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27 TOWARDS HEALING OUR BROKEN FOOD SYSTEM: A SOCIAL AND THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO FOOD INSECURITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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[T]he coronavirus has made the mighty kneel and brought the world to a halt like nothing else could. Our minds are still racing back and forth, longing for a return to “normality”, trying to stitch our future to our past and refusing to acknowledge the rupture. But the rupture exists. And in the midst of this terrible despair, it offers us a chance to rethink the doomsday machine we have built for ourselves. Nothing could be worse than a return to normality. Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.²

– Arundhati Roy

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I address the structural and systemic nature of poverty in South Africa as it intersects with food insecurity and diet-related health disparities that disproportionately affect South Africa’s poor. I concur with Roy,³ who articulates how the pandemic has presented us with a unique portal, an opportunity anew to address our broken systems and structures and work collectively towards a better world. I argue that the pandemic heightened awareness of structural and systemic drivers of food insecurity and created opportunity for us to rebuild systems in a manner that foregrounds justice and equality for all. I further argue that given that the food security, health and well-being of all people in South Africa is enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, it is the prerogative of government to work closely with all stakeholders – including civil society, both the public and private sectors, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and faith-based organisations (FBOs) as well as other communities – to *re-envision* a more healthy and inclusive society, where poverty is holistically addressed and measured to eradicate food insecurity and food-related health disparities are decisively challenged and confronted. Moreover, from the perspective of the Christian faith, I maintain that in addressing food insecurity in South Africa, the Church needs to see itself as part of a larger whole and not operate in a silo with regard to food

1 Researcher, Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa.

2 Roy A. 2020. “The Pandemic is a Portal”, *Financial Times*, 9 April.

3 Arundhati Roy is a political analyst and human rights activist of Indian descent who challenges political and unjust power inherent in societies.

security. The Church must therefore work collectively with all stakeholders in order to envision theological innovations that cogently addresses the problem of food insecurity and related issues as a mandate of Christianity.

GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AND THEIR REACTION TO THE CONSTITUTION

Section 27 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, stipulates that the state, within the context of available resources, should take legislative measures to achieve proper health care services, inclusive of reproductive health care, food and water security and reasonable social security for all citizens.⁴ Section 28(1) stipulates that every child has the right to basic nutrition, shelter, health care and social services, to protect them from malnutrition, neglect, abuse or degradation.⁵ At the dawn of South African democracy in 1994, the need for drastic action to achieve food security for all South Africans was outlined in the Reconstruction and Development Programme.⁶

As constitutional mandate, the democratically elected government focused strongly on the food security of the nation. A national Integrated Food Security Strategy (IFSS) was adopted in 2002 in order to integrate the various existing food security programmes. The main aim of this policy was to achieve widespread access to enough nutritious food by all South Africans to meet daily dietary requirements and maintain health and well-being of all citizens.⁷ The expected outcomes of this policy were that there would be greater participation and ownership of productive assets by those who were food insecure. There would be increased productivity and competitiveness in farming operations and initiatives that are owned and managed by or on behalf of food insecure people. A high level of nutrition and food safety would be attained thereby mitigating food insecurity. Better prevention and mitigation of food emergencies would be attained. There would be greater, more accurate and reliable tools of analysis, dissemination of information and communication on the status and conditions of food insecure people and the way in which improvements impact their status and lead to interventions. There would be a greater level of communication, collaboration and participation from all sectors of society in improving food insecurity interventions. The IFSS would stimulate greater governmental accountability and improve integration and coordination between government and the private sector as well as financial and administrative management.⁸ The South African Department of Agriculture was appointed to

4 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, s 27.

5 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, s 28(1).

6 African National Congress (ANC). 1994. "A Basic Guide to the Reconstruction and Development Programme". Johannesburg: ANC.

7 South Africa. National Department of Agriculture (NDA). 2002. "Integrated Food Security Strategy". Pretoria: NDA.

8 Hendriks S. 2013. "Food Security in South Africa: Status Quo and Policy Imperatives", *Agrekon* 52(2):1-8.

oversee the IFSS, with a cluster of other social departments playing a supportive role. However, it has been argued that a serious disjuncture exists between institutional response mechanisms to food insecurity, as the IFSS is awkwardly positioned under the leadership of the South African Department of Agriculture, contributing to ineffective delivery.⁹ Significantly, there has been no discussion on the complexities of food insecurity on an urban scale.¹⁰ Furthermore, even though the IFSS proclaimed placing emphasis on both household and national food insecurity, it was critiqued for a lack of action.¹¹

Housed within the South African Department of Health, the Integrated Nutrition Programme focuses on household food security, nutritional treatment and counselling that is disease specific, monitoring and promotion of growth, education advocacy, as well as the promotion of nutrition, breastfeeding protection and support, malnutrition control, food service management and nutritional interventions for HIV, AIDS and tuberculosis. However, this programme is deemed largely unsuccessful and has been critiqued for failing to engage the larger food system environment in South Africa.¹²

The National School Nutrition Programme housed in the South African Department of Basic Education is aimed at alleviating short-term hunger and enhancing learning capacity of school pupils through school feedings, nutritional education and the promotion of food gardens in schools. In 2012, the Department of Basic Education reported that the programme fed over eight million learners throughout all nine South African provinces. However, the programme is marred by issues of procurement.¹³

The National Policy on Food and Nutrition Security was instituted with the intention of working towards a Food and Nutrition Security Act for South Africa, and it aimed to provide a broad framework towards the fulfilment of the constitutional mandates of food security. While the focus is food security at national and household levels, there is no mention of urban food security within the policy. Despite multiple research initiatives indicating the dire state of urban food security and the drastic increase in urban populations, the policy continues to identify rural food insecurity as the main problem.¹⁴

9 Drimie S and Ruysenaar S. 2010. "The Integrated Food Security Strategy of South Africa: An Institutional analysis", *Agrekon* 49(3):316-337.

10 Battersby J, Haysom G, Marshak M, Kroll F and Tawodzera G. 2017. "A Study on Current and Future Realities for Urban Food Security in South Africa", *South African Cities Network*. Braamfontein: SACities, 54.

11 Battersby et al, "A Study on Current and Future Realities for Urban Food Security", 55.

12 Battersby et al, "A Study on Current and Future Realities for Urban Food Security", 55.

13 Battersby et al, "A Study on Current and Future Realities for Urban Food Security", 55.

14 South Africa. Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. 2014. "The national policy on food and nutrition security for the Republic of South Africa", *Government Gazette* No. 37915, 22 August.

The National Development Plan of 2012 is an overarching plan aimed at eradicating poverty and reducing unemployment and disparity by 2030 in South Africa by developing an inclusive economic policy, increasing state and societal capacity, endorsing strong leadership and engaging in partnerships with societal stakeholders. Connecting food security to wider food systems, the plan seeks to expand the concept of food security to include nutritional security. The plan also seeks to increase the production of fruit and vegetables and to work towards equalising power and ownership imbalances in the food sector. In sum, the National Nutritional Plan aims to offer a holistic approach to the nation's food security.¹⁵

In order to address the constitutional mandate of the Republic of South Africa to achieve food security and food health for all, several more strategies were adopted. These include the Zero Hunger Strategy, which was adopted in 2009. The Medium-Term Strategic Framework 2009-2014 sought to address priority areas for the implementation of a set of strategic objectives designed to realise food security for all. Research indicates that these and numerous other strategies and policies related to South Africa's food security cover the support for land reform, provision of social grants¹⁶, boosting crop production, health and nutrition education.¹⁷

Notwithstanding all these governmental and constitutional interventions, numerous studies indicate that a large number of people, both rural and urban, living in South Africa are unable to access sufficient, nutritious food to meet daily dietary requirements and live healthy, productive lives.¹⁸ Globalisation, international trade regimes, climate change and the poor storage and distribution of food coupled with an increasing population, poor coordination of interventions and food price volatility has led to a large percentage of the population having inadequate access to nutritional food on a sustained basis.¹⁹

15 Battersby et al, "A Study on Current and Future Realities for Urban Food Security in South Africa", 56.

16 The South African government pays a social grant to qualifying South African citizens on a monthly basis. The amount varies based on the type of grant such as old age grant, foster care, disability grant and child support. South Africans who earn minimum wage often do not qualify to obtain the grant and those without valid identification documents, foreigners and undocumented migrants do not qualify. See Western Cape Government. 2020. "Applying for a social welfare grant", 9 April.

17 Makwela M. 2019. "Why SA's food security policies have not lived up to their promises" Cape Town and Pretoria: DSI/NRF Centre of Excellence in Food Security, 14 March.

18 Naicker L. 2021. *Food, Sex and Text: Exploring Survival Sex in the Context of Foods Insecurity through Communal Readings of the Book of Ruth*. PhD Diss, University of the Western Cape; Abrahams M and Smith J. 2016. PACSA Food Price Barometer; Pietermaritzburg: Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action; Crush J and Caesar M. 2014. "City without choice: Urban food insecurity in Msunduzi, South Africa", *Urban Forum* 25:165-175.

19 SA DAFF. "The national policy on food and nutrition security for the Republic of South Africa".

THE STRUCTURAL AND SYSTEMIC NATURE OF FOOD INSECURITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, both white settlers and black farmers responded to the growing demand for food in the country, particularly from new settlements and mining towns. By 1860, 80% of the almost half a million hectares of white-owned land were farmed by black tenants. White farmers began to complain that labour shortage and competition from black tenants hampered their progress and success. Resultantly, the Native Land Act of 1913 was instituted creating reserves for black people and prohibiting the sale of supposed *white land* to blacks. This served to meet the demands of white farmers for more land to farm and create a black labour force for the white agricultural and mining industries. In effect, this act eliminated all competition from black farmers in the agricultural industry. Under apartheid, national food security was equated with large scale commercial farming, which was dominated by white South Africans, who were given resources in order to develop and flourish.²⁰ Resultantly, black South Africans, to a large extent, became landless, impoverished and food insecure.

At the dawn of democracy in 1994, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) identified food security as a basic human right and food insecurity as a legacy of apartheid's socio-economic and political policies. At this point, it was largely understood that agriculture played a significant and historic role in the nation's food security. However, household food security in South Africa was, and still is, largely dependent on household income.²¹ The IFSS, which was developed in order "to attain universal physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food by all South Africans at all times to meet their dietary and food preferences for an active and healthy life", focused on availability of food, not access to food. This focus continues to inform policy and food security initiatives in South Africa. Yet, South Africa has adequate availability of food. The problem lies in access. Moreover, over 60% of South Africa is urbanised and urbanisation is growing rapidly. Gareth Haysom, an urban studies researcher, maintains that governmental interventions and policies do not reflect the rapid urbanisation of South Africa and continue to a large extent, to work from the perspective of rural development and agriculture.²² Jane Battersby, an urban geographer, opines that, "despite the constitutional right to food for all and the specific right to basic nutrition for all children, we have shockingly high levels of long-term food insecurity

20 Hendriks S. 2013. "Food Security in South Africa: Status Quo and Policy Imperatives", *Agrekon* 52(2):1.

21 Shisanya S and Hendriks S. 2011. "The contribution of community gardens to food security in the Maphephetheni uplands", *Development Southern Africa*. 28(4):509-526.

22 Haysom G. 2017. "Climate change, food and the city: Agency and urban scale food system networks", in Thomas-Hope E (ed). *Climate Change and Food Security: Africa and the Caribbean*. London: Routledge, 145-155.

and devastatingly high levels of child stunting. A country like South Africa should not have more than a quarter of children under the age of five stunted.”²³

A myriad of intersecting factors determines the systemic nature of South Africa’s food insecurity. In a cash-based society such as South Africa, income reliability is a key determinate of food security because people rely on markets to obtain food.²⁴ Yet rampant unemployment and enduring structural inequalities hamper the growth, development and food security of millions of South Africans. Urban infrastructure in under-resourced communities is limited or non-existent. A large percentage of urban dwellers live in informal settlements with limited or no access to basic services – such as sanitation, drainage, water supply and electricity, and, most importantly, land – that would enable them to live in a humane way and grow their own food. These inequitable social structures and arrangements put excessive strain on households, impinging on their health and well-being. In addition, rising inflation further hampers livelihoods.²⁵ Over 1.7 million households across the country experience hunger,²⁶ and food insecurity was declared a national crisis by the South African National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey in its 2013 publication. In urban South Africa, 28% of households are at risk of hunger and 26% of households are already experiencing hunger. Statistics in rural South Africa indicate that 32% of households are at risk of hunger and 36% of households are already experiencing hunger. In essence, roughly 50% of the South African population are food insecure or at risk of food insecurity, with urban household food insecurity growing at a rapid rate.²⁷ Battersby argues that within a rights-based framework, government has a responsibility towards its citizenry to defend, protect and realise the people’s right to food through policies and programmes. However, government has failed to fully grasp its own role and has therefore failed to protect the right to food in South Africa.²⁸

Women are most vulnerable to food insecurity, and pregnant women in particular face greater challenges in accessing adequate food to meet their nutritional needs and the nutritional needs of their unborn babies. Resultantly, there is a link between food insecurity and poor pregnancy outcomes, with numerous low-birthweight babies and occurrences of gestational diabetes and pregnancy-related complications. Children in food insecure households suffer poor health and increased probability

23 Battersby J. 2021. “Food Insecurity is not a COVID Related Shock but a Chronic, Systemic Problem in South Africa”, *The Daily Maverick*, 15 October.

24 Warshawsky D. 2011. “Urban Food Insecurity and the Advent of Food Banking in Southern Africa: Urban Food Security Series”, *AFSUN* 9:10.

25 Crush J and Franye B. 2010. “The Invisible Crisis: Urban Food Insecurity in Southern Africa”, *African Food Security Urban Network* 1:6-47.

26 Statistics South Africa. 2019. “Towards Measuring the Extent of Food Security in South Africa: An Examination of Hunger and Food Inadequacy”. Pretoria: Stats SA, 18.

27 Maluleke T et al. 2013. “South African National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (SANHANES-1)”. Cape Town: HSRC Press, 145; Kings S. 2018. “Food Insecurity Rising in Africa”, *Mail & Guardian*, 21 September.

28 Battersby, “Food Insecurity is not a COVID Related Shock”.

of hospitalisation. Children from these household types also suffer increased developmental delays, chronic hunger and chronic medical conditions, such as asthma, heart conditions, kidney disease and allergies. In addition, maternal health problems, such as postpartum depression, as well as psychosocial risk factors related to stressful life events, including intimate partner violence and other forms of abuse and trauma are associated with food insecurity.²⁹ In this context, on 23 March 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic emerged worldwide, a state of national disaster was declared in South Africa, and the nation went into total lockdown on 26 March 2020. The Covid-19 pandemic brought into sharp focus a different long-term pandemic in South Africa – that of food insecurity promulgated through structural and systemic inequalities.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A KAIROS MOMENT IN TIME

The Covid-19 pandemic drew sharper attention to the dire state of food insecurity in South Africa. However, even before the coronavirus pandemic, as mentioned earlier, about half of the nation's population were already food insecure and unable to access a healthy diet as a result of chronic structural and systemic problems.³⁰ There has never been a more decisive time since the dawn of democracy to take seriously how the historic legacy of structural and systemic inequalities in South Africa continues to perpetuate food insecurity, malnutrition and ill-health. The coronavirus has brought to light the significant disparities in the areas of health and food security. Undoubtedly, the people who suffer the effects of food insecurity the most are those who were *previously* disadvantaged in South Africa.³¹ Impoverished communities in the country remain largely black. The pandemic cast a spotlight on the spatial, health and food security inequalities of the nation. The burden of nutrition related disease, poor health care and chronic hunger continues to disproportionately affect poor, black communities.

During the lockdown phase of the pandemic, all activities, both economic and social, came to a halt. For the nation's poor, those who receive only a small social grant, low-income households and the unemployed, the situation became untenable. Where people were previously able to move around freely and forage for food, at the very least, under lockdown, they became prisoners to hunger in their own homes. Disconcerting images of winding queues stretching for kilometres, where people waited all day for food parcels, flooded social media and news outlets. The number of people who needed food assistance was staggering and an indication of the dire state of food insecurity in South Africa. In 2021, protest actions erupted

29 Ellis E. 2022. "Food Justice: The Shame of the Nation", *The Daily Maverick*, 29 March.

30 Battersby, "Food Insecurity is not a COVID Related Shock", 15.

31 I place the word "previously" in italics to indicate the untruthfulness of the term because a large percentage of those who were disadvantaged under apartheid is still disadvantaged in the present democratic dispensation.

across the country, as the poor demonstrated their frustration at their “long walk”³² of never attaining food security and the economic freedom they expected to enjoy post-apartheid. The pandemic brought into strident focus the proportion of people vulnerable to hunger, poverty and lack of the goods necessary for survival. Journalist Tasmin Oxford has asserted:

What makes this crisis worse is that South Africa has food. It has the food that could potentially transform lives, and yet it throws away 10 million tonnes of food a year – fruit and vegetables, grains, meat, roots and tubers. According to the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research the cost of this food loss is approximately 2% of the country’s gross domestic product. In 2013, R71.4 billion was lost to inedible food waste ... Far more needs to be done. Creating access to nutritious food will have a huge influence on this country’s people, economy and future.³³

Battersby asserts that the government lacks political will to decisively address the food and nutrition security of South Africa. Furthermore, it lacks understanding of how ordinary citizens access food. This, asserts Battersby, “was clear during Covid when one of the first responses of the state was to shut down informal food vendors, as well as the ongoing battle to get school feeding restarted. This is not a problem without history.”³⁴ The pandemic made clear that there has never been a more pressing and opportune moment in time, a *kairos*³⁵ moment in South Africa’s democracy, to institute progressive, sustainable and far-reaching changes to its social, economic and political policies in order to improve the health and food security of people in the country.

In 1985, at the height of apartheid oppression, inspired by the Aristotelian concept of *kairos*, a group of mainly black South African theologians, clergy and laypeople based predominantly in the South African township of Soweto, released a theological response to the injustices of apartheid known as the Kairos Document. The Kairos Document is a Christian, biblical and theological comment on the political crisis in South Africa under apartheid. It is a reflection on the political injustice, death and destruction meted out to black people in South Africa and a critique of the theological models particular Church denominations in South Africa used to promulgate apartheid and, in some instances, to attempt to resolve the country’s

32 I use the term “long walk” as a reference to an autobiography credited to Nelson Mandela, freedom fighter and first democratically elected South African president. The work profiles the life and times of Nelson Mandela and his struggle for freedoms for all who live in South Africa from all forms of oppression. See Mandela N. 1994. *Long Walk to Freedom*. Boston: Little Brown.

33 Oxford T. 2018. “The Complex Insecurity of Hunger in South Africa”, *Mail & Guardian*, 26 October.

34 Battersby, “Food Insecurity is not a COVID Related Shock”.

35 “Kairos” is an ancient Greek term used to denote the proper or optimal moment in time to take action as opposed to “chronos” which refers to chronological time. See Valentine M. 2020. “Chronos vs Kairos: Understanding how the Ancient Greeks viewed time will make your life richer”, *The Whippet*, 9 March.

problems. Creators of the document developed an alternative biblical and theological model in order to participate in the dismantling of apartheid.³⁶ In this chapter, I argue that, likewise, an alternative biblical and theological model must be developed through engaging conversations, strategies and interventions with a myriad of stakeholders in order to address the food insecurity crisis of the nation. From an ecclesial and theological perspective, there must be a concerted effort to engage public life and numerous relevant disciplines of knowledge that take the structural and systemic dimensions that contribute to food insecurity in South Africa seriously.

CREATING CONVERSATIONS, STRATEGIES AND INTERVENTIONS

According to Jane Battersby, two very important aspects are crucial if the nation's food security is to be realised. Firstly, collaborative action is key. Secondly, there is a need for concerted effort at addressing systemic drivers of food insecurity rather than addressing food security at sectoral levels.³⁷ Oxfam notes that in order to address the problem of food insecurity and its related health and livelihoods conditions, a national food act should be developed. The act should make provision for the eradication of hunger and food insecurity with "greater legal force than existing piecemeal policies to incentivise better coordination and implementation".³⁸ For such an act to be meaningful and fruitful, it must include all sectors of South African society, including communities suffering hunger, big business, both formal and informal sectors of the economy, institutions, NGOs, FBOs, and cultural and religious sectors of society. Such an act must include mechanisms that hold accountable the government and all stakeholders, including local and municipal governmental divisions. Within the act, provision must be made for the development and monitoring of a fair, accountable and sustainable food industry. Provision must also be made for a clearer understanding and evaluation of the food security needs in the country. Importantly, provision must be made for better coordination between local, municipal and national government, working in tandem with civil society and other stakeholders. Such an intervention measure will take seriously the structural and systemic nature of food insecurity and address price-fixing, cartels, food deserts³⁹ and food waste management, resulting in improvement in all levels of coordination and policy implementation. In this way,

36 The Kairos Theologians. 1985. "The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa", Kerkargief.

37 Battersby, "Food Insecurity is not a COVID Related Shock".

38 Tsegay YT and Rusare M. 2014. "Hidden Hunger in South Africa". Nairobi: Oxfam International, 34-35.

39 The term "food desert" is increasingly used by academics and other stakeholders in the field of urban food security worldwide to describe areas where people cannot access affordable, nutritious food. While definitions of food deserts appear are varied and there appears to be no definitional consensus, food deserts have been defined as "poor urban areas", where residents cannot buy affordable, healthy food. Food deserts are, therefore, "areas of relative exclusion where people experience physical and economic barriers to accessing healthy food". See Cummins S and Macintyre S. 2002. "Food Deserts: Evidence and Assumption in Health Policy Making", *British Medical Journal* 325:436-438.

all stakeholders can work collaboratively in order to formulate a just and equitable food system in South Africa.⁴⁰

I concur with Oxfam that collective action is necessary to repair the nation's broken food system. Battersby notes that the seeds for a better response to food insecurity in South Africa exist. At the beginning of the Covid crisis, Battersby observes, civil society organisations demonstrated how the shock of food insecurity should be addressed and plotted pathways towards a better food future for the country. Innovative and committed food activists began working together, engaging in discussions and establishing new and transformative action plans. In addition, activists have held government to account for its failure to effectively address the food insecurity crisis of the country and they have sought to work with government in order to address this crisis. It is clear that a more inclusive framework is necessary in order to alleviate food insecurity.⁴¹ A comprehensive multi-tiered and transversal approach must be undertaken that takes into account and closely involves those on the margins of society, who experience food insecurity daily. In addition, all societal stakeholders must hold government to account and demand far greater action in the fight to eradicate food insecurity.

Liberation theologian Albert Nolan points out that in South Africa, the struggle itself produced hope through the successful dismantling of apartheid, the negotiated settlement and relatively peaceful transition into democracy, as well as the new Constitution and charismatic leadership of Nelson Mandela. However, laments Nolan, these hopes have been gradually eroded and the general mood in the country can be described as disillusionment and despair.⁴² For Nolan, problems such as systemic food insecurity and other socio-economic disparities experienced in post-apartheid South Africa nullify true democracy. Nolan's insights raise important questions regarding the causes of food insecurity in South Africa. What can be done to address the historic structural and systemic drivers of food insecurity biblically and theologically? How can the overwhelmingly high unemployment rate and crushing poverty that perpetuates food insecurity be addressed biblically and theologically? How can theological engagement that demonstrates a *kairos* awareness contribute to the eradication of food insecurity? Focusing on theological responses to food insecurity, the next section expounds on how Christianity can and must be an active participant in addressing the food security crisis in South Africa.

THE CHRISTIAN MANDATE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE FOOD SECURITY OF THE NATION

To be socially and theologically relevant, Christian engagement with food insecurity and poverty must embody a *kairos* awareness that is contextually based, critical and

40 Tsegay and Rusare, "Hidden Hunger in South Africa", 34-35.

41 Battersby, "Food Insecurity is not a COVID Related Shock", 15.

42 Albert N. 2010. *Hope in an Age of Despair*. New York: Orbis Books.

socially relevant.⁴³ The Kairos Document explicitly states that prophetic theology commensurate with the contextual realities of struggle takes into consideration the lived realities of local communities and responds theologically, in a socially engaged manner.⁴⁴ From the perspective of Christianity, the Church and theological engagement must participate in measures and interventions that effectively address the broken food system of the country and the broken lives of the poor and the hungry. Theologian George Byarugaba contends that:

The obligation of ensuring that each person is food secure calls on the state, communities and their leaders ... Religious communities in particular must remember that genuine religion is liberating, transforming and empowering to individuals and communities in order to realise God-given dignity. Both religious and civil society must work together to create conducive ethical environment in which every citizen subscribes to the principle that food is a basic human right – as it is stated in the South African Constitution and the Bill of Rights ... Because God is the God of life, and the guarantor of the fundamental rights of the poor, to believe in God is to believe in the life of all, especially the poor. Belief in God is incompatible with the death of hungry people. Where life is oppressed, God is oppressed.⁴⁵

Charitable giving has for centuries been the hallmark of Christianity. Churches and Christian organisations have throughout the ages offered food aid to individuals, congregations, communities and countries in need. While such initiatives are needed and important in a country such as South Africa, where there is a necessity to address the immediate need of hunger, such actions must accompany a far greater social justice response. Liberation and contextual theologies have for decades paved the way towards an understanding that the Christian message of justice, hope and providence must be embodied within a socio-economic paradigm that calls for and works collectively towards radical social change.⁴⁶

In order to achieve this, a Food Justice Theology from the South African perspective must be developed. The key aim of a South African Food Justice Theology must be the creation of a more sustainable and just food system. Such a theology must take into account how racialised societal arrangements intersects with capitalism to perpetuate food insecurity and other forms of injustice and inequality. A Food Justice Theology unique to the South African context will require the exploration, examination and investigation of how access to and ownership of land in South

43 Le Bruyns C. 2015. "The rebirth of Kairos Theology and its implications for Public Theology and Citizenship in South Africa", *Missionalia* 43(1):131.

44 West G. 2021. "Contextual Bible Study and/or as Interpretive Resilience", in Chitando E, Mombo E and Gunda MR (eds). *That All May Live! Essays in Honour of Nyambura J. Njoroge* Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 143-159; Haysom, "Climate change, food and the city".

45 Byarugaba G. 2017. "The influence of food symbolism on food insecurity in South Africa: how relevant is the Eucharistic celebration?", *Scriptura* 116 (1):1-19.

46 Astley J. 2000. *Ordinary theology: looking, listening and learning in theology*, Aldershot: Ashgate. See also Guterrez G. 1973. *Theology of Liberation*, New York: Orbis Books.

Africa is a key driver of food insecurity. The ways in which land in South Africa is racialised, resulting in race and class disparity that directly affects the food security of the economically oppressed must be addressed.⁴⁷ A South African Food Justice Theology must ask critical questions regarding the food consumption patterns based on race and class and why healthy food is inaccessible to some and easily accessible to others. Moreover, the ideological construction of a racialised working class, rampant unemployment and below minimum wage earnings must be interrogated and confronted. A South African Food Justice Theology must address and seek to dismantle racism through sustainable food systems and theologically address how a sustainable food security system can be achieved. Race and class privilege in terms of food consumption and food movements must be analysed against the backdrop of prioritising access to fresh, healthy, culturally appropriate food for all.⁴⁸

A South African Food Justice Theology will require collaboration with a wide variety of voices and perspectives. Christianity's social mission of charitable giving cannot be a substitute for adequate social participation by the Church to effectively deal with the historic, structural and systemic nature of food insecurity as we experience it today. The post-apartheid theological discourse in South Africa, argues theologian Clint Le Bruyns, "may not necessarily be as appropriate and responsive as we would like for the kind of public impact and critical participation the times demand. Emphasis must be placed on contextuality, criticality and change in order to make a meaningful impact towards transformation".⁴⁹ The development of expertise in other disciplines of knowledge must accompany a commitment to engage in conversations and programmes that transcend ecclesial and theological discourses. Those in positions of power and influence and those whose participation is limited must be engaged equally from a theological perspective with the aim of meaningful participation, transformation and change. Moreover, theological engagement must draw its resources and what informs it, from the African soil in its quest to overcome dehumanisation and oppression.

For a Christian response to food insecurity to be relevant, biblical and theological engagement must address what dominates policy and practice in the nation's food systems and how this affects the lives of the poor and food insecure. Biblical and theological engagement must conduct social analysis of what perpetuates existing structures of power and privilege and what reinforces structural and systemic racial inequality. A critical issue that requires theological engagement is reparations and redistribution. The forceful dispossession of black people's land under colonialism and apartheid robbed them of a means of livelihood, survival and sustenance. The theological task should therefore be working towards land restoration. Theologically, the failure to meaningfully engage the land issue should be regarded

47 See Alkon AH and Agyeman J (eds). 2011. *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

48 Alkon and Agyeman, *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*.

49 Le Bruyns, "The rebirth of Kairos Theology and its implications for Public Theology and Citizenship in South Africa".

as justice denied. From this perspective, restorative justice should be advocated for through continued dialogue with the aim of achieving socio-economic progress and food security for all.⁵⁰ The Church and theological engagement must advocate for the basic right to food for all people living in South Africa and conduct focused analysis of how violations of such rights intersect with systemic racism and structural inequalities.

CONCLUSION

The need for economic accessibility to food, employment, skills development and liveable wages, as well as addressing racial and gender disparity in the workforce, must be engaged theologically in the context of food insecurity. The important issue of how land dispossession systematically oppressed and exploited people, as well as reparations and redistribution, must be approached from the perspective of justice and equity. Access to proper housing, infrastructure and adequate health care must be advocated through theological engagement with all stakeholders in the food security landscape. Within the framework of a holistic theological response to food security, the Church must enter into dialogue, debate and meaningful action that challenges the status quo and calls for the realisation of freedom from economic oppression and food security for all.

In an effort to demonstrate the need for government, the Christian Church and all other stakeholders to rethink and reevaluate the manner in which they address the food insecurity crisis in South Africa, I lift up an excerpt from sociologist Janet Poppendieck's book, *Sweet Charity: Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement*, which highlights the long-term ineffectiveness of current ecclesial interventions:

In a quaint village situated on a river, a villager one day sees a baby floating down the river. She rushes into the water and saves the baby. Her neighbours help her find clothes, a crib, a blanket and food for the baby, making sure it is warm and fed. The next day two babies are rescued and the day after that, several more. Soon, babies are being rescued in large numbers as a regular feature of life in the village. Finally, after much consternation over the source of the babies landing up in the river, one of the villagers suggests that they make an expedition upstream to determine how the babies are getting into the water in the first place. The villagers however are too afraid to take time and energy away from the immediate rescue project, fearing that the babies will drown if there was no one there to save them.⁵¹

As one of the most unequal countries in the world, economic justice is an important measure of redress. However, for the South African context, charity and justice cannot be viewed as opposing ideals. Both are needed in order to address the dire

⁵⁰ Resane K. 2015. "Naboth's Vineyard: Theological Lessons for the South African Land Issue", *Acta Theologica* 35(1):174-188.

⁵¹ Poppendieck J. 1998. *Sweet Charity: Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement*. New York: Viking.

state of food insecurity in the country – charity cannot replace justice and justice cannot replace charity. Out of necessity, these two aspects must exist side by side.

In this chapter, I discussed critical issues such as structural and systemic oppression and race and class disparity as it intersects with food insecurity. I demonstrated how the embedded political and economic power imbalances entrench food insecurity and the need for restructuring the current food system to include all stakeholders, inclusive of food insecure communities and the cultural religious sectors. With focus on Christianity,⁵² I maintain that there is an urgent need for a contextually based South African Food Justice Theology that will comprehensively address South Africa's broken food system.

⁵² While the focus of this chapter is a Christian response to food insecurity, it must be stated that the Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and other faith-based charitable organisations and communities in South Africa are actively involved in providing humanitarian support and food to vulnerable communities on a regular basis. Moreover, I wish to categorically state that when I speak of the involvement of the religious sector, I include all cultural and religious sectors of society.