every six months. Income dynamics panels are usually spaced at no less than one year, but part of the reason is that these studies usually have very long questionnaires, and in the context of straight panels are very expensive to conduct. Particularly in a subject such

as food security where there is apt to be a strong seasonal influence, and yet where the questionnaire can be kept relatively brief, there is a good argument for conducting the survey more frequently than once per year.

- *Should open-ended questions be retained in the questionnaire even after the questionnaire has been piloted?* One rationale for including open-ended questions in a questionnaire is to allow the researcher to check that the other questions are being properly understood. Therefore, once the questionnaire has been refined, perhaps it is no longer necessary to include the open-ended questions, especially because it is more laborious to actually make use of the answers to these questions in the reporting.

Although this rationale for having open-ended questions may indeed fall away, and although it is also true that it may not be worth coding the answers to open-ended questions so that the answers can be easily reported, there is still good reason to have some open-ended questions in the questionnaire. The main argument in favour of retaining open-ended questions in a monitoring exercise such as the one proposed, is because they are able to pick up issues (e.g. new influences on food security) that the questionnaire otherwise does not cater for, and that the researcher would not otherwise become conscious of, except through the focus group interviews. If nothing else, it is wise to include an all-purpose open-ended question at the conclusion of an interview in which one asks the respondent if she has anything else she would like to say on the subject of food prices or food security.

- *Would this be a monitoring system to track the impact of food prices on household food security, or to track household food security more generally?*

While this is obviously the decision of the Department of Agriculture, it would seem to be sensible to ensure that the research tools are able to pick up other influences on food security. Open-ended questions are one way to ensure that other influences will be captured, while the focus group interviews are another.

- *Should respondents be rewarded or compensated for their co-operation and time?*

The question whether respondents should be rewarded for their co-operation is a hot debate, and the opposing positions each have merit. It is felt however that in particular for a government-sponsored exercise, it would be inappropriate to reward respondents, as this would set a precedent against which other government-sponsored research projects in particular might take place, not least the census. An option that is sometimes exercised by researchers is to make a donation not to respondents themselves, but rather to a community institution from which many community members benefit. Respondents are informed of this, and in theory this goes some way towards making them think there are tangible benefits coming from the exercise even if they are not directly 'compensated'. For focus group interviews, it is customary to provide drinks to participants, who are more apt to perceive their participation as a form of 'work', not least because these interviews often last much longer than household interviews. Another reason is that offering refreshments contributes to a convivial atmosphere which favours good participation in the discussion.

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Appendices

Appendix A – List of recent surveys on nutrition and food intake in South Africa

Appendix B – Household Survey

Appendix C – Focus Group Interviews

Appendix D – Data Collection from Shops

Appendix A – List of recent surveys on nutrition and food intake in South Africa

This list is taken from Nel and Steyn (2002), pp.7-9.

1. National Food Consumption Survey – Project leader: Prof D Labadarios

The National Food Consumption Survey (NFCS), carried out in 1999 (n= 2868), was based on a random representative sample of children aged 1 – 9 years old, from all ethnic groups and provinces in South Africa, with over-sampling of children living in low socio-economic areas. The following information gathered in the survey were used in the present study: 24-hour recall data, quantitative food frequency data and anthropometrical data.

2. The Lebowa Study – Project leader: Dr NP Steyn

The Lebowa Study was undertaken in rural villages of the Northern Province in 1991. Anthropometric and dietary data (24-hour recalls) were collected for black preschool children (n=118) and school children aged 6-25 years (n=365). The study examined the nutritional status of children in rural areas of the Northern Province, in order to determine the extent of undernutrition and quantity and quality of the diet consumed.

3. The Dikgale Study – Project leader: Dr NP Steyn

The Dikgale Study (1998) examined the dietary intake and weight status of black adults in rural villages of central Northern Province. Average dietary intakes were calculated for 210 (anthropometry for only 111 adults available) adults. The repeated 24- hour recall method was used to determine dietary intakes.

4. The Black Risk Factor Study – Project leader: Dr K Steyn

The Black Risk Factor Study (BRISK) (1983–1990) examined risk factors for cardiovascular disease in urban black Africans living in Cape Town including: smoking, dietary factors, weight status, alcohol consumption and physical activity. This database included dietary intake data on 3 – 60+ year-olds (n=1507), based on the 24- hour recall method.

5. The Transition, Health and Urbanisation Study – Project leader: Prof. HH Vorster

The Transition, Health and Urbanisation in South Africa (THUSA) Study (1996-1998) examined the effect of urbanisation on the health status and dietary intakes of the black population (urban and rural) of the North West Province of South Africa (n = 1854 adults). For the purpose of this study, a sample of 890 participants, referred to by MacIntyre et al. (2000b), was used. Data on food consumption were obtained by means of a quantified food frequency method.

6. The Transition, Health and Urbanisation Bana Study – Project leaders: Dr HS Kruger & Prof. JH de Ridder

The THUSA Bana study (2000-2001) examined the prevalence of obesity and associated factors among 10-15 year-old children (n=1257) in the (rural and urban) North West Province, South Africa. Data on food consumption was obtained by means of a 24-hour recall.

7. First Year Female Students Project – Project leaders: Dr NP Steyn & Dr M Senekal

The First Year Female Students (FYFS) Project was undertaken in 1994 at the University of the North. First-year entering black female students aged 18-34 years (n=431) comprised the sample. Anthropometric and dietary data (n=136) were collected from each student by means of a quantified food frequency questionnaire. Sixty percent of the students came from rural areas and 40 % from urban areas, mainly Gauteng.

8. Weight and Risk Factor Study – Project leaders: DR M Senekal & Dr NP Steyn

In the Weight and Risk Factor Study (WRFS) dietary data was obtained by means of a semi-quantitative food frequency questionnaire. Self-reported height and weight measurements were also collected for black, white, Asian and "coloured" adults aged 18 – 55 years (n=449) from all provinces of South Africa by means of a postal survey.

9. Coronary Risk Factor Study – Project leaders: Dr J Rossouw, Dr P Jooste & Dr K Steyn

The baseline Coronary Risk Factor Study (CORIS) was undertaken in 1979 to establish prevalence and intensity of coronary risk factors in white adult populations in 3 towns in the Western Cape. Anthropometric measurements and dietary intakes (24-hour recall) were measured in participants aged 15 to 64 years (n=1784) and again in 1983 (unpublished).

10. Food balance sheets for South Africa - 1998/99

Food balance sheets (1998) were obtained from the Department of Agricultural Statistics. They comprise per capita consumption data that were derived by taking the total production of a specific food item in the country, and by subtracting the total amount used for animal feed and the total amount exported, and then by adding the total amount imported. This amount was then divided by the total population, giving per capita availability of each food item. All per capita food items were calculated in terms of the average energy, protein, carbohydrate and fat available on a per capita basis.

11. A liquid consumption survey of individuals in Greater Cape Town – Project leader: Dr LT Bourne

Water intakes were added to the final tables generated based on the results of the study undertaken by Bourne in Cape Town (1986) and from the BRISK study (Bourne et al. 1993).

Appendix B – Household Survey

**Questionnaire
Selected Results**

Food Security Questionnaire

Site: _____

Time began: _____

No: _____

Time finished: _____

Date of interview: _____

First name of respondent: _____

[Respondent should be the person who bears most responsibility for meal preparation]

General instructions: *Introduce yourself to the person and explain that the study is for the Department of Agriculture, and that the purpose of the study is to understand how changes in food prices are affecting people. Explain that the information they provide will be kept strictly confidential, that the interview will take about 40 minutes, and that you will be grateful for their help.*

1 GENERAL HOUSEHOLD INFORMATION

1.1 Gender of respondent: _____

1.2 Age of respondent: _____

1.3 Marital status of respondent: _____

1.4 What work do you do as your main source of income? _____

1.5 How long have you been doing this work? _____

1.6 How many days a week do you do your present work? _____

1.7 Is your work fulltime or part-time? _____

1.8 What is your mother tongue? _____

1.9 Does anyone in the household receive a monthly grant from the government, e.g. child support grant, old-age pension, etc.? If yes, please describe:

1.10 Please list the people in the household, including only those that usually sleep in the household 4 or more nights per week.

First name (start w/ resp.)	Relationship to head of household	Gender	Age	Main 'economic' activity	Present in hh 6 mo. ago?
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	female / male		1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	Y / N
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	female / male		1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	Y / N
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	female / male		1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	Y / N
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	female / male		1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	Y / N
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	female / male		1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	Y / N
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	female / male		1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	Y / N
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	female / male		1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	Y / N
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	female / male		1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	Y / N
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	female / male		1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	Y / N
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	female / male		1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	Y / N

1.11 Please list the people who were living in the household six months ago but who are not living in the household now.

First name (start w/ resp.)	Relationship to head of household	Gender	Age	Where did person go and why?
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	female / male		
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	female / male		
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	female / male		
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	female / male		
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	female / male		
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	female / male		

Codes for tables 1.10 and 1.11:

Relationship to head of household	Main 'economic' activity
1 = head/acting head	1 = employed in formal sector
2 = husband/wife/partner	2 = employed, informal sector
3 = son/daughter/stepchild/adopted child	3 = self-employed, informal sector, non-agric
4 = brother/sister	4 = self-employed, subsistence agriculture
5 = father/mother	5 = casual/occasional worker
6 = grandparent/great grandparent	6 = seasonal worker
7 = grandchild/great grandchild	7 = unemployed
8 = other relative (e.g. in-laws or aunt/uncle)	8 = pensioner
9 = non-related persons	9 = student
	10 = infant/child

2 POVERTY QUESTIONS

2.1 Materials for enclosure and main house

Main material	Enclosure	Walls	Roof
Brick			
Cement block/concrete			
Corrugated iron/zinc			
Wood			
Plastic			
Cardboard			
Mixture of mud & cement			
Wattle & daub			
Tile			
Mud			
Thatching			
Asbestos			
Tree branches			
Wire fence			

2.2 How many bedrooms are there in the main house and other structures? _____

2.3 Assets and possessions of the household

Asset/possession	Has / Does Not have <i>[tick if has, leave blank otherwise]</i>	Condition <i>[tick in one column]</i>		
		Good	Fair	Poor
Sofa / couch				
Radio				
TV				
Gas or electric stove				
Cell phone				
Plough for tractor				
Animal traction plough				
Wheel barrow				
Cart				
Car / truck				
Bicycle				
Sewing machine				
Other <i>[indicate]</i>				

2.4 Is your household better off, worse off, or about average in comparison with most households in this area? Better / Worse / Average / DK, Refuse

2.5 Please explain why you define your household this way: _____

3 HOUSEHOLD AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

3.1 Did you cultivate any crops during the last production season? Yes / No

3.2 What was the main crop? _____

3.3 Did you plant any vegetables? Yes / No

3.4 What was the main vegetable? _____

3.5 Please indicate in which months you engaged in the following activities:

Activities	March	April	May	June	July	August
Harvesting subsistence foods						
Processing subsistence foods (e.g. threshing / drying/ milling)						
Purchasing more food than usual						

3.6 Did you sell any surplus produce? Yes / No

3.7 Do have any stored produce (food reserves) Yes / No

3.8 Do you have any small and/or large livestock? Yes / No

3.9 Has there been any change in their number? Yes / No

3.10 If yes, please describe in what way and why: _____

4 FOOD PRICE AND QUANTITY INFORMATION

4.1 Please provide information about food items as you purchase them currently:

Food items	In what quantity do you purchase?	How much do you pay for this quantity?	How frequently do you make these purchases?	Where do you usually make these purchases?
1. Maize meal	<input type="checkbox"/> 80 kg bag <input type="checkbox"/> 50 kg bag <input type="checkbox"/> 25 kg bag <input type="checkbox"/> 12.5 kg bag <input type="checkbox"/> other [] <input type="checkbox"/> do not purchase	R _____	<input type="checkbox"/> times per month <input type="checkbox"/> once every __ months other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> local shop <input type="checkbox"/> local supermarket <input type="checkbox"/> shop in other town <input type="checkbox"/> other []
2. Sugar	<input type="checkbox"/> 12.5 kg bag <input type="checkbox"/> 2.5 kg bag <input type="checkbox"/> other [] <input type="checkbox"/> do not purchase	R _____	<input type="checkbox"/> times per month <input type="checkbox"/> once every __ months other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> local shop <input type="checkbox"/> local supermarket <input type="checkbox"/> shop in other town <input type="checkbox"/> other []
3. Rice	<input type="checkbox"/> 10 kg bag <input type="checkbox"/> 5 kg bag <input type="checkbox"/> 1 kg bag <input type="checkbox"/> other [] <input type="checkbox"/> do not purchase	R _____	<input type="checkbox"/> times per month <input type="checkbox"/> once every __ months other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> local shop <input type="checkbox"/> local supermarket <input type="checkbox"/> shop in other town <input type="checkbox"/> other []
4. Bread	(Loaf) <input type="checkbox"/> do not purchase	R _____	<input type="checkbox"/> times per month <input type="checkbox"/> once every __ months other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> local shop <input type="checkbox"/> local supermarket <input type="checkbox"/> shop in other town <input type="checkbox"/> other []

4.2 Please provide information about food items as you purchased them 6 months ago:

Food items	In what quantity do you purchase?	How much do you pay for this quantity?	How frequently do you make these purchases?	Was quality of brand same or different than now?
1. Maize meal	<input type="checkbox"/> 80 kg bag <input type="checkbox"/> 50 kg bag <input type="checkbox"/> 25 kg bag <input type="checkbox"/> 12.5 kg bag <input type="checkbox"/> other [] <input type="checkbox"/> do not purchase	R _____	<input type="checkbox"/> times per month <input type="checkbox"/> once every __ months other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> was same <input type="checkbox"/> was better <input type="checkbox"/> was worse
2. Sugar	<input type="checkbox"/> 12.5 kg bag <input type="checkbox"/> 2.5 kg bag <input type="checkbox"/> other [] <input type="checkbox"/> do not purchase	R _____	<input type="checkbox"/> times per month <input type="checkbox"/> once every __ months other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> was same <input type="checkbox"/> was better <input type="checkbox"/> was worse
3. Rice	<input type="checkbox"/> 10 kg bag <input type="checkbox"/> 5 kg bag <input type="checkbox"/> 1 kg bag <input type="checkbox"/> other [] <input type="checkbox"/> do not purchase	R _____	<input type="checkbox"/> times per month <input type="checkbox"/> once every __ months other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> was same <input type="checkbox"/> was better <input type="checkbox"/> was worse
4. Bread	(Loaf) <input type="checkbox"/> do not purchase	R _____	<input type="checkbox"/> times per month <input type="checkbox"/> once every __ months other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> was same <input type="checkbox"/> was better <input type="checkbox"/> was worse

5 DIVERSITY OF FOOD CONSUMPTION

5.1 In the past 7 days, what are the different types of food consumed by members of the household, both here at home and away from home? *[Refer to check-list]*

Vegetables? If so, what kind? Here or at school, work, elsewhere?

Meat and other animal products? If so, what kind? Here or at school, work, elsewhere?

Staples? If so, what kind? Here or at school, work, elsewhere?

Fruit? If so, what kind? Here or at school, work, elsewhere?

Other? E.g. drinks, prepared foods, etc. If so, what? Here or at school, work, elsewhere?

	Tick if eaten	Tick if produced at home		Tick if eaten	Tick if produced at home
Vegetables			Fruit		
Beans/peas			Apples		
Brinjals			Apricots		
Cabbages			Avocados		
Carrots			Bananas		
Madumbis			Cherries		
Onions			Citrus		
Potatoes			Fruit juice		
Pumpkins			Grapes		
Spinach			Guavas		
Squash/marrow/etc.			Litchis		
Sweet potatoes/patats			Mangoes		
Tomatoes			Peaches		
Turnip			Pears		
Other			Plums		
Other			Prickly pear		
Other			Watermelon		
Other			Other		
Meat & animal prods.			Other		
Beef			Other		
Cheese			Other foods		
Chicken			Beer		
Eggs			Biscuits		
Fish			Fast foods		
Goat			Other prepared foods		
Milk			Soup		
Mutton			Sweets		
Pork			Other		
Yoghurt			Other		
Other			Other		

	Tick if eaten	Tick if produced at home		Tick if eaten	Tick if produced at home
Other			Other		
Other			Other		
Other			Other		
Staples			Other		
Bread					
Green mielies					
Mielie pap					
Madumbis					
Potatoes					
Rice					
Samp					
Sorghum pap					
Spaghetti					
Sweet potatoes/patats					
Other					
Other					
Other					

5.2 Does your household eat more different kinds of vegetables or fewer than six months ago?

- More than 6 months ago
- Fewer than 6 months ago
- About the same as 6 months ago
- DK or Refused
- Don't eat then or now

5.3 Does your household eat more different kinds of meat or fewer than six months ago?

- More than 6 months ago
- Fewer than 6 months ago
- About the same as 6 months ago
- DK or Refused
- Don't eat then or now

5.4 Does your household eat more different kinds of food or fewer than six months ago?

- More than 6 months ago
- Fewer than 6 months ago
- About the same as 6 months ago
- DK or Refused

6 COPING AND COPING STRATEGIES

6.1a Do you worry whether the household will run out of food before it gets money to buy more?

- Never
- Once this past month
- At least once per week
- All the time
- DK or Refused

6.1b Do you worry about this more or less than you did 6 months ago?

- More often than 6 months ago
- Less often than 6 months ago
- About the same as 6 months ago
- DK or Refused

6.1c How do you explain this change? _____

6.2 Does it sometimes happen that the food you buy just doesn't last, and you don't have money to get more?

- Never
- Once this past month
- At least once per week
- All the time
- DK or Refused

6.3a Can the household sometimes not afford to eat balanced meals?

- Never
- Once this past month
- At least once per week
- All the time
- DK or Refused

6.3b Does this happen more or less often than 6 months ago?

- More often than 6 months ago
- Less often than 6 months ago
- About the same as 6 months ago
- DK or Refused

6.3c How do you explain this change? _____

6.4 Does the household ever have to cut the size of its meals because there isn't enough money for food?

- Never
- Once this past month
- At least once per week
- All the time
- DK or Refused

6.5 Do members of the household sometimes have to skip meals because there isn't enough money for food?

- Never
- Once this past month
- At least once per week
- All the time
- DK or Refused

6.6a Are members of the household sometimes hungry, but don't eat because you can't afford enough food?

- Never
- Once this past month
- At least once per week
- All the time
- DK or Refused

6.6b Does this happen more or less often than 6 months ago?

- Less often than 6 months ago
- More often than 6 months ago
- About the same as 6 months ago
- DK or Refused

6.6c How do you explain this change? _____

6.7 Do members of the household sometimes not eat for a whole day because there isn't enough money for food?

- Never
- Once this past month
- At least once per week
- DK or Refused

6.8 Do you sometimes receive food from neighbours or friends to help feed the family?

- Never
- Once this past month
- At least once per week
- All the time
- DK or Refused

6.9 Do you sometimes buy food on credit from the shop?

- Never
- Once this past month
- At least once per week
- All the time
- DK or Refused

6.10 Do members of your household sometimes collect wild plants from the veld for food?

- Never
- Once this past month
- At least once per week
- All the time
- DK or Refused

[If there are children under 18 in household, ask 6.11 through 6.14; otherwise skip to 6.15]

6.11a Is the household sometimes unable to afford to feed your child/children a balanced meal?

- Never
- Once this past month
- At least once per week
- All the time
- DK or Refused

6.11b Does this happen more or less often than 6 months ago?

- Less often than 6 months ago
- More often than 6 months ago
- About the same as 6 months ago
- DK or Refused

6.11c How do you explain this change? _____

6.12a Does the household sometimes rely on only a few kinds of low-cost food to feed the child/children because you are running out of money to buy food?

- Never
- Once this past month
- At least once per week
- All the time
- DK or Refused

6.12b Please describe what foods you have substituted for what other foods, i.e. the one's you are feeding your children versus the ones you would prefer to feed them:

6.13a Is the household sometimes unable to afford to feed your child/children enough food?

- Never
- Once this past month
- At least once per week
- All the time
- DK or Refused

6.13b Does this happen more or less often than 6 months ago?

- Less often than 6 months ago
- More often than 6 months ago
- About the same as 6 months ago
- DK or Refused

6.13c How do you explain this change? _____

6.14 Are the children sometimes forced to skip meals because there isn't enough money for food?

- Never
- Once this past month
- At least once per week
- All the time
- DK or Refused

6.15 How much difference does the household's own ploughing and gardening make to the household's ability to get enough food?

- None
- A little
- A lot
- It makes all the difference
- DK or Refused

6.16 Do you have anything else you'd like to tell me about food and food prices, and changes you've experienced in the last 6 months?

7 POST-INTERVIEW IMPRESSIONS

After completing the interview, please take a few minutes to write down your impressions about the interview and the household, especially things you learned that may not have been captured in the questionnaire.

Selected Results of the Household Survey

Multiple choice questions on coping strategies

	Number	Percent
Do you worry whether the household will run out of food before it gets money to buy more?		
Never	5	17.2%
Once this past month	10	34.5%
At least once per week	2	6.9%
All the time	11	37.9%
DK or Refused	1	3.4%
<i>Sum</i>	29	100.0%
Do you worry about this more or less than you did 6 months ago?		
More often than 6 months ago	17	60.7%
Less often than 6 months ago	2	7.1%
About the same as 6 months ago	9	32.1%
DK or Refused	0	0.0%
<i>Sum</i>	28	100.0%
Does it sometimes happen that the food you buy just doesn't last, and you don't have money to get more?		
Never	6	21.4%
Once this past month	10	35.7%
At least once per week	2	7.1%
All the time	10	35.7%
DK or Refused	0	0.0%
<i>Sum</i>	28	100.0%
Can the household sometimes not afford to eat balanced meals?		
Never	13	44.8%
Once this past month	2	6.9%
At least once per week	3	10.3%
All the time	11	37.9%
DK or Refused	0	0.0%
<i>Sum</i>	29	100.0%
Does this happen more or less often than 6 months ago?		
More often than 6 months ago	12	48.0%
Less often than 6 months ago	3	12.0%
About the same as 6 months ago	10	40.0%
DK or Refused	0	0.0%
<i>Sum</i>	25	100.0%
Does the household ever have to cut the size of its meals because there isn't enough money for food?		
Never	10	35.7%
Once this past month	5	17.9%
At least once per week	5	17.9%
All the time	8	28.6%
DK or Refused	0	0.0%
<i>Sum</i>	28	100.0%
Do members of the household sometimes have to skip meals because there isn't enough money for food?		
Never	15	51.7%
Once this past month	5	17.2%

At least once per week	5	17.2%
All the time	3	10.3%
DK or Refused	1	3.4%
<i>Sum</i>	29	100.0%

Are members of the household sometimes hungry, but don't eat because you can't afford enough food?

Never	16	57.1%
Once this past month	3	10.7%
At least once per week	7	25.0%
All the time	1	3.6%
DK or Refused	1	3.6%
<i>Sum</i>	28	100.0%

Does this happen more or less often than 6 months ago?

More often than 6 months ago	3	14.3%
Less often than 6 months ago	10	47.6%
About the same as 6 months ago	7	33.3%
DK or Refused	1	4.8%
<i>Sum</i>	21	100.0%

Do members of the household sometimes not eat for a whole day because there isn't enough money for food?

Never	20	71.4%
Once this past month	4	14.3%
At least once per week	4	14.3%
DK or Refused	0	0.0%
<i>Sum</i>	28	100.0%

Do you sometimes receive food from neighbours or friends to help feed the family?

Never	19	65.5%
Once this past month	6	20.7%
At least once per week	2	6.9%
All the time	1	3.4%
DK or Refused	1	3.4%
<i>Sum</i>	29	100.0%

Do you sometimes buy food on credit from the shop?

Never	20	69.0%
Once this past month	5	17.2%
At least once per week	3	10.3%
All the time	1	3.4%
DK or Refused	0	0.0%
<i>Sum</i>	29	100.0%

Do members of your household sometimes collect wild plants from the veld for food?

Never	26	89.7%
Once this past month	3	10.3%
At least once per week	0	0.0%
All the time	0	0.0%
DK or Refused	0	0.0%
<i>Sum</i>	29	100.0%

Is the household sometimes unable to afford to feed your child/children a balanced meal?

Never	10	45.5%
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Once this past month	4	18.2%
At least once per week	2	9.1%
All the time	5	22.7%
DK or Refused	1	4.5%
<i>Sum</i>	22	100.0%

Does this happen more or less often than 6 months ago?

More often than 6 months ago	1	6.7%
Less often than 6 months ago	8	53.3%
About the same as 6 months ago	3	20.0%
DK or Refused	3	20.0%
<i>Sum</i>	15	100.0%

Does the household sometimes rely on only a few kinds of low-cost food to feed the child/children because of lack of money?

Never	7	31.8%
Once this past month	5	22.7%
At least once per week	1	4.5%
All the time	7	31.8%
DK or Refused	2	9.1%
<i>Sum</i>	22	100.0%

Is the household sometimes unable to afford to feed your child/children enough food?

Never	10	45.5%
Once this past month	3	13.6%
At least once per week	2	9.1%
All the time	6	27.3%
DK or Refused	1	4.5%
<i>Sum</i>	22	100.0%

Does this happen more or less often than 6 months ago?

More often than 6 months ago	1	7.1%
Less often than 6 months ago	6	42.9%
About the same as 6 months ago	6	42.9%
DK or Refused	1	7.1%
<i>Sum</i>	14	100.0%

Are the children sometimes forced to skip meals because there isn't enough money for food?	Number	Percent
Never	10	50.0%
Once this past month	2	10.0%
At least once per week	4	20.0%
All the time	2	10.0%
DK or Refused	2	10.0%
<i>Sum</i>	20	100.0%

Open-ended answers to question 6.1c, i.e. asking respondent to explain why they worry more or less than 6 months ago that the household will run out of food before it gets money to buy more. These answers are only for those who answered in 6.1b that they worry *more* than 6 months ago.

Food prices have skyrocketed and we can't buy all the items they need.
There have been no meaningful salary/wage increases and food prices have wiped out the present salary levels through inflation.
The household cannot afford to buy food as the prices are too high. The head is not employed but survives by doing odd jobs for neighbours.
Food prices are too high - cannot afford.
It means food prices have skyrocketed beyond the means of most people.
The budget is difficult to establish as a result of spiralling food prices.
The lack of employment and the escalating food prices.
There have been unparalleled price increases, and the price of seeds has also gone up.
Did not know what was going on - maybe the government was feeding Zimbabwe.
Because we are buying less food because of the prices.
Price increases every month that is why I said I worry that my household will run out of food before I'll try to get money to buy.
Because I'm unemployed I can't afford to eat more food, anything that I get pleases me.
The prices of the last 6 months were better than now (price increase).
Our family is big and my children are not at school most of them enjoy food so it would be not fair for them to run out of food and do not get any.
Due to increased food prices and more debts from clothes shops to settle.

Open-ended answers to question 6.3c, i.e. asking respondent to explain why they are more or less able than 6 months to be able to afford to provide balance meals.

The food budget is diminishing while jobs are being lost; escalating food prices.
Food prices have increased- simply cannot make ends meet.
Prices. The seeds are also very expensive. Fields not fenced, exposure to roaming cattle and occasional theft
Unemployment.
Unemployment / little wages.
The rand has depreciated and this has impacted on the pockets of the customers.
The household is in an economic decline. 2002 came with spiralling food costs.
There's no change because the way I suffer this month is just the same as last month.
Price increases and it's hard for us to save some of the foods that we already bought.
Prices have put food beyond the reach of ordinary people.
Prices have increased almost every month.
It all comes to our salary because sometimes we can't buy all the things we would like to have.
NA
There is no money and the prices are so high we have to cut down on some expenses.
I am suffering a lot so for me to have enough I must sometimes cut down on other foods.
One can't afford a lot of money to buy in bulk, also has been paying back stockvel money that he had

Appendix C – Focus Group Interviews

Discussion Path

Summary for Stinkwater (Gauteng)

- 1 mixed group interview**

Summary for Jericho (Northwest)

- 1 interview with men**
- 1 interview with women**

Summary for Mamelodi (Gauteng)

- 1 mixed group interview**

Summary for Umzinto (KwaZulu-Natal)

- 1 interview with women**
- 1 mixed group interview**

Summary for Ntambanana (KwaZulu-Natal)

- 1 interview with women**
- 1 mixed group interview**

Summary for Umlazi Township (KwaZulu-Natal) –

- 1 interview with women**
- 1 interview with men**
- 1 mixed group interview**

Discussion Path for Focus Group Interviews

1. When do you regard a person as poor?
2. What is a staple food in the village?
3. How do you perceive food prices today as compared to a period before April 2002?
4. How has the price changes affected your households?
 - Number of meals/day
 - Children's diet
 - Payments of necessary liabilities, like, school fees
5. Are you still eating the same food items you used to purchase six months ago or have you been forced to change? If there are any food substitutes, are household members satisfied with them?
6. For those who ploughed crops in the backyards and /or vegetables in the garden or small plot last production season - how did that help in regard to household food security?
 - Change in food purchasing
 - Any reserves (stored produce)
 - Is such an activity helpful? Explain
7. For those who keep livestock, how does that help in regard to household food security?
8. Where do you buy food items like mielie meal, sugar, bread and milk?
9. When you do not have enough money to buy food, are there any arrangements you can make with your local shop owner?

Summary of Stinkwater Focus Group Interview

The group comprised of 10 women and 5 men from the Stinkwater community whose ages ranged between 25 and 55 years. Fourteen of the participants were unemployed and one was a councillor¹⁴. The interview was scheduled to start at 11h00 as arranged with the participating women as it gave them enough time to be home when their children returned from school. However the interviews commenced at 11h40 and lasted for 1 hour and twenty minutes.

Perceptions regarding what distinguishes poor households

A household might be considered poor for a variety of reasons:

- It does not have food and its members depend on their neighbours to share food with them. This is especially true if a member of the household dies. In this situation the household will have to depend on community members to donate food rations and for money to pay for burial costs.
- Children from poor households are often without proper school uniforms, in particular clothing such as jerseys and shoes. During winter they go to school without warm clothes. If they do wear ordinary clothes they are punished which may make them withdrawn from school activities. School principals are often in a position to identify poorer households.
- Children from poor households are often seen searching dump sites for food and are forced to lick tins for leftovers. (One group member indicated that her children were in this position and that she preferred to bring them along with her in order to ensure that they were safe).

When the group was asked if housing was one of the characteristics to identify poor households, the participants unanimously said that housing was not important but that food was. One of the participants indicated that many of the occupants of newly erected RDP houses who are unemployed leave their houses in the morning and spend most of their day at relatives' households (either parents' or grandparents') with the aim of getting meals. They then return to their houses to sleep after they have had supper. This movement happens daily. The councillor emphasised that lack of food is a main characteristic of poverty. He continued to prove that many community members experience starvation since many of them are unemployed and this was evident in one of the community gatherings where food was prepared and served. He said that people were pushing and fighting over food and it soon became chaotic. The ward committee members often conduct prayer meetings to console those facing starvation.

Staple foods

The community's staple foods are mielie meal porridge and chicken legs (*maotwana*). They are used to this combination and they regard it as wholesome.

Perceptions of food prices

¹⁴ The councillor's presence was unexpected, however his presence was not intimidating the group as the members continued to communicate openly.

The community's perception of food prices as compared to six months ago, i.e. before April 2002, was that food prices have gone up. They gave an example of a 12.5 kg bag of mielie meal that they used to buy for R18 earlier and it is now about R35. This was for good quality mielie meal namely Tafelberg and Super Sun.

Impact of food price changes on households

Immediately they told us how the price changes, especially of the mielie meal bag, has left them buying the same quantity of mielie meal but a different quality at a lower price. They buy mielie meal which has a poorer taste and has a very fine texture, meaning that one uses more powder to prepare the same stiff porridge that households were used to. Stiff porridge of lower quality does not keep for long; if it is prepared in the evening it cannot be kept for the following morning as it becomes watery. This is especially the case when one prepares soft porridge for a baby, i.e. one has to prepare a small quantity for each meal, therefore consuming more electricity and women's time. Participants stressed that they are aware that soft porridge does not provide babies with sufficient nutrients but that is normally what they feed them, as they cannot afford nutritious baby cereals.

The price of bread price has risen forcing them to buy fewer loaves. During the day households used to serve bread saving the mielie meal, but now a loaf of bread, which is all they can afford, is not enough for four children, especially if they are boys. They complain that the situation is making many boys behave violently and steal from their neighbours.

Payments to clubs

The participants said that they used to belong to burial societies and some used to be members of food clubs, but the continuous rise in food prices has forced them to abandon these clubs. They prioritise their social responsibilities as parents. One participant explained that people have priorities in the following order: the first thing is to buy food; second, pay school fees; after that, then contribute towards burial society. Many of the participants agreed that all they strive to do is buy food. Food clubs are things of the past as one struggles to satisfy his or her household's food needs.

Does the community still enjoy the same food they used to enjoy earlier?

They unanimously agreed that they are eating less of what they used to enjoy. They gave an example of what used to happen traditionally in the village. They said that Sunday lunch used to include lots of vegetables (e.g. beetroot, pumpkin and cabbage), starch (preferably rice) and meat, but that this gradually changed because it became too expensive to prepare all these vegetables at once. Now the situation allows that they can only eat stiff porridge and one vegetable, and that the vegetable is sometimes considered to be a substitute for meat, e.g. they cut half of a cabbage and save the other half for the following day's meal. Eating rice on Sunday's lunch is out of question. Chicken legs are highly preferred in terms of affordability and have substituted white and red meat. Beetroot and pumpkin are vegetables that are enjoyed by elite members of society. They believe that very few community members are still able to enjoy the traditional Sunday lunch.

One participant gave an example of how she has changed from buying the 5 kg bag of beans due to increased price of R30, to settling for buying a bag of potatoes and cabbages.

The role of self- production

All participants explained that they did not plough during the last production season for two main reasons:

- They said that lack of fencing around their households was a big problem because domestic animals (goats, donkeys, sheep and poultry) roaming around in the village eat whatever that was planted.
- Water was another limiting factor. The taps in the village were always dry because of the known problems with their reservoir. They buy water from the few houses with hand pumps. Summer rains do not sustain their crops through a production season and the hot sun kills their crops and vegetables.

These claims are not altogether valid however, as upon further questioning it was admitted that there are people within the village who do plant crops on a large scale. The participants acknowledged that some well-off households with tractors do plough crops under rain-fed conditions, and that they get satisfactory yields despite the fact that they experience some cases of theft. We saw a big, fenced vegetable garden on the outskirts of the village owned by few community members. There was an electric-powered water pump for the vegetables.

Livestock ownership

One participant mentioned that she owned a few poultry. She used to slaughter once in every three months. She did not see them increasing because her family used their eggs as part of the family's diet. She acknowledged that keeping chickens was very important for her household food security. Her only big problem with keeping many chickens would be to feed them, as she could not afford buying chicken rations from the supermarkets. Other participants said that they could not keep poultry, pigs and other small livestock and large livestock since they would not be able to buy them feed.

Where do people purchase food items?

They all agreed that transport costs were very high hence they preferred to buy such food items locally. They elaborated that if they did not have enough cash to buy there were possibilities for one to ask for credit from a local shopkeeper. He would agree to that only if he were certain that there was one member within the family who earned a stable income and would be able to repay.

Other general comments from the group:

- Government should consider giving out the child support grant for children who are older than seven years;
- Government should bring income generating programmes which are sustainable. The participants complained about short-term income generating projects, e.g. RDP housing project.

Summary of Jericho Focus Group Interviews

Two focus group interviews were conducted in Jericho, one comprised only of men and the second only of women. Both interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Focus Group Interview with men

The first interview was with 13 men who were all unemployed. Among them there were those who were very quiet and only talked when individually asked to comment.

Perceptions regarding what distinguishes poor households

All the participants kept on referring to their own situation when they were giving indicators of poor households. For example, a household with a male head that is not working that has children at school. School going children do not have school uniforms and they struggle with settling their school fees. They mentioned that such household were not affiliated to any burial societies. Poor households' members lived in shacks or mud house with less furniture. Such households were normally with dilapidated fencing or enclosure with thorn tree branches.

There was one young man who consistently complained about lack of jobs and later confessed that he does not have anyone to take care of him as his both parents have passed away.

A staple food in Jericho is white stiff porridge. They believed that even if a household was very poor there must be at least stiff porridge which can be eaten with salt.

Perceptions of changes in food prices

All of the participants agreed that food prices have gone up and that this has exacerbated their plight due to unemployment.

The impact of food price increases on households

They have reduced their number of meals to one or sometimes two a day. Children go hungry especially when arriving home after school when there is nothing to give them because the next meal will be supper. The money that they can accumulate is firstly spent on food then on other basic payments like school fees and buying school uniforms. One participant gave an example of his own situation. He has three children who are all at school going age. He buys one a pair of school shoes and wait until he gets money to buy the second child's shoes and normally by the time he buys for the third child, the first child's pair of shoes are very old and damaged. Some of the participants have not settled their children's school fees as yet. They have abandoned the funeral societies they used to be members of.

Food substitution

They have substituted food they like with cheaper and usually food that they do not enjoy. They find themselves eating chicken legs and other kinds of food that are new to them as they used to

eating both chicken and beef. [People of this community used to have large herds of cattle]. This change has forced some of the respondents to cut down on the food they preferred to eat. For example, they used to buy both mielie meal powder and sorghum meal powder but now they have settle for only mielie meal. They have substituted breakfast made of bread for soft porridge made from mielie meal, as they believe that it is cheaper to have it that way. They avoid buying bread every day. They mentioned that they have meals with more than one vegetable at gatherings like funerals and weddings but not at their homes.

The role of own crop production

The participants have ploughed their backyards in the last season but they did not harvest as most of their crops wilted due to the hot sun and lack of rain. They do not have vegetable gardens as a result of lack of water and proper fencing. They agree that having some produce from land does help a household to be food secure.

The role of livestock keeping

They do not small and large livestock. They complain about a high level of livestock theft in their village. There are those who have few poultry but they complain that they do give them special feeds instead they share with the portions of prepared stiff porridge. They acknowledged that keeping livestock contributes to a household food security.

Where people purchase food

Participants purchase their food from local shops. They normally do not have the extra money necessary to commute to town.

Use of credit to purchase food

The shop owners give credit to people who are working or receiving pension. There is usually a limit on credit relating to the certain percentage of the household income. In this way shop owners avoid taking all the income when one has to repay. This arrangement is specifically for pensioners because shop owners know that pensioners are financially supporting extended family members like grandchildren.

Focus Group Interview with women

The second focus group was composed of nine women. Some of them were unemployed and some were doing temporary jobs like doing washing for other households.

Perceptions regarding what distinguishes poor households

They say the type of house structure is an indication of a poor household, like a tin house for example. (One woman told us how her tin house became flooded when it rained. This is an example of how the group kept referring to their own situation when describing poor households.)

The children of such households are always leaving their homes early in the morning to their neighbours' house who are having enough to eat. They will stay there until they are given something to eat. Such children do not have school uniform and they do not like attending school probably because they are often punished for not having a proper uniform. They have a tendency of stealing petty things and girls get involved in relationships with older men with an intension of getting some financial support.

Poor family members are not affiliated to any burial societies and the reason is not that they are not interested but that they do not have money to pay the required monthly premiums.

Staple food

They regard stiff porridge made of mielie meal as the staple food.

Perceptions of changes in food prices

They are aware that food prices are increasing. They mention mielie meal price increase as an example.

Impact of food price changes on the households

They complain that they are not able to buy enough food to eat. They agree that they do not eat balanced meals. They serve babies soft porridge made of sifted mielie meal powder as this is all they can afford. They have changed into eating two little portions of meals per day. They have electricity but they do not use it for preparing their food because they are saving it they rather use firewood to do so. Some women say this food price increase has made them to be selfish in the sense that whatever little food they have got they do not share it with visitors instead they save it for their children.

They are unable to settle their children's school fees and they are even not sure as to when will they be able to do so, as a result, their children are unlikely to receive a performance reports from schools at the end of the year.

Food substitution

They all agree they have been forced to change the diets. They used to eat meal components like vegetables but now this is not possible, as they cannot afford to buy them anymore. The traditional Sunday lunch is something they are looking forward to seeing it at Christmas time, as that is the time when they will be expecting visitors who are likely to bring them food. They are worried that they cannot afford the food that they are supposed to eat.

The role of own crop production

They do not have fences around their houses – this makes it difficult for them to think of ploughing any crops. They cannot even make a vegetable garden, as there is not enough water.

The role of livestock keeping

They do not have large or small livestock but there are some who have few chickens, however they complain about not having money to buy them feeds

Where people purchase food

They all buy from local shops, as they cannot afford transport cost to towns.

Use of credit to purchase food

Same arrangements as those said under the same topic in the first focus group interview.

Summary of Mamelodi Focus Group Interview

The focus group was made up of 10 male and female participants. They were from low income earning households. Some of the participants were members of the vegetable growers at a big garden established at a clinic. They were allocated plots in that garden and they plant some vegetables for households' consumption. Initially they started working that garden as volunteers but now they work the plots and produce for their households and sometimes sell the surplus. A moderator conducted the interview and a scribe made recordings.

Perceptions regarding what distinguishes poor households

Very poor people often live in shacks or *zozos*, which are seldom electrified. If such dwellings are electrified one sees naked electric chords. The dwellings have fewer or no furnishes. They may lack basic items like brooms.

Poor households members are often isolated they rarely mix with other community members and they look like they have lost links with their relatives. Sometimes family members of such households become mentally disturbed. Their facial expressions show that they are sad. Their skins do not look glossy and healthy especially those of the kids who are always dirty. Children from such households often have loose morals, they tend to be alcohol abusers and have a tendency to steal petty things from their neighbours. They often leave their homes and play at their neighbours' houses and stay there until they are given food. They do not carry money to buy lunch at school and are identified by their teachers as those who must benefit from food offered through feeding schemes.

Members of these poor households are not affiliated to burial societies. When they have to bury their family members people in their surroundings have to raise money and assist them and Tshwane Metro usually come to their assistance with burial costs. Such people have registered to be members of the Poor of the Poorest (POP) scheme¹⁵ from which they are given some food rations.

Staple foods

Mielie meal porridge and chicken legs (*maotwana*) are regarded as the community's staple food.

How do people perceive food prices?

The participants regard the prices of food as very high. They mention how they see the rapid price change especially for basic food items. They are quick to mention the changes of mielie meal and *maotwana* price.

For good quality mielie meal bag of 12.5 kg (Super sun brand) the price changes are as follows:

In January the price was	R19.00
In April- May	R24.00
In May – June the price was	R34.00
Now in September the price is	R42. 00

¹⁵ This is a municipality initiative to help the poorest members of the Mamelodi community.

The price for a box of chicken legs was R53.00 but now (September) it is R60.00

How do the price changes affect households?

One participant says she is not motivated to write a shopping list when preparing to do shopping because, butter and peanut butter; they rather buy one of them. They no more afford to have more than one vegetable on a plate. They consider it normal to have meal without a dessert, as that is a luxury they cannot afford.

It is now difficult for the participants to be up to date with payments for credits at the furniture shops and monthly subs of burial societies. They do not feel that the children grants help much because as the money comes it is used to pay credits which are already there. Children are becoming juvenile criminals because they are always involved in activities that will make them access money, e.g. gambling. They are expecting their parents to give them pocket money when they go to school just like the other well off parents do and if this is not met they tend to drop from schools. Increased food price is making the parents to be in a difficult position, as they cannot afford to care for their children's needs, as they would love to. One woman says it is shocking to know that the money she has does not enable her to buy basic things she used to buy. She now affords to buy only few basic things. This leaves her so depressed.

The older family members have now adjusted to a two-day meal schedule. They do not prepare food for lunch, if they eat lunch that is when such food is the leftover from previous meal.

The participants say that they are now getting used to feeding their grandchildren (at infancy stage) sifted soft porridge, as they cannot afford to buy baby cereals. Those with school going children say their children complain about same types of meals that are prepared in their homes, for example, parents will prepare stiff pap and spinach for consecutive days because she picks it from the garden at the clinic. The children are embarrassed to take lunch boxes of stiff porridge to schools because their parents cannot afford to buy them food items to make sandwiches. This makes them to come home lunchtime and eat the inferior food.

According to the participants, people within the community have been forced to change the good quality brands and shifted to cheaper ones. They are now buying cheaper low quality brands of mielie meal powder, rice and bread spreads. They do not consider buying variety of food items like, jam, butter and peanut butter.

Strategies people have to supplement their diets

All the participants said that they do not have gardens as their yards are so small and water is expensive. For those who work the gardens at the clinic agreed that this is very important for their households' food security. They all stressed that they cannot keep either livestock or poultry, as they cannot afford to buy them feeds.

Where people purchase food

Some buy their groceries in the local supermarket and so mentioned that they buy at shopping complex at Denneboom in the outskirts of the township as it often sell many food items on sale prices. To get to the shopping complex one has to pay taxi fare of R3.00.

Use of credit to purchase food

All the participants do not buy on credit but one mention that his daughter buys on credit. As she is receiving children grant. They say shopkeepers give credit to people whom are receiving pensions and other government grants but not to unemployed people who do not have any guarantee that they can repay.

Researcher's comments:

- Both female and male participants were actively participating
- In the section of the township where we conducted the interviews many people stayed in the houses of different sizes hence I think that a reason for the participants to mention the house structure as an indicator of poverty. (Contrast to Stinkwater).
- Compared to all the focus groups this group is all a highest level than the rest of the groups.

Summary of Ntambanana Focus Group Interviews

Two focus group interviews were conducted in Ntambanana, first with a group of women, and then with a mixed group. The FGI with women had 11 participants and lasted about two and a half hours. The mixed group had 15 participants, of which 8 were women, and also lasted about two and a half hours. Men tended to dominate the discussion in the mixed group.

FGI with women

Perceptions regarding what distinguishes poor household

People are perceived as poor when they are unemployed and they cannot have three satisfying meals per day, when they do not have access to clean water and they cannot afford to buy seeds for planting. When they had shabbily-built house, which have no garden with which to grow food, and when they cannot afford to pay school fees, have no qualifications to get job, when their children are not well-nourished.

Staple foods

The staple foods in the village are greens (herbs) such as imbuya, beetroot leaves, home baked bread. Game such as rabbits, inyala, and impala, and samp, mielie meal, beans, anything such as wild fruit and home-reared fowls.

Perceptions of food prices

Prices have rocketed through the roof and no attempts are being made to control them. For instance a 25 kg bag of rice that was costing R80 a year ago is now selling at R120 and this is beyond the financial capacity of the rural poor. A 12.5 kg of mielie meal that was costing R35 in 2001 has escalated to R55, and in some really rural shops it costs R70.

An elderly woman said it was important to appoint a committee that could monitor the price increases as it was impacting on the poor, she also said that a 5 kg bag of maize seeds had shot to unbelievable levels which were unprecedented. If the seeds were so costly how would the ordinary man survive? This was pushing the rural poor to crime. There was consensus that food prices were continually rising not yearly but almost weekly. One lady (a single parent) said that what worried her most was that they are told that the prices of petrol and paraffin are dropping but this is never undertaken by the shop owners who maintain the old price levels.

Impact of food price changes on households

All the participants said that putting breakfast on a table had become an almost impossible exercise. In the first instance children were used to having tea and bread or porridge, but then food items have vanished from the tables. In some households porridge is now offered as a lunch delicacy. If households are fortunate enough, they have sprinkled with sugar as supper, in some cases iphuthu is served with herbs or greens for supper, however there are times when households go to bed on empty stomachs.

One pensioner grandmother pointed out that her granddaughter could no longer cope with her schoolwork as she had nothing to eat, she developed dizziness and lost concentration. Even though she was naturally a brilliant child, she started failing her tests and became forgetful. Her teacher asked the grandmother to come to school for a private discussion regarding her granddaughter, the teacher was concerned for the drop of her concentration, and wondered if the granddaughter was being abused at home. After explaining the child's family background and its poverty, and that there was no breadwinner, the teacher committed herself to buying sandwiches for the child. After two weeks the child slowly regained her ability in school.

All the participants pointed out that because of the unemployment and ever escalating food prices constricting their budgets, many were failing to pay school fees, clothe their children and consequently some children were playing truant and becoming 'half baked' prostitutes and contracting sex-linked diseases. One of the participants pointed out that while her husband was employed she always happily looked forward to a healthy grocery package every month as well as household 'maintenance money' (pocket money), but all this has come to an end. She said that her four children had been expelled from school for non-payment of school fees. After speaking to the principal an agreement was reached and the children were re-admitted. The family now survives by begging from neighbours.

It was pointed out that the combination of higher food prices and higher unemployment levels has put more pressure on pensioners as they have become the breadwinners of their families. Some pensioners have ended up being drawn into the practice of borrowing from moneylenders (mashonisa). In this context an old-age pensioner painted a very bleak picture. Each time when she goes to collect her pension she has two important goals: to put food on the table for her family and to repay the moneylenders. The interest rate (30%) they charge hurts a lot, but as long as she gets the money to look after her family she is happy. Sometimes after paying their creditors, including shop owners who have the tendency of increasing prices if food is bought on credit, they remain with R80 and they then have to take another loan from the moneylenders, and this becomes a vicious cycle that shreds their pension base.

Does the community still enjoy the same food they used to enjoy earlier?

The participants were unanimous in that there had been massive changes in their diets. They all noted that in year 2001 and before that, food prices had tended to remain steady and if there were increases they ranged around R5 or less an item. However early in 2002 they were astounded by the huge price increases, in some cases which were around 50%. One participant asked the author for permission to draw up his pre-2002 grocery list: bread (one a day), mielie meal (50 kg), rice (50 kg), dried beans (10 kg), cooking oil (5 litres), cake flour (10 kg), sweets for children (R10), samp (5 kg), tea (2x100 gram packets), potatoes and tomatoes (1 case), beef (R50), chicken (R30), powdered soup (2 packets), Knorrox, tinned stuff (fish and baked beans x6).

However after April 2002 or even before April, the list had been whittled down to the bare essentials and reduced quantities: mielie meal (50 kg), rice (10 kg), flour (5 kg), beans (5 kg), sweets (R3), samp (5 kg), tea (1 bag), beef (R30), chicken (1). This is the grocery basket for a household that still had some income. However for those who had no income the purchases were confirmed to the following: mielie meal (50 kg), beans, cooking oil and samp. Then they would supplement this with greens, and if they happened to have meat it would be a home reared-one. When asked, almost everybody agreed that the food substitute they normally use is soya mince, but this cannot really replace real meat.

The role of own crop production

They concurred that at harvest time expenditure on food was minimum. At that time they would often harvest mielie meal, greens like spinach, beetroot, beans, madumbis and sweet potatoes. The participant whose household had an employed husband pointed out that instead of spending R700 per month, she could lower the budget to about R400 around this time, and she would even be able to buy some meat. The same situation also prevailed in those households which had no regular income: harvest time meant healthy food on the table and whatever money they had secured through casual work could be better used or spent on other household needs such as school fees, buying some beef, some fowls for rearing as a hedge against poverty.

However the indigent households still faced some economic battles as sometimes there would be a severe drought with disastrous effects on cultivation. They also pointed that even in the event of the rain falling issues such as seeds and hiring of tractors could impose a huge financial burden on them.

On the question of how stored produce helped them, they unanimously agreed that stored produce played an important role in food security. For instance they pointed out that they could use such produce as seeds. Such produce was also consumed. In this case, they stored pumpkins, maize, madumbis, and potatoes. And if there was still food surplus they could sell it to the community to get extra income. One elderly lady illustrated by saying that she sold some extra beans this year for R20 and also sold the madumbis and potatoes to women who were involved in informal trading in town. This had a stabilising effect on her pension and she could use some of the money for her monthly stokvel subscription.

The role of livestock ownership

Apart from chickens the majority of the participants looked at livestock as an investment or as a form of wealth creation, rather than for consumption purposes. Goats and cattle form part of culture and are used extensively in ceremonies and weddings. As a result, the more livestock one has the better the prospects for income generation. The participants said that it was rare for a household to slaughter a goat or cow for household consumption. Although chickens form part of the ceremonial rites, in terms of investment they do not match cattle and goats. They said the goats and cattle would be sold to get an income which would then be utilised to buy food.

Where do people purchase food items

The participants said that they purchase mielie meal, sugar, bread and milk at the local spaza shops. But these were only bought in small quantities. When they were flush with money they could go to town (Empangeni) and buy in bulk.

Arrangements made with local shop owners

The participants said that such arrangements could be made with local shops on condition that a person patronised the shops on a regular basis. If a person hardly patronised a shop, the chances of being offered credit were very slim. In some of the local shops, regularity was not the only

condition, but also the amount of money spent was a determining factor. For instance, a potential credit customer could not expect to be offered credit if he buys just one or two items.

However, the participants pointed out that these shops were very expensive and they charged interest on arrears. The pensioners were the most welcome at these shops because they were easily exploited and some of the collection points were at these shops. If the pensioners bought on credit the prices were inflated so that they ended up spending most of their pensions there.

FGI with mixed group

Perceptions regarding what distinguishes poor households

People are perceived as poor when they are unemployed, when they cannot organise a household budget, and they cannot afford meals for the family. When they cannot afford to pay school fees for the children and also when they cannot access medical care because of financial constraints. When a member has to rely on public works programmes that pays R10 a day, when he has to be supported by his wife who baby-sits for neighbours, this tears apart his dignity when the woman develops high blood pressure because of stress trying to support a family with an unemployed husband. And which cannot afford good healthy food for the family as it is too expensive. Having a poorly built house with a rickety roof. Being unable to cultivate because of a perpetual lack of money, children wearing tattered clothing, failing to provide Christmas clothing, having to commit crime to survive, being deserted by husbands and having no remittances. Having no access to pensions, family grants because of bureaucracy, no access to food because of escalating prices.

Staple foods

The staple foods in the village are mielie meal, herbs, greens such as imbuya, game such as rabbits and inyala, beans, samp, tripe and processed fish.

Perceptions of food prices

The participants said the prices had reached unprecedented levels and they wondered what the government was doing about this. One participant questioned the wisdom of privatisation that deprived people of their jobs. Other participants said food prices had been stable before 2002 and if they increased it was never almost half of the price as had happened recently. They pointed out that mielie meal was being priced beyond their reach, for instance the price charged on mielie meal increased from R38 to R40 per 12.5 kg bag, to R50. This was a price from formal shops. In the informal ones it was beyond R50, the tinned fish had jumped from R5.99 before 2002 to R7-R8 (410 grams). Rice had also become very expensive, from R35 in 2001 to R60 and even the new brands that were of lower quality than the old. Some of these brands had been on the market for R25 but they have now shot to R40 a 10 kg bag. Tea had also shot from R5 to R8.95, and the participants said the market was now being flooded by very low quality tea which tasted terrible. People also were now resorting to buying single tea bags at R1 each.

The spiralling prices of food had affected the grocery budgets tremendously. The budget had in most cases been reduced by three-quarters. One participant pointed out that in year 2001 her grocery budget had been R600 per month whereas in year 2002 after January the budget had been reduced to R450. The food prices had shot up, some of the participants also blamed the depreciating

value of the rand and it was exacerbating their poverty. There was also serious concern about the cost of vegetables prompting others to question whether there were some sinister motives against blacks to prevent them from emerging out of poverty. They said this was based on the huge price increases of vegetables, which the poor also relied upon. For instance they said the potatoes, tomatoes and onions had reached unparalleled price levels. They pointed out that potatoes were now priced at R40- R45 as composed to R15 before 2002 (April), tomatoes now ran at R30 against pre-2002 prices of R10-R15, and onions reached sky-high at R38. They felt their interest in agriculture was being discouraged by the high price of seeds.

Impact of food price changes on households

The participants pointed out that while their children were used to two or three meals per day, this had now been reduced to only meal per day. Sometimes there would be no food at all and they would just drink tea. If the households were lucky enough they would cook mielie meal and make iphuthu (stiff pap) and sprinkle sugar on it or fry onions and tomatoes to make fried chutney.

The food price changes have significantly affected household budgeting and food has become the most worthy item in the household. Consequently it is now difficult to meet other needs such as clothing and school fees. This they pointed out has been compounded by the decline in employment opportunities and most households are now drawing on the pensioners' savings to survive.

In addition, the participants pointed out that the food prices had so devastated their incomes that it was no longer possible to access medical facilities. Transport was too expensive (to town R18 return). It was possible to see a person dying because there is no money to pay for the medical expenses. One elderly man pointed out his daughter was lying on the bed because of AIDS, but it was hardly possibly to take her to the doctor on a regular basis and he also wondered how she would recover if the household had no access to nutritious food.

Does the community still enjoy the same food they used to enjoy earlier?

They said that there had been drastic changes in their eating patterns. Beef, mutton and chicken had been dropped from their grocery lists. Some participants pointed out that these items are only eaten around Christmas, while others pointed out that they now relied on the home-reared fowls for meat. But these fowls were also diminishing in large numbers as most households were slaughtering to provide food for their families. Others had turned to soya, eggs were no longer being bought because they were expensive, some were only having mielie meal, samp, beans, flour and were also increasingly using Holsum instead of cooking oil, which had become too expensive. In addition they were also buying chicken feet and heads if they craved meat, tripe was also being used but to a limited extent as children did not like it. They also pointed out that tripe had been the most affordable food item but because of demand for it, it was now almost competing with red meat in terms of pricing.

The role of own crop production

All of the participants pointed out that the cultivation of vegetables or crops was the highlight of their lives because they know that at end of the day they will harvest and be rescued from food insecurity as well as saving on their food budgets. At this time they would have vegetables, maize (to be stamped), spinach, cabbages and beans.

These crops would contribute towards having nutritious food and the children would eat their two or three meals a day. This would also improve the concentration levels of their children, because of food shortage many children could no longer concentrate and their performance levels had dropped drastically. These crops were not only providing food security, but also some income (they sold some of them), which was then used to offset domestic debts, for instance they pointed out that peanuts were used as cooked food but since they were not eaten on a regular basis they sold much of them. They also pointed out that stored produce was coming in handy as they provided seeds for the next planting season.

The role of livestock ownership

The participants unanimously agreed that livestock provided food security for the households. However they pointed out that goats and cattle were not necessarily being slaughtered to provide food in the family except in the event of a spiritual ceremony. The goats and the cattle were being reared as an investment as they were sold when the household was in need financially. However the fowls were being reared to provide food for the family.

Sometimes also the goats and cattle were being exchanged for a loan as security. A family that is in financial need will approach another household for some money and the lender will require some kind of security. This happens when the borrower is unemployed and has no other means of generating an income. Once the money is paid back the goat is released back into the borrower's possession.

They pointed out that although some households would slaughter a goat for food it would be after all possible loan opportunities had been exhausted.

Where do people purchase food items

They said they bought these at either local shops or in town. They emphasised that the local shops were utilised for emergency items and normally they did not buy there in bulk. They bought in small quantities until such time that they had enough money to buy in bulk in town.

Arrangements made with local shop owners

There was consensus that the local shop owners did arrange such, however they normally wanted to deal with men for such deals. They regarded the men as the providers and heads, also they ensured that such men were employed or had some form of income or livestock which could be confiscated in the event of non-payment.

Since shop owners knew almost everybody in the village they could monitor how much the villagers were buying from the shop and if the needy household did not buy a lot the request for credit could be turned down.

Summary of Umzinto Focus Group Interviews

Two FGIs were conducted in Umzinto, KwaZulu-Natal, one with a group of women and the other with a mixed group. The group of women included 13 participants, including a primary school teacher, a secondary school teacher, an extension officer, a crèche owner, and an *induna's* wife. The mixed group comprised 10 individuals overall, of whom 6 were women and 4 were men.

FGI with women

Perceptions regarding what distinguishes poor households

People are perceived as poor when they are unemployed and have no other means of generating an income. Having no qualifications to help get a job contributes to this problem. Poor households are observed as those which cannot 'put a plate of food on the table', which have no garden with which to grow food, and which cannot afford to pay school fees.

Staple foods

The staple foods in the village are bread, mielie meal, samp, rice, meat, cabbage, greens and eggs.

Perceptions of food prices

All the participants concurred that food prices have increased tremendously. In some cases, they have gone up by 40%-50% and this was eroding the value of people's wages which were not keeping up. The participants pointed out that the less popular rice which was costing R25 for 10 kg in 2001, was now costing R40, and the popular brand that was costing R35-R37 for 10 kg pre-April 2002 has now shot up to R60. Consequently, most participants pointed out that they were now shopping in Durban as most people were also working there. They said in Umzinto town, the 12.5 kg bag of mielie meal was costing R35 pre-2000, and has now jumped to R48, while in Durban it still hovers at around R40.

In addition, the 5 litre bottle of cooking oil cost R28 pre-2002, but it now costs R45 and it is more expensive to buy in 750 ml bottles as they cost around R10. However, the participants said it was economical to buy in bulk in Umzinto rather than in the local shops, which seem to charge almost twice the price. For instance, 5 litres of cooking oil costs R60 in local shops as compared to the R45 in Umzinto. The participants lamented the fact that the increase in food prices had led to the proliferation of unknown brands whose safety-levels were unknown.

The participants were of the view that the capitalists were out to ensure that black people remained in their poverty. At the same time they felt that the government was not very interested in their poverty, but was rather more interested in flexing its muscles as a regional power and thus forgetting its constituency.

The participants were very incensed at the endless increases in prices of staples, and wondered where the poor would get their next meal. They said the eggs that were supposed to provide protein were beyond reach. In some of the shops in Umzinto eggs cost R20 per dozen. Beans had also risen considerably in price. A 5 kg bag of beans costs R20 before April 2002, but now cost R45. Even the households that had stable incomes were finding it difficult to survive. A participant who

happens to be a teacher said she now shuns red meat and only buys it at the end of the month. Generally she rather buys tripe and chicken feet.

Impact of food price changes on households

The recent food price increases were said to have considerably reduced households' monthly grocery baskets. Some of the participants said they preferred to do bulk buying in Durban where there was a wide selection of specials. While in 2000/2001 people could fill up their trolleys for R1000 (for the month's shopping), now they have to spend about R1400, which is only possible for those with well-paying jobs. For those earning very little, for instance R1500 per month, life had become very difficult. One elderly woman said she was spending R800 per month and yet she always ended up with a big shortage of food. By contrast, in 2001 R800 was almost filling all of her grocery needs.

Another participant pointed out that as a result of her husband having lost his job, she now buys mielie meal, rice, samp, beans, potatoes, tomatoes, and a few tins of food. She cannot afford the rest of the food that she would normally have bought, such as meat, chicken, tea, coffee, and cooking oil.

The extension worker added that being a community worker she was coming across households that could not pay school fees, let alone buy food. This was compounded by the high rate of unemployment. At one stage she had put together a small donation of R100 for a household to buy some food. Some of the participants said they were now renegeing on their hire-purchase agreements because the family had no money, therefore their furniture was being repossessed. Children were said to be going to school on empty stomachs and the teacher participant said at some schools teachers were raising money to buy tea and food for the children. This was important to improve the children's concentration.

The crèche owner also added that she had to dig into her pocket to provide meals for the children. There were instances when the children would cry incessantly and the other would have running stomachs. When she asked some of the parents why the children were always fretful, they pointed out that they did not have enough food and so sometimes gave their children sugar water. Whatever they earned as casual workers went to transport costs and other needs.

Does the community still enjoy the same food they used to enjoy earlier?

There was a unanimous response among the participants to the effect that food items had definitely changed and/or the quantity of food consumed had been reduced. Greens, tripe, and cabbage had taken over from meat. Each day they were forced to go around the bushes looking for herbs. Meat had become a luxury which could only be enjoyed once or twice a month, whereas before they could have it five or six times per month.

Bread had also become a scarce resource as a result of escalating prices. Bread now cost R5 for white and R4 for brown at the local shops. Consequently, the participants said they had started making home-made bread by using stamped fresh mielies that is converted into dough, or if flour is in abundance they also make their own bread popularly known as *ujeqe* ('steamed bread'). Porridge which had previously been just for breakfast had suddenly become a lunch or even supper item.

The role of own crop production

There was unanimous agreement that growing crops offered relief from poverty. There was a discernible reduction of expenditure on shop-bought food as the households had access to fresh crops. This is the time when they could save some money for other domestic needs such as paying school fees, stokvel subscriptions, and making improvements to their homes. Participants stressed the importance of proper storage. Surplus crops might be sold to earn some extra cash. Seeds would be kept over for planting the next season.

Livestock ownership

The participants said the keeping of livestock was regarded as an investment which in turn would lead to food security, as the stock would be sold in times of need or slaughtered for food. Poultry might be slaughtered for food, while goats, sheep and cattle would only be sold for cash. The participants pointed out that in the event of a food shortage the livestock might also be placed in the care of a money-lender and kept as security until the loan was repaid. This was however a tricky exercise as in some cases the borrower was so indigent that the money could not be repaid and the meant that the animal was forfeited to the lender.

Where do people purchase food items?

The participants said they buy from both local shops as well as shops in Umzinto and in Durban. Food bought from local shops tends to be in smaller quantities, e.g. a maximum of 5 kg bag, because it was more expensive.

Arrangements made with local shop owners

The participants said it normally depended on whether the buyer was on good terms with the shop owner and how often the buyer patronised that particular shop. If the buyer normally bought in very small quantities, the chances of getting credit were very small.

However, some local shop owners enjoyed doing business with the pensioners because pensioners normally bought in bulk out of despair. The pensioners always ran short of money and were then compelled to do business with the local shop owner, but the shop owner knew that the pensioner would always come back and pay. In some cases the pension payout was actually at the shop, which made negotiating credit from the local shop very easy.

FGI with mixed group

Perceptions regarding what distinguishes a person as poor

People are perceived as poor when they are unemployed and have no other means of generating an income. Also, when they cannot afford to pay school fees, when they cannot afford money to buy seeds, when they cannot afford to buy clothes for their children.

Staple foods

Staple foods in the village are mielie meal, beans, greens, samp, processed beans and tripe.

Perceptions of food prices

They all voiced their concern at the escalation of food prices. They said it was no longer possible to understand the logic behind these increases. In the past they were used to increases of R5 or even less per item, but did not understand increases that reached R20 an item. However they felt meat prices were sometimes lower than the prices of mielie meal, and samp, beans and tinned foodstuffs which kept on increasing. They said before 2002 the price of mielie meal was between R35-R38 but now was selling at R46. They said these prices were worse in the local shops and it was really impossible to do grocery shopping at such shops, where the 12.5 kg of mielie meal was selling at around R55. They also pointed out that cooking oil was beyond the reach of most people as it was selling at around R40- R45, whereas in 2001 it was remaining at around R28-R30. They said the market was now getting saturated with new brands that they did not trust with regard to their health safety. They said that some of these brands were said to be full of cholesterol which was contributing to high blood pressure. These brands were obviously selling at lower rates than the established ones. Beans have also have gone up from R25 per 5 kg to R45-R50 per 5 kg in 2002. They said they did not know how they could maintain good health standards in face of these food prices and they wondered how can the unemployed cope. Most households cannot afford protein-rich foods such as eggs and were now more focused on only starchy foods. The eggs were selling at around R40 per 60 eggs whereas in 2001 they were retailing at around R25.

Impact of food price changes on households

The participants said that food price changes had affected their budgets and basket contents. They pointed out that it was no longer possible to provide 2 to 3 meals a day and this was affecting the performance of their children at school. Children were not focusing on their studies because they were hungry. One of the participants, who is a member of a local school governing body, said he had received many reports regarding the level of hunger amongst the school children. He said some households cannot even provide porridge for their children when this was supposed to be a guaranteed food in the morning.

One participant said her groceries were now short of foodstuffs that she used to be able to provide pre-2002. She used to buy in bigger quantities such as 10 kg beans, 50 kg mielie meal, 10 kg flour, 2.5 kg rice and meat around R80. But these had whittled down to smaller quantities such as 5 kg and meat was now being bought for R40. On the other hand school fees were also taking away a big chunk of the budget and other things were being sidelined in terms of budget. Again the school governing body member said the schools were experiencing a big problem in terms of payments by parents. They also pointed that food was competing with transport and there was no way people could save money and most of the households were relying on pensioned parents for survival.

Does the community still enjoy the same food they used to enjoy

The participants were again unanimous that food eating patterns had definitely changed, for instance they pointed out that the vacuum created by the absence of meat from grocery lists had been filled in by cabbages and tuna fish, beans although also expensive and also taking the place of

meat. Most of the households were also used to some baked bread and fat cakes. There was no longer any money for delicacies such as biscuits. The greens were also being eaten on a large scale. They also pointed that soya was also found on the grocery list. Tripe was also being eaten regularly, but surprisingly tripe was steadily increasing in price. Chicken feet and heads were now featuring strongly in their groceries. They also pointed that they were seeing more and more whites eating the feet and heads, whereas before it was usually considered food for poor blacks.

The role of own crop production

Crop plantation was definitely considered very important and at harvest time all agreed that expenditure on food was reduced as people had access to food they produced themselves. They said they had access to beans, samp, mielie meal, vegetables and these items were on the list of household groceries. They said they kept these products either for food consumption or seeds. One participant said at harvest time she was able to get 2 x 10 kg bags of beans, 10 x10 kg of maize which was stamped to make mielie meal, and she normally sold the surplus. At harvest time she only had to worry about the procurement of eggs, meat but not regularly and a few other items that could not grow.

Livestock ownership

Livestock were regarded as a source of income rather than household food consumption. However the fowls were regarded as food for the family. In time of food shortage the household could slaughter a fowl but the goats and the cattle were not slaughtered for such purposes, although indirectly they also became part of food security. They were sold and the money generated was spent on domestic needs.

Where do people purchase food items

They bought these food items both in local and other shops in outside areas. If they bought these food items locally they were all in small quantities as big quantities were very expensive.

Arrangements made with local shop owners

They said this depended on the disposition of the shop owner towards to customers.

Summary of Umlazi Township Focus Group Interviews

Three focus group interviews were undertaken in Umlazi Township: one with women only, one with men only, and one with a mixed group comprising men and women. The women-only group comprised 10 members; the men-only group had 14 members; and the mixed group had 13 members. Each focus group interview lasted between one and a half and three hours.

FGI with women

The focus group members were all women from one of the informal settlements in Umlazi Township. The discussion lasted for one hour and thirty minutes.

The perception regarding poor households

They regard themselves as poor because they live in shacks and they cannot buy food for their families. They neither pay school fees for their children nor buy them school clothes. Such members of poor households survive by pushing trolleys at the supermarkets for customers and expect them to pay a little wage. They are unable to access clean piped water and cannot afford electricity bills. They live in a crowded environment with very little space and they cannot afford medical care.

Staple foods

The community's staple food is mielie meal, beans, samp and tripe.

Perception of food prices

The focus group participants mentioned that food prices have reached their highest levels even and that this was contributing to more crime. Many people are poor and unemployed. The participants said that they wondered who approved of the food price increases. They asked if it was the government. They said that prices have increased so much in the past but the latest increase was very high as they estimated it to be 40-50%. They pointed out that before 2002 the following food items' prices changed:

- 25 litre cooking oil was R25 but was now costing R42-R45 depending on the brand;
- 5 kg Beans was costing between R15-R20, now selling at R36-R47;
- 1 kg of meat is reported to have increased its price to R20-R30 depending on the type of meat;
- 2 kg chicken pack which was always regarded as cheaper at R20-R25 was said to have increased to a range of R30-R36;
- Tripe was said to be steadily rising in price since many people have changed to it.

Impact of food price changes on households

They reported that they were content to eat cooked mielie meal (*uputhu*) with chicken feet or beans. In the past although they were poor beef and chicken featured in their grocery list. The escalating

food prices have led to cutting down of number of meals. Previously they could afford 2 to 3 meals a day but now sometimes parents have to sacrifice their meals in the interests of their children. They complained that the food price increases were coinciding with a time when employment opportunities were becoming scarce, thereby fuelling more and more criminal activities.

The food price increases were blamed for causing havoc with the children's health and performance at school. Their children were going to school on empty stomach. High prices have rendered parents unable to pay school fees and electricity bills. In addition, one young participant said she found it difficult to go to town and look for work as she did not have money and neither of her parents were working. She could not borrow from her neighbours since she would not be able to repay. Consequently her house was beset with gloom.

Are the households still enjoying the same food?

One of the participants said visiting a shop was no longer possible as her husband was not working and she also does not have an income. She normally visited the dumping sites in Durban and searched for the food crumbs. She did that despite knowing that the food could be poisoned. Each time she did that she never told her children about it.

Other participants pointed out that food substitution was in itself difficult when people were poor and not working. The participants said that the people in rural areas are better off because they had access to community gardens and big fields and they could even pick green *morogo* or herbs. Some however stated that they had substituted meat by cabbages, tripe or beans. Others have replaced real meat with bones which they mixed with beans or cabbage. However bones too were also becoming expensive (cost R6-R7 per kg and meaty bones were R8-R10 per kg). They were concerned about the rising food prices and were worried about the rising prices of the food they had chosen as substitutes.

The role of own production

All the participants said they had no access to arable land and their yards were too small.

Livestock ownership

None of the participants had livestock

Where do people purchase food items?

They bought their food items from local shops and spaza shops. When they had enough money they travelled to Isipimpo and bought food in bulk at cheaper prices.

Buying on credit?

They were unable to secure any credit arrangements with any shop owner in their area since they were unemployed and that did not guarantee any possibility of repayment.

FGI with men

The ages of the men ranged from 25 to 50 years. Three of them were employed, four were self-employed, and the other three unemployed. Initial arrangements were made for the interview to start at 9 am, however due to unforeseen circumstances it started instead at noon.

Perceptions regarding what distinguishes poor households

A person is considered poor:

- when he is unemployed;
- when he has to rely on his wife for support (one man even pointed out that when a wife is employed she tends to be dominating and always speaks ill of an unemployed husband, i.e. as a failure);
- when he cannot pay school fees for his children;
- when he cannot pay rates;
- when he cannot put food on the table for his children.

Staple foods

Staple foods include: tripe, beans, samp, processed fish and beans, ugali (cooked mielie meal), and ujeqe (home-made steamed bread).

Perceptions of food prices

Food prices have reached unprecedented levels. Having R800 to spend on groceries no longer completely fills the trolley as it did before 2002. In 2001 the price of rice was R35, but now it is more than R50. As a result the market has been swamped by the unknown brands which don't swell and take longer to cook. Local shops are charging more than city shops. A 10 kg bag of mielie meal costs around R50, whereas in town it is around R46, depending on the brand. The cheaper quality brands average around R36 to R40. Before 2002, flour was around R29, but now retails at around R38 to R40. Cooking oil was also said to have become very expensive.

As a result of the high prices charged by the local shops there was an exodus of people to the Isipingo area, formerly an Indian area.

Impact of food price changes on households

The participants who were employed said their wages/salaries were depleted before they even reached home. A parents, they could not provide regular meals. The food prices had taken over from transport and were now competing with school fees that were also exorbitant. One participant pointed out that before 2002 he was able to provide regular meals every day, but now very cautious and strict so as to not waste any food. Other participants pointed out that children more commonly went to school on empty stomachs.

It was worse in the case of the unemployed. They said shops had become their 'enemy territories' because they did not have money. Some were relying on their wives who were domestic workers and earning around R500 to R800 per month, almost the same they themselves were earning per week back when they still had jobs.

The inability to provide food was affecting the relative within the households as the fathers were being regarded with scorn because they were failures. One of the participants said he preferred to be away from home and return late in the evening because he could not face a starving household. An employed participant also said that the payment of rates and of his bond was becoming difficult as the cost of food was exerting a greater demand on his income. Sometimes he was forced to tamper with his electricity meter as he could not maintain regular power payments, but he would reserve money for the meter readers so that his power was not cut off.

At one stage one of the participants said his children were expelled from school because he was not up-to-date with fees.

There was a persistent consensus in the group that somewhere along the line there was or were some people who were gaining through this food price spiral. Also one of the participants said the progressive minds must declare a Black Christmas as they did during the dark ages of Apartheid.

Does the community still enjoy the same food they used to enjoy earlier?

The demand for meat had gone down because it was too expensive.

The unemployed participants said they sometimes had stiff pap laced with Knorrox soup or if they had some money they would buy bones, cabbages or spinach. But these items were going up in price.

There was sustained agreement among the participants that in most households including theirs, tripe had also taken over although the children were averse to this kind of meat, i.e. they regarded it as 'low class'.

The role of own crop production

Unfortunately, most of the participants could not access patches of land on which to grow vegetables. However, those who happened to have such patches said the impact of harvest on food purchases was minimal. One of the participants said because that because a patch of land was close to the main road they got stolen when the vegetables reached a harvestable stage.

The participants also pointed out that the mielie stalks in some patches would only be about a hundred and that could be consumed in a week's time. Also, if one grew beans or spinach, it would last about two weeks, or less if aided by thieves.

The role of livestock ownership

None of the participants kept any livestock.

Where do people purchase food items

They bought these at the local shops, generally in small quantities. However, if they had money for full household groceries they would buy from city shops in bulk.

Arrangements made with local shop owners

The participants said such arrangements did exist but were conditional on personal relationships with the shop owner. The unemployed participants said they could not make any such arrangements because they lacked visible means of income generation.

Further remarks

The focus group was very lively, but men were clamouring for job opportunities and mid-way through the discussion they started asking when the group would wrap up the proceedings.

There was an unrelenting attack on the government for its short-sightedness in privatising state assets. One of the participants pointed out that he was the victim of privatisation. Privatisation was in the interest of the elite classes who had connections in government. Some of the participants said that it was a matter of pulling the wool over the eyes of people that privatisation would create black empowerment opportunities. The government did not care about the downtrodden, and this was creating a politically dangerous situation.

FGI with mixed group

The group was made up of 11 men and women.

When do they regard a person as poor?

The participants reported that a person is regarded as poor when he was unemployed and survived by doing casual work for neighbours. Such a person could neither buy food for his family nor afford the payment of school fees. Poor people could not afford to pay for electricity and medical care.

Staple food

Mielie meal, beans, samp, bones and tripe, were mentioned as staple foods for the area.

Perception of food prices

All the participants acknowledged that food prices had gone up tremendously and that had affected their livelihoods. They concluded that in 2001 food prices were not increasing as rapidly as those for 2002. They were quick to point out examples of food items whose prices had gone up, for example:

- In January, 5 litre can of cooking oil was R25, then it changed to R35, but after April its price ranged between R42 –R45.
- In January a 5 kg bag of beans cost R15-R20, but it changed to R36 and then after April it cost between R40-R47.
- Bread's price shot up too and that was a devastating blow as it was consumed more.

Impact of food price increase on a household

The food prices were said to have affected many households adversely. The participants complained that their children were starving and that left many parents with a suicidal feeling because they could not stand seeing their children in that state. They reported that many children have been forced to drop from school and went to the bigger shop to push trolleys for customers. They opted for that unwillingly but they helped many of their parents with the income they earned. The parents agreed that that was bad for children of that age, who should not have to be burdened with the responsibilities of an adult.

They pointed out that school fees is another responsibility that they were unable to satisfy as there was usually no money left after buying food. They believed that inability to pay school fees was affecting their children's performance at school and their self-esteem. One participant gave an example that he used to feed his family with R600 that he received monthly but with the food price increases that is no longer enough to cover his household's needs.

Does the community still enjoy the same food they used to enjoy earlier?

Many participants reported that there were foods that they stopped buying and which they substituted with cheaper ones. They had shifted from using cooking oil to using Holsum fat. Their diet is made up mainly by the indigenous greens that they collect. Bones substitute for meat and sometimes spinach and cabbage are used. Cabbage prices had gone up and that made it difficult to depend on it as a substitute. Sometimes soya mincemeat flavoured with spices was used to get a meaty taste.

The role of own vegetable production

All participants agreed that growing vegetables could be very helpful but to them land was a limiting factor. Some of the participants were using a patch of land within a school's premises and they were in negotiation with a school governing body to release that land to them. That garden was like a community garden. The community planted carrots, spinach, cabbages and mielies. They said that it was a temporary hedge against hunger. At harvest time they were able to survive on the produce but very little was being stored.

Livestock ownership

None of the participants kept livestock

Where did they buy their food items?

Most of their food items were bought from local shops and spaza shops. They usually did not have enough money to commute to neighbouring towns to buy in bulk hence they were stuck with the local shops which were too expensive.

Buying on credit?

They said for one to buy food from the local shops on credit depended on having a relationship the shop owner. Furthermore the local shops often had very few items in stock which hindered them getting credit there. *Spaza* shops might allow customers to buy on credit, would usually expect the customer to repay in a day's time.

Appendix D – Data Collection from Shops

Data capture sheet for local shops

Selected Results

Data capture sheet for local shops

Site: _____

Shop name: _____

Date of interview: _____

Instructions: *Introduce yourself to the shop keeper and explain that the study is for the Department of Agriculture, and that the purpose of the study is to understand how changes in food prices are affecting people. Stress that you are not interested in comparing prices between shops, and that the information provided will not be shared with other shops in the area.*

1. What has been happening in general to food prices over the past six months?

2. What is the most popular brand of mielie meal you sell? _____

3. Can you tell us what you charge (the retail price) for this brand?

80 kg bag	R_____
50 kg bag	R_____
25 kg bag	R_____
12.5 kg bag	R_____
5 kg bag	R_____
other _____	R_____

4. What about 6 months ago?

80 kg bag	R_____
50 kg bag	R_____
25 kg bag	R_____
12.5 kg bag	R_____
5 kg bag	R_____
other _____	R_____

5. Which size bag do people buy most frequently? Has there been any change over the past 6 months in this? How do you explain this?

6. Have other foods changed in price over the past 6 months? Which and by how much?

7. Do you allow people to buy food on credit? Yes / No If yes, please describe, i.e. to whom and under what circumstances?

8. Do you observe people asking more credit more or less over the past six months? More / Less

Why is that? _____

9. Do you have anything else you'd like to tell me about food and food prices, and changes you've observed in the last 6 months?
