



**Press Release: Statement from the National Coordinating Committee
Meeting (5-6 March 2016)**

March 11, 2016

The National Coordinating Committee of the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC) met in Johannesburg from 4-6 March 2016, to address the current food crisis precipitated by the devastating drought affecting many regions throughout the country and countries in the region. SAFSC has taken the position that the drought should be declared a national disaster given the impact on subsistence, small scale farmer production and poor communities. The NCC meeting heard testimony from small scale farmers on the impact and severity of the drought. We heard that livestock deaths, emergency slaughtering, crop failures and dry water wells and rivers were causing financial ruin and massive insecurity amongst predominantly small scale farmers and their communities. Government relief in most instances was seen as too little too late with no long term solutions to the cause of the crises being placed on the agenda. We will be challenging this situation with a 'Drought Speak Out' for small scale farmers and affected communities in the Southern African region.

SAFSC and the climate justice and land rights social movements working directly with small scale farmers has been warning of impending climate shocks and the need for an appropriate response for quite some time. The need for Food Sovereignty alternatives based on agro-ecology has never been more evident than at the present moment as we have witnessed how the dominant Industrial Agricultural system, which depends heavily on chemical pesticides and fertilisers, has proven to be unable to withstand the ever changing variables that can be directly attributed to climate change. The El Nino phenomenon has definitely been exacerbated by the changing weather patterns with the current drought being measured as the worst ever on record and with about 29 million people affected in the region.

The SAFSC believes that the current drought offers a unique window into the future where severe weather extremes and climate shocks will become more prevalent. The drought also offers farmers the opportunity to explore alternative methods of farming shifting their focus to more indigenous varieties and species that have proven and built in resilience to grow in and withstand the harsher future climate variations that are predicted by most experts. Agro-ecological and indigenous alternatives offer resilience without negatively impacting the environment. The need to develop sustainable alternatives has never been more urgent as the current chemical and carbon intensive food system is unsustainable and contributes massively to carbon emissions that lead to the climate crises.

SAFSC believes government's response to the drought and its effects have been grossly inadequate. We commend the efforts of Operation Hydrate, who tirelessly works to deliver much needed water to affected communities, but the fact that NGO's, individuals and businesses have to jump in to assist in delivering a basic human right such as water clearly indicates the failed state trajectory that South Africa is heading towards. Drought relief is inadequate and the allocations in this year's budget is disproportionate to the severity of the impact experienced by farmers and rural communities. From the budget speech and the few references in the State of the Nation by the President it is clear that the Government is underestimating the severity of the drought and the long term impact of climate change. SAFSC offers a hotline for farmers to call in and tell their stories about the severity of the drought so that we can document where the stress and the impact is. We will use this data to inform our strategies to demand appropriate relief. **The hotline number is 011447 1013.**

The impact of the drought and the poor economic growth, especially on the urban poor, is being ignored completely by all state agencies and the meagre R80 per month increase to pensioners and R20 a month increase for child grants indicates Government's complete disconnect with the lived realities of the poor. With food inflation at above 15% it is the poor, especially the urban poor, that are facing the brunt of both the economic policy failures of the present regime as well as the high food prices that results from the systemic crises of capitalism and the corporate imperative to ensure profit at all costs. It is SAFSC's contention that most of the food inflation is driven much more by corporate greed than by real input costs attributed to the drought. Profiteering throughout the value chain has substantially increased using the drought and the weaker rand as a convenient excuse to exploit vulnerable consumers. The Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action (PACSA) has tracked the impact of food inflation on poor households through their basic food basket price indices, below are some of their findings.

*(The substantial food price inflation seen on the food baskets of low-income households has been in effect since November 2015, with month-on-month increases averaging 4.47% per month through February 2016. The PACSA food basket has increased by R231.14 or 14% in this short period. The food baskets of low-income households are particularly vulnerable to food price inflation because the number of foods in the basket is few (only 36 items) and the types of foods are disproportionately made up of core staple foods – maize meal, rice, flour, cooking oil, sugar; sugar beans; cheaper proteins and vegetables. It is these foods, vulnerable to drought, and heavily exposed to speculation (many are traded as commodities) and exchange rate fluctuations which are driving food price inflation on the baskets of low-income households. The price of a bag of 25kg maize meal increased by R21 (12%) month-on-month, taking a 25kg bag to a high of R200.16 in February 2016 (up from R179.14 in January 2016). Food price inflation is set to escalate throughout 2016 as the full effects of the drought and importing – particularly maize – has yet to be felt. PACSA projected a 15% increase as a floor in January 2016– we do not yet know what the ceiling might be) Source: **PACSA Monthly Food Price Barometer: FEBRUARY 2016***

The South African Food Sovereignty Campaign demands that government immediately prioritises the plight of the urban poor by promoting a food commons with an emphasis on developing urban food gardens and farms that are cultivated on the principles of Agro-Ecology, Food Sovereignty and the Solidarity Economy. SAFSC insists that all available urban land be allocated to Community Food Producing Co-operatives in order to advance Food Sovereignty and mitigate the impacts of hunger and malnutrition on especially children. SAFSC believes that the over reliance on the Corporate Capitalist food system has left communities vulnerable with their right to Food Sovereignty severely compromised. The Food Sovereignty alternative allows communities to take control of their food systems and build the necessary resilience to withstand economic and climate related challenges ensuring that nutritional requirements of the most vulnerable are met. SAFSC has committed to join the call for **#FOODPRICESMUSTFALL** initiatives that are gaining momentum throughout the country. We believe that given the high levels of profiteering as well as the lack of state intervention in the food system there is ample room for the food prices to fall and that the demands of the Rural and Urban poor for decent nutrition is not unreasonable. Failure by Corporate Food Monopolies and the State to take heed of the **#FOODPRICESMUSTFALL** demands has the potential to explode into violence in our communities. Already women, children, the elderly and the unemployed bear the brunt of corporate induced hunger. The South African Food Sovereignty Campaign will be engaging all stakeholders in the food system in an effort to highlight the urgency of curbing the spiralling food inflation if major civil strife and instability is to be averted.

The SAFSC National Coordinating Committee places on record our concerns with regards to the importing of potentially diseased poultry from the USA. We believe the capitulation of our Government to the bullying tactics imposed through the AGOA agreement has illustrated clearly that South African citizens' interests are secondary when it comes to towing the Washington consensus line. SAFSC endorses the calls for a consumer boycott of all these suspicious products and demand that all poultry originating from the USA be clearly marked so that consumers can make informed decisions when purchasing poultry, failure to indicate places of origin is a criminal offence and we expect strict enforcement in this regard. SAFSC further believes that the relaxation of the rules on

Genetically Modified Organisms being imported especially maize from Mexico and the USA, places South African Food Sovereignty at risk with the potential for cross contamination with non-GMO varieties and health risks to consumers becoming legitimate concerns. At minimum we demand that the government label all GMO products. Moreover, all the science on GMOs should be placed in the public arena for scrutiny.

SAFSC is advancing Seed Sovereignty to Fight Climate Change and Corporate Power. Many governments and corporations are quite aware of the challenge that climate change poses for our food systems. But corporations who are responsible for climate change are also trying to promote false solutions, like genetically modified organisms (GMOs). These corporations claim that GMOs will help farmers adapt to the impacts of climate change, but what they are really about is taking control over seeds away from farmers, to force farmers to buy their seeds and thereby increase their profits every year. GMOs are therefore a form of dispossession! Building alternatives like seed banking and agro-ecology advances us towards sustainable production practices and builds the power of small farmers and communities in the food system. As part of building real resilience in the face of climate change, we need to build seed sovereignty, through:

- Increasing the variety of seeds that we use
- Protecting existing organic and agro-ecological farmers' varieties of seeds
- Expanding our stock of such seeds through seed sharing, saving and banking
- Using our own seeds in agro-ecology farming in our communities

Whatever happens to seed affects the web of life. – Vandana Shiva

SAFSC has partnered with other interest groups such as 350.org to target coal and coal derived energy as the major source of carbon emissions in South Africa, SAFSC finds it imperative to link coal to the climate crises that is devastating food production. Furthermore, coal mining is water intensive and pollutes both water and land as part of the extraction process. Corruption in the acquisition of mining rights is rife and often to the detriment of small scale and communal farmers. SAFSC unequivocally echoes the call for clean and socially owned renewable energy. We will continue to campaign against dirty energy such as coal, oil, gas, fracking and nuclear energy.

SAFSC places on record our concern with regards to the proposed Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Bill as it places enormous power in the hands of traditional leaders who now would have the authority to dispossess communal and small scale farmers. SAFSC shares the legitimate concerns raised by representatives of Communal Property Associations and their many associated farming co-operatives that this bill has the potential to reverse gains made in the redistribution of agricultural land. Traditional leaders have in many instances prioritised mining rights above those of small scale subsistence farmers leading to dire consequences for entire communities.

The South African Food Sovereignty Campaign will launch and develop a strategy that will seek to make farming and agriculture more appealing to the youth. Farm work has been stigmatised as degrading and menial labour as more rural youth become urbanised and Westernised. SAFSC together with our partners such as the INALA Food Garden and Food Bank initiative at Wits University and the Slow Food Youth Movement will look at programmes that demonstrate how farming and especially agro-ecology has both, a cool and funky appeal, while also being a sustainable and even lucrative alternative to entering the industrial and corporate job market. Youth agro-ecology farmers are the future! They will save the planet and end hunger!

The SAFSC will increase its key focus strategies by continuing to roll out and initiate actions that will transform our society and its relationship with food. Amongst these will be the food sovereignty festivals, activist schools, food dialogues and speak-outs, logistical support to small scale farmers and co-operatives, awareness and information campaigns, developing resource materials for activist and farmers, establishing community seed banks and seed sharing programmes, learning exchanges, as well as building networks and coalitions to advance Food Sovereignty.

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