CHALLENGING FALSE NARRATIVES IN A GLOBAL CRISIS
Reflections on Human Rights, Inequality and Securing Food Systems

EDITORS
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The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically exposed the deep inequities and dysfunction in our society. The most vulnerable people are not only most threatened by the virus but also more immediately by hunger which threatens over 30 developing countries and possible starvation for millions. The pandemic thrust the issue of food security into glaring focus; in particular the system which underpins its production, distribution and consumption. These structural and systemic issues will not disappear once the virus is brought under control.

Community Chest, along with many other non-profit organisations and government bodies, has, by virus, but also more intimately by hunger which threatens over 30 developing countries and possible starvation for millions. The pandemic thrust the issue of food security into glaring focus; in particular the system which underpins its production, distribution and consumption. These structural and systemic issues will not disappear once the virus is brought under control.

The contributions in this publication reflect thought-leadership around emerging possibilities. The Southern Africa Food Lab has focussed much attention on understanding why food is not reaching people and what systemic issues will not disappear once the virus is brought under control.

In the concluding contribution, CHARLEEN DUNCAN of The Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (CEI) at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) is hopeful that COVID-19 is not the end of the road but presents an opportunity to bring an entrepreneurial mind-set into reimagining a food-secure post-Covid-19 scenario.

The pandemic has exposed the existing governance processes and structures that are failing to address the issue of food and nutrition security, as being inappropriate. In particular the Southern Africa Food Lab, alongside the Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, coupled with dominant policy support for an industrialised system focused on staples, clearly cannot facilitate food access.

In the immediate term, implementing phased movement restrictions could open up distribution channels and ease food security challenges in South Africa. In partnership with eThekwini metro, the lomela municipality, grassroots NGOs, farmer support organisations and other activists, the Southern Africa Food Lab has established new local food systems based on small-scale farmers connected to local markets. The Southern Africa Food Lab has focussed much attention on understanding why food is not reaching people and what systemic issues will not disappear once the virus is brought under control.

“South-eastern transitions in agriculture will require visionary leadership from youth and older farmers alike. Organisations and individuals who recognise the pandemic as an accelerator for change are those who will see the benefits”.

JULIA HARPER and SANDRA BOATEMAA of the Food Security Initiative of Stellenbosch University, write: “COVID-19 has shown that we need improved alignment and coordination across sectors and at different levels. At each level, a champion’s is needed to drive this and for, on a personal level, I am committed to work with other stakeholders to ensure that food security is strengthened in the post-COVID-19 world.”

In the immediate term, implementing phased movement restrictions could open up distribution channels and ease food security challenges in South Africa. In partnership with eThekwini metro, the lomela municipality, grassroots NGOs, farmer support organisations and other activists, the Southern Africa Food Lab has focussed much attention on understanding why food is not reaching people and what systemic issues will not disappear once the virus is brought under control. The Southern Africa Food Lab has focussed much attention on understanding why food is not reaching people and what systemic issues will not disappear once the virus is brought under control.

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World Hunger Day 2020: Asking New Questions About The World We Want To Live In

On the 27 April 2020, Freedom Day, 26 years after our first democratic election, the President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, called on South Africans to see the COVID-19 crisis “as an opportunity to invest in a new society, a new consciousness and a new economy.”

The grave concern is that the President’s call for all South Africans to invest in “a new society, a new consciousness and a new economy” is being drowned out by political theatre on the one hand but more so by the exposure of the depth of the food crisis in South Africa on the other.

South Africa’s 58 million people live in the most developed country on the African continent and yet 31 million people (55.5% of the population) live trapped in crippling poverty bands as defined by StatsSA, the government’s statistical service.

According to the Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute, StatsSA redesigned the poverty measures in South Africa from measuring a single official poverty line to three official poverty lines:
- an upper-bound poverty line (UBPL) – “the better-off poor”
- a lower-bound poverty line (LBPL) – “the poor”
- a “food poverty line” (FPL) – “the really poor”

To measure the total cost of living in South Africa.

At the lowest poverty level, defined as the Food Poverty Line, citizens earning R561 or less per month make up some 13.8 million people or 25.2% of the population. This refers to the amount of money that an individual will need to afford the minimum required daily energy intake. This is also commonly referred to as the “extreme” poverty line. The Index shows that this group of 13.8 million South African citizens are living on less than R39 a day or on US$ 1.03 a day, well below the general – and totally inadequate - indices of the US$2 a day threshold.

The Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice and Dignity Group’s Household Affordability Indices have repeatedly stated that more than half (55.5%) of the population lives below the upper-bound poverty line.

The impact of being exposed to the three forces of food poverty i.e.
- food insecurity (insufficient or irregular access to consistent food sources);
- food loss (losing access to a food source and not in a position to replace it); and
- food risk (crop failure and external agency dependency) all compound to deepen the South African food crisis. Since the inception of democracy in 1994, we have witnessed a growing dependency on a single food supply chain that is driven by a monetary framework which is out of reach for most South Africans.

Add to this the absence of food security as a core strategy in most South African government programmes and we are seeing the making of one of the biggest threats to the stability of our democracy.

With the President’s call to all of us to invest in a new society, a new consciousness and a new economy, we should now begin to ask ourselves a series of deep questions about our developmental trajectory. Have we been wrong about our strategies about poverty eradication, poverty elimination and poverty reduction? Have we been asking the right questions about how to engage the poorest 31 million citizens about a more food, health and education secure future?

In exploring a new consciousness, a new society and a new economy, I have begun to explore the following questions: “Instead of trying to implement poverty reduction, poverty elimination and poverty eradication programmes, should we not be asking ourselves what wealth creation should look like for poor people?” These are not the capitalist notions of wealth but the power of a family or community to be in a position to make their own decisions about their food security, their education, their housing and their health. If our aid theories do not allow vulnerable families and communities to arrive at a place of dignity and independent decision making about a sustainable future, then we are aiding the toxicity of their poverty.

I am particularly pleased to thank Zenariah Barends in her role as editor and Prof Scott Drimie as co-editor of “World Hunger Day 2020 - Challenging False Narratives in a Global Crisis: Reflections on Human Rights, Inequality and Securing Food Systems” for bringing together a collection of challenging and diverse voices to raise the multi-dimensional aspects of building a more food secure future for South Africa. Thank you to all the contributors. In particular, I would like to thank the Southern Africa Food Lab, for co-anchoring this online publication with Community Chest, the Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice and Dignity Group and the Western Cape Economic Development Partnership.

With World Hunger Day 2020 occurring midway in a global pandemic, it is appropriate for all us to stop and look deeply at what that new consciousness, new society and new economy should look like. We have this one moment to do so.
The coronavirus is thought to have been transmitted into the human population through our use of animals as food – possibly even through the course of a meal. This is not the first time that food, our sustenance, has delivered a potentially lethal pathogen. It is just the most recent and most catastrophic health event of our time, even though we might consider ourselves lucky this time round. While this disease is extremely disruptive and highly contagious, it is not as deadly as some other zoonotic diseases (transmitted from animals to humans) such as Ebola and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS).

In fact, given the intensifying of the enabling conditions (the drivers) for zoonotic disease, this might be considered a timely warning, a generational opportunity to act now to reduce the probability and severity of the emergence of even deadlier diseases which have the potential to become pandemics, affecting humanity across the globe.

Earlier this year WWF’s Global Science team reviewed the scientific literature to identify the nexus between emerging zoonotic diseases and conservation. There are seven primary zoonotic pathway types from tick bite fever through to the coronaviruses. In all the zoonotic pathway types, changing land use, primarily for agriculture, was found to be a direct driver of disease. Other drivers included climate change, trade and wildlife hunting.

Increase in spill-over risks were directly connected to:
- Land-use change which results in the loss and degradation of nature
- The intensification and expansion of agriculture and animal production to meet an increasing demand for animal protein worldwide
- The sale and consumption of high risk animals

Ultimately, these findings show the shortcomings of seeing this crisis purely through the lens of human health. What is needed is a systemic response which includes a holistic conservation agenda and in so doing will make it possible to solve multiple threats including climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation. And in this it is really important that we don’t make the vulnerable more vulnerable by denying access to good nutrition and rights to natural resources.

In the month of May there is a great, globally shared desire to go back to normal as quickly as possible, given the disruptions we have experienced. This would be a mistake, particularly if we did so without reflection. We need to reconsider what we want in the world in the future, particularly as the drivers of climate disruptions are the same

 drivers that are creating biodiversity loss and potential pandemics. Addressing the drivers within this complex system requires innovations which can be brought to bear on resolving the challenge, but high level conversations should also be taking place with the following objectives:

- Decreasing deforestation: Conversion-free supply chains are very important – these are the same things that give rise to climate change and biodiversity destruction. We need to link human health with planetary health, nature and nature’s contribution to healthy people. How we convert land for economic opportunities needs to be considered in a way that factors in both human and biodiversity outcomes
- Regulating animal husbandry, particularly where animals are raised and sold
- Eating less meat, as it is this unchecked demand that is linked both to health risks and environmental change. This lever will look different in every geography but it is a clear action point.

While the illegal wildlife trade has always been an area of concern when it comes to biodiversity, we need to pay greater attention to the food system and how it impacts on biodiversity. We need to pay more attention to how the way in which we obtain our food is encroaching on habitats and intact biodiversity areas. We need to look at current approaches to the production and sale of meat and meat consumption – which is driving the rise of pandemic diseases, climate change and biodiversity loss.

So if we are going to have a whole planet for nature and people, these three points need to be factored into our recovery approach. In Africa, where rural communities have long been the best custodians of biodiversity, there is a critical need to establish mechanisms to determine their own future. It is an opportunity to fast-track credible scientifically informed approaches and community based solutions that help to ramp up government efforts with boots on the ground. For WWF-SA this is a clear imperative.

The disruption has happened; it is time to come together to catalyse a creative, collective response and a lasting solution.
"How can you frighten a man whose hunger is not only in his own cramped stomach but in the wretched bellies of his children? You can’t scare him – he has known a fear beyond every other."

(John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath)

HOW LONG DOES THE FOOD LAST?
For most South African households food runs out between the second and third week of the month. After the second week women restrict their access to nutritional foods as an attempt to prolong the period of relatively better nutrition on their children's plates. Towards the end of the third week and into the fourth week, and no matter how much women sacrifice their own bodies, nutritional diversity on everybody’s plates dwindles from almost nothing to nothing. Women eat last and whatever is left in the pot so that their children and families can eat better. Women forgo all the good nutritious food in the home, and with it they sacrifice their own health and wellbeing. The South African plate, for much of the latter part of the month, offers little resistance to disease. Families get hungry. Families push through because they simply have too. The last week comes to its end despite itself. At month end, money comes in; and the cycle starts anew. This is what happens in a normal pandemic-free, lockdown-free world. Now COVID -19 made this situation worse. With more people at home households must buy more food and food runs out earlier in the month. This leads to longer periods of hunger and it is not surprising to see the food rebellions across the country and the long queues to get a food parcel. Over the past two months the cost of the PMBEJD Food basket has increased by R249.92 absorbing the COVID -19 related increase on the Old Age pension of R250.

LOCKDOWN REGULATIONS HAVE DISRUPTED SHOPPING PROCEDURES
Transport regulations during the lockdown have severely disrupted shopping and herded women into danger. 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. 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. Queues outside supermarkets are very long. Supermarkets only let in a few shoppers at a time: some 15, some 20, some 50 people at a time. Women must wait anything from 45 minutes up to 4 – 6 hours.
to get into the supermarkets. One of the key strategies' women use when shopping is to shop in three or four supermarkets and one or two butcheries to first compare and then buy at the cheapest prices. Women can no longer shop around. Instead, they stand in one queue and shop in one supermarket. Women now buy their entire grocery list in just one supermarket. Unable to shop around, women are now absolute price takers. 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.

The removal of street traders and vendors off the streets during the initial stages of lockdown further served to hurt women. 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 namely R10’s worth of tomatoes; women are able to haggle and check the quality of the potatoes in that brown paper pocket. Due to exorbitant prices for vegetables in supermarkets, vegetables and fruits have been pushed off the plate. Many street traders are now back on the streets and so women can buy from them again.

Expect deeper levels of hunger and desperation unless we change course

Women are concerned that with the projected job losses, the staggered return of workers to employment, the restrictions on informal trade, 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 very rough. Most workers are still at home and most will not get paid in May. If workers are lucky enough to qualify and do get UIF, this will still only be a third of what they used to get paid. Most school children are going to still be at home for a long time.

The continuing escalation of food prices in a context where most households have almost no capacity to absorb shocks and where government help is hardly sufficient means that most families in South Africa will start facing ever deeper levels of hunger, poverty and desperation. We have yet to factor in what it will mean when more and more people start dying. Thus far, government intervention seems to be lacking in the basic understanding of how the majority of South Africans live, and how fragile and complex our systems are. Instead of waging a war against COVID-19: It is now waging a war against poor people and disrupting and destroying lives and systems. A country where millions of people cannot afford to put food on their tables, where hunger lives, cannot be scared into submission.

Is it too much to hope that the lesson we take from this pandemic is that sufficient and nutritious food is the base upon which we build a healthy populace and a just economy?
Hunger and food insecurity can negatively influence a child’s school performance from their early school years and carry through till their 12th grade and even beyond. Research in this field demonstrates that children from families who are not sure where their next meal may come from are more likely to have lower math scores or repeat a grade; are more likely to experience developmental impairments in areas like language, motor skills, and behaviour. Children need nutrients so they can grow, develop and focus on learning instead of thinking about the food they need. It is difficult for a child to focus on learning when he or she is experiencing the painful effects of chronic hunger.

According to a study of undernutrition in children by the United Nation’s Children Fund, children who come from food-insecure homes, are often shorter than average height for their age or significantly underweight. But more than that, these kids may also experience learning disabilities and other cognitive impairments.

Food insecurity is defined as the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food. The United States Department of Agriculture breaks food insecurity into two categories:

- **Low food security** - when the food you eat is lower-quality or is not very appealing, and you do not have many choices. But you typically get enough food.
- **Very low food security** - when you cannot get food when you need to or you have to eat less because you do not have money or other ways to get it.

People face food insecurity for different reasons like if they’re unemployed, don’t make enough money, or have been raised in an environment where poverty is rampant. Children who live in food-insecure homes are more likely to become ill, have a harder time recovering from sickness, and go to the hospital more often. This is in addition to the emotional tax of having to worry about how and when they will be fed and especially if they are perceptive enough to understand the stress this may be putting on their care-givers.

This phenomenon of food insecurity often stays with families for generations – exacerbated by systematic and unjust socio-cultural situations. Which means that many times a child who experiences food insecurity growing up will very likely experience it as a first-generation college/university student. Having worked on university campuses over the last 15 years I have seen first hand what the impact of poverty and financially strapped legacies have had on, especially, first-generation students.

Despite what many want to believe, hunger is not an issue that affects only developing-world countries. It is a near-epidemic right here in the USA. With more than 40 percent of households in the United States living below poverty level, it is no surprise that hunger plagues many families, most of which include children. There are approximately 13 million American children to date who live with or are at high risk of hunger. Chronic hunger results in a lack of vitamins and minerals that are necessary for a child to reach developmental milestones.

**THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 IN WIDENING THE GAP BETWEEN THE HAVE AND THE HAVE-NOTS**

According to The Economist of May 23rd, 2020, “most countries in the developing world still require their citizens to stay at home, except to go out for essentials. But few of the world’s poorest can work from home. And without work, many cannot eat. Thus, COVID-19 imperils one of the greatest achievements of recent decades—the stunning reduction in global poverty.”

In many places in the world, workers cannot make up for the lost income by resuming their work because demand for their labour has collapsed. If there are not operational restaurants, there is no need for waiters, or cleaners; closed malls do not need mopping or trash collection; even something as simplistic as hawking your wares on the streets becomes hard when there are no people or motorists on them. Both here in the USA and in South Africa the need for food banks have risen dramatically – people line up overnight to be assured of receiving a food parcel; these are folk who are working people but whose source of work and income has come to a screeching halt.

From 1990 until 2019 the number of extremely poor people—those who subsist on less than $1.90 (R35) per day—fell from 2 billion, or 36% of the world’s population, to around 630 million, or just 8%. Now, for the first time since 1998, that number is rising—very quickly.

The big questions are: how many millions will slip back into penury? And will they quickly escape again when the pandemic is past, or will its effects be long-lasting, or even permanent?

So that leaves us with the biggest questions of all: What will we do to bridge this divide? How we place ourselves in this dire situation? What does our humanity and philanthropy look like?

One thing for sure is that we cannot stand idly by. We have to move, build and grow by reimagining access to education and equity, thus enabling us to truly use this moment in time as the impetus to build a better world.
Food, water, sanitation and social security are under severe pressure at the moment. An estimated 265 million people will face acute hunger by the end of 2020, due to the impact of COVID-19.

In the midst of this global crisis, we have seen an extraordinary amount of resources mobilised in a very short period to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Well-doers have donated funds and governments have found money in state coffers; saten-wide media releases have reiterated important messages and obedient citizens are following rules and extending helping hands to those in need. This pandemic has shown that it is possible to act swiftly and decisively in a time of crisis.

A slightly uncomfortable question arises from this observation: why have the voices pleading for the nutrition crisis to be recognised systematically been ignored for decades?

The food and hunger crisis that is predicted due to COVID-19 is not new. Prior to this global pandemic, malnutrition was the global disaster that was set to threaten 135 million lives by the end of 2020. COVID-19 only exasperated this persistent problem and highlighted the shortcomings in the global food system. To illustrate this statement, let us look at stunting in young children.

Stunting is a nutritional disorder that comes about due to a number of factors, including inadequate diet, disease, suboptimal caring practices, poor food security, inadequate water and sanitation, inadequate healthcare, poverty and poor governance of health, food and other resources. It manifests in poor growth, particularly in height. It also impacts on brain growth. If undetected and untreated by the age of two years, the damage is irreversible. The child cannot reach his or her full cognitive potential, which impacts on schooling achievement, and later on educational and employment opportunities. Stunting also increases the risk of chronic diseases in adulthood. These include diabetes, cancer and heart disease, as well as hereditary conditions that can affect the next generation. The management of all these conditions have a tremendous impact on the healthcare system and the economy.

In South Africa, 27% of children under the age of five years are stunted and the stunting levels in the country have remained stubbornly persistent over a period of 40 years, despite economic growth, political and social transitions, and national nutritional programmes.

So, why did it take a virus and a global pandemic to highlight the cruel silence that has prevailed over the real state of food and nutrition in South Africa and many parts of the world?

Since nutrition is central to optimal human and economic development, the predicted impact of COVID-19 emphasises weaknesses in policies, programmes, stakeholder accountability and governance in relieving malnutrition. Poor diets continue to be a leading cause of life years lost, diets of infants and young children remain suboptimal, adult overweight and obesity are on the rise, almost 70% of packaged foods are not aligned with healthy diet recommendations, and fruit and vegetable intake remain low. It is therefore evident that for some time there has been an insufficient alignment among various role players in nutrition, such as the United Nations bodies, funding institutions, NGOs and NPOs, business and industry, research and academia, the media and local governing bodies.

Looking ahead to a post COVID-19 in South Africa, can we imagine getting the same stakeholders that acted so swiftly and courageously to fight the pandemic to agree on another target for combat: malnutrition? Imagine, if they, in the same united way decide on the coordination and mobilisation of resources to create environments, food production systems, and infrastructure in which all humans have an opportunity to thrive. Starvation should not be the end-result when people lose their incomes, as is the case in many low-and-middle income countries such as South Africa. Because this means that as adults continue to lose their jobs and livelihoods, their children will continue to lose the opportunity of reaching their full potential.

COVID-19 should be the impetus for the creation of social safety nets, food supply chains and urban food environments that are robust and resilient. The burden of nutrition-related morbidities and suboptimal economic growth.

Everybody hopes that the world will recover from COVID-19 and that our daily lives will go back to “normal”. But, there is a danger of wanting to return to a normal that is flawed. Instead, let us create a new normal whereby food and nutrition, especially for infants and young children, continue to receive the attention they deserve and where all role players work together to advocate for nutrition and mend the broken food system.
It does not matter which corner of the African continent you come from; we all have a common understanding of “ubuntu” as our common African heritage. We have shared values – by far and most importantly our food is something that can dispel animosity, create social cohesion and make us see our oneness despite our geographical origins. Across the continent hospitality is a valued trait – a feature of the continent’s common heritage.

There is an isiXhosa proverb “isisu somhambi asingakanani singaphambili ngemva ngumhlonzo” (loosely translated to “never refuse a visitor food and sustenance”) which speaks to the hospitality that is embedded in our African cultures especially around food. Perhaps, cooking is one leaf we can all take out of Finance Minister Tito Mboweni’s book – or at least his Twitter account. Cooking and eating together builds emotional bonds and allows for an atmosphere of honest conversations about the daily solutions that could help integrate migrants within the local population, lay down the rules of engagement and restore law and order in our streets. We ought to celebrate the cultural diversity including the diversity of people and food that is in our own country from the north of Limpopo – but even more so across the entire continent of Africa.

However, unlike the mismatch highlighted by the competing ambitions for food and water in our national development plans, what we cook must be aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals. It must help us to adapt to the reality of climate change, reduce poverty, improve health and education and most importantly help us to think together. It is a pity that our governments do not adequately engage their citizens about their daily experiences, until there is a crisis such as the Covid-19 lockdown or the xenophobic violence of 2019. Growing evidence confirms that under the right conditions, citizen engagement can help governments achieve improved developmental results.

Every person worries about where to stay and what to eat. As a country we can create more social cohesion by promoting indigenous African food. Food unites us; we learn who we are through food. We use many more common ingredients than we realise. When we depoliticise food and see it as food and appreciate its nutritional value, we will reap tons of nutritional benefit and be healthy as a collective because after all we are what we eat.

In this time of climate change, there are many African crops that have been shown to be drought resistant. Foods such as cassava, cocoyam/amadumbe/taro, okra, millet, plantains, amaranth and more are cultivated and eaten in over 40 different African countries. They are not only inclusive; they are also highly nutritious, versatile and easy to grow. So through indigenous food we can create new industries and offer more healthy options while, at the same time, keeping an eye on the climate challenges that lie ahead.

An increase in lifestyle and non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, which is also a risk factor for Covid-19, is linked to what we eat. Indigenous African food presents us with an opportunity to improve our health instead of increasing the number of chronic medicines we take. This could go a long way in reducing our national health budgets or diverting it towards development.

When we celebrate food diversity we are able to co-exist and see ourselves as a collective rather than framing ourselves as “us and them”.

The world sees Africa as one, and while we are made up of different countries, why don’t we, for the sake of unity and social cohesion, let food bind us together.

Furthermore, the benefits of African foods align well with the global, expert-led EAT-Lancet Report, which recommends a reference diet that could help save the planet from climate change and degradation.

In broad terms, this diet stipulates that most of a person’s daily intake should come from plants, especially whole grains, fruits and vegetables, legumes, and nuts.

By using our heritage of African food wisely, mostly from indigenous crops, we could be leaders in reducing climate change, improving human health and be the custodians for a sustainable planet and its people.

The Role Food Can Play In Addressing Key Developmental And Social Issues On The African Continent

It does not matter which corner of the African continent you come from; we all have a common understanding of “ubuntu” as our common African heritage. We have shared values – by far and most importantly our food is something that can dispel animosity, create social cohesion and make us see our oneness despite our geographical origins. Across the continent hospitality is a valued trait – a feature of the continent’s common heritage.

There is an isiXhosa proverb “isisu somhambi asingakanani singaphambili ngemva ngumhlonzo” (loosely translated to “never refuse a visitor food and sustenance”) which speaks to the hospitality that is embedded in our African cultures especially around food. Perhaps, cooking is one leaf we can all take out of Finance Minister Tito Mboweni’s book – or at least his Twitter account. Cooking and eating together builds emotional bonds and allows for an atmosphere of honest conversations about the daily solutions that could help integrate migrants within the local population, lay down the rules of engagement and restore law and order in our streets.

We ought to celebrate the cultural diversity including the diversity of people and food that is in our own country from the north of Limpopo – but even more so across the entire continent of Africa.

However, unlike the mismatch highlighted by the competing ambitions for food and water in our national development plans, what we cook must be aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals. It must help us to adapt to the reality of climate change, reduce poverty, improve health and education and most importantly help us to think together. It is a pity that our governments do not adequately engage their citizens about their daily experiences, until there is a crisis such as the Covid-19 lockdown or the xenophobic violence of 2019. Growing evidence confirms that under the right conditions, citizen engagement can help governments achieve improved developmental results.

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In order to achieve the Agenda 2063, this thinking should go into our national development plans. For example the migration patterns should be followed by changes in what farmers grow, shops sell and restaurants serve. The food must follow the people.

In this time of climate change, there are many African crops that have been shown to be drought resistant. Foods such as cassava, cocoyam/amadumbe/taro, okra, millet, plantains, amaranth and more are cultivated and eaten in over 40 different African countries. They are not only inclusive; they are also highly nutritious, versatile and easy to grow. So through indigenous food we can create new industries and offer more healthy options while, at the same time, keeping an eye on the climate challenges that lie ahead.

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By using our heritage of African food wisely, mostly from indigenous crops, we could be leaders in reducing climate change, improving human health and be the custodians for a sustainable planet and its people.
In South Africa the Right to Food is enshrined in the Constitution. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the existing governance processes and structures to “progressively realise” that right, and the attainment of food and nutrition security, as being alarmingly inappropriate. There are many areas where food governance failures are evident, but the centralised policy and governance regime, coupled with dominant policy support for an industrialised system focused on staples, has been exposed as being inadequate in facilitating food access.

Our research at the African Centre for Cities, using internationally applied food security measurement tools, has consistently found urban food insecurity to be far higher than official South African food security and hunger figures. Similarly, work of the Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice and Dignity Group has demonstrated how other household essentials have to be prioritised over nutritious food. For many South Africans food access is a daily struggle, one in which multiple sources, formal and informal, using credit at local spaza shops, activating and maintaining thick social networks, name but a few, have formed part of household food access strategies. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted (even closed) many of these food access options. In doing so it has demonstrated how thin the veneer of food security is for the majority of South African households.

Increasingly evident is that despite the obligations placed on the State to ensure the realisation of the Right to Food, ensuring food and nutrition security, goes well beyond just the mandate of the State. Required is a far wider societal response. A response that addresses immediate issues, but also longer term strategic processes – and a deliberate focus at the urban scale is essential. In the current policy architecture cities have no direct food security mandate. South Africa is 66% urbanised. The current South African agrarian/production policy and governance bias fails to adequately consider the accessibility, utilisation and stability dimensions of food security at the urban scale.

In the past I have argued that due to the lack of agency, and as a result the absence of a politicisation of food and hunger, emerging imaginations from the Global North of pluralistic collaborative urban food governance arrangements are not well suited to the Global South. Additionally, the food system responses contained within these Northern pluralistic structures focus on issues very different to those faced by the urban food insecure in the Global South.

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However, very interesting and important collaborative food security responses (and governance processes) are emerging. In Cape Town these food networks are not new but their recent activation and intensity, as a result of multiple households tipped into crisis by the COVID-19 lockdown regulations, require far greater attention. Despite political resistance, thick networks between civil society, academia and local government have been building over the past 15 years. More recently, processes associated with the Western Cape Nourish to Flourish Strategy and the embedding of food concerns in the City of Cape Town Resilience Strategy, coupled with the work of the NRF Centre of Excellence in Food Security Community of Practice all provide insights into novel collaborative food security engagements emerging at the urban and regional scale, often playing a more proactive governance-framing role.

These nascent urban food and hunger focused actions are being done without a formal urban food policy mandate. National government departments still seek to retain their position as the governors of the food system, food and nutrition security. What has been clearly demonstrated by the COVID-19 crisis is that the nationally controlled and governed food system is flawed. Required is the addition of far more integrated and urban scale responses to food and nutrition security. We do not need urban ministries of food, but cities (as a societal construct) need to play a far more proactive role in urban food questions. Urban actors, from officials to civil society, to everyday citizens, have been forced to do this, suddenly, as a result of COVID-19. Place-based urban networks have been able to actively shift food system actions, they have been able to curtail national government’s adoration of the formal system, actually lobbying for more equitable distribution of benefits, to name but a few. New relationships, new networks and new partnerships, across income and race, are emerging. This may not yet reflect pluralistic governance but the governance processes of the past months have been very different to historical processes.

Going forward, the new normal, whatever that may be, needs to include designated, resourced and empowered urban food governance officials, that can work across city departments and mandates, proactively engaging an assemblage of vocal and active food system stakeholders at the urban scale. Without this, the flawed food system will remain, and the next crisis will again see the spectre of hunger and poor diets being as much of a crisis to the urban poor as whatever the other crisis may be.

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3. In the 2008 AFSUN research it was found that an average of 70% of sampled poor households in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Msunduzi reported accessing the emergency food assistance schemes.
6. See: https://pmbejd.org.za
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The COVID-19 pandemic did not cause food insecurity in rural areas. But it will deepen the pre-existing condition. But a return to traditional farming systems is not the answer.

Albert lives in a rural town in the Western Cape. He has a knack for computers and is well-spoken. Together with his unemployed aunt and her two school-aged sons, Albert is dependent on his grandparents’ social grants for his subsistence. He matriculated three years ago with poor grades and misaligned subjects. After a brief casual job as a salesman in town – just enough time to start a cycle of debt - he is back in the village with his grandparents with no savings, no means and no prospects. His grandparents, avid farmers, have always been able to sustain the household income with food and sales from their share of communal land. Harvest losses due to recent spates of youth vandalism has stopped that flow of income. Albert is a hungry youth, and his family’s land lies fallow. Some of his schoolmates are amongst the vandals. Neither Albert, nor any of his unemployed friends, is interested in agriculture.

Youth disinterest in agriculture is widely cited as one of the main reasons for a decline in rural economic activity. With the exodus of young people to urban centres, go the labour and energy required for physically demanding subsistence and small-scale commercial production. But what about those that stay behind? A study based on 30 interviews with youth in Albert’s town in 2016 revealed a more nuanced narrative.

For some, “agriculture” was limited to primary production with no further benefit to be had. Far removed from processing plants, any benefits further up the value chain simply don’t accrue to local youth - unless they come as wages for their unskilled labour as farm workers. Assuming access to land and inputs (each on their own is a gross assumption), even gains from primary production is limiting. Produce sold at unprofitable prices to the large proportion of state-dependent residents is not sustainable. The small pool of residents with buying power find their food choices elsewhere. The poor who are willing to buy do so on credit, delaying payment until their next grant. With no seed capital to start with, and no buffer to sustain production, a young person with no means cannot stay in business.

Another youth saw no point in investing in the half a hectare of land he might gain access to after the tedious application process. As a new entrant he has to contend with older, more established producers with more secure tenure rights. Others associated agriculture with the menial work and lowly wages that stripped their parents of their health and dignity. For them, the difference in farm wages and the state welfare grant is hardly dramatic, but their parents no longer have to break their backs working for someone else.

Elsewhere, in another rural community in the Northern Cape, Andreas is part of a cohort of youth successfully taking over an agricultural co-operative as the next generation of producers. Compared to his counterparts in the Overberg, Andreas had limited access to good education, fewer amenities such as electricity and telecommunications, and poorer access to goods and services from remote city centres. Two decades ago, Andreas’ family members were amongst 15 older farmers who started the Heiveld Co-operative. They faced limitations of their own, some very similar to those described in the interviews by youngsters up to 40 years their junior in the Overberg. But these farmers resolved to build a co-operative that would secure their livelihoods, and a future for their Alberts. A generation later, Andreas, now a farmer himself, has seen his organisation circumvent the severe effects of cyclic drought, political disservices, social pathologies and economic downturns. Needless to say, Andreas and Albert will experience the effects of COVID-19 very differently with regard to food security and livelihood.

An attempt to get youth to return to traditional farming systems that are limited to local primary production for remote markets is not the answer to food insecurity in rural areas. It is an invitation to youth to enter a broken system that was never designed to serve their rights or personal aspirations. Just transitions rooted in traditional values of agriculture – shared responsibility, trusted networks, an appreciation for the value of land, and knowledge of how to work it – will lead to good governance. Access to land, seed, water and learning opportunities should follow. They also need support, encouragement and agency. Youth-centred transitions in agriculture will require visionary leadership from youth and older farmers alike. Organisations and individuals who recognise the pandemic as an accelerator for change are at the forefront of such leadership.
Although South Africa is regarded as a food secure nation, we know that even before the COVID-19 pandemic some 54% of South Africans were hungry or at risk of hunger. The economic recession and extended national lockdown has only intensified the problem in this country where millions of people spend more than half of their income on basic sustenance.

Furthermore, South Africa faces the double burden of both under- and over-nutrition. Malnutrition heightens the severity and duration of several diseases and places people at greater risk of severe COVID-19 symptoms. Highlighting healthy diets must be a central goal of all food related response initiatives. Not only will this help protect people now, it will pave the way for a more equitable and sustainable food system on the other side of COVID-19.

South Africa’s agrarian structure is characterised by the concentration of resources and a dualistic structure of production with an entrenched commercial sector and a struggling, previously disadvantaged, smallholder agricultural sector. This also then manifests in a highly developed commercial food system and a less developed informal food system.

This informal food system is however substantial and is by some estimates worth around R360 billion a year, accounting for anything between 30-50% of the country’s food and grocery sector. The Southern Africa Food Lab has focussed much attention on the smallholder sector can lead the shift of the South African food system onto a more sustainable path. It is the smallholder farmers that the Southern Africa Food Lab has focussed much attention on the smallholder sector can lead the shift of the South African food system onto a more sustainable path. It is the smallholder farmers that are most likely to support the food security of the most vulnerable populations both in rural and urban areas.

COVID-19 has revealed the deep fragility of the South African food system and is now resulting in a hunger crisis. In poor communities, households that were previously struggling to eat are now becoming desperate. The lockdown has radically suppressed the informal economic sector, upon which many households depend. Households that relied on informal trading or precarious work have found themselves without any income to buy food.

While the supply chains from commercial farms to agro-processing centres and supermarkets are largely intact, the same cannot be said for small farmers, who have often lost access to markets. Access to food is not only a matter of how much food is being produced, but about how and when it gets to people, and what it costs when it does.

Nonhlanhla Joye is the founder of Umgibe Farming Organics and Training Institute, an organisation based in Durban that supports the Southern Africa Food Lab and an independent Consultant.

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The Southern Africa Food Lab has launched the Strengthening local food networks for food system transformation initiative in eThekwini Municipality and iLembe District Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal. Both eThekwini Municipality and iLembe District Municipality have established smallholder farmer support programmes through which they assist farmers to establish their agri-businesses and with accessing markets such as the local schools associated with the National Schools Nutrition Programme. Vuyo Jayiya from eThekwini Municipality is deeply aware of the fact that around 80% of the fresh produce consumed in the municipality comes from outside of the boundaries of eThekwini. “We need to support our local farmers to improve their production so that we can increase resilience with the municipality,” says Vuyo.

iLembe District “has a contract to supply 153 770 learners at 399 schools in the District with around 55 tons of vegetable produce per week”, says Mqungube Ngqose from Enterprise iLembe Development Agency. The Covid-19 lockdowns have temporarily closed this market for the farmers and left the school children without a nutritious meal every day.

The objective of Strengthening local food networks for food system transformation is to reconnect and recalibrate the local food systems in these municipalities. The obstacles that currently limit farmers from accessing local markets will be understood through rapid dialogue and consultation, and the team will work urgently and systematically to establish new routes to market whilst re-connecting farmers to the available local markets that deliver transparent value for the actors in the value chains. Community food security will be prioritised by concentrating on and strengthening the less formalised food flows and networks that deliver food deep into the local communities.

In order to ensure that the changes endure, specific focus will be leveraged to strengthen the transformative capacity of those involved in these local systems. The team will work with different actors to recognise the interdependencies across the flows of food, the relationships between Nature and People, the need to recognise own agency rather than wait for others, and act in deliberate and conscious ways. In particular, ecological principles will be respected in order to enable a resilient local food system that can withstand future crises.

Through this approach, we intend to enable a local food system that works for all.

References:
As one of the world’s most unequal societies, South Africa has borne the pressure of food insecurity for years. In 2017, 6.8 million people experienced hunger. In the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic, and the subsequent lockdown enforced by the South African Government, the threat of food insecurity has become as much of a risk to our society as the virus itself.

COVID-19 has highlighted the economic fragility of South Africa’s vulnerable communities, where too many citizens have no financial buffer in the face of a crisis. It has quickly become clear that food access in vulnerable communities is a key issue as many people face a loss of livelihood. The Western Cape Economic Development Partnership (EDP) has been involved in both government-led and community-led initiatives to enable food security during the national lockdown. This article focuses on some of the lessons learnt through this work, including recommendations for improvement to the overall food system.

This crisis has shown us that the government’s bureaucratic, hierarchical, and overly regulated nature makes it difficult to respond to the food security crisis effectively. Unwieldy, compliance-driven supply chain processes have failed to work with the required urgency and agility to get goods to those who need them. The focus on regulation and due process (necessary in normal times), has outweighed the need to act in ways that preserve the rights and dignity of the individual.

Similarly, government’s lack of relationship with, and connection to, organised civil society is a serious flaw in its structure. Beyond the registration of NGOs on its database, the government has no way of communicating with community-based organisations to enable joint-problem solving. In a time of crisis, public sector and civil society networks play an important role in enabling government to act effectively and rapidly. Without these networks, the government has been left trying to make sense of who is doing what and contemplating how it should be effective when it should have been acting.

Existing community organisations have ramped up their efforts to deliver food to vulnerable communities. Self-organising community groups established themselves rapidly and have been successfully organising to mobilise resources and deliver food to vulnerable communities. While these groupings have managed to respond quickly, however, a number of challenges have emerged with this model.

Because of the historically unequal nature of our society, some community initiatives have better resources than others due to the networks they have access to. This has created competition for scarce resources. In addition, a lack of data around the nature and extent of support required in various communities, and a lack of a coordinated response, has also resulted in overlapping efforts in food distribution and, more dangerously, gaps in relief.

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Most importantly, the food security crisis has revealed the extent of the structural issues present in our society. COVID-19 has revealed the ugly truth we can no longer hide from: We have positioned food in such a way that an individual cannot feed themselves without a job. Without a livelihood, people have no choice about what they eat.

Our government has the responsibility to uphold the Constitution. This means the state must enable a system that empowers our people to make choices about their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of their children. As a society, we should not be comfortable with the reality that food insecure are a necessity for everyday life and we must confront the fact that our food issues are far greater than “providing the next meal”.

**NOW WHAT?**

We believe there are three main recommendations:

**Recommendation 1**

Government must focus on creating enabling conditions for supporting and empowering communities, rather than on control through heavy-handed regulations. The Department of Social Development’s proposed regulations to centralise food distribution and prohibit soup kitchens are not in the best interest of citizens. Government, on its own, cannot act with the swiftness required to address food relief. It would do better to build reinforcing relationships with civil society through which issues, such as health standards, can be addressed collaboratively, and without compromising the wellbeing of our most vulnerable citizens.

**Recommendation 2**

Build relationships of trust between government and citizens and acknowledge that this takes time and resources. COVID-19 has proven that the government must invest in building collaborative relationships with business and civil society. Similarly to the 2017 water crisis, the government would have been in a stronger position to act effectively during this crisis had it already put in the work to become a collaborative institution. Now is the time to allocate resources to build partnerships as a necessary component of building a resilient society and a responsive government.

**Recommendation 3**

Redefine the food system in collaboration with informal traders, growers, small-scale fishermen, and community activists. The system must support local food production and distribution so as to build thriving, resilient local economies; and ensure that individuals, even those without incomes, are able to feed themselves. A collaborative approach is required to design an equitable, resilient, and humane food system.

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**REFERENCES**


In South Africa a range of social solidarity networks have emerged to respond to the COVID-19 hunger crisis. They are a vital part of a societal response because of their speed, innovation, and local responsiveness. They complement the central role of government.

Government responses to crises are crucial. But the scale and complexity of the current crisis is too great for the government alone. The bureaucracy cannot grow rapidly enough to meet the scale of the need. It is constrained by its prior way of working, which emphasises standardisation and control. It also lacks information about who is in need, beyond grant recipients, and it lacks the supply chains to get help to them quickly.

It is important to realise that this is not necessarily a criticism of this particular government. All governments are struggling with the fallout of COVID-19. Moreover, we know from the extensive scholarly literature on disasters that governments are inherently constrained in responding rapidly to the local impacts of disasters.

We have been participating in and/or studying a number of such emergent solidarity networks and “spontaneous venturing” efforts that are responding to the COVID-19 crisis in South Africa. This has shown us how they are able to play an important role and how this role needs to be strengthened.

**SOLIDARITY NETWORKS**

Local actors can build on vital local knowledge and social networks built up prior to the crisis. For example, the NGO Boost Africa has for many years worked in one of Cape Town’s most vulnerable communities, Dunoon. The NGO’s Christine Fyvie had set up after-school clubs to help children from particularly vulnerable households, so when the crisis unfolded this gave her vital information about which households were at particular risk and how to channel food and other essentials to them. Even so, ensuring that the food was getting to those most in need has been a challenge.

Trust is especially vital in pre-empting potentially debilitating competition among different groups within communities as the need for food and the resulting desperation grows. It is also crucial because the urgency of the current crisis is requiring speedy responses that make traditional accountability mechanisms difficult to adhere to.

Spontaneous venturing in response to crisis shows how innovation can be brought to bear to broker the growing need with diverse sources of supply. For example, the social enterprise Food Flow has created novel network connections in response to the crisis. It was established just before lockdown started in Cape Town, when Ashley Newell and her partner, Iming Lin, realised that small farmers in their area were losing their customers among hotels and restaurants, while vulnerable households were going hungry.

They came to know about this because of their local knowledge and networks. Iming is a farmer herself and both Ashley and Iming had been actively involved in local social development efforts. Their response was to connect this supply and demand by using donor funding to buy food from the local farmers and deliver it to local NGOs working in low-income communities. Food Flow has scaled up, reflecting radical innovation based on pre-existing relationships.

Our third example is the remarkable emergence of Community Action Networks (CANs) in diverse neighbourhoods across the country. An initial objective of each CAN was to ensure that vulnerable members of the local community would be supported during lockdown.

Initiated in Cape Town, the social and spatial inequalities in the city meant that their purpose soon grew to promote and show solidarity across communities. This was expressed most strongly in the pairing of CANs in poorer and better-off areas, to support the exchange of information and ideas, and to ensure that food and other essentials could be channelled to those most in need.

There are over 2,000 volunteers registered in about 150 such CANs in the Cape Town metropole, and there are about 20 pairings between CANs. The CANs are connected in an overarching network called Cape Town Together.

These have facilitated an impressive exchange of finance, food, and other physical resources. They are also playing a vital role in exchanging information about local needs and how best to address them.

There is, however, a risk that the government could stifle initiatives like these. It has sought to exert control by, among other things, insisting that food parcels fulfill strict standards and are vetted by local municipalities.

There are good reasons for some regulation. But the risk is that this impulse to control civil society responses ignores the magnitude, complexity, and human costs of the hunger crisis, as well as the inherent constraints that the government faces in responding. The bureaucratic limitations that have made the civil society response necessary may now impose themselves on the response.

**THE WAY FORWARD**

The examples above show the importance of local knowledge and networks, the innovation, and local responsiveness that solidarity networks can bring to addressing the COVID-19 hunger crisis.

A first step is to recognise and celebrate these vital contributions.

A second step is for the government and other large organisations to recognise the complementarity between their own efforts and those of the local solidarity networks. Building this into a partnership requires efforts on both sides.

Some coordination and collaboration is already happening between government and these networks in some places. But the scale and severity of the hunger crisis require a much stronger and ambitious partnership between government and civil society.

This article has been written in a community of practice including Alison Sewlal, Ashley Newell, Christine Fyvie, Aneeka Sumaria, Benny Suttleberg, Judy Delichte, Mandy Repson, Sante Sengot, and Thandani Basumana (all research students at the UCT Graduate School of Business) and Scott Drenze. A version of this was published at: https://theconversation.com/local-networks-can-help-people-in-distress-south-africas-covid-19-response-needs-them-138219

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**Photo Credit:** Stock photo
COVID-19 is on the tips of all of our tongues. Our new daily reality changes with each day and adaptiveness is key to survival and one is reminded to be grateful and thankful for food, shelter and access to healthcare – the basics of human rights.

COVID-19 has highlighted the enormous and insurmountable challenge of working towards food security in Africa at all levels, as the pandemic has brought the inequalities and failure of our market-led food system to the fore. What is important is that the pandemic has brought to light the global nature of this; it is not just those in South Africa or Ghana who are going to bed hungry, the fissures and fractures are evident all over the globe. One has seen images of food that cannot be exported being dumped whilst in other headlines people queue for food parcels without observing social distancing measures. When we see a fracture, our inclination should not be to ignore it and as such this global crisis allows for a new narrative, for a new approach to human rights and food security to be carved. The question is how? Where do we start? What level and what scale can we act on? These are complex issues but should not be immobilising.

Food security is measured at many levels and the opportunity to re-assess and re-fuse is a welcome one. Global, regional, national and local scales all face different challenges and thus the opportunities to reassess are at all levels. Historically, there has been a lack of cross-disciplinary dialogue on the complexity of the causes, and as such, the policy responses and suggestions of the roads ahead have not been clear. Food and nutrition security cuts across several Sustainable Development Goals, and the outcomes are reflected with public health indicators, namely stunting, obesity and macro- and micro-nutrient deficiencies. In order to ensure nutrition and public health outcomes the production, processing, access and utilisation of food all need to be addressed. In particular, the need to reconsider the vulnerability of the informal food system and those whose livelihoods are dependent on it. In both Accra and Cape Town, there are reports of fear of capital loss, unemployment and hunger among this vulnerable group. The food system needs to be reconceptualised.

Fukuda-Parr and Taylor (2016) provide a conceptual framework for addressing the root causes for food security, with a human right perspective underpinning this framework. COVID-19 has shown that we need improved alignment and coordination across sectors and at different levels. At each level a ‘champion’ is needed to drive this and for me, on a personal level, I am faced with the question, “am I willing”? If we are all willing at different levels and scales then the re-imagining, the re-designing and transformation can begin. With such a rare opportunity at our fingertips and COVID-19 on the tips of our tongues let us ensure that the mind and body are nourished, and that this is done with equality, dignity and equity.

REFERENCES

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Calling For Champions In A Global Food Crisis: Perspectives From Cape Town And Accra During The COVID-19 Lockdown
To say that the incidence of COVID-19 pandemic is impacting most on the poor and vulnerable is not an understatement. Since the outbreak of the fast-spreading coronavirus late 2019 and early 2020, there have been major disruptions, not just in travel or movement restrictions, but also in systems entrepreneurship, resilience thinking, socialization, and more profoundly in food systems. A glaring instance is how movement restrictions are driving increasing postharvest losses and worsening food security in Nigeria.

According to the International Food Policy Research Institute, “Globally, about a third of all food is lost or wasted every year, accounting for a quarter of the calories that would have been available for human consumption. In a world where one in nine people goes hungry, food loss and waste are urgent issues. Reducing food loss can improve food security, nutrition, and smallholder incomes.”

Before the pandemic, postharvest losses had been one of the difficult challenges to food security in most sub-Saharan African countries, including Nigeria. From 213 documents comprising results of household surveys, field trials and laboratory experiments between 1980 and 2012, Hippolyte Affognon and his colleagues Christopher Mutungi, Pascal Saminga and Christian Borgemeister (2015) synthesized evidence on the nature, magnitude, costs, and value of various groups of commodities along the value chain in sub-Saharan Africa, and showed that postharvest losses can range between 25.6 ± 27.4% in cereals, 23.5% ± 22.0% in pulses, and as high as 43.7 ± 27.4% in cereals, 23.5% ± 22.0% in pulses, 55.9 ± 25.4% in roots and tubers, fruits, vegetables, and fish, respectively. Also, Bolarin, F. M and Bosa, S. O (2015) believe that collectively, postharvest losses account for about 25% of all food produced in Nigeria.

Since the pandemic, countries have taken critical measures to curb the spread of the coronavirus, such as the introduction of partial or full lockdowns as experienced in Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana, and Zambia amongst others. The immediate effect in Nigeria has been farmers’ inability to make available their agricultural produce to a wide range of consumers, leading to monumental losses in food quantity and quality. Even as farmers rely on new-found channels and intermediaries to reach alternative markets, such as door-to-door food delivery, they still report increases in post-harvest losses.

Regrettably, in rural Nigeria, farmers rely heavily on farming income as their main income source with produce meant for household consumption and the market. The shocks caused by the pandemic is rapidly making more households undernourished, adding more to the one-in-five Africans who go hungry per day. The pandemic has been projected to result in increased hunger and poverty, subsequently making Goal 2 (Zero Hunger) and 3 (Good health and wellbeing) of the Sustainable Development Goals far from being achieved.

Our field observation and interaction with rural farmers in Nigeria reveal that even among the poor and vulnerable, produce losses have much more significant impact on women and female-headed households than men and male-headed households, thus exacerbating the circumstances and cases of inequality amongst the male and female gender, especially as it affects agriculture.

In the immediate term, implementing phased movement restrictions could open up distribution channels and ease food security challenges in Nigeria. There is also a need to re-think and build sustainable food systems that can survive shocks and stresses such as the novel coronavirus, by empowering critical players in the different agricultural value-chains such as rural farmers, indigenous communities, producers and offtakers. Also, attention should be paid to diversification of income-earning opportunities for low-income women who are into subsistence farming. The place of innovation and digitization of farming practices should not also be left blank. Ecosystems can only function well when proper planning and measures are put in place.
“A bend in the road is not the end of the road...unless you fail to make the turn.”

Sometimes wrongly attributed to the blind activist and writer Helen Keller, this slogan has been much used by motivational speakers since it first appeared on a poster in the USA in the mid-1990s. Whoever the writer was, we can be pretty sure nobody was thinking of a global viral pandemic and its economic effects on the poor and vulnerable when that poster began appearing in corporate offices and public spaces.

Yet, in many ways, the road analogy exactly captures not only where we are as a country but also our great potential for moving forward, even when it looks like we are at the end of the road.

- For the vast majority of South Africans, before the pandemic and even more so now, the lack of decent work and a secure income often results in the end of one or other road, be it the road to education or acquiring a skill, a proper home in a safe environment, the expectation of health and wellbeing, meaningful relationships, security in old age, or even life itself. It is shameful that in Africa’s biggest economy, millions of our people cannot guarantee their next meal, and are increasingly dependent on the goodwill of charitable organisations, individual acts of kindness and access to social grants to fend off malnutrition and starvation.

As hard as it is to see beyond such adversity, we are not at the end of the road. In fact, many of the responses to the virus show that rather than sticking to going in a direction that looks like it will end in failure, people are more likely to adopt a bend-in-the-road approach to adversity and change direction.

In a little more than a month, we have seen an entire country stop almost all normal movement and social interaction, businesses re-evaluating their modus operandi, universities forced to upgrade online learning technology, and a government finally reassessing how it manages social welfare. Literally overnight, a wasted army was put to use, a crime wave receded, a national airline was shown to be a luxury and a certain company stopped shedding its only product.

Individually, we discovered we can live without alcohol, cigarettes and junk food, we can do simple repairs, make masks, cook better, entertain ourselves and use the internet for serious work and learning.

This willingness to change, to try something new, to not allow obstacles to become the end of the road, is the very definition of an entrepreneurial mindset.

The entrepreneurial mindset has two elements – a way of thinking (or attitudinal perspective), and a way of acting (behavioural perspective), both of which we have seen recently in many forms. An attitudinal shift in perspective involves people seeing themselves as agents of change, recognising that anything can be done better, becoming more opportunity-driven, embracing innovation and change, and developing a tolerance for failure. Behavioural change involves an action orientation, a readiness to experiment and adapt, a willingness to take calculated risks, creativity in using the resources of others, and tenacity in overcoming obstacles.

We have just demonstrated informally that this entrepreneurial mindset can be learned. What we will need to do post COVID-19 is to change how we learn formally and informally. This involves three key strategies. The first is to move toward a competency-based model of learning that includes:

- opportunity recognition
- opportunity assessment
- creative problem-solving
- resource leveraging
- guerrilla skills
- mitigating and managing risk
- planning when nothing exists
- value-based innovation
- building and managing networks
- the ability to maintain focus yet adapt
- implementation of something novel or new

The second strategy is to systematically orientate learning infrastructure towards entrepreneurship by teaching it from foundation phase to higher education.

The third strategy is to entrench entrepreneurship in our culture by leaders championing it, by businesses rewarding it, and by policymakers and politicians writing it into our governance and legislation at every opportunity.

The post COVID-19 scenario will be resource constrained; it will lack obvious opportunities and it will have an absent ecosystem. This ecosystem will need to be reshaped and recreated and it may need a multi-layered and a multi-stakeholder approach. The challenges of unemployment, food security and many others will be a demanding reality.

But given time and resources, we can develop a national entrepreneurial mindset that will ensure that we always find the bend in the road, adapt faster to challenges and create opportunities to reimagine our society and resolve its many inequities.

It took a tiny organism smaller than a 1000th of the width of a human hair to show us that we all need this mindset. Let us embrace the challenge of COVID-19 by investing in the development of this entrepreneurial mindset.
MKHULULI SILANDELA

Local and global issues he brings an inquisitive interest to WWF. He launched his career in the food and beverages industry. With a B.Sc. Honours in Agribusiness and international food-chain management from the University of Stellenbosch, he worked as an auditor for the Dutch certifications body Controlunion managing its operations in Africa and Indian Ocean for five years. Mkhululi worked as the regional manager for Fairtrade Africa responsible for supporting farmers in Southern African (SADC) countries. He is currently busy with his Masters in Public Health Nutrition at Stellenbosch University and helps prevent and manage malnutrition and disease. He is currently busy with his Masters in Public Health Nutrition at Stellenbosch University and working on the fact that we are people through the existence and interaction with and from other people. He is an activist, a mother of two sons, a wife, a researcher, a scholar, and teller of stories. She believes in equality in access of education for all.

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Marcelle Mentor is a Lecturer in the English Education Department at Teachers College, Columbia University. Marcelle is Chairperson of the Sediba: Global Partnership Office Board. Her academic interest focuses on Critical Race Theory, with an emphasis on Black Masculinity. As a South African native her teaching philosophy is based on the concept of Ubuntu, which is a Southern African ethic or humanistic approach that focuses on the fact that we are people through the existence and interaction with and from other people. She is an activist, a mother of two sons, a wife, a researcher, a scholar, and teller of stories. She believes in equality in access of education for all.

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Lisanne is an Associate Professor in Community Nutrition in the Division of Human Nutrition, Department of Global Health, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences at Stellenbosch University. She is dually registered as dietitian and nutritionist with the Health Professions Council of South Africa. Her field of experience and research focus is in Public Health Nutrition with a special interest in the environment that affects Maternal, Infant, and Young Child Nutrition (MIYCN). Lisanne currently lectures postgraduate modules to dietetic and medical students. Furthermore, she provides study leadership for undergraduate and postgraduate research projects. She is active in various committees and working groups with a link to social impact, among other, the Western Cape Government, Department of Health: Nutrition Sub-Directorate - Infant and Young Child Feeding Technical Working group.

LIZEZEL M. ENGELBRECHT

Lizezel Engelbrecht is a registered dietitian with a previous career in content creation and media management. After nearly a decade in the media, her interest in health and food led her to enrol as a full-time student again to study BSc Dietetics. She aims to integrate her past experience with her current profession through working with diverse stakeholders to support health messaging and interventions that facilitate behaviour change to help prevent and manage malnutrition and disease. She is currently busy with her Masters in Public Health Nutrition at Stellenbosch University.

MKHULULI SILANDELA

In November 2012 Mkhululi joined WWF-SA where he is the Senior Manager for the Sustainable Agriculture and Smallholder Support programme. The programme is inspired by the possibility of an inclusive regenerative agriculture and food system which provides for people and gives back to nature. Mkhululi worked as the regional manager for Fairtrade Africa responsible for supporting farmers in Southern African (SADC) countries. He worked as an auditor for the Dutch certifications body Controlunion managing its operations in Africa and Indian Ocean for five years. Mkhululi launched his career in the food and beverages industry. With a B.Sc. Honours in Agribusiness and international food-chain management from the Drenten University of Applied Sciences, The Netherlands; an MBA and a unique insight into African value chains and some of the most pressing local and global issues he brings an insatiable interest to WWF.
SIPHIWE SITHOLE
Siphiwe Sithole is the founder and CEO of African Marmalade, an organic farming business. She started her business three years ago after she identified a gap in the market for authentic African food. Sithole grows and supplies vegetables like cassava leaves, okra, collard greens and jute mallow, many of which are still relatively unknown in many South African households. Her target market is African expats. However, her produce is also attracting the palates of health-conscious shoppers. Once a week, Sithole supplies produce to a number of independent fruit and vegetable markets in Johannesburg which include the upscale Jackson’s Real Food Market in Bryanston, the Randburg Wholesale Market and City Organics in Rustenburg.

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Gareth Haysom is a researcher at the African Food Security Urban Network (AFSUN) based at the African Centre for Cities at the University of Cape Town. Gareth’s research focuses primarily on issues of urban food governance in cities of southern Africa. In addition, Gareth is also a research fellow at the Sustainability Institute (linked to Steellenbosch University) where he set up a Sustainable Agriculture specialisation within the Sustainable Development post-graduate degree in 2008. Gareth’s key area of interest includes understanding the consequences and possible opportunities associated with the interactions between wider sustainability challenges, including the likes of ecosystem destruction and climate change, with urbanisation and changes in the food system.

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Rhoda Malgas is a researcher and lecturer at Stellenbosch University. She teaches on conservation of social-ecological systems and sustainable agriculture at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. She has received several faculty nominations for innovative teaching and curriculum design. Rhoda has worked with small-scale farmers in the rooibos and honeybush sectors for more than 15 years. She serves on the boards of four rural NGOs in the conservation sector and is conducting her PhD research in those areas. Rhoda is also the founding director of The Small Things Fund, a non-profit company that serves the academic needs of first-generation students. She currently hosts two fellowships: one with Transforming Change, an initiative between the Stockholm Resilience Centre and the Swedish Institute, and the Ubuntu Dialogues Programme hosted between Stellenbosch University and Michigan State University in the USA.

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Kenneth Carden is an independent consultant for the Southern Africa Food Lab, as well as serving as an Advisory Board member. His area of speciality is the development of smallholder-friendly value chains. As a project manager of the S4R Rural Hub Development Project, the focus is on the development of sustainable community owned business models that enable smallholder farmer driven local value chains. He also consults to the GIZ/Vodacom Connected Farmer Partnership on market access for smallholder farms. Kenneth has over 30 years of experience in business with a focus on smallholder development, sustainability and value chain management and has held senior management positions at South African Breweries, Price Waterhouse Coopers and Woolworths. He has developed smallholder and emerging farmer support programmes and managed the multi-stakeholder and collaborative Supporting Smallholder Agriculture project.

NONHLANHLA JOYE
Nonhlanhla Joye is a farmer, social entrepreneur, and the founder of Umbgie Farming Organics and Training Institute. She is also an advisory board member of the Southern Africa Food Lab. She is passionate about food security and community empowerment. In 2014 she developed Umbgie frugal climate smart growing system, which is a viable model that brings solutions to social, societal and environmental issues. Based in KwaZulu-Natal, Umbgie’s main purpose is to train and promote farmer-owned, well-governed, well-managed, profitable & equitable cooperatives for small-scale farmers.

GILL CULLINAN
Gill Collinan is the Operations Executive at the Western Cape Economic Development Partnership (EDP), where she manages the overall operations of the organisation and is also responsible for its knowledge generation portfolio. Gill is a professional Town and Regional Planner with extensive experience working with local, regional and national government on issues of resilience and inclusivity in planning. Gill holds a Master’s degree in Town Planning from UCT, and has worked as a writer and editor for local and international magazines, as well as a planner for MCA Urban and Environmental Planners.

RUSHKHA ELY
Rushka Ely is a development practitioner with a focus on local, town and town-scale, challenges, processes and solutions. She currently leads a number of programmes for the Western Cape Economic Development Partnership (EDP), a government support NPC geared to enable cross-sector and cross-boundary collaboration. This role builds on her experience working within the South African government, having been a part of the green economy team within Western Cape Government. During her current and previous roles, Rushka has built up extensive experience in working with local and regional governments, as well as the private sector and civil society, on a range of developmental challenges such as economic development, regional collaboration, housing, urban development and governance. She holds a BA (Hons.) with a focus in development studies.

RALPH HAMMAN
Ralph is Professor and Research Director at the UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB), and he also directs the school’s PhD programme. His research and teaching is on why and how organisations create or address complex social-ecological problems. Rated an “internationally acclaimed” researcher by the National Research Foundation, he has published in diverse outlets including Journal of Business Venturing and Journal of Management Studies. His publications have received various awards, most recently a best teaching case award from the European Foundation for Management Development. Among his other roles, he is an executive editor of Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development; South Africa lead at the Embedding Project (which received the inaugural International Impactful Collaboration Award from the Academy of Management); and co-founder of the Southern Africa Food Lab (for which he received the Resilience Award). He has held diverse visiting positions, most recently as Pearson Visiting Professor of Entrepreneurship and Engineering at Brown University.

JULIA HARPER
Julia Harper completed her undergraduate education at the University of London (BSc Hons in Geography) with a focus on development and food security in Southern Africa. After graduating she worked in both London and Zambia as a data analyst and an assistant manager to an outdoor centre. When she returned to South Africa in 2007, she completed her MSc in Soil Science at the University of Stellenbosch. The focus of her thesis was on soil fertility constraints to small-scale agriculture in North West Zambia. Subsequently she worked for two years on an Ezekiel Fly Ash research project in Mpihalanga, South Africa, and spent 10 years managing a cross faculty and inter- and multi-disciplinary research programme at Stellenbosch University, the Food Security Initiative. The essence of this initiative is to bring together new projects and programmes towards the broader goal of developing cutting edge research in sustainable food systems.

SANDRA BOATEMA KUSHITOR
Sandra Boatema Kushitor has academic training in sociology, psychology and population studies. In her research she draws on theoretical and methodological perspectives from the social sciences to understand population health dynamics. Currently, her research focuses on three distinct, yet related areas of population health: population shifts (disease patterns and mortality, urbanisation, dynamics of family change,); public health nutrition (nutrition-related non-communicable diseases, foodways, the nexus between food environment and health) and governance (food systems and health systems governance). Her publications have focused on non-communicable disease (NCD) risk factors, hypertension prevalence, treatment and control, health system response to NCDs and food system governance in Ghana, Eswatini and South Africa. Her work has influenced food system institutions in the Western Cape through Transformation labs and policy dialogues with public officials at the office of the Presidency and the office of the Premier of the Western Cape government. She is currently contributing to a research on urban food security and to another on developing a framework for governance of urban nutrition. Sandra teaches three graduate level courses on food and nutrition security. She is based at the Food Security Initiative and the Centre for Complex Systems in Transition, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

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Aduragbemi Victor Fasakin, Founder and CEO of Advic Farms and Allied Services based in Ado Ekiti, Nigeria, is a value driven Agco company committed to producing organic produce. Victor is exploring the challenge of knowledge translation and transmission on farming practices, from older to younger generations, including capacity building and creating new and appropriate platforms. Victor is also creating an environment more conducive for small scale farmers, enabling them to transform their farms into successful Agribusiness to enable them to lift themselves and their communities out of poverty. He has a BSc (ED) in Human Kinetics and Health Education from the Ekiti State University, Nigeria.

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Charleen Duncan is the Director at The Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (CEI) at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). Currently she serves as the chairperson of board of directors of Community Chest. CEI is active in developing short courses and entrepreneurship training programmes at UWC which has a footprint across all seven faculties. Its objective is addressing the student entrepreneurship agenda. Ms Duncan has developed a global network for Centres for Entrepreneurship on the African Continent, USA and Europe. She is the co-convener of the Community of Practice: The Entrepreneurial University, for the national platform representing the 26 South African universities, Entrepreneurial Development in Higher Education Reporting into Universities South Africa (USAf). Ms Duncan recently completed a Master’s degree (cum laude) in development studies with a focus on the informal economy.
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