



Press Release

National Food Crisis Forum - Food Relief Efforts Assembly

12th August 2020

South Africa's Worsening Food Crisis Is a Humanitarian Emergency

To:

Mr Cyril Ramaphosa, President, Republic of South Africa

Ms Lindiwe Zulu, Minister of Social Development

Ms Gloria Serobe, Solidarity Fund Chairperson

Ms Wendy Tlou, Solidarity Fund Official

On the 11th of August 2020, representatives from the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign-convened National Food Crisis Forum held an Assembly. This Assembly specifically concerned the Food Relief and Engagements Committee which was created under the Forum, and allowed for these stakeholders to meet for the first time with respondents from the food relief efforts survey. This survey mapped food relief efforts during the national lockdown. In addition to the [mapping](#) process which was done with the data collected from the surveys, the committee wrote a short report summarising the findings, and made several recommendations. The survey was sent out with the initial goal of making these efforts more visible to government, the Solidarity Fund and other funders, as well as to make these efforts more visible to each other.

The survey's findings have been very helpful, not only for the food relief committee, but also for the overall goal of the National Food Crisis Forum to address hunger. It is clear that the hunger crisis in South Africa existed prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, and has worsened under lockdown. With unemployment increasing, access to the corporate-owned food system is increasingly difficult for many South Africans. Approximately 1 million people have fallen from employment into poverty during the lockdown. The findings of the food relief mapping survey (available here: https://www.safsc.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/National-Food-Crisis-Forum_-Food-relief-mapping-report.pdf) are summarised below:

- A cumulative 92% of the respondents were spread across the 4 most populated provinces, and the hardest-hit in terms of Covid-19 infections: the Western Cape, Gauteng, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.
- Up to 60% of respondents stated that they started their initiative at the beginning of lockdown, which is a reflection of the swift response that came from civil society and NGOs in the context of the hunger crisis. Close to a quarter of respondents stated that their

initiative has been running for over 5 years, which indicates how protracted the hunger crisis has been. Both these responses reflect the potential of communities to respond to crisis, and this potential must be used to embed long-term alternatives for the alleviation of hunger.

- The type of relief that was provided to communities is important, as more than 90% of initiatives are providing food parcels, hot meals or both. This is a key intervention in the short term, to meet the immediate needs of communities. However, with less than 5% of initiatives providing seed/seedlings, the potential for these initiatives to have a long-term impact, and transform the food system is not being realised. This approach also affects the sustainability of these initiatives. With growing unemployment, hunger will worsen and the vulnerable groups will grow, eventually overwhelming relief efforts.
- Sourcing of ingredients is an important factor because it has an impact on longevity. A total of 42% of respondents stated that they rely entirely on community donations. With an already longstanding and currently indefinite lockdown, as well as a recession, community donations are unlikely to continue at current levels. Additionally, donor fatigue is likely to prevent the ongoing support of these initiatives. These efforts need guaranteed and consistent funding to succeed.

Only 16% of respondents stated that they were supporting local producers, even though this would be the most helpful for communities because it would stimulate the local economy and minimise transport costs. There is also a significant sourcing from big retailers which reproduces a reliance on the corporate-owned food system.

- The survey found, most importantly, three key unsustainable dynamics to the current food relief system. Firstly, short-term food relief (hot meals and food parcels) encourages communities to be reliant on external food relief efforts. Secondly, as the communities in need of food grow because of increased unemployment and hunger, this will therefore require initiatives to grow in their efforts to meet the increasing demand. Thirdly, initiatives will not be able to do meet demand the long term as most of them rely on donations, which is fundamentally unsustainable due to donor fatigue. Thus, as the demand for food relief increases, the capacity to meet it will decrease which is a fundamentally dangerous and unsustainable dynamic. We need to employ more food-sovereignty-based initiatives to avoid falling into this trap and exacerbating the hunger crisis further.

In line with the aims of the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign-convened National Food Crisis Forum, and in the context of a failing government and Solidarity Fund effort to adequately address the hunger crisis, South Africa is facing a humanitarian emergency. These recommendations are made in the report, which we will champion together with food relief efforts:

1. The government, along with the Solidarity Fund and other food funding schemes must support organisations on the ground, who are embedded and experienced in organising food relief in their communities.
2. These and other donors should use the findings from this and other studies to inform their financial support of initiatives.
3. To address the food crisis in a more sustainable way, the government should support grassroots efforts to establish agro-ecological food gardens and small-scale farms that can be used to feed communities at a local level. This will decrease communities' reliance on the national food system, and decrease instances of national hunger.
4. The government should also support the SAFSC national strategy and efforts to establish food hubs, including gardens, food kitchens and training centres. This will enable local food

systems, knowledge and skills for self-sustainability. This infrastructure is crucial to address the worsening climate crisis, as well.

5. The government must ensure communities have access to the water commons to grow food and contribute to the food commons.
6. Food relief providers should consider including more long-term solutions to hunger in their initiatives, such as seeds, and training or information on starting a garden. Training tools are available for download at: www.safsc.org.za
7. Individuals and small organisations should use the map generated by this survey to network and grow their impact on communities across the country.
8. Community-led food relief efforts in this mapping exercise must reach out to Disaster Management Centres in their districts for support and share the responses with the SAFSC at copac2@icon.co.za. (full list of centres in annexure of original report).
9. We should all stand together on October 16th, a national day of action, to address hunger, as well as, Covid 19 and Climate injustices. Our rallying slogan: “End Hunger - Covid 19 Justice, is Climate Justice!” This is also the day the SAFSC will be handing over the Climate Justice Charter to parliament to demand it be adopted as per section 206 of the South African constitution. The Climate Justice Charter is available at: <https://www.safsc.org.za/climate-justice-charter/>
10. The government must implement a universal basic income grant for South Africa. This will decrease national hunger, and consequently increase the standard of living for all.
11. Finally, if the government and the Solidarity Fund are unresponsive to the requests for support to address the worsening hunger crisis, SAFSC will report the worsening humanitarian crisis to relevant human rights agencies in the United Nations system. We will confirm this step with all involved in this study before action is taken.

For Further Information Contact:

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