



Public Statement and Press Release

20 April 2020

To:

Mr Cyril Ramaphosa, President, Republic of South Africa

Mrs Thokozile Didiza, Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, South Africa

Mr Ebrahim Patel, Minister of Trade and Industry, South Africa

Mrs Nosiviwe Nolutando Mapisa-Nqakula, Minister of Defence and Military Veterans, South Africa

Mrs Barbara Creecy, Minister of Forestry and Fisheries and Environmental Affairs

Mrs Angie Motshekga, Minister of Basic Education

Ms. Gloria Serobe, Chairperson of the Solidarity Fund

Re: Covid-19 Lock Down and Worsening Food Crisis in the Country

While we commend the government's efforts to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic, the lock down has not been accompanied with adequate socio-economic mitigation measures. South Africa is one of the most unequal countries in the world and with major food stress amongst big parts of its population. About 14 million people went to bed hungry before the lock down. With social grants inadequate to meet the food needs of households (17.6 million), about 4 million informal sector workers (including street traders, domestic workers, waster reclaimers, car guards etc) living from hand to mouth suddenly losing income generating opportunities and high structural unemployment at about 5.9 million posed to jump to about 9 million, the country is facing a food crisis involving about 30 million people. This is a big challenge.

From all assessments we have done and reports received from grassroots communities, governments response to food needs has been inadequate. The Solidarity Fund has centralised resourcing and 3 weeks into the lock down it has not been able to effectively ensure food supply, through food parcels. The food crisis is going to persist as long as we have the Covid-19 pandemic. The Solidarity Fund is far from blunting the edge of desperation and hunger. Politicians handing out food parcels is not helping the situation and it politicises the crisis.

Democratise the Solidarity Fund

We demand that all politicians desist from handing out food parcels. Moreover, the Solidarity Fund (SF) must work closely with local government to identify community organisations that can facilitate food distribution in grassroots communities. In addition, it needs to call for a partnership with NGOs willing to support food distribution. It also needs to work with the armed forces (army, navy, military and police) to ensure food parcels are distributed in specific communities, while monitored by local faith based and community leaders. We also would like greater transparency on food parcel pricing and its nutritional content. Moreover, we believe the Solidarity Fund must also be open to receiving proposals from small and micro-level community farmers that need resources to jump start production again as part of food sovereignty and agro-ecology pathway building.

On the 6th of April, we sent this public call , <https://www.safsc.org.za/public-statement-demand-for-supermarket-chains-and-government-to-enable-peoples-pantries-and-solidarity-buying/> , to government and supermarkets to ensure the promotion of peoples pantries and solidarity buying. We wanted ethical pricing for solidarity packages that could be bought by consumers and placed in supermarket peoples pantries. These solidarity packages could then be distributed by the military and police to communities in need, while monitored by local faith and community leaders. We have not heard back from government and since then, supermarkets have been looted in Mitchells Plain and Nelson Mandela Bay. As the situation worsens supermarkets will become targets for desperate households without any sources of income.

As Democratic Leaders Talk to Us

We would appreciate a response from government on this proposal.

The government has also failed to appreciate that thousands of community gardeners, small scale farmers, community feeding schemes and subsistence fishers are central to meeting the food needs of many communities. The lock down of the localised food commons has meant produce is wasting away while people starve and many families dependent on fishing cannot survive. This is an unacceptable situation. While the Minister of agriculture has earmarked finance for small scale farmers this excludes thousands of small and micro scale food producers. The financing set aside for small farmers also does not assist household and community food sovereignty pathways based on food sovereignty. School feeding schemes which provide hot meals to about 9 million children have also been stopped in most provinces, with the Western Cape being an exception.

Unlock the Food Commons

We demand the government unlock the food commons – community gardens, small scale farmers, community feeding schemes and subsistence fishers. We need a clear pronouncement that these local food producers are part of essential services and will also be supplied with essential health equipment. We also believe the Minister of Agriculture needs to dedicate a significant stream of the financing for small farmers to community based micro and small scale farmers, households and agro-ecology support NGOs. All school feeding schemes should be reinstated under public health guidelines.

Together let's ensure that the Covid-19 pandemic is not also a food pandemic. We need decisive leadership now to prevent social collapse through starvation. We have also started a peoples referendum on basic income grant #BIGNOW for South Africa (available here: <https://copac.org.za/peoples-referendum-bignow/>) Many governments in the world are doing everything in their power to mitigate the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic and lock downs on the lives of their citizens while rising to the public health challenge. The South African government needs to do the same. We need bold, innovative and heterodox thinking now!

For more information, contact:

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