Addressing food and nutrition security in South Africa: A review of policy responses since 2002

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Abstract

Since 2002, a range of South African policies have attempted to address the disproportionate burden of food and nutrition insecurity on the population. Yet malnutrition among the poor has worsened. This study reviewed policies to examine their implications for food security and the treatment of malnutrition. Policies enacted between 2002 and 2017 were retrieved from government departments and the data were thematically analysed. A preliminary analysis shows that policy has aided production through input provision and capacity building. Taxation, school nutrition programmes and social grants are some of the food access initiatives, whilst micronutrient supplementation, breastfeeding campaigns and food fortification are policies specifically focused on nutrition. However, despite these interventions, food insecurity has remained due to gaps in and contradictions among policies and the lack of coordination in policy development and implementation, especially across sectors. To improve food and nutrition security, government must better engage with ideas about how to address food and nutrition security systemically, and develop the appropriate coordination mechanisms for a more holistic approach to this challenge.

Key words: food security; nutrition security; policy; food systems; South Africa

1. Background

Globally, hunger and malnutrition persist in spite of the countless efforts and technical expertise that have been directed at eradicating them (Von Grebmer *et al.* 2017). At this level, approximately 28% of children are stunted, 10% are wasted, and about a third experience micronutrient deficiency (Miller & Welch 2013; Von Grebmer *et al.* 2017). Chronic food and nutrition insecurity have led to extensive illness and death, especially among children and women (Nohr 2012). Due to the persistence of food insecurity despite global eradication efforts, it has been described as a wicked problem by scholars (Grochowska 2014; May 2017). The latest figures indicate that hunger is increasing again – despite outstanding technical solutions (International Food Policy Research Institute 2016). New ways are required to address persistent hunger and food insecurity.

At the national level, South Africa is a middle-income country and food secure. However, the experience of food insecurity and malnutrition at the household and individual levels are immense (John-Langba 2015). Data at the population level show high levels, from extreme undernutrition to obesity and diet-related diseases. Over a quarter of children under five years of age are stunted (27%), and 10% are severely stunted (Statistics South Africa 2017). In 2015, the proportion of households that reported hunger was 30% (Aliber 2015). In addition, over half of the adults in South Africa are overweight/obese, with a higher prevalence among women compared to men (Agyemang *et al.* 2015). In addition, there is a higher burden of food insecurity and malnutrition on poor, black and coloured households compared to white households (May & Timaeus 2015). The complex challenge of malnutrition underscores the importance of understanding how policy shapes the risk of food and nutrition insecurity.

A major factor underlying high malnutrition are colonial and apartheid policies that institutionalised racism and discrimination (Triegaardt 2006). These policies limited the social, economic and political rights and opportunities of people classified as "non-whites", and have shaped the experience of food security by population group and geography. Since the transition to a democratic government in 1994, the government has implemented programmes to address the structural factors that initiated and have sustained the high levels of food and nutritional insecurity in the country (McLaren *et al.* 2015). These initiatives are largely informed by Section 27 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, which states that all South Africans have a right to sufficient food and water, and that "the state must by legislation and other measures, within its available resources, avail to the progressive realisation of the right to sufficient food" (Republic of South Africa 1996).

These policy interventions, which have included support for land reform, the provision of social grants, field crop production, and the provision of nutrition education, have shown mixed impacts on improving food insecurity, but not on nutrition security (Taylor 2015; Pereira & Drimie 2016). The policies have yet to achieve the desired effect after years of implementation (Hendriks 2014; Hendriks *et al.* 2017). This review assesses policy progress and highlights places where change is required to address food and nutrition insecurity. It is guided by the question: what are the implications of the policies on food production, food access and food utilisation in South Africa? This study synthesises evidence from existing policies, macro-level statistics and case studies, using thematic analysis.

2. A food systems approach

The FAO defines food security as when "all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (World Food Summit 1996). The definition altered the view of food security to include health, and socioeconomic and environmental outcomes, together with their availability, access, utilisation and stability components. These components are outcomes of the activities and actors involved in the food system. Ericksen's (2008) concept of the food system refers to a set of interrelated activities and actors for the production, processing and consumption of food. She emphasises social welfare, food security and environmental security as outcomes of the different elements and activities of the food system.

Food policies are some of the significant national and global factors that influence food and nutrition security (FNS). Food policies can be described as indirect actors in the food system, as they connect and define relationships between the direct actors (Ericksen 2008). This perspective enables a political and social power lens to be applied to the question of FNS. Global food systems have transitioned rapidly to a modern format, where income is the primary determinant of food security (Karamba *et al.* 2011). The modern food system has achieved immense success in reducing hunger through commercial, mechanised agriculture (Popkin *et al.* 2012). Through advance

transportation mechanisms, food imports from different countries are able to reach a variety of areas within the shortest possible time (International Markets Bureau 2010). However, the modern food system is also causing a crisis in food and nutrition security and environmental degradation. At the global level, food and nutrition security is threatened by the rapid expansion of supermarkets that specialise in the sale of cheap, highly processed foods (Howard *et al*. 2016). In addition, the adoption of monoculture has destroyed biodiversity and resulted in soil pollution (Pollan 2006). The outcomes of the modern food system in South Africa are characterised by food and nutrition insecurity, land degradation, and marginalisation of the informal food sector (Pereira & Drimie 2016). This is mainly because both producers and consumers are embedded in a system in which national and global factors play a more significant role in food security than local factors (Ericksen 2008).

Effective policies relating to food and nutrition security have been a challenge in South Africa (Hendriks 2014; McLaren *et al*. 2015). These challenges emerge from the policy formulation process, the framing of the food security problem and the implementation of interventions (Drimie 2015; Pereira & Drimie 2016). In South Africa, policies are developed with limited consultation of the various stakeholders in the food system (McLaren *et al*. 2015). Food security has consistently been framed as a rural challenge, with food production as the solution, yet food insecurity in South Africa is also prominent in urban informal areas and is mainly caused by the inability to access food (Battersby 2015). There is, in addition, a lack of political will to drive the desired change during implementation. This has resulted in uncoordinated and duplicated programmes with minimal impact (Devereux & Waidler 2017).

For this study, Ericksen's (2008) concept of food systems was applied to food security policies. Elements were adopted from three food security domains, namely availability, access and utilisation. The study uses production to measure initiatives that increase the availability of food, and affordability to measure economic access to food. Food utilisation was measured using initiatives for the prevention of malnutrition. Elements of these components guided the extraction and thematising of the policies. To understand policy coordination, themes were selected from Pereira and Drimie (2016).

3. Methodology

In order to address the question, "what are the implications of the policies on food production, food access and food utilisation in South Africa?" a review of relevant policies was undertaken. South Africa adopted its first comprehensive food security policy in 2002 – the Integrated Food Security Strategy (IFSS). The IFSS was developed by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries [DAFF] (2002). The website of the national departments that participated in the IFSS were searched for associated policies. These departments were the departments of Health, Social Development, Public Works, Water Affairs and Sanitation, Transport, Education, Human Settlements, Land Affairs, Environment and Tourism, Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, Trade, and Treasury. An initial search showed a pattern of presentation of policies by the departments into folders, such as bills, acts, regulations, legislation, policy documents, strategic documents, frameworks and white papers. Population-level data on food and nutrition security were retrieved from Statistics South Africa and the relevant literature.

3.1 Inclusion criteria

Policies that focused on food availability, access and utilisation by households and individuals, and were published between 2002 and September 2017, were included. The policies can be described as department specific. Overarching policies were made by the Presidency and the National Planning

Commission to inform the strategies of the departments. All overarching policies were included. The titles and executive summaries of the documents were screened.

3.2 Data extraction and analysis

The data were extracted into Excel using deductive codes adapted from Ericksen (2008) and Pereira and Drimie (2016) (see Table 1). Food production was used as a proxy for food availability. Policy objectives and programmes to address household production of food were extracted. Access was defined as economic access (the means to purchase on a sustainable basis): initiatives that addressed the food market, food prices, job creation and incomes were noted. Utilisation included nutrition and the prevention of malnutrition. The data were analysed thematically.

Table 1: Deductive codes used for the data analysis

	Production	**Access**	**Utilisation**	**Coordination**
Definition	How much and which types of food consumed are available through local production	Affordability: the purchasing power of households relative to the price of food	Nutritional value: how much of the daily requirements of calories, vitamins, proteins and micronutrients are provided by the food consumed	Initiatives to intervene efficiently in the activities and outcomes of the food system together
Proxies	Land reform, human capital development, control local producers have over their own products, inputs	Pricing policies and the form in which households are paid, income	Diet diversity, type of primary protein, education, access to clean water, food fortification, micronutrient supplements	Continuous process of interaction, adaptation and learning during policy formulation and implementation

Sources: Ericksen (2008), Pereira and Drimie (2016)

4. Results

4.1 Description of the policies in the review

Seventeen policies were reviewed (Table 2). After the move to democracy in 1994, food security-related initiatives were scattered across different departments. The first relevant policy was implemented by the National Treasury in 1994 through the development of a regulation that zero-rated staple foods, including maize meal, wheat flour, fruits and vegetables, to improve economic access to food. In addition, the Primary School Nutrition Programme was introduced to supply meals to poor students in public schools. The programme was revamped in 2006 and became the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP). In 2002, the first inclusive national food security policy was published by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF). Its content was influenced by the 1996 Rome Declaration on Food Security and the Food Security Programme of the Southern African Development Community. The goal of the Integrated Food Security Strategy was to "eradicate hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity by 2015", especially in rural areas (DAFF 2002: 6).

The Integrated Nutrition Programme (INP) of the Department of Health (DoH) (2002-2007) followed the IFSS (Department of Health 2002). The INP targeted both the general population and specific vulnerable groups. It identified seven focal areas to prevent and treat malnutrition. The Regulations Relating to the Fortification of Certain Foodstuffs was passed in 2003 to achieve the fourth focus of the Integrated Nutrition Programme, namely "micronutrient malnutrition control" (Department of Health 2003). The Department of Social Development (DSD) was also active in implementing the Integrated Food Security Strategy. It developed the Social Assistance Act (Department of Social Development 2002) and the Social Relief of Distress Grants (Department of Social Development 2004) to provide social support to citizens in dire need.