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**Covid-19: Food prices continue to spike; women are getting increasingly concerned.**

On Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2020 we collected food prices in Pietermaritzburg supermarkets which target the low-income market. We present these price increases from before the lockdown to this date (2 March 2020 to 23 April 2020). Last week we started talking to women in Johannesburg and Durban, and some smaller more rural towns in Northern KZN and Northern Cape: the thoughts and fears that women in Pietermaritzburg have are reflected in other parts of South Africa. The cost of household food baskets continues to escalate. Women are worried about government's ability to understand their situation, and whether there is a genuineness to step up and help them. This Research Report provides our latest PMBEJD data as well as observations of women holding their families together and struggling to buy and put food on the table. The Report also includes our own analysis based on what women are experiencing, thinking, and how they are responding.

*[Text = 4 pages; and data = 3 pages]*

**1. Increases in the cost of the household food basket**

Over the past **3 weeks** (from 2nd April 2020 to 23 April 2020): The cost of the household food basket **increased by R65,67 (1,9%) to R3 473,75 on 23rd April 2020.**

Over the past **two months** (from 2nd March 2020 to 23 April 2020): The cost of the household food basket **increased by R252,75 (7,8%)** from R3 221,00 on 2nd March 2020 to R3 473,75 on 23rd April 2020.

*(See Table 1, page 5 for the latest price data of the costs of foods in the household food basket).*

The foods driving increases in the household food basket **over the past 3 weeks are all foods which are essential staple foods:**

- Rice 12% (R106,19 for a 10kg bag)
- Cake flour 4% (R76,79 for a 10kg bag)
- Cooking oil 9% (R102,79 for 5 litres)
- White sugar 4% (R150,59 for a 10kg bag)
- Sugar beans 8% (R99,79 for a 5kg bag)
- Onions 5% (R82,84 for a 10kg pocket)
- Eggs 4% (R85,79 for 2 trays of 30 eggs)
- Cabbage 10% (R32,98 for 2 heads of cabbage)

South Africa imports rice, wheat, and palm oil. The spike in rice, cake flour and cooking oil, and bread may be linked to supply disruptions, exchange rates, amongst other factors.

Maize meal prices continue to be stable (the harvest is coming in). The maize meal price should decrease if prices in supermarkets are related to supply.

Bread prices in Pietermaritzburg have not spiked further over the past three weeks (they are still 14% to 15% higher than they were at the beginning of March 2020).

The Regulations issued by the DTI on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March for Consumer and Customer Protection omitted bread, sugar beans, samp and eggs from the list of foods whose prices should be protected from price increases during the Covid-19 outbreak. These foods are critical staple foods, and sugar beans and eggs are essential for proper nutrition. Green bar soap should also be included. The DTI must urgently amend the regulations.

Potatoes (-16%) and Butternut prices have come down (-31%) over the past three weeks.

The food price increases we are seeing in Pietermaritzburg are considerable. A 7,8% or additional R250 cost on a basic basket of core staple foods over the past two months, for families living on low incomes is a serious financial shock. The basket on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April is R3 473.

Women are concerned that with the projected job losses, the staggered return of workers to employment, and with the small bits of top-ups on the grants, and the physical distancing at supermarkets restricting their strategy to shop for the cheapest prices across several supermarkets: **that May is going to be a very hard month.**

Women are also concerned with the transport regulations during lockdown – for the majority of South Africans who do not have a car, taxis start at around 4am and stop at 10am, before starting again in the afternoon. For most women who still do their shopping in CBDs, it means that they must finish up their shopping before 10am if they are to catch the last taxi home. Missing this taxi means waiting with perishable foods until the afternoon. Imagine what that 5kg bag of frozen chicken portions looks like after 6 hours in the sun. The consequence of these regulations means that everybody rushes to get in a taxi as early as possible – taxis are very full, as are supermarket queues.

It also means that women are price takers in supermarkets because the restricted times and long queues means that women have to buy their entire grocery list in just one supermarket and one butchery, and therefore their food baskets are more expensive at the very time when household income has dropped. In some supermarkets, women, when they are let in, are only given 20 minutes to shop, thus turning their shopping into a sort of mad-tragic parody on the “lucky trolley dash.” PMBEJD averages its prices over 5 supermarkets and 4 butcheries – typically the cost of the PMBEJD Household Food Basket is priced above the cost of the basket that women bring home because women shop in several supermarkets and butcheries and find the best lowest price across the stores. Now, the cost of the PMBEJD Household Food Basket is probably priced below the cost that women are able to source their baskets. An educated guess of possibly R200 to R300 more. Again, at a time when women have less money in their pockets to buy food – food prices have increased and women’s ability to buy cheaper foods has been suspended.

Reports from women we are talking to in different parts of South Africa are all saying that the queues outside supermarkets are very very long. Supermarkets are only letting a few shoppers in at a time: some 15, some 20, some 50. Women have to wait anything from 45 minutes up to 4 hours and even 6 hours to get into the supermarkets. Women are complaining that even the lines at Home Affairs are quicker. Waiting in a queue where the line snakes around corners and you cannot see the entrance, where you are on top of everyone, and when it is blisteringly hot or shatteringly cold, and where you are watching times’ running wings is frustrating and exhausting and it makes you very agitated. It is important to note that the 23<sup>rd</sup> of the month, is not generally a busy time at supermarkets; women worry what the situation will be like when it is the busy time at supermarkets (like for example, pension pay-out day on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May).

Social distancing outside supermarkets does not start at the end of the queue – it starts at the front of the queue. You can be in a queue for two hours before social distancing via a trolley between you and the next shopper, a barrier line of some sort, or a security guard starts marshalling the queue. It is human nature to want to create an illusion that any line is shorter than it actually is – you might start off well by being 2 meters away from your fellow shopper, but after a few exhausting hours you just want to get into the supermarket.

Women are still complaining that street traders are not on the streets. Women typically buy vegetables, fruits and eggs, amongst other things domestic and personal hygiene products from street traders. Street traders allow women to buy foods in relation to how much money they have viz. R10s worth of tomatoes; women are able to haggle and check the quality of the potatoes in that brown paper pocket. They cannot do this in the supermarket. But street traders also offer a service – women are able to leave their packets with them as they go and find other foods and meat. Not being on the street means that women have to use the supermarket storage counters – here again the queues are long.

## **2. Increases in the cost of the household domestic and personal hygiene products basket**

Over the past **3 weeks** (from 2nd April 2020 to 23 April 2020): The cost of the household domestic and personal hygiene products basket **increased by R14,43 (2,1%) to R709,18 on the 23rd April 2020.**

Over the past **two months** (from 2nd March 2020 to 23 April 2020): The cost of the household domestic and personal hygiene products basket **increased by R49,09 (7,4%)** from R660,09 on the 2nd March 2020 to R709,18 on 23rd April 2020.

*(See Table 2, page 6 for the latest price data of the costs of domestic & personal hygiene products).*

The products driving increases in the household domestic and personal hygiene product basket are all important for proper hygiene and sanitation; these include: *Jik* (up 5%), dishwashing liquid (up 8%), green bar soap (up 2%), washing powder (up 3%), toilet paper (up 13%) and sanitary pads (up 2%).

Domestic and personal hygiene products are critical expenses for safe hygiene and overall health and well-being. The money needed to secure domestic and personal hygiene products are sourced from within the food budget. These products compete with the food budget. Women are telling us that they are buying more *Jik*, bath soap, and green bar soap to try to protect themselves from contracting Covid-19. Women are caught in a catch-22. Protecting family's costs money, families need to spend money to protect themselves. Most families do not have extra money to spend on extra hygiene products which are now also extra expensive. It means that there is now even less money to buy food.

### **3. Increases in the cost of a basic nutritious diet for a child**

Over the past **3 weeks** (from 2nd April 2020 to 23rd April 2020): The cost of feeding children a basic nutritious diet **increased by an average of R14,43 (2,2%) to R670,30 on the 23rd April 2020.**

Over the past **two months** (from 2nd March 2020 to 23 April 2020): The cost of feeding children a basic nutritious diet **increased by an average of R29,47 (4,6%)** from R640,83 on the 2nd of March 2020 to R670,30 on the 23rd of April 2020.

*(See Table 3, page 7 for the latest data, analysis and comments on the Child Support Grant and the cost of a nutritious diet for a child).*

*In most household's food starts running out between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of every month; with the lockdown food has run out quicker. In a normal month families just push through until the end of the month. But now, at a time when families are in an even more unbearable situation than normal; Sassa pushed back the grant pay-out date to the 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of May.*

*With all the talk of the top-up in grants – this money is not yet in our hands.*

*Children are getting hungry, and for every child that is hungry know that women are even hungrier because women sacrifice their own nutritional needs for their families.*

*Some women are telling us that lockdown has meant that they have had to do their one big shop a month, 'almost' twice. The second time buying almost as much maize meal, rice, flour, and oil that they did in the beginning of the month. "When children are not playing; they are eating. Kids are eating non-stop."*

*We are seeing long queues outside supermarkets – these are women that have still been able to find money to try and buy some more food that has run out; but for every woman in the queue; there are many more at home who have no money. They cannot go to the supermarket. Their children are hungry. They are waiting for money to come in. They are at home.*

*Sassa acted on bad information to delay the pay-out date of social grants. Women are telling us that they are terribly afraid of what is going to unfold on the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> of May. Millions of women, all at the same time, will be forced out of their homes by the hunger in the bellies of their children and grandchildren, and the fear of that hunger in theirs, to collect grant money and will be corralled into the chaos of what will be the grant collection queues and the long, so very long queues to buy food, if there is food on the shelves when they eventually get there. Women (particularly elderly pensioners) fear contracting Covid-19 in the queues. They are worried that if there is coronavirus in their homes, then come the 4<sup>th</sup> of May – it will explode across the country. Women are afraid, their children are hungry, and they are angry.*

The Child Support Grant of **R440** per month is set below the food poverty line (**R561**) and further below the cost to secure a basic nutritious diet for a child (**R670,30**).

On the 23rd of April 2020, the Child Support Grant is **22%** below the food poverty line and **34%** below the cost to secure a basic nutritious diet for a child.

On the 6th of May 2020 government will increase the Child Support Grant by **R300**, taking the total value to **R740** in May 2020. At this level mothers might be able to secure the nutritional needs of a child but mothers too need direct cash assistance to ensure that they too are able to eat during the Covid-19 pandemic and the economic crisis.

The **R300** top-up grant per child is *only for one month*. Thereafter, from the 6th of June 2020 (and until October 2020), ***the Child Support Grant will revert back to the original value of R440.*** *Government will then give mothers R500 each, to share amongst their children and themselves.* This decision to not top up the Child Support Grant by R500 per child, but rather to share the R500 amongst all children and the primary caregiver will severely reduce the income coming into the homes of South Africa's most vulnerable families. It will neither secure the nutritional needs of children nor will it secure the nutritional needs of mothers in the midst of the pandemic and economic crisis. (Nor will the R500 assist to any significant sense to cover all the other expenses which mothers need to pay to ensure their children live securely and their basic needs are covered).

The top-up of R500 per child (as announced in the President's Speech) signalled that government understood the importance of securing the nutritional needs of children, just generally but also in the face of a vicious pandemic and deepening economic crisis. By reverting back to R440, just one month after increasing the grant, and then splitting R500 between all the family members in need suggests that actually government doesn't understand the purpose and importance of the Child Support Grant or South Africa's unique social security system, or South Africa's economic crisis, the affordability crisis in the homes of millions of South Africans, and nor do they seem to understand our poverty and inequality, **or that the majority of South Africans have almost no more capacity to absorb shocks.** The consequences of government's decision will have both immediate short-term and long-term consequences - none of them good.

The decision by government to not support mothers and their children adequately in the past but now again to make this very same decision in the face of one of the worst crises South Africa has ever faced is shameful. We need our leaders to want, for all of our children, what they want for their own children. If they cannot do this, if they cannot think in terms of universality just from the basis of their own love for their own children and extend this to ours; then our leaders have hurt their credibility to lead. Government's decision will reverberate negatively into every facet of our developmental trajectory and will undermine the ability of millions of South Africans and the future generation of our country to resist Covid-19 and build a better society and new economy.

Government will *reap its small savings of removing food off the plates of millions of children by renegading on the R500 Child Support Grant top-up per child*, in hunger multiplied in a million stomachs and with it a massive public health bill, extraordinary expenditure in the public education system because hungry children struggle to learn, an economy that is not able to draw on the minds and bodies of strong men and women, anger in communities and a growing wrath on our streets. ***It was just such a simple thing - help mothers feed their children in their time of greatest need by using an incredibly effective instrument in the grant system. How wrong it has turned out.***

Millions of South African families were in a very bad situation prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown. We do not have the space to make bad decisions. People are hungrier than we think they are. People are angrier than we think they are. *Top up the Child Support Grant to R500 per child. Top up the Old Age Grant by R640 to R2500. Do it in now. Disperse it as early as possible.*

## 1. Price increases in the Household Food Index (2nd March to 23rd April 2020)

Foods tracked	Quantity tracked	Index March to April 2020			change in Rands		change in %	
		2nd Mar_2020	2nd Apr_2020	23rd Apr_2020	2 Apr 2020 vs. 23 Apr 2020	2 Mar 2020 vs. 23 Apr 2020	2 Apr 2020 vs. 23 Apr 2020	2 Mar 2020 vs. 23 Apr 2020
Maize meal	25kg + 10kg	R 246,47	R 248,31	R 248,31	R 0,00	R 1,84	0%	1%
Rice	10kg	R 87,19	R 94,59	R 106,19	R 11,60	R 19,00	12%	22%
Cake Flour	10kg	R 73,79	R 73,79	R 76,79	R 3,00	R 3,00	4%	4%
White sugar	10kg	R 145,19	R 144,49	R 150,59	R 6,10	R 5,40	4%	4%
Sugar beans	5kg	R 84,39	R 92,21	R 99,79	R 7,58	R 15,40	8%	18%
Samp	5kg	R 35,79	R 32,96	R 34,24	R 1,28	-R 1,55	4%	-4%
Cooking oil	5L	R 91,19	R 94,57	R 102,79	R 8,22	R 11,60	9%	13%
Salt	1kg	R 15,39	R 17,39	R 15,79	-R 1,60	R 0,40	-9%	3%
Potatoes	10kg	R 48,45	R 66,70	R 56,05	-R 10,65	R 7,60	-16%	16%
Onions	10kg	R 55,24	R 78,84	R 82,84	R 4,00	R 27,60	5%	50%
Frozen chicken portions	10kg	R 339,44	R 330,39	R 335,39	R 5,00	-R 4,05	2%	-1%
Curry powder	200g	R 27,59	R 28,79	R 29,19	R 0,40	R 1,60	1%	6%
Stock cubes	24 cubes x2	R 35,58	R 35,18	R 37,98	R 2,80	R 2,40	8%	7%
Soup	400g x2	R 26,38	R 25,98	R 29,18	R 3,20	R 2,80	12%	11%
Tea	250g	R 20,79	R 20,79	R 21,79	R 1,00	R 1,00	5%	5%
Maas	4L	R 39,79	R 44,19	R 42,39	-R 1,80	R 2,60	-4%	7%
Eggs	60 eggs	R 86,99	R 82,39	R 85,79	R 3,40	-R 1,20	4%	-1%
Chicken feet	5kg	R 173,59	R 159,74	R 167,47	R 7,73	-R 6,12	5%	-4%
Gizzards	2kg	R 59,44	R 64,65	R 66,99	R 2,34	R 7,55	4%	13%
Beef	2kg	R 151,44	R 143,94	R 143,94	R 0,00	-R 7,50	0%	-5%
Wors	2kg	R 111,94	R 126,89	R 123,44	-R 3,46	R 11,50	-3%	10%
Inyama yangaphakathi	2kg	R 64,94	R 66,39	R 75,00	R 8,61	R 10,07	13%	16%
Tomatoes	6kg	R 59,15	R 60,66	R 68,48	R 7,82	R 9,33	13%	16%
Carrots	5kg	R 23,79	R 35,59	R 34,59	-R 1,00	R 10,80	-3%	45%
Butternut	10kg	R 49,13	R 65,99	R 45,70	-R 20,29	-R 3,43	-31%	-7%
Spinach	8 bunches	R 63,92	R 79,92	R 93,96	R 14,04	R 30,04	18%	47%
Cabbage	2 heads	R 26,98	R 29,98	R 32,98	R 3,00	R 6,00	10%	22%
Cremora	800g	R 32,19	R 33,79	R 33,79	R 0,00	R 1,60	0%	5%
Tinned pilchards	400g x6	R 101,56	R 105,54	R 104,34	-R 1,20	R 2,78	-1%	3%
Canned beans	410g x6	R 65,16	R 65,35	R 68,36	R 3,01	R 3,20	5%	5%
Bananas	4kg	R 47,16	R 47,16	R 50,96	R 3,80	R 3,80	8%	8%
Apples	1.5kg	R 24,65	R 19,65	R 17,19	-R 2,46	-R 7,46	-13%	-30%
Margarine	1kg x2	R 63,98	R 69,18	R 71,58	R 2,40	R 7,60	3%	12%
Peanut butter	400g x2	R 57,18	R 52,48	R 55,58	R 3,10	-R 1,60	6%	-3%
Polony	2.5kg	R 60,49	R 63,79	R 64,79	R 1,00	R 4,30	2%	7%
Apricot jam	900g x2	R 51,98	R 57,98	R 56,78	-R 1,20	R 4,80	-2%	9%
White bread	25 loaves	R 248,35	R 291,40	R 286,40	-R 5,00	R 38,05	-2%	15%
Brown bread	25 loaves	R 224,35	R 256,45	R 256,35	-R 0,10	R 32,00	0%	14%
<b>Total household food basket</b>		<b>R 3 221,00</b>	<b>R 3 408,08</b>	<b>R 3 473,75</b>	<b>R 65,67</b>	<b>R 252,75</b>	<b>1,9%</b>	<b>7,8%</b>

**Over the past 3 weeks (from 2nd April 2020 to 23 April 2020):** The cost of the household food basket **increased** by **R65,67 (1,9%)** to R3 473,75 on 23rd April 2020.

**Over the past two months (from 2nd March 2020 to 23 April 2020):** The cost of the household food basket **increased** by **R252,75 (7,8%)** from R3 221,00 on 2nd March 2020 to R3 473,75 on 23rd April 2020.

The household food basket includes the foods and the volumes of these foods which women living in a household with seven members (the average low-income household size in Pietermaritzburg) tell us they typically try and secure each month. Food prices are sourced from supermarkets (5) and butcheries (4) that target the low-income market in Pietermaritzburg and which women identified as those they shop at. The supermarkets we track are not those which target the middle-class; and therefore tend to fall outside of the public gaze. The usual dates for data collection fall between the 1st and 4th day of each month, however with the Covid-19 pandemic, PMBEJD will track food prices more frequently.

Along with washing hands and physical distancing, it is important that South Africans are also advised to eat proper nutritious food. The first line of defence against disease is our bodies. Eating proper nutritious food is critical to support health and build a strong immune system to resist disease. The affordability crisis in homes works against women being able to buy a sufficient diversity of proper nutritious foods.

## 2. Price increases in the Household Domestic & Personal Hygiene Index (2nd March to 23rd April 2020)

Products tracked	Quantity tracked	Index March to April 2020			change in Rands		change in %	
		2nd Mar_2020	2nd Apr_2020	23rd Apr_2020	2 Apr 2020 vs. 23 Apr 2020	2nd Mar 2020 vs. 23 Apr 2020	2 Apr 2020 vs. 23 Apr 2020	2nd Mar 2020 vs. 23 Apr 2020
Green bar soap	8 bars	R 50,38	R 51,98	R 53,18	R 1,20	R 2,80	2%	6%
Washing powder	3kg	R 57,79	R 58,39	R 59,99	R 1,60	R 2,20	3%	4%
Dishwashing liquid	750ml	R 26,19	R 26,19	R 28,39	R 2,20	R 2,20	8%	8%
Handy Andy	750ml	R 23,19	R 23,59	R 22,99	-R 0,60	-R 0,20	-3%	-1%
Jik	750ml	R 23,39	R 21,99	R 23,19	R 1,20	-R 0,20	5%	-1%
Jeyes Fluid	500ml	R 36,19	R 36,19	R 35,59	-R 0,60	-R 0,60	-2%	-2%
Toilet paper	24 rolls	R 86,79	R 94,99	R 106,99	R 12,00	R 20,20	13%	23%
Bath soap	500g x 2	R 26,38	R 27,18	R 27,58	R 0,40	R 1,20	1%	5%
Toothpaste	100ml x3	R 43,77	R 45,57	R 44,37	-R 1,20	R 0,60	-3%	1%
Vaseline	500g	R 26,74	R 29,99	R 31,74	R 1,75	R 5,00	6%	19%
Cream	big bottle x2	R 34,38	R 35,18	R 35,48	R 0,30	R 1,10	1%	3%
Roll-on deodorant	x4	R 60,76	R 64,76	R 67,16	R 2,40	R 6,40	4%	11%
Spray-on deodorant	big spray x 3	R 73,77	R 81,57	R 73,17	-R 8,40	-R 0,60	-10%	-1%
Sanitary pads*	2 big packs	R 66,78	R 71,98	R 73,56	R 1,58	R 6,78	2%	10%
Shoe Polish	100ml	R 23,59	R 25,19	R 25,79	R 0,60	R 2,20	2%	9%
<b>Total household domestic and hygiene products</b>		<b>R 660,09</b>	<b>R 694,74</b>	<b>R 709,18</b>	<b>R 14,43</b>	<b>R 49,09</b>	<b>2,1%</b>	<b>7,4%</b>

**Over the past 3 weeks (from 2nd April 2020 to 23 April 2020):** The cost of the household domestic and personal hygiene products basket *increased* by R14,43 (2,1%) to R709,18 on the 23rd April 2020.

**Over the past two months (from 2nd March 2020 to 23 April 2020):** The cost of the household domestic and personal hygiene products basket *increased* by R49,09 (7,4%) from R660,09 on the 2nd March 2020 to R709,18 on 23rd April 2020.

Domestic and personal hygiene products are critical expenses for safe hygiene and overall health and well being. The money needed to secure domestic and personal hygiene products are sourced from within the food budget. These products compete with the food budget. Women are telling us that they are buying more Jik, bath soap, and green bar soap to try to protect themselves from contracting Covid-19. Women are caught in a catch-22 situation. Protecting families costs money, families need to spend money to protect themselves. Most families do not have extra money to spend. It means that there is now even less money to buy food.

### 3. Price increases in the Basic Nutritional Food Index for Children (2nd March to 23rd April 2020)

By age of child	Index March to April 2020			change in Rands		change in %	
	2nd Mar 2020	2nd Apr 2020	23rd Apr 2020	2 Apr 2020 vs. 23 Apr 2020	2 Mar 2020 vs. 23 Apr 2020	2 Apr 2020 vs. 23 Apr 2020	2 Mar 2020 vs. 23 Apr 2020
Small child aged 3-9 years	R573,56	R584,30	R595,94	R 11,64	R 22,38	2,0%	3,9%
Small child aged 10-13 years	R617,76	R631,66	R644,96	R 13,30	R 27,20	2,1%	4,4%
Girl child aged 14-18 years	R651,77	R667,10	R681,93	R 14,83	R 30,16	2,2%	4,6%
Boy child aged 14-18 years	R720,24	R740,42	R758,38	R 17,96	R 38,14	2,4%	5,3%
<b>Average for all children</b>	<b>R640,83</b>	<b>R655,87</b>	<b>R670,30</b>	<b>R 14,43</b>	<b>R 29,47</b>	<b>2,2%</b>	<b>4,6%</b>

**Over the past 3 weeks (from 2nd April 2020 to 23rd April 2020):** The cost of feeding children a basic nutritious diet **increased** by **R14,43 (2,2%) to R670,30** on the 23rd April 2020.

**Over the past two months (from 2nd March 2020 to 23 April 2020):** The cost of feeding children a basic nutritious diet **increased** by **R29,47 (4,6%)** from R640,83 on the 2nd of March 2020 to R670,30 on the 23rd of April 2020.

The annual Government Child Support Grant increase as per Budget 2020 is R20. A R10 increase was effected on the 1st of April 2020 (government splits the annual increase in 2 tranches: the first in April and the second in October). The total value of the Child Support Grant as from April 2020 is R440 per month. *This is a fixed value and does not increase as a child grows older.*

In April 2020 the Child Support Grant is R440 per month.

The food poverty line calculated by Statistics South Africa is R561 per capita per month (latest April 2019).

On the 23rd of April 2020 it cost R670,30 to feed a child a basic nutritious diet per month.

The Child Support Grant of R440 per month is set **below** the food poverty line and **further below** the cost to secure a basic nutritious diet for a child.

On the 23rd of April 2020, the Child Support Grant is 22% below the food poverty line and 34% below the cost to secure a basic nutritious diet for a child.

On the 6th of May 2020 government will increase the Child Support Grant by R300, taking the total value to R740 in May 2020. At this level mothers might be able to secure the nutritional needs of a child but mothers too need direct cash assistance to ensure that they too are able to eat during the Covid-19 pandemic and the economic crisis.

The R300 top-up grant per child is only for one month. Thereafter, from the 6th of June 2020 (and until October 2020), the Child Support Grant will revert back to the original value of R440. Government will then **give mothers R500 each, to share amongst their children and themselves**. This decision to not top up the Child Support Grant by R500 per child, but rather to share the R500 amongst all children and the primary caregiver will severely reduce the income coming into the homes of South Africa's most vulnerable families. It will neither secure the nutritional needs of children nor will it secure the nutritional needs of mothers in the midst of the pandemic and economic crisis. (Nor will the R500 assist to any significant sense to cover all the other expenses which mothers need to pay to ensure their children live securely and their basic needs are covered).

The top-up of R500 per child (as announced in the Presidents Speech) signalled that government understood the importance of securing the nutritional needs of children, just generally but also in the face of a vicious pandemic and deepening economic crisis. By reverting back to R440, just one month after increasing the grant, and then splitting R500 between all the family members in need suggests that actually government doesn't understand the purpose and importance of the Child Support Grant or South Africa's unique social security system, or South Africa's economic crisis, the affordability crisis in the homes of millions of South Africans, and nor do they seem to understand our poverty and inequality, or that **the majority of South Africans have almost no more capacity to absorb shocks**. The consequences of government's decision will have both immediate short-term and long-term consequences - none of them good.

The decision by government to not support mothers and their children adequately in the past but now again to make this very same decision in the face of one of the worst crises South Africa has ever faced is shameful. We need our leaders to want for their own children what they want for all of our children. If they cannot do this, if they cannot think in terms of universality just from the basis of their own person care for their own children, and extend this to ours; then our leaders have destroyed their credibility to lead. Governments decision will reverberate negatively into every facet of our developmental trajectory, and will undermine the ability of millions of South Africans and the future generation of our country to resist Covid-19, and build a new society and new economy.

Government will *reap its small savings of removing nutritious food off the plates of millions of children*, in hunger now multiplied in a million stomachs and with it a massive public health bill, extraordinary increases in the public education system because hungry children struggle to learn, an economy that is not able to draw on the minds and bodies of strong men and women, anger in communities and a growing wrath on our streets. It was **just such a simple thing** - help mothers feed their children in their time of greatest need by using an incredibly effective instrument in the grant system. How wrong it has turned out.