



29 October 2020

Press release

27 October National Food Crisis Forum

No to Mboweni's austerity measures: A climate justice critique of the budget

The 11th meeting of the National Food Crisis Forum (NFCF) took place on Tuesday, 27 October. This meeting, convened by South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC) 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, was held to take stock of the hunger, water and general crisis of socio-ecological reproduction in South Africa and further discuss responses by the forum to the crisis. The situation is still dire, and Tito Mboweni's budget statement is a further slap in the faces of the precarious working class and poor. His approach to macro-economics is problematic in the following respects:

- It continues a globalised management approach which is about pandering to credit rating agencies and international financial markets while the majority continue to suffer. The Minister needs to be reminded that we are not just a democracy in name. He and the ANC government he represents must govern in the interests of the people not undemocratic market forces;
- It continues to reproduce inequality while allowing corporations and the wealthy to continue concentrating wealth at the top. This has a racialised and gendered character. In the context of Covid-19 and worsening climate shocks this is a recipe for climate injustice such that precarious workers, the powerless and vulnerable carry the cost of austerity;
- Accompanying and supporting the State President's Recovery Plan, this budget is blind to the worsening climate crisis. It entrenches a carbon and mining led growth path. We fundamentally disagree with this anti-climate science and anti-climate justice policy thrust.

In the short term, the worsening crisis of socio-ecological reproduction and failure of the austerity budget are reflected in the following lived realities:

Hunger, unemployment and food prices

The [NIDS-CRAM Wave 2 report](#) shows that there has been a 27% decline in child and household hunger between August and June 2020. This is a positive result and can be due to grants, UIF transfers and previously furloughed workers returning to work. In terms of unemployment, the 2.8 million jobs lost between February and April have not returned by June. From February to June 2020 workers who were poor, rural, female, unskilled and less educated have experienced the largest declines in employment. High food prices contribute to hunger as families simply cannot afford to buy food or the required nutritious food. Research by PMBEJD shows that a household food basket (comprising 44 food items and catering to a family of 7 for a month) has increased by R60 (1.6%) from R3856,34 in September 2020 to R3916,72 in October 2020. This is above the minimum wage in South Africa and makes it extremely difficult for low wage earning and grant recipient households to

survive. Since the start of lockdown there has been a 9.1% increase in the cost of a food basket over the seven-month period. The loss of caregiver and pension top-ups are creating worries that this will spark massive spikes in hunger. South Africa is transitioning to mass starvation and this creates conditions for social conflict including violence against women and children. The problems faced by our communities are multi-faceted and complex and on top of that, some communities are still without water. We continue to stand with 120 communities in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo who are still struggling to meet their water needs. The Eastern Cape government has failed to provide progress reports to our water assemblies with affected communities. Moreover, the Limpopo government has just been unresponsive and leaves us with no other option but a legal challenge, which we are seriously considering. The Department of Water and Sanitation has stopped reporting on water tank delivery and hence the public does not know who is benefitting and whether the government is still rolling out such solutions. The Eastern Cape and Limpopo communities who were not receiving water before Covid 19, have had to endure a drought and are still suffering. The austerity budget of the Finance Minister makes these realities worse.

The ANC Government has failed us

Government has failed with the covid-19 response to meet the needs of the people. Ten years of job creation (2.2 million) was wiped out in a few months during the hard lockdown. The poor and hungry continue to suffer as is evident by rates of hunger, unemployment and food price increases. Government's solutions such as top-ups and food parcels (only about 6 million reached since September) have been insufficient. Top-ups have also been withdrawn by the government to manage the public debt largely caused by ANC looting. If the ANC government stopped stealing public money South Africa would have very different macro-economic choices. The government's trickle down emphasis on public and community works programs does not address the depth and scale of the crisis of socio-ecological reproduction. It does not match the suffering of the people. We can expect continued hunger and unemployment for millions in our country with the current budget.

The Climate Justice Charter Alternative – Towards a Climate Justice Deal for South Africa

The Climate Justice Charter (which has been endorsed by over 230 organisations) was handed over to the deputy speaker of parliament at an online engagement on the afternoon of the 16 October. The charter calls for systemic solutions to the crises we face as society, including hunger, water issues, housing, work/unemployment, to name a few. Key systemic solutions that speak directly to the crisis of socio-ecological reproduction in the Charter are food sovereignty, democratic planning of our water commons, eco-social housing, a universal basic income grant system and a break with mainstream economics. On the latter point the Minister's budget confirmed what is wrong with mainstream neoliberal economics. Hence the Climate Justice Charter movement is working towards a Climate Justice Deal based on heterodox economics and the systemic solutions it proposes for a just, democratic and transformative recovery. We want an economics that advances climate justice and a deep just transition that benefits the working class, the poor and the most vulnerable in our society.

For further information, contact:

Vishwas Satgar, Board Chairperson COPAC and SAFSC activist, 082 775 3420

Jane Cherry, COPAC Executive Manager and SAFSC activist, 084 236 3649

Courtney Morgan, COPAC and SAFSC activist, 083 483 9119

Awande Buthelezi, COPAC and SAFSC and activist, 079 613 8191