



Press release

8 July 2020

Mr Cyril Ramaphosa, President, Republic of South Africa
Ms Gloria Serobe, Chairperson of the Solidarity Fund
Mr Ebrahim Patel, Minister of Trade and Industry
Ms Lindiwe Sisulu, Minister of Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation
Mr Tito Mboweni, Minister of Finance

A Call to the Solidarity Fund – Support Community led Food Relief Efforts and Food Sovereignty Pathways

On Tuesday, 07 July, the sixth meeting of the National Food Crisis Forum (NFCF) was convened by the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign and the Cooperative and Policy Alternative Center (COPAC), a vibrant alliance partner of the SAFSC and which is currently coordinating its response to Covid-19.

An Anti-People Minister of Finance

The supplementary budget tabled by the Minister of Finance fails to appreciate that the everyday suffering of South Africans has worsened. His budget moved South Africa from one of the most unequal countries in the world, in income terms, with a racialised and gendered regime of exclusion on to a trajectory of social collapse. The economics of the Minister's budget, based on austerity cuts and fiscal reprioritisation, reflects a government captured by financial markets; it is terrified by the power of finance and has turned its back on a simple truth: society is too big to fail. Ironically when even the International Monetary Fund expects governments in the global south to be spending fiscal resources and even, debt financed, to meet the urgent relief needs of citizens. A smart approach to social relief and fiscal stimulus can have important structural impacts. We agree with the observations of progressive economists, the Budget Coalition, the Institute of Economic Justice and numerous other progressive voices that the budget is not proportional to the economic fallout experienced thus far, it cuts crucial fiscal allocations such as agriculture (reduced by R2.4 billion) at a time when we need to scale up small scale farmer food production and social grants (cut by R9 billion), for instance. The Minister of Finance, Mr. Tito Mboweni, needs to understand the South African government's socio-economic mitigation response is out of step with international experience, particularly governments that care for their citizens. South Africa needs a substantive and universal basic income grant now to cushion society. We will intensify our campaigning for such a #UBIGNOW.

A Call for Dialogue with the Solidarity Fund

However, in this context the Solidarity Fund needs to have an open and transparent dialogue with the National Food Crisis Forum. We disagree with Minister Lindiwe Zulu's demand that more resources be allocated by the Fund to her department for food relief, as opposed to supporting community led food relief efforts. This is a false binary. Our mapping of 220 community led food relief efforts highlight how government has failed to meet food needs on the ground (data available here: <https://www.safsc.org.za/food-relief-mapping/>). At minimum, and with limited resources, these initiatives feed about 63 000 people per week. Moreover, 35.9% of respondents source their food from community donations. This in a context of failing government socio-economic mitigation

and solidarity fatigue in communities. We request an urgent dialogue with the Solidarity Fund so that these community-led initiatives, and not just high profiled humanitarian NGOs, are supported. We are also concerned about shifting all food relief support to a voucher system by the Solidarity Fund. There are various issues we would like to discuss least of all inclusion/exclusion problems with vouchers, costs, urban and rural reach and support for community food sources. It is imperative the Solidarity Fund appreciates that the frontline of the worsening food crisis is about strengthening local food sovereignty pathways now, given that the pandemic is likely to be with us for another year or more, until a decommodified vaccine is made available to all. The Fund can play a catalytical role for the next food system that South Africa urgently needs to feed its communities, villages, towns and cities. Our national food sovereignty strategy development work suggests with 1000 food sovereignty hubs 10 million people will benefit supported by a million small scale and micro-agroecology farmers. We should not waste this crisis by employing shallow and technocratic modes of thinking that fail to see the interconnections of multiple crises and the link between the present and the future. We need visionary thinking and action now.

High Food Prices

We also call upon the Minister of Trade and Industry to reply to the research shared with his department on increasing prices of essentials in supermarkets and to our proposal that supermarkets set up people's pantries for solidarity buying. The solidarity packages available through such initiatives must be ethically priced so we stop rampant profiteering by supermarkets.

Water Stressed Communities

Finally, the Minister of Water Affairs has still not responded to our [three reports](#) on 79 [water stressed communities](#). In response we have reached out to the Human Rights Commission and will be actively working with the Commission to challenge the Minister's unresponsiveness. The right to water is contained in section 27 of our Constitution. The Minister of Water Affairs leads a department that has consistently disregarded this right and its progressive realisation. In the context of Covid-19 and the worsening climate crisis this is nothing short of irresponsible leadership. Minister Mboweni's allocation of R20 billion to municipalities to also deal with water and sanitation issues does not inspire confidence given that only 20 municipalities, out of 257, received clean audits. Again another slap in the face of the South African citizen and further confirmation of a Minister of Finance out of touch with reality.

For more information, contact:

Dorah Marema, Gender CC Southern Africa – Women for Climate Justice, 073 177 1817
Vishwas Satgar, Board Chairperson COPAC and SAFSC activist, 082 775 3420
Jane Cherry, Executive Manager, COPAC and SAFSC activist, 084 236 3649