UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH, FACULTY OF COMMUNITY AND HEALTH SCIENCES

# The Politics of Malnutrition: Self-determination and the Right to Food in the era of Sustainable Development Goals.

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This dissertation is submitted in pursuance of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Public Health


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**DEDICATION**

*In memory of my late grandmother Hildah Gumede née Khumalo (1934 – 2019) and my late mentor and supervisor Professor David Sanders (1945 – 2019)*

*Equally, this work is dedicated to my mother, Nosikelelo Moyo, thank you for feeding me, teaching me how to read and always keeping me in your prayers.*

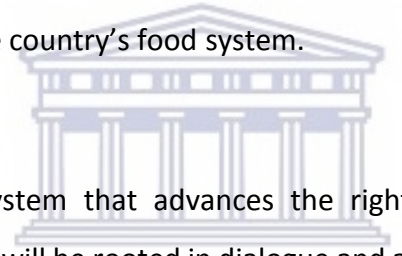
**Thesis abstract**

This research is about the analyses of power, governance, social capital and social justice in food and nutrition policy processes with the aim of informing efforts to achieve the right to food and address the complex burden of malnutrition in South Africa, and to transform the food system. Too often, malnutrition and the right to food are disconnected from one another, from the food systems practices that systematically generate health risks, and from the underlying environmental and socioeconomic conditions for health - conditions that are currently undermined by food systems activities.

Although the right to food and nutrition is enshrined in the South African constitution, and existing government policies in South Africa acknowledge the multi-pronged nature of food insecurity to an extent, they fall short in drawing-in the wide range of actors needed to recalibrate the food system as a whole. Moreover, nutrition, wellbeing and mortality are inextricably linked to public policies and strategies related to the broader food system. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge and recognise that right to food issues should not merely be treated as issues relating only to the question of sufficiency but health and nutrition standards as well. At present, low and middle income countries are in the throes of what has been termed a 'nutrition transition', associated with an increased urbanisation and a shift in the direction of Western food habits and food supply chains. As a result, policies must not only offset under-nutrition, but also address problems of over-nutrition, including chronic diseases associated with obesity.

This thesis is a mixed-method study grounded in Marxist and sociogenic theory frameworks. It unpacks the current state of the political economy of food and nutrition in South Africa by applying perspectives originating in Marxian and institutional policy analyses. Although much of these perspectives are familiar to scholars in the social sciences ( and the global South more broadly) they remain something of a black box to public health practitioners and academics. The aim is to shed light on that box and inspire more heterodox research and analysis of the processes of subordination existing in the struggles for the right to food and nutrition

and elsewhere in the public health system. The dissertation has four core chapters. The first describes and delves into three global rights-based paradigms - 'food justice', 'food security' and 'food sovereignty' - that inform activism on the right to food globally and their relevance to food system change in South Africa; for both fulfilling the right to food and addressing all forms of malnutrition. Second examines how accountability for realising the right to food could be effectively promoted to the benefit of food and nutrition security in South Africa. Third describes the characteristics and dynamics of the policy subsystem relevant for nutrition. And fourth seeks to gain insight into street food vendors' understanding of the right to food and nutrition and what it means for them as food system actors. The study utilized an array of research methods that make it interdisciplinary, including in-depth key informant interviews, an adapted photo-elicitation exercise and open-ended interviews with informal street food traders. A total of 57 interviews were conducted with stakeholders involved in the country's food system.




The creation of a food system that advances the right to food and addresses malnutrition in South Africa will be rooted in dialogue and action, coordination across multiple sectors that currently do not ordinarily work together, attention to local and global inequity and cultural life-ways, and a strategic focus on systemic solutions and policy opportunities to support sustainable change. Accountability mechanisms are also needed to support governance processes, constrain the influence of corporate and other actors with conflicts of interest in public policy development, and reinforce civil society engagement in their calls for a nourishing food system. A new social compact between the state and its citizens will be essential to recalibrate South Africa's food system.

**DECLARATION**

I declare that this work '*The Politics of Malnutrition: Self-determination and the Right to Food in the era of Sustainable Development Goals'* is my own work. I declare that this work has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Student: Busiso Helard Moyo

Signature:

Date:

**Acknowledgements**

"What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" first and foremost I want to thank my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who has afforded to me His grace and has looked upon me with kind favour. All glory and thanksgiving go to Him. My first words of thanks are to my major supervisor Dr Anne Marie Thow for never restraining me from pursuing this research project in the way that I desired. The provocations she offered and her patience towards me were indispensable for writing this dissertation. She was always willing to listen carefully to a new idea, a different direction, and suffered through my lamentations and moments of despair, but also smiled when I had my fleeting moments of satisfaction, I say thank you. That this doctorate has been realized is a testimony to your skills as an advisor, critic, and editor. May the good Lord continue to guide your steps and grant you the desires of your heart, I'll forever be indebted to you.

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you. Throughout the life of this project I encountered many scholars and activists who were curious about my intervention in the public health sphere, I am particularly grateful for the many insightful discussions and deliberations. These conversations made me know that there is much truth to the claim that intellectual work is not merely engagement with written text.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Context for the thesis

The negative impact of food systems on our wellbeing and health is an area of growing attention and growing concern[1]. The health impacts associated with food systems are highly diverse in terms of where they originate, what types of health conditions they are associated with, and who is affected. These pathways are multiple and interconnected. Malnutrition in particular "can be viewed as an outcome of dysfunctional interactions between different systems: the agri-food system, the environmental system, the health system, and, crucially, the system of individual and household decision-making[2]." However, the full picture is often lost from view, allowing the connections to be obscured and the root causes of poor health to be left unaddressed. As such, in the interplay of ideas, debates, and movements struggling to influence and change the prevailing food system this dissertation offers a food sovereignty critique of the politics of malnutrition in South Africa. Food sovereignty, one of the world's largest and fastest growing grassroots social justice movements, is effectively challenging what we've come to know as the 'food security' paradigm, and specifically the economic system that has supported it thus far[3]. Food sovereignty includes the right to food – "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through socially just and ecologically sensitive methods. It entails peoples' right to participate in decision making and define their own food, agriculture,

[1] See: United Nations. 2021. "Secretary-General's Chair Summary and Statement of Action on the UN Food Systems Summit: Inclusive and Transformative Food Systems Nourish Progress to Achieve Zero Hunger." https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/news/making-food-systems-work-people-planet-and-prosperity.

[2] See: Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition. 2018. Improving diets in an era of food market transformation: Challenges and opportunities for engagement between the public and private sectors. Policy Brief No. 11. London (UK): Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition. Policy Brief; Gillespie, S. & van den Bold, M. 2017. Agriculture, Food Systems, and Nutrition: Meeting the Challenge. *Global challenges (Hoboken, NJ)*, *1*(3), 1600002. https://doi.org/10.1002/gch2.201600002 & Walls, H., Nisbett, N., Laar, A., Drimie, S., Zaidi, S., Harris, J. 2020. Addressing malnutrition: the importance of political economy analysis of power. *Int J Health Policy Manag.* x(x):x–x. doi:10.34172/ijhpm.2020.250

[3] Desmarais, A. 2007. La Vía Campesina: Globalization and the Power of Peasants. Black Point: Nova Scotia.

livestock and fisheries systems[4].” At present, it appears the right to food and nutrition occupies a mythical role in the popular imagination, anti-hunger advocates are finding themselves forced to defend the eroding social safety net while at the same time lamenting that there is no sufficient political will for comprehensive right to food and nutrition legislation[5].

The paradox of national food sufficiency and simultaneous widespread hunger and malnutrition in the country must not be allowed to absolve the South African government from its obligations as a human rights duty bearer to create a comprehensive and coherent food and nutrition policy sphere that respects, protects and fulfills the right to food and nutrition of all rights holders, especially those most marginalised. Granted, it is often argued by the mainstream agricultural sector and many agriculture economists that the country is food secure, as it is generally a net exporter of agricultural and food products, with agricultural production levels having grown steadily to meet the growing demand for human consumption, animal feed and alternative industries such as biofuel[6].” However, while South Africa is considered food secure at a national aggregate level it is clear that access to this food is dangerously limited for a very significant proportion of the population as a result of policies that are heavily influenced by a global environment inimical to national food sovereignty, and international advice that promotes current economic orthodoxy[7]. With this in mind, it is important to acknowledge from the onset that this study draws its inspiration primarily from food consumers whose histories and articulations with today’s advanced capitalism have produced an alienated relationship with food

[4] Patel, R (Guest Editor). 2009. Food sovereignty, The Journal of Peasant Studies, 36:3, 663-706, DOI: 10.1080/03066150903143079

[5] See: Waidler, J. and Devereux, S. 2019. Social grants, remittances, and food security: does the source of income matter?. *Food Sec.* **11,** 679–702 (2019). https://doi.org/10.1007/s12571-019-00918-x . & Durojaye, E. and Chilemba, E.M. 2018. Accountability and the right to food: A comparative study of India and South Africa, Food Security SA Working Paper Series No. 003. DST-NRF Centre of Excellence in Food Security, South Africa.

[6] Bureau for Food and Agriculture Policy (BFAP). 2019. BFAP Baseline Agricultural Outlook 2019-2028. Pretoria: BFAP.

[7] People’s Health Movement, Medact, Medico International, Third World Network, Health Action International and ALAMES. 2014. Global Health Watch 4: An Alternative World Health Report. London: Zed Books Ltd. p394

production, land, and nature. At the moment, in the words of Meleiza Figueroa, "a host of utopian visions, constructed around the quality and value of food as a commodity and abstract models of 'sustainability' that often, in practice, end up reinforcing the social divisions and structures of alienated capitalist life are the norm[8]." Changes are urgently needed and should include intentional shifts in reframing the right to food and nutrition as well as food sovereignty; the South African government must fulfill its obligations to the food insecure and hungry without depending on charity, and also respect and protect social justice of diverse communities in exerting sovereignty and/or self-determination over their own local food systems.

**Global nutrition and food systems challenges and need for policy**



There has been increased scholarship and focus on the topic of nutrition and food systems challenges in recent years but many gaps remain in our knowledge of the relation between environmental factors, food systems, and nutritional outcomes[9]. Globally, transformation of food systems has become necessary and urgent so that the world delivers healthy, safe and nutritious foods in sustainable and equitable ways. Food systems are complex entities that impact on diets, human health, and a range of other outcomes including economic growth, natural resources and environmental resiliency, and sociocultural factors. In this dissertation, I speak to this emerging field through a public health lens and make an appeal to clinical nutritionists and academics in particular to consider how the broader food system affects diets, nutrition, and health outcomes of the South African population. Evidence is just beginning to gather as nutrition research embraces a more inter and transdisciplinary approach to improve diet quality and reduce all forms of malnutrition[10].

[8] Figueroa, M. 2015. Food Sovereignty in Everyday Life: Toward a People-centered Approach to Food Systems, Globalizations, 12:4, 498-512, DOI: 10.1080/14747731.2015.1005966

[9] Fanzo, J. Bellows, A.L., Spiker, M.L., Thorne-Lyman, A.L. Bloem, M.W. 2021. The importance of food systems and the environment for nutrition, *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 113 (1): 7-16. https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcn/nqaa313

[10] ibid

Given that many of the challenges South Africa faces "are global in nature, and with rapid convergence in the type of diets being consumed and growing commonality in the type of disease burdens faced in both low and middle income countries (LMICs) and high-income countries (HICs), traditional disciplinary boundaries appear to adversely affect our ability to identify and implement public health interventions relevant to the field [11] ."Due to the fact that food systems are complex and interconnected with multiple drivers, outcomes, and actors it becomes crucial that we adopt a food systems approach in our interventions and policies to reduce all forms of malnutrition. We cannot gain a better understanding without a systems approach that facilitates collaboration between experts, food system actors and rights-holders across the food system continuum[12]. What is crucial is our understanding of how food systems influence and impact-on diets, nutrition and health outcomes. Context becomes key in this regard as we should seek to understand food system dynamics under different drivers, with different political and societal transitions, and in-turn what this also means for the environment and overall planetary health as well. Significantly, we also need to go beyond just understanding associations and impacts to also understanding levers of change within food systems and how to operate them and in-turn reflect this in effective policy and legislation.



**A rights-based approach**

Human rights standards consider malnutrition and hunger as injustices, by recognizing health and fundamental rights as interdependent approaches to defining and advancing human wellbeing. Globally, while we can find reference to the right to food in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), it derives much of its legal power and meaning from Article 11 of the International Covenant on

[11] Loc cit

[12] Fanzo, J. Bellows, A.L., Spiker, M.L., Thorne-Lyman, A.L. Bloem, M.W. 2021. The importance of food systems and the environment for nutrition, *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 113 (1): 7-16. https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcn/nqaa313

Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). These international instruments and a select few others[13] promoting the right to food have set the global direction for uniting all the conditions necessary for progressively reducing the rate of malnutrition and guaranteeing food security/sovereignty for everyone. They also provide key guidance and measures that allow governments to focus on the underlying social, political and economic determinants of health that are essential for good nutrition outcomes. However, to reiterate, the issue of food is not only ideological and deeply personal, but also a highly political matter, requiring right to food and nutrition advocates to tiptoe into the world of formal as well as informal politics. To illustrate, South Africa is rated as a food secure country, but at the same time is also considered the most unequal society in today's world[14]. Unequal economic and power relations governing the South African food system are currently surfacing as revealed through narratives of 'looting' of food recently experienced in the country[15]. The Covid-19 pandemic in particular has aggravated the historical burden of racial, class and gendered inequality embodied disproportionately by black and mostly female bodies. While the 'looting' narrative has inevitably exposed rifts in South Africa's social fabric the protests relayed an underlying everyday food and livelihood crisis for marginalised black urbanites[16]. A shallow diagnosis by the media of the 'looting' as thuggery continues to downplay the need for long due critical dialogue between the ruling elites, white monopoly capital and the masses of food insecure black communities.

The aim behind a rights-based approach is not to necessarily apportion blame for the non-realization of rights, but rather to identify the duty-bearers and to strengthen capacity of rights-holders in order to contribute directly to the realization of human rights. Weak governance and poor policymaking, power dynamics, and poor

[13] The right to food is a crosscutting concept including both the right to be free from hunger and the right to access food, which satisfies the dietary needs of individuals. But this fundamental right is also enriched in the right to health, and appears clearly in the Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

[14] See: Francis, D. & Webster, E. 2019. Poverty and inequality in South Africa: critical reflections, *Development Southern Africa* 36(6): 788-802, DOI: 10.1080/0376835X.2019.1666703

[15] Swilling, M. 2021. "July 2021 and the Zumite sedition and the emerging 'politics of the mall'", *Daily Maverick,* 21 July.

[16] Ibid

distribution of goods and services result in inequities that significantly affect the food and nutritional outcomes of individuals[17]. The myriad factors that shape nutrition in particular require multi-sectoral efforts that enable and support people to address the underlying determinants of poor health and nutrition. I argue later that to do this effectively, perhaps a human-rights based approach that is grounded in the recognition of a stand-alone right to nutrition separate from the broader right to food could provide a breakthrough if included as part of policy and programs.

**Understanding the importance of the political economy approach in policy processes**

Achieving food systems transformation presents an immense political challenge of great complexity. It is a "wicked problem" involving many public and private stakeholders, often with competing interests, worldviews and beliefs. Globalisation has pushed many of the productive and regulatory activities relating to food systems outside of national jurisdictions, while the expanding scope of international trade rules has diminished the regulatory autonomy of governments to act within them[18]. Neoliberal free market thinking has given rise to more market-orientated forms of food governance[19]. With this has come an expansion in the size and reach of multinational food corporations, and the power they wield in relation to both state and non-state actors, globally and nationally.

In this dissertation, the above complexity is explored. The aim is to demystify the web of political economy factors currently driving the country's regressive trajectory on the fulfilment of the right to food and nutrition. Political economy in this regard means the interplay between "political, economic and social forces in society, the distribution

[17] Popkin, B. M., Corvalan, C. & Grummer-Strawn, L.M. 2020. Dynamics of the double burden of malnutrition and the changing nutrition reality. *The Lancet* 395(10217): 65-74.
[18] Baker, P., Lacy-Nichols, J., Williams, O. & Labonté, R. 2021. The political economy of healthy and sustainable food systems: an introduction to a special issue. *Int J Health Policy Manag*. 10 (12): 734-744. doi:10.34172/ijhpm.2021.156
[19] Ibid

of power and resources between different individuals and groups within and surrounding food systems, and the processes that generate, sustain and transform these relationships over time[20].” Although political economy factors do not directly cause unhealthy and unsustainable food systems, they significantly influence policy responses that can exacerbate or mitigate the problem and are therefore essential to investigate. More importantly, for the author any worthwhile change in the food system will be radical and this line of thought is supported by scholars who assert that the “transformation of food systems ultimately requires an equally transformative, and even radical, change in the political economy of those systems. Technical ‘problem-solving’ and overly circumscribed policy approaches that depoliticise food systems challenges are insufficient to generate the change [that is needed][21].”

> There is no secret as to how to eradicate hunger. There is rather a need for political commitment to challenge existing policies, inequities and corruption across the world that are making the poor, poorer and the rich, richer. We need political solutions, rather than complicated technical solutions to hunger. There is rather a need to challenge the growing inequities between rich and poor around the world. Widening inequalities will simply result in even greater poverty, as the profits of economic growth will go to the rich. But we should all be concerned about reducing the poverty and marginalization of poor countries and poor peoples, which will stabilize the world[22].



### 1.1 The double-burden of malnutrition in South Africa

At present, South Africa is grappling with a double burden of malnutrition [23] characterised by the coexistence of under-nutrition (including micronutrient

[20] Corduneanu-Huci, C., Hamilton, A., & Ferrer, I. M. 2012. Understanding policy change: How to apply political economy concepts in practice: Washington, DC: World Bank Publications.
[21] Baker, P., Lacy-Nichols, J., Williams, O. & Labonté, R. 2021. The political economy of healthy and sustainable food systems: an introduction to a special issue. *Int J Health Policy Manag*. 10 (12): 734-744. doi:10.34172/ijhpm.2021.156
[22] Golay, C., Mahon, C., and Ziegler, J. 2011. Right to Food: Lesson Learned, Palgrave Macmillan, p332
[23] The concept of a double burden of malnutrition was first introduced in 1992 at the first International Conference on Nutrition which initially referred to the coexistence of undernutrition along with

deficiencies) and over-nutrition[24]. Malnutrition and its associated health burdens have significant economic and social costs. For example, reports have highlighted that under five stunting alone, is projected to cost the country R62 billion per annum[25], while the estimated budget allocation for nutrition related interventions in the nine provinces under the health budget vote is R320 million[26]. And according to the 2017 Child Gauge report the estimated additional cost of implementing the proposed response to bring about food and nutrition security is R86.8 billion[27]. Although at a national level, South Africa has a relatively well-endowed agrarian sector, albeit based on limited arable land and significant water constraints, the reality is that gross inequalities and poverty renders almost two-thirds of children in South Africa at risk of food insecurity and hunger[28].

A number of elements are required to meaningfully deliver double-duty [29] interventions and address the double burden of malnutrition in the country. In particular, alignment among key government departments responsible for other issues related to the right to food and nutrition will be essential, namely, climate



overweight and obesity at a national level (International Conference on Nutrition, 1992). Soon after, it became clear that this double burden existed within communities, households and individuals alike, and that micronutrient deficiencies, known as hidden hunger (such as anaemia) represented an additional threat in many low and middle-income countries (Global Nutrition Report, 2020), and is sometimes referred to as a triple/multiple burden of malnutrition (UNICEF, 2016).

[24] Sanders D, Hendricks M, Kroll F, Puoane T, Ramokolo V, Swart R, et al. The triple burden of malnutrition in childhood: Causes, policy implementation and recommendations. In: Shung-King M, Lake L, Sanders D, Hendricks M, editors. South African Child Gauge 2019. Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape Town; 2019.

[25] Jamieson L, Berry L, Lake L, editors. 2017. South African Child Gauge 2017. Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape Town.

[26] Ibid

[27] Diagnostic/Implementation Evalutation of Nutrition Interventions for Children from Conception to Age 5: Final Report. Pretoria, South Africa: Department of Health (DOH), Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), Department of Social Development (DSD); 2014. https://evaluations.dpme.gov.za/evaluations/441

[28] Statistics South Africa. General Household Survey 2018. Pretoria: Stats SA; 2019.

[29] The double burden of malnutrition offers an untapped window of opportunity for integrated actions, generally termed "double-duty actions" (DDAs). These DDAs include policies, programmes and interventions that have the potential to simultaneously reduce the risk or burden of both undernutrition (including wasting, stunting, and micronutrient deficiency) and overnutrition (overweight and obesity).

change, water, energy, marketing and food safety[30]. At the same time we must advance accountability mechanisms that will enable us to monitor, report-on and review commitments. If anything, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the urgent need for new taxes and policies to both stabilize and/or subsidize escalating food prices for nutritious foods this appears to be the only worthwhile avenue towards resilient recovery. South Africa's political will to address malnutrition is well documented in the foreword of the National Food and Nutrition Security Plan for South Africa (2018-2023) which was written by President Cyril Ramaphosa and states that "The National Food and Nutrition Security Plan 2018-2023 embodies our collective response to the challenge of food insecurity and malnutrition[31]." However, even though there's this demonstrated capacity and political investment in addressing hunger and malnutrition, the pandemic has highlighted the inertia and inefficiencies currently restraining the country's food and nutrition response[32]. Apart from the loss of lives, COVID-19 has left lasting memories of media images and headlines of people, and children in particular, queuing for food relief. While chronic malnutrition is well documented in South Africa and is worsening[33], this particular pandemic reality should have been sufficient enough to compel us to reflect on the food system impacts and to demand state intervention to ensure access to sufficient food is guaranteed a basic human right.



[30] These include the departments of Trade and Industry, Agriculture, Basic Education, Water and Sanitation, together with Health and related policies to ensure policy coherence on over and under nutrition.

[31] See: https://www.nutritionsociety.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/National-Food-and-Nutrition-Security-Plan-2018-2023.pdf

[32] Hart, T., Davids, Y., Rule, S., Tirivanhu, P. & Mtyingizane, S. 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic reveals an unprecedented rise in hunger: The South African Government was ill-prepared to meet the challenge. Scientific African. 16. e01169. 10.1016/j.sciaf.2022.e01169.

[33] Horwood, C., Haskings, L., Engebretsen, I., Connolly, C. & Coutsoudis, A. L. S. 2020. Are we doing enough? Improved breastfeeding practices at 14weeks but challenges of non-initiation and early cessation of breastfeeding remain: findings of two consecutive cross-sectional surveys in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. *BMC Public Health* 20 (1) : 440. & May, J. & Timaeus, I.M. 2014. Inequities in under-five child nutritional status in South Africa: What progress has been made? *Development Southern Africa* 31 (6): 761-74.

### 1.2 Constitutionalism, the right to food, and malnutrition

The Constitution is the guiding framework that informs the values, beliefs and ideas of various food and nutrition policies in the country. Yet, nutrition in particular as a national priority has lacked policy cohesion and coordination in the broader food security domain, leading to duplication, uncoordinated efforts and inadequate progress towards national and international development targets. In the Constitution there is a human rights imperative to address malnutrition and promote good health[34]. This mandate is placed on the legislature, executive, judiciary and all organs of state, which, in this research, I refer to as government. The government is obliged to "progressively realise" the right to access sufficient food and water. "Though South Africa is a resource-constrained setting, the Constitution still requires the government to have acted reasonably in realising these rights. Reasonableness in this context requires that government and policy actors are continually improving access to these rights in as comprehensive and responsive a way as resources permit[35]."

The primary obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the right to food and nutrition of their people will always rest with national governments. However, in the age of globalization and increasing interconnectedness, with the gradual emergence of a single integrated world market and the progressive globalisation of most commercial, economic and social relations between peoples, it is critical that we re-examine the interface between constitutionalism and politics. In South Africa, interest in nutrition interventions thus far has been strongly shaped by scientific enquiry and medical advancements; the current context of nutrition policy is divided between food security and nutrition. While the country has a (albeit weak) food security and nutrition policy (gazetted in 2014) spearheaded by the Department of Social Development (DSD) and The Presidency, there is still little coordination of activities[36].

[34] Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996.

[35] Hofman, K., Erzse, A., Kruger, P., Abdool-Karim, S. & May, J. 2020. Double burden and double duty: Government action required to improve child nutrition. *In*: May, J., Witten, C. & Lake, L (eds). South African Child Gauge 2020. Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape Town.

[36] Thow, A.M., Greenberg, S., Hara, M. *et al.* 2018. Improving policy coherence for food security and nutrition in South Africa: a qualitative policy analysis. *Food Sec.* 10**,** 1105–1130. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12571-018-0813-4

On the one hand, nutrition programmes related to micronutrient interventions (including supplementation and fortification) fall under the Department of Health (DoH). On the other hand, food security is the Department of Agriculture, Land and Rural Development (DALLRD) (formerly known as the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries') responsibility. While early childhood development and school feeding programmes are the responsibility of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) with the DSD responsible for social safety/security interventions including the social relief of distress grant that may be in the form of a food parcel or a voucher to buy food. No one takes responsibility for coordination to realise the *rights* that underpin the national transversal policy framework and there is no legislation to deliver on the constitutional rights to food and health for all and the unconditional right to basic nutrition for children.

Though criticism is directed towards the South African government in light of its ineffectiveness in implementing a credible food and nutrition security strategy, this by no means negates the importance of the state. The state remains the dominant entity when it comes to redistribution to the most vulnerable and marginalized in society. Domestically, this role is enshrined in the country's Constitution[37]. As the principal duty-bearer for the right to food and nutrition, the government must now acknowledge that "food governance is no longer purely in the ambit of the state, but lies in the complex articulation between the state, the private sector, international institutions, and civil society[38]." And the government must manage these relationships whilst giving special attention to those at the bottom of the pyramid that are often left out of discussions.

The fulfilment of the right to food and nutrition is not only a question of finding resources but it is also about challenging structural injustices and inequities of power that allow human rights abuses to take place. It is also a question of challenging

[37] Section 27 (1) (b) & section 28 (1) (c) of the Bill of Rights, Republic of South Africa, 1996.
[38] Pereira, L. and Ruysenaar, S. 2012. Moving from traditional government to new adaptive governance: the changing face of food security responses in South Africa. *Food Security* 4(1): 41-58. doi: 10.1007/s12571-012-0164-5

economic inequalities and adopting a principled and fair approach to the political economy of food. This, at least, seems to be the view of *La Via Campesina*[39], which differentiates 'food security' from 'food sovereignty', and advances the latter.

> Visions of food sovereignty have been extremely important in helping to galvanize broad-based and diverse movements around the need for radical changes in food systems. Yet while food sovereignty has thrived as a 'dynamic process', until recently there has been insufficient attention to its origins, its connection to other food justice movements, its relation to rights discourses, the roles of markets and states and the challenges of implementation[40].

This research contributes to the food sovereignty praxis by pushing the process of critical self-reflection forward through considering its relation to the politics of malnutrition - and vice versa. There are the beginnings of a food sovereignty movement in South Africa, and this work, examines how 'food sovereignty' as a concept may be used to increase equity and justice in South Africa's food system with a particular emphasis on nutrition outcomes.



Historically, nutrition and food policies in the country "have been dominated by issues of food insecurity, dietary diversity, micronutrient deficiency control programmes, breastfeeding, and infant and child feeding practices[41]." Yet nutrition policies have not kept pace with South Africa's rapid nutrition transition towards unhealthy diets[42] and

[39] La Via Campesina is an international movement bringing together millions of peasants; small and medium size farmers, landless people, rural women and youth, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers from around the world. It defends peasant agriculture for food sovereignty as a way to promote social justice and dignity and strongly opposes corporate driven agriculture.

[40] Marc Edelman, M., Weis, T., Baviskar, A., Borras Jr, S.M., Holt-Giménez, E., Kandiyoti, D. & Wolford, W. 2014. Introduction: critical perspectives on food sovereignty, *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 41 (6): 911-931, DOI: 10.1080/03066150.2014.963568

[41] Hofman, K., Erzse, A., Kruger, P., Abdool-Karim, S. & May, J. 2020. Double burden and double duty: Government action required to improve child nutrition. In: May, J., Witten, C. & Lake, L (eds). South African Child Gauge 2020. Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape Town.

[42] Nnyepi, M.S., Gwisai, N., Lekgoa, M. & Seru, T. 2015. Evidence of nutrition transition in Southern Africa. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society* 74 (4) : 478-86.

increasing obesity rates[43]. As a result, "much support is given to increasing agricultural productivity but little or none to nutrition programmes. The notion is that once sufficient food is produced, people will no longer be malnourished. However, food production is not synonymous with good nutritional status[44]." Additionally, another concern is the state's obsession with econometric thinking[45], which often time does not take into account the main goal of improving human health (beyond providing sufficient calories), but is always invested in amplifying the strategic role that agriculture plays as a major driver of economic growth and livelihoods.

### 1.3 Researcher positionality and reflection

As an activist scholar I believe that the human rights approach should be about challenging the status quo on all levels. The desired outcome of this dissertation is to illuminate the statecraft that is currently frustrating efforts geared towards the establishment of a nourishing food system for all in South Africa. Throughout the course of this research project that was situated within the School of Public Health (SoPH) at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) as part of the *Researching the Obesogenic Food Environment* (ROFE) project, my own identity and sense of activism both informed and constrained the research process and my affiliation with it. I entered "the field" having had personal experiences with "right to food and nutrition activism" as both an actor in civil society and as an academic. I had studied the country's legal opportunity structure and the lack of right to food litigation and was also an active participant of the food movement that lobbied and advocated-for the adoption of the Health Promotion Levy (regulation on salt and sugar reduction) in South Africa. Through this work, and my involvement with broader socio-economic struggles of national interest, I believe that while there will be many paths to food

[43] Armstrong, M.E.G., Lambert, M.I. & Lambert, E.V. 2011. Secular trends in the prevalence of stunting, overweight and obestiy among South African children (1994-2004). *European journal of clinical nutrition* 65(7):835-40.
[44] Gillespie, S & van den Bold, M. 2017. Agriculture, food systems, and nutrition: Meeting the challenge. *Global Challenges* 1(3): 1600002. https://doi.org/10.1002/gch2.201600002
[45] See: Padayachee, V. 2018. Beyond a Treasury View of the World. Southern Centre for Inequality Studies, Wits University. SCIS Working Paper Number 2

systems transformation, rights-based approaches hold great promise, based on principles of participation, accountability and non-discrimination, alongside social mobilisation grounded in food sovereignty.

One of the weaknesses of the current discourse is that we talk about the transformation of the food system as if that is the goal - to "fix" the system without (at the same time) referring to what the purpose of this transformation-drive is. We should always be clear as to why we want to transform the food system. From a food and nutrition security perspective the system is broken because some have too much to eat and some have too little to eat and many have something to eat of which the quality is poor or questionable or detrimental to their health. In her assessment of the food crisis in South Africa, Jacklyn Cock has insisted that transformation must necessarily be grounded in the experience of working class South African women who bear the brunt of the provision of food and nutrition within a patriarchal, capitalist system[46]. With this in mind, the change needed to address the country's inequality woes won't be achieved by piling up so many reports that power gracefully gives in to intellectual prowess, nor by befriending a few officials with smooth insider advocacy. Instead, to secure real change we have to get engaged in the political economy of food systems (inequality) – that is, not just participate in the surface level formal discussions, but understand how power is maintained and work out how we challenge it. This is the essence of this dissertation.



### 1.4 Thesis aims and focal research questions

This study examines food and nutrition policies in South Africa with the aim to 1) understand how power, institutions, discourse, ideas and knowledge shape the status-quo, and 2) identify opportunities to re-orient food system policy to deliver healthy food to everyone, and fulfil the right to food and nutrition in a meaningful way. It seeks

[46] Cock, J. 2016. A feminist response to the food crisis in contemporary South Africa. *Agenda* 30 (1):121-132

to demystify the web of political economy factors driving the multiple burden of malnutrition in the country.

Food system actors are identified by considering who deploys and accrues power within South Africa's food systems in relation to whom. I draw on Clapp and Fuchs (2009) conceptions of power for research on global food and agriculture governance in making my argument, which lays out instrumental, discursive and structural power, Clapp and Fuchs build on the work of Lukes' (2005) that speaks to the 'three faces' of power[47]. Additionally, the concept of power is explored as it relates to policy change, as arguably the single most important variable to consider in political economy analysis. In advancing this argument, I borrow from the work of John Gaventa by further conceptualising power as embedded-in and operating through institutional arrangements, both in visible and hidden ways[48]. Pointedly, understanding the complexity of power, governance, social capital and social justice in food and nutrition policy processes requires a trans-disciplinary approach. As such, themes from the food policy and governance, public health and political science literatures are also engaged with. In doing so, a richer understanding is provided rather than drawing upon one disciplinary perspective alone. By drawing from the evolution of human rights instruments in particular, as well as scholarship on the political economy of food, the intersection of 'food security' and 'food sovereignty', the right to health and right to food, this dissertation interprets and articulates the intersectional rights-based obligations of the South African state and non-state actors in the face of growing food and nutrition insecurity.

In order to achieve the abovementioned, this thesis has 3 key questions that go together towards achieving the aims of the research. These are also set out below with reference to the chapters that answer them. The focal research questions for this dissertation are as follows:

[47] Clapp, J., & Fuchs, D. (2009). Corporate Power and Global Food Governance: Lessons Learned. In *Corporate power in global agrifood governance* (pp. 285-296). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press Journals.
[48] Gaventa, J. 2006. Finding the spaces for change: a power analysis. *IDS bulletin, 37*(6), 23-33.

I. How is the right to food – and action to achieve the right to food – conceptualised and understood in a "food systems and nutrition" policy and practice context, in South Africa? - Chapters 2 and 3.
II. What are the characteristics of policy and politics in South Africa, with reference to the multiple burden of malnutrition? (Including the interface with economic and social factors ) - Chapters 3 and 4.
III. What are the roles and realities of key stakeholders, food traders, consumers, and people in general in the construction of food sovereignty within broader political-economic transformations? – Chapters 4 and 5.

**Papers embedded in this thesis**

The above objectives are addressed in the four core chapters that present the results of the study. Two papers integrated into the thesis have been published and peer-reviewed as detailed below:



Paper 1: Moyo, B.H. & Thompson Thow, A.M. 2020. Fulfilling the Right to Food for South Africa: Justice, Security, Sovereignty and the Politics of Malnutrition, *World Nutrition* 11 (3).

Paper 2: Moyo, B.H. 2021. Photo-elicitation and the voiceless: Narrating the "lived experiences" perspective of informal street food vendors in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, *World Nutrition* 12 (3).

With the approval of the supervisors the above papers constitute chapters 2 and 5 and the remainder two papers that present the results of this research have been submitted to relevant peer-reviewed journals and will be forthcoming publications. All persons who meet authorship criteria and have participated sufficiently in the work presented in chapters 3 and 4 are listed as authors and take public responsibility for the content. The first author and supervisor participated in the concept, design, analysis, writing of the original chapters, and revision of both chapters. Contributing

authors in chapter 4 specifically provided critical reviews, commentaries, revisions and editing. Each author certifies that the material presented in this dissertation has not been and will not be submitted to or published in any other publication before its appearance in a forthcoming special issue of the Public Health Nutrition (PHN) Journal.

### 1.5 Theoretical Framework Underpinning Research

The awareness that one has a right to food, rather than a right to 'earn' their food is reflected in the ideologies and objectives of the food justice movement, which attempts to dismantle racism and oppression within the food system[49] and to subvert the neoliberal planning paradigm that renders the acquisition of food invisible[50]. Food and hunger have both registered their presence in politics and the very constitution of the political. However, there are many different disciplinary, epistemological, and ideological entry points to the study of power and this dissertation examines different perspectives of power in the food system, and the web of actors, relationships, activities, and institutions that play a major role.

This thesis draws on Marxist and sociogenic frameworks to underpin the research. By taking-up Foucault's theory of discourse[51] and Fanon's sociogenic[52] principle as a theoretical-praxis[53] for the imperial relations of food I expound on the relation



[49] See: Alkon A H and Agyeman J (eds). 2011. Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class and Sustainability. Cambridge: MIT Press

[50] Lindemann, J F. 2014. The Intersection of Race and Food in the Rust Belt: How food justice challenges the urban planning paradigm. Master of Science: Thesis. Cornell University, p57. Available at https://ecommons.cornell.edu/bitstream/handle/1813/36016/jfl93.pdf;sequence=1 (Accessed 08/04/2018)

[51] Discourse, as defined by Foucault, refers to: ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning.

[52] This research proposes that Frantz Fanon's dually third person, and first person exploration of the "lived experience of being black" in his book, Black Skins/White Masks, was both to develop the earlier insights of Black American thinkers such as W. E. B. Dubois with respect to the conflicted "double consciousness" of the "Negro" in Western civilization (Dubois, 1986) and to put forward, as the explanatory cause of this "double consciousness" a new theoretical object of knowledge, which enabled the calling in question of our present culture's purely biological definition of what it is to be, and therefore of what it is like to be, human ,while Fanon gave to this new object of knowledge the name sociogeny.

[53] Here, the term *praxis*, refers to a single or multiple set of complete oscillations between either: theory or practice. It thus corresponds to both (a) the interaction between cognition of experience and

between the individual and the social structure, between the colonial subject and the colonial world itself. For Fanon, "… in the colonial context what happens at the level of the private and the intimate is fundamentally linked to social structures and to colonial cultural formations and forms of value.[54]" Colonialities of being, power and knowledge extract and exploit globally both people and places as legacies of colonialism and perpetuate an abyssal divide between worlds. This research unsettles and makes an attempt at reconfiguring both geopolitical contemporary and historic accounts of food-related narratives in South Africa. Critically, I am doing this to help reveal how the 'food system' is actually a mainly Euro-American-centred narrative of dispossession, presented as universal. It is in this spirit that social movements for the right to food/food sovereignty echo this de-colonial critique, as they reclaim the spaces of the garden, the farm, the kitchen, and ultimately, the body and the land. Food justice as a field of work enacts this Fanonian decolonial praxis which in-turn challenges our understandings of activism. Fanon's idea of 'freedom', 'liberation from oppression', 'justice' and 'human rights' is applied throughout this study in order to illustrate the extent of the struggle for an end to colonialism, poverty, and oppression, thus creating a development narrative that is inclusive and 'liberative' - contributing to the wellbeing of all humankind in the broader sense.



The above is then juxtaposed to world systems theory and historical materialism, two influential schools of thought rooted in Marxism that seek to demonstrate that exploitation and imperialism are unavoidable in capitalism. Both approaches argue that economic processes are central to global relations. In particular, "historical materialism examines the connections between power in production, power in the state, and power in international relations[55]." In other words, it examines how the production process, the state/society complex and neoliberalism interact. Markedly,

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the attribution of meaning to it, and (b) the interrelationship between subjective and objective realities; as a guide for action. However, due to the range of applications the *meaning* of the concept *praxis* needs further examination.

[54] Maldonado-Torres, N. 2008. Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, p127.

[55] Cox, R, W. 2001. The Way Ahead: Toward a New Ontology of World Order. *In* Richard Wyn Jones ed. *Critical Theory and World Politics,* Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 45-59, p96.

the expansion of capitalist markets is central to the reproduction of food and hunger on a global scale according to Marxist/neo-Marxist scholars. Phillip McMichael, Harriet Friedmann and Laura Reynolds form part of Marxist scholars who see contemporary food and hunger as inherent to modern capitalism [56]. However, inasmuch as Marxist and international political economy approaches correctly attend to capitalist relations, they often fail to account adequately for the intersection of race and gender with capital, because the former tends to be subsumed under the latter[57].

This tendency to ignore representation and the working of race, gender and class with power is problematic, for these are critical to understanding the global food regime. As such, a major shortcoming within Marxist traditions is how scholarship has continually failed to embrace representation, as Doty explains, representation and meanings (re)produce relations of power and the identities which constitute and are constituted by them[58]. Consequently, because global discussions of food (in)security are often made in the context of 'North-South' relations, which is itself a field of representation, careful attention must be given to the meanings that are produced and circulated within this field if we are to engage with the fullness of power. Hunger and the hungry and their representations, as this research shows, are integral to modern-day politics of food and hunger.



**1.6 Research Design**

Self-consciously, I have adopted a non-positivist stance for this study. My approach is not intended to provide a causal argument but instead to generate understanding. In-

[56] See: Friedman, H., and McMichael, P. 1989. Agriculture and the State System: The rise and decline of national agricultures, 1870 to present, *Sociologia Ruralis* 29 (2), pp93-117, and also McMichael, P. and Raynolds, L. 1995. Capitalism, Agriculture and World Economy, in L. Sklair (ed.) Capitalism and Development. London: Routledge.

[57] For example, feminist scholars have critiqued the way in which Cox's categories of "integrated," "the precarious" and "the excluded" fail to adequately capture the gendered nature of being any of these types of workers in the context of neoliberal capitalist restructuring that shifts additional costs of social reproduction onto women, especially those most racially marginalized.

[58] Doty, R. 1996. Imperial Encounters: the politics of representation in North-South relations. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. pp2-4.

turn, this means that my approach is one of critical realism[59]. This study's research design is influenced by this meta-theoretical position in the social sciences which calls for identifying and illuminating the structures and mechanisms - those of institutions and markets, in this case – that play a part in producing phenomena of interest, such as the injustice and unsustainability of the South Africa's food systems[60]. In conducting this research I seek to highlight the fact that the responsibility of *laissez faire* principles for creating, or at least facilitating the creation of, the undesirable state of today's food systems has been severely underestimated, or at a minimum underexplored. As articulated by Sam Bliss, "markets do not distinguish between luxury and sufficiency; food goes to whoever can and will pay the market price. This systematically punishes the markets' poorest and most marginalized participants[61]." Due to South Africa's inequality woes, the majority of the population is struggling to afford enough market food to meet their basic nutritional needs while at the same time, others pay to overeat, waste food, and direct edible crops to livestock and biofuel production[62].

This research is not necessarily motivated by a hypothesis invested in the author, but by concepts and problems made evident by issue characteristics and individuals and groups who form part of the research. Significantly, I am informed by Jacqui Alexander's notion of "methodological layering." Following Alexander's scholarship on the importance of thinking about the "geopolitical histories of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and neo-imperialism," I am tracing the trajectory for the fulfilment of the right to food in today's world. My aim was to register in part the "various ways in which racialization and colonisation are being consistently written into "food security's" different projects with particular reference to the South African experience[63]. Generally speaking, mainstream discourse on food security continues to operate from an epistemological framework that is constitutively Eurocentric and

[59] Positivists are also realists. However, the difference is that the post-positivist is a critical realist who recognizes that all observation is fallible and has error and that all theory is revisable. In other words, the critical realist is critical of our ability to know reality with certainty.
[60] Bliss, S. 2019. The Case for Studying Non-Market Food Systems, *Sustainability* 11(11): 1-30.
[61] Ibid
[62] Loc cit
[63] Alexander, M. Jacqui. 2006. Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory and the Sacred. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

driven by an empiricism that disallows non-European ways of knowing. If anything, this orthodox epistemology is intricately interconnected with the very "colonial" nature of public health discourse. And by "colonial" I mean not only the dominance of European thought and the focus on the "West" within public health discourse, but also the way the discourse enacts the erasure of the West's systematic and widespread violence against non-Europeans across the world.

This thesis is driven by a post-positivist epistemological approach and embraces methodological layering as an emerging qualitative methodology that allows the deconstruction and analysis of complex social issues. Methodological layering enables the assessment of worldviews and cultural factors, as well as social, economic, and political structural issues, to be considered in understanding the present and in formulating alternative projections of the future. In this dissertation I have utilized a range of textual, visual, and experiential data sources, such as interview transcripts, photos, and field notes. The analysis itself is much like a thematic analysis. However, it is structured according to conceptual layers - from a topical interpretation of the issue to underlying mythologies and metaphors that underpin the issue of power in food systems. By identifying these qualities for the lack of fulfilment and realisation of the right to food in South Africa, I argue that there is a greater propensity for the root of the issue to be identified and therefore the opportunity for second-order change (i.e., meaningful alteration of relationships and social systems) to occur.

Analysis of the political economy of food reveals that continuing under-nutrition is “rooted in wider structural causes of poverty and unequal access to resources[64].” Like Alexander, I am concerned with the way in which "colonialism's multiple projects" are "constitutive of the [post] modern[65]". The methodology I utilise for the research also relies heavily on the work of Foucault. Leaning on the work of Foucault opens up aspects of the global politics of food and hunger to critical scrutiny, which is often

[64] Patnaik, B and Thow, A M. 2017. Discussion Paper: The Politics of Malnutrition: Achieving Policy Coherence in a Globalised World, p4.
[65] Jacqui, A M. 2006. Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory and the Sacred. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, p191.

ignored. A non-positivist approach is therefore ideal because of its attention to the power of discourses and the way in which discourse conditions meanings and practices, facilitating an understanding heretofore denied. Pointedly, if "food security" has constituted a body of doxa or taken-for granted common-sense beliefs that escape critical scrutiny, my aim was to de-familiarize food security and to make the power/knowledge at work more visible. And while my methodology is informed by the work of Foucault, especially as it relates to examining discursive regimes, I also remain attentive to the material. Put differently, my use of discourse analysis does not take discourse as simply words or ideas. Rather, it includes the actions and practices that are bound with the idea[66]. In particular I demonstrate this by challenging the most dominant view on hunger and malnutrition in the country, which sees malnutrition as deficit behaviour, and thinking by the black poor majority, and one of self-responsibility, regardless of context. I argue, however, that this view renders silent the fact that malnutrition for the black majority results more from food insecurity and disempowerment.

Important to note is that this thesis is an effort to remember the relationship between our bodies and the land. It is concerned with how the disruption of this relationship affects our health and the wellbeing of our families and our communities.

> Colonialism, both historically and today, dismembers our bodies, from the land, and therefore, from our ancestral food-ways. This 'de-territorialization' of the body has resulted in the cultural alienation of our communities, and the unmitigated destruction and violation of the sacred. Fanon understood colonialism in a similar way, as a perversion of the 'proper' order of things, of our most fundamental rights as human beings[67].

Nevertheless, activists working in food sovereignty use food and the food system as a

[66] Hall, S. 1995. When was 'the post-colonial'? Thinking at the limit. *In* Chambers, I. & Curti, L (eds). The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons. New York: Routledge.
[67] Montalvo, M. and Zandi, H. 2018. The Modern/Colonial Food System in a Paradigm of War. Planting Justice, p1. Available at: http://plantingjustice.org/resources/food-justice-research/the-moderncolonial-food-system-in-a-paradigm-of-war/ (Accessed 31/5/18)

platform for a wide array of justice-based critiques of society, and as a way to centre communities' fight for survival and self-determination. These discourses on food sovereignty together with considerations of policy at the local, provincial and national level, including regulation pertaining to agriculture, food systems, spatial planning, health systems, gender and the informal economy offer powerful insights into how food systems support or undermine marginalised and poor communities. In-depth interviews with key actors in food supply policy making were integral to understanding issues of agenda setting, policy context, issue characteristics and decision-making shaping current (and potential) policy directions. Important to note is that this research argues for evaluating food policies in terms of the degree to which they increase self-determination for individuals and communities; this focus on epistemic self-determination is inspired by the complex assemblages and articulations of the food sovereignty movement and serves as the point of departure for the interviews conducted with activist-scholars, policy makers, formal and informal food traders', civil society organizations and peak industry bodies.



### 1.6.1 Analysis of paradigms and discourse for food policy

This dissertation presents a narrative on why a concept like 'food sovereignty' matters, linking this to how ideas spread through networks of intellectuals, public officials, activists and politicians on their way to institutional uptake in South Africa. As such, policy paradigms and discourse are employed in this study as part of my political economy analysis, which enables me to get beneath the formal structures of the food value chain and reveal the underlying interests, incentives and institutions that enable or frustrate change in the country. Such insights are important if we are to advance challenging agendas around governance, economic growth and service delivery, which experience has shown do not lend themselves to technical solutions alone.

Of particular relevance herein is the genealogy, content and development of 'food security' as the principal paradigm that has informed the world's food and nutrition

policy interventions to date. Any investigation that seeks to understand why there now exists social movements devoted to displacing and/or replacing the 'food security' paradigm must be rooted in an understanding of the state's exercise of power in expanding and sustaining fields of market and ideological dominance. A food regime[68] analysis that explains the strategic role of food (and agriculture) in the construction of the world capitalist economy is key when advancing a human rights approach to food systems. Foucault describes genealogy as a form of history which transforms the "development of the given into a question.[69]" He states the following:

> Genealogy… seeks to re-establish the various systems of subjection: not the anticipatory power of meaning, the hazardous play of dominations… if interpretation is the violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a different game, and to subject it to secondary rules, then the development of humanity is a series of interpretations. The role of genealogy is to record its history[70]

By investigating the paradox of under-nutrition and obesity in South Africa I am concerned with discourses, specifically as they relate to mainstream human rights discourse interaction with food security as a concept. In so doing, I am able to respond to the question of *how is the right to food – and action to achieve the right to food – conceptualised and understood in a "food systems and nutrition" policy and practice context, in South Africa?* But what do I mean by discourse? Foucault contends that "discourse is not simply that which expresses struggles or systems of domination, but that for which, and by which, one struggles; it is the power which one is striving to

[68] The 'food regime' concept historicises the global food system: problematizing linear representations of agricultural modernisation, underlining the pivotal role of food in the global political-economy, and conceptualising key historical contradictions in particular food regimes that produce crisis, transformation and transition. In this sense, food regime analysis brings a structured perspective to the understanding of agriculture and food's role in capital accumulation across time and space.

[69] Foucault, M. 1994. Politics, Polemics, Problematizations in Paul Rabinow (ed.) Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth. New York: New Press, pp369-391.

[70] Foucault, M. 1977. Nietzsche, Genealogy, History, in Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault. (ed.) Donald Bouchard. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, p148.

seize[71]." Calls to 'fix a broken food system' assume that the capitalist food system used to work well at some point in time. This assumption ignores the food system's long, racialized history of mistreatment of people of colour in particular. The food system is unjust and unsustainable, but it is not broken. It functions precisely as the capitalist food system has always worked, concentrating power in the hands of a privileged minority and passing off the social and environmental "externalities" disproportionately to racially stigmatized groups. More explicitly, in considering Fanon in my method I'm staying true to my belief that food poverty generally, should be described as being a significant contributor to malnourishment which one ought to understand as a feature of a global food system that is unresponsive to warnings across its geopolity or sensitive to patterns at different points in its evolution. However, the food system cannot be said to be constructed over an even topography of value, some lives evidently matter more than others. It has defined systemic roles in accordance with the imperative of its construction being centred in an idea of economic imperatives set out by a 'rationalist science'.

### 1.6.2 Political Economy Analysis



The starting point for understanding the political economy of food systems is to consider who exercises power and in relation to whom. Food systems typically comprise highly complex actor networks that evolve as food systems develop from traditional (local/national and rural) to mixed and modern (globally integrated and urban) over the course of a country's economic development. To understand who is within this scope a holistic conceptualization of the food system encompassing both constitutive and political economy elements is crucial[72]. On this basis, food systems comprise a broad range of actors with the power to influence: (a) market transactions within food supply chains; (b) food environments and consumer behaviour; and (c) institutions, knowledge systems and regulatory frameworks that influence those

[71] Shankar, S. 2001. Textual Traffic: Colonialism, Modernity, and the Economy of the Text. Albany: State University of New York, p17.
[72] IPES-Food. 2015. The new science of sustainable food systems: Overcoming barriers to food systems reform. London: International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems.

systems[73]. Consequently, this dissertation responds to this issue of power dynamics by adapting and drawing upon Gaventa's three-dimensional 'Powercube' model[74]. This model is useful for understanding the interrelationships between different dimensions of power as it relates to complex food actor power relations. It depicts the levels (global, national, subnational), spaces (closed, invited, claimed), and forms (instrumental, structural, discursive) of power that food actors can deploy or draw upon. Each side of the cube represents a continuum rather than a static set of possible categories[75].

The "expansion in the geographical scale and complexity of food systems, in the power of food companies relative to nation states, and in the international rules governing national food economies has diminished the power of governments to influence food system activities, both within and beyond their territorial borders[76]." With this in mind, key-expert interviews and desktop research were conducted in responding to question of *what are the characteristics of policy and politics in South Africa, with reference to the multiple burden of malnutrition? (Including the interface with economic and social factors)*. By conducting in-depth interviews with stakeholders in public, private and civil society sectors and also making extensive use of existing literature, I was able to review the nature and extent of the politics of malnutrition, the 'political-economic' causes of insufficient entitlements to food, the socio-cultural and/or physiological sources of nutritional deprivation; and the mechanisms through which the right to food is supposed to be guaranteed by UN declarations, covenants, and agencies. Interestingly, delving into how 'political-economics' of food production and distribution operate, and socio-cultural issues of defining who has membership in the community and what constitutes adequate food, complicate basic human rights questions. Nevertheless, the underlying motive was to embark on a structured process to see the South African food system holistically and identify where there is

[73] HLPE. 2017. Nutrition and food systems: A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security. Rome: Committee on World Food Security.
[74] Gaventa, J. 2006. Finding the spaces for change: A power analysis. *IDS Bulletin* 37 (6): 23-33.
[75] Ibid
[76] Baker, P., Lacy-Nichols, J., Williams, O. & Labonté, R. 2021. The political economy of healthy and sustainable food systems: an introduction to a special issue. *Int J Health Policy Manag*. 10 (12): 734-744. doi:10.34172/ijhpm.2021.156

the potential, subject to facts and circumstances, and the greatest possibilities, subject to willingness, for change geared towards the realisation of a nourishing food system for all. The analytical process presented in this dissertation highlights existing initiatives/concerns, which might not be known across the food system, and offers insight into whether there is potential to innovate, connect or bring these ideas to scale.

### 1.6.3 Observational Research

To reiterate, the main objective of this study is not merely concerned with answering causal questions. Rather, I am fascinated by the constitutive. Engaging the constitutive helps us to explore causal questions more critically. By going beyond the boundaries of positivist epistemology I was able to confront the way in which hierarchies of power affect the most vulnerable in society. Hence, my empirical point of departure was to identify with the poor and marginalised in their struggle for 'food sovereignty'. By using 'empirical' I am referring to the lived realities of people as opposed to a theory.



By referencing those at the bottom of the pyramid and their lived realities, I have rejected academia as the only and/or supreme site for the generation of knowledge. As a result of identifying with the struggles of those at the bottom of the pyramid I have illuminated the institutional, structural and epistemic violence unleashed upon them through the discourses and practices of 'food security'. The political economy of food is not delivering affordable and healthy diets, which are necessary to address the double burden of malnutrition in South Africa and elsewhere.

> In order for public health actors to effectively support wide-scale food policy change to improve nutrition outcomes amongst other concerns, they must develop strategies for advocacy that are rooted in an understanding of the

historical context of the current food policy environment – including legacies in both content and paradigms[77].

My approach further puts into conversation imageries of the poor and marginalised in an attempt to illuminate the socio-economic realities of those at the bottom of the pyramid. Through the use of photo elicitation I have been able to advance the role of the researcher as not only having to do with analysis and extraction but also how the researcher is embedded in a process of network building, experimentation, learning and sharing. Photographs encapsulate ideas and are representative of larger concepts and worldviews. The use of adapted photo-elicitation together with an integrated "picture" of how social capital affects food and nutrition security in the country, this dissertation has enabled me to answer the question regarding *what are the roles and realities of key stakeholders, food traders, consumers, and people in general in the construction of food sovereignty within broader political-economic transformations?*

With reference to social capital in the food system the suggestion stemming from this research is that actors, producers and consumers at different stages of the food value chain need to form networks and communities, because these can contribute to both food and nutrition security by increasing food availability and increasing community resilience to extreme events and shocks. Therefore, policymakers, civil society actors and other initiatives that can form social networks can benefit from the finding of this study which places emphasis on the development of policy and necessary actions to build social capital for dealing with right to food and nutrition issues. Photo-elicitation on the other hand makes several distinct contributions to observational research but most important is that it gives health researchers and health professionals "the possibility of perceiving the world from the viewpoint of the people who lead lives

[77] Thow, A., Apprey, C., Winters, J., Stellmach, D., Alders, R., Aduku, L., Mulcahy, G., Annan, R. 2021. Understanding the Impact of Historical Policy Legacies on Nutrition Policy Space: Economic Policy Agendas and Current Food Policy Paradigms in Ghana, *International Journal of Health Policy and Management* 10 (Special Issue on Political Economy of Food Systems), pp. 909-922. doi: 10.34172/ijhpm.2020.203

that are different from those traditionally in control of imagining the world[78]." The objectivist perspective believes that "photography records reality 'written by light' in that images reflect an omniscient recording of reality as it occurred and the camera acts simply as a mnemonic device that requires no special knowledge to interpret. This is also seen in the term 'documentary photography'[79]."

> While it is always difficult to measure the exact effect of art upon change, there is no doubt that artists are the ones who uphold a mirror to society, provide a vision for the future, and who through their work, can shift consciousness on issues of concern[80].

Nevertheless, the ideal "who" or "where" for using what is referred to elsewhere as 'photo-voice' would be a community or a group in which people are involved in the planning and selecting process of images. However, due to resource constraints that hindered any prospect of effective participation of my Khayelitsha (Cape Town) group in this regard, I embarked on the use of photo-elicitation on my own and commenced with a three-stage process that provided the foundation for analysis: selecting (choosing those photographs that most accurately reflect the research concerns); contextualising (telling stories of what the photographs mean); and codifying (identifying those theories or issues that emerge).

All the same, a study of the politics of malnutrition unavoidably leads to a study of resistance and agency. Because of this, I also leaned-on postcolonial theory when contending with the question of *what difference does food sovereignty make within broader political-economic transformations in South Africa?* Postcolonial theory provides a useful analytical tool because of its insistence on the on-going significance of colonialism in today's world; its systematic interrogation of the nation-state; its

[78] Ruby, J. 1991. Speaking for, speaking about, speaking with, or speaking alongside: An anthropological and documentary dilemma. *Visual Anthropology Review* 7(2): p50.
[79] Basil, M. 2011. Use of photography and video in observational research, *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal* 14 (3): 246-257.
[80] Preiser, R. 2017. *Using Photo elicitation and Photovoice in development settings for knowledge co-creation towards transformation practices*. Dialogue Session 2: PowerPoint Presentation. Resilience for Development Colloquium, Johannesburg – 9 May.

critical attention to the power of representation and its attentiveness to gendered, racialized and classed practices to the exercise of power.

Indeed, my approach could be viewed as eclectic. Granted, some scholars may even question whether the postcolonial approach I lean-on constitutes a “theory”? My response is that while postcolonial scholarship provides a foundation, my intention is to utilise critical race theory in making my case. Furthermore, Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL[81]), the school of thought concerned with how our understanding of international law perpetuates the subordination of non-Europeans to Europeans through international legal norms is relied on as well. Combining these three sets of discourse is not as eclectic as it seems. It must be recognised that the three sets of discourses have informed each other and generally share a similar set of concerns, although with varying emphasis.

It was not my intention to position this research as providing a “theory.” Instead of providing a theory, I bring together various insights from select approaches that best enable me to explore the topic at hand with an action-oriented objective. Accordingly, I have constructed an analytical framework that is in-tune with what Chin terms a "critical interdisciplinary approach[82]". The desire is for the subject matter to lead the inquiry as opposed to a methodological commitment. As a result my interest in food (in)security does not coerce me to take security studies as the natural starting place to my narrative. Instead, the fact that the violence of hunger and malnutrition is experienced in ways that are explicitly informed by racialized, gendered, and class relations of power, demands that I start theorizing from this reality. By the same token, my interests in human rights and the right to food do not lead me immediately

[81] TWAIL was inspired by the decolonization movements that occurred after World War 2 in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Symbolically, the conference held in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955 has been viewed as the birthplace of TWAIL, this was the first attempt by African and Asian states to create a coalition to address the issues specific to the Third World. TWAIL came about to address the material and ethical concerns as well as hardships of the Third World.

[82] Chin, C. 1998. In Service and Servitude: Foreign Female Domestic Workers and the Malaysian "Modernity" Project. New York: Columbia University Press, p7.

to academic human rights discourses. Rather, social justice movements fighting for their way of life, for me, is a logical starting point for thinking about human rights.

Disciplinary demands ask that I, similar to the way Keohane has asked of feminist scholars, specify my propositions and provide "systematically gathered evidence to test these propositions[83]". Unfortunately, to explore the political economy of food is to examine an object of analysis with no clear boundaries. On the upside, my confidence in embarking on this journey was built by my resolve to bring together different discourses, to juxtapose them, to explore real divergent and unconnected sites, and to be attentive to disjunctives and continuities. I drew on an approach to research advanced by international relations and feminist scholars[84]. To be precise, such an approach:

- Embeds itself in the concrete human experiences and material context, especially of marginalized peoples and problems;
- Attends carefully to intersections as loci of power and domination[85];
- Asks "how is it possible" questions as well as "why" questions as a way to interrogate the construction of policies and practices;
- Brings together various moments, events, and practices illuminating their continuities and disjunctives; and
- Engages in a continuous process of critical self-reflection.



[83] Keohane, R O. 1998. Beyond Dichotomy: Conversations between International Relations and Feminist Theory. *International Studies Quarterly* 42 (1): 197. JSTOR. www.jstor.org/stable/2600824 (Accessed 12/10/17)

[84] These standards are adapted from work of critical and feminist theorists, especially the latter. See for example Jacqui, A. M. 2006. Op Cit and Cox, R, W. 2001. Op cit.

[85] Crenshaw, K. 2000. Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and sex: A Black Feminist Critiques of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics, *in* James, J., and Sharpley-Whiting, T D. (eds.) The Black Feminist Reader. Maiden: Blackwell.

### 1.7 Ethics

"A primary consideration in any research study is to conduct the research in an ethical manner, letting the community and participants know that one's purpose for observing is to document their activities[86]." Billie and Kathleen DeWalt advise the researcher to take some of the field notes publicly to reinforce that what the researcher is doing is collecting data for research purposes. When I met participants and community members for the first time, I ensured that I informed them of the purpose my research and for being there, sharing sufficient information with them about the research topic so that their questions about the research and the researcher's presence in their space are put to rest[87]. I had to constantly re-introduce myself as a researcher. To this end, I developed a clear narrative about my background in right to food and nutrition politicking in the country and the importance of my research in giving a credible account of what is at stake within South Africa's food system.

Scholars point out that there is an ethical concern regarding the relationships established by the researcher when conducting participant observations in particular; "the researcher needs to develop close relationships, yet those relationships are difficult to maintain, when the researcher returns to his/her home at a distant location[88]." As Anne Marshall and Suzanne Batten note, one must address issues, such as potential exploitation and inaccuracy of findings, or other actions which may cause damage to the community[89]. They suggest that "the researcher takes a participatory approach to research by including community members in the research process, beginning with obtaining culturally appropriate permission to conduct research and ensuring that the research addresses issues of importance to the community[90]."

[86] DeWalt, K. M. & DeWalt, B. R. 1998. Participant observation. *In* H. Russell Bernard (Ed.), *Handbook of methods in cultural anthropology*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press. pp.259-300.
[87] Ibid
[88] Marshall, A & Batten, S. 2004. Researching across cultures: issues of ethics and power. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* [On-line Journal], *5*(3), Art.39. Available at: http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/572/1241 (Accessed 19/06/18).
[89] Ibid
[90] Ibid

Additionally, another suggestion is that the research findings must be shared with the community to ensure accuracy of findings.

Nonetheless, I must admit that in Khayelitsha in particular people were tired of talking about their food and nutrition woes, and tired of talking to people with their own ideas and agendas - frankly, tired of talking to people like me. I was forced to confront the possibility that individual people could respect me personally, while resenting my presence as both an outsider and as someone who wanted something. I needed to humbly and honestly appraise my purpose for being in their environment: it was to obtain information that would be serviceable to me as a researcher, and specifically, as someone who needed to write a dissertation and complete a degree. I acknowledge this as a potential limitation of the research, but ultimately I was committed to respecting the needs and privacy of individual community members, which, ultimately, meant that a majority of my interviews were with academics, policy practitioners and right to food activists actively engaged in critical analysis of food systems and the search for alternatives.

The study was approved by the Biomedical as well as the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics committees of the University of the Western Cape (BM18/7/20; HS19/5/33).

**1.8 Thesis structure and paper outlines**

This thesis consists of six chapters and incorporates four academic articles that have been published or submitted to relevant peer-reviewed journals. As such, the thesis meets the requirements for a dissertation by publication. The thesis itself is divided into two parts: the introduction, literature review and conclusion chapters (Chapters 1, 2 and 6) form the 'bridging material' linking the three empirical chapters (Chapters 3, 4 and 5).

Chapter 2 of this research is based on a paper, which at the time of submission has been published with the *World Nutrition* journal under the same title as shown in this thesis. This paper sets out the rationale behind the thesis through its critique of South Africa's celebrated constitutional commitments that appear to have expanded and deepened South Africa's commitment to realise socio-economic rights; juxtaposing this to the limited progress witnessed in the implementation of right to food policies which stands to compromise the country's developmental path. If not a deliberate policy choice, the persistence of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms is a deep policy failure. The analysis delves deeper into the need for food system recalibration in South Africa, which requires addressing wider issues of who controls the food supply, thus influencing the food chain and the food choices of the individual and communities. Specifically, the paper examines three global rights-based paradigms – 'food justice', 'food security' and 'food sovereignty' – that inform activism on the right to food globally and their relevance to food system change in South Africa; for both fulfilling the right to food and addressing all forms of malnutrition. The conclusion is that the emerging concept of food sovereignty has important yet largely unexplored possibilities for democratically managing food systems for better health outcomes.



In conjunction with the literature review herein Chapters 1 and 2 cover the first aim of this research which is to unpack the evolution of human rights instruments, as well as to zone-in on scholarship on the political economy of food in order to highlight the intersectional rights-based obligations of the South African state and non-state actors in the face of growing food and nutrition insecurity. Additionally, the three empirical chapters are briefly described below. These were designed to focus on identifying key policy levers that currently exist at the level of food systems and value chains that are shaping the nature of South Africa's food environments - and to identify how the agency of poor and vulnerable populations can be effectively engaged in these spaces.

Chapter 3 seeks to transform the discourse on the right to food in South Africa into practical polices and programmes that can address the dual burden of malnutrition. It is based on a paper, which at the time of thesis finalization was submitted to a peer-

reviewed journal. To approach food systems transformation holistically, policy-makers in particular must democratize planning and invite all actors working-in and alongside food systems to be part of the effort. A myriad of factors including state disinterest, poverty and misallocation of resources keeps the full potential of a nourishing food system from being realised. This paper in-conversation with key stakeholders speaks to the fact that there is an opportunity for a reframing of 'access to sufficient food' as food justice, and to place increased attention on social dimensions of existing food policies, including making nutrition outcomes more visible and in advocating for a human rights based framework to addressing South Africa's double burden of malnutrition. Politics of place and food system dynamics are then discussed in Chapter 4. Similarly, the chapter is based on a submitted paper.

Chapter 4 addresses the fact that in a human rights framework, the violation of the right to food is a reflection of power relations as much as biological or behavioural factors. In this paper my co-authors and I use the call for transformation in the country's food system as an entry point to examine the power dynamics involved in shaping the food and nutrition planning agenda that is inadvertently generating a food system that undermines the right to food. The argument is that politics and power are equally important in the direction of policy processes – however, policy is only one lever in a food systems approach and should not be seen as singularly important in eliciting change. Therefore, the paper utilizes empirical data to demystify the veil of secrecy surrounding the governance of food and nutrition in South Africa through engaging in a force-field analysis of all stakeholders actively involved in shaping the modalities and outcomes of our food systems. Improving nutrition outcomes will require managing the political economy challenges that affect the food system at global, national and subnational levels. The argument is that in order to build greater awareness of the broader political economy factors shaping the nutrition landscape; and to embed systematic political economy analysis into the work of stakeholders navigating this field – 'the power to convene' is urgently needed. This power to convene and the creation of deliberative spaces is demonstrated in a variety of contexts and often results in outcomes that further the aims of activist-scholars, including policy change and repositioning right to food defenders vis-à-vis others in

the field. This coming together of stakeholders may help to improve the political feasibility of efforts to reform food and nutrition policies and ensure that historical legacies do not continue to shape the future.

Furthermore, while some critical scholars focus primarily on the consequences of abuses of power by dominant actors in the food system [91] others consider the transformative role governance – particularly collaborative and co-governance schemes at various levels – can play to spark food system transformation[92]. As such, a majority of political economy scholars assume that higher levels of participation by non-governmental actors are necessary to ensure transitions towards sustainable food systems. However, of vital importance to the author is the fact that any worthwhile social change in society has to first begin from within, where we analyse our own inculcation in the oppressive systems whose fallacious logics are deeply ingrained in our psyches. Statistics can tell us a lot about the official story of progress, but what about the experience of those living at the grassroots? What does the attainment of the right to food look and feel like from the perspective of those who live with insecurity every day? These questions mark the entry-point to the discussion in Chapter 5. Terms such as "food democracy" and "food citizenship" are being used in public discourse, calling attention to the role citizens and civil society organisations[93] (CSOs) play in shaping food systems. Yet we know little about the mechanisms that empower, or disempower, community members and CSOs within networked decision-making structures around food systems[94]. For example, are civil society actors merely assigned stakeholder roles in governance structures or are they collaborators in public problem solving? Chapter 5 builds on this analysis, highlighting

[91] See: Howard, P.H. 2016. Concentration and Power in the Food System: Who Controls What We Eat?, New York NY: Bloomsbury Publishing; & Clapp, J. 2016. Food, 2nd ed., Cambridge: Polity Press

[92] See: Andrée, P., Clark, J.K., Levkoe, C.Z. & Lowitt, K. (eds). 2019. Civil Society and Social Movements in Food System Governance, Abingdon and New York NY: Routledge; & Barling, D. & Duncan, J. 2015. The Dynamics of the Contemporary Governance of the World's Food Supply and the Challenges of Policy Redirection, *Food Security* 7.2: 415–24

[93] My use of civil society organisations includes a multiplicity of formal and informal associations, religious organisations and social groups - as distinct from government and business – that work for what they understand to be the collective interests of society.

[94] Moragues-Faus, A. 2017. Emancipatory or neoliberal food politics? Exploring the "politics of collectivity" of buying groups in the search for egalitarian democracies. *Antipode*, 49 (2), 455 – 476.

the importance of endemic food culture (foodways) as a tool for retaining identity, building community, and maintaining health among the residents of Khayelitsha in Cape Town. Running in-tandem with the analysis are images of informality that reflect the working conditions of informal food traders, the types of foods they offer and why, what their equipment and infrastructure looks like, how it further fits in with the wider environment of specific spaces and how this competes with other uses of space.

The role of the township food economy is insufficiently understood in relation to food and nutrition insecurity, and is hardly considered in government's decision making on food and economics. Through a combination of written analysis and an adapted photo-elicitation[95] approach in Chapter 5, my intention is to shift the focus on nutrition research from what people eat to rather why they have particular choices and how they get these choices. The lived reality of how informal food traders navigate their environment also helps us understand food choices. When combined, the findings in all three empirical chapters (3,4 & 5) are used to achieve the second aims of this research which are to offer insight into how various sectors active around food in South Africa understand the right to food / sovereignty and to highlight the roles and realities of food traders, consumers and people in general in the construction of food sovereignty. Chapter 5 has been published in the journal *World Nutrition.*

Chapter 6 is the final chapter with the aim of bringing all the narratives together and to conclude-on the politics of malnutrition in South Africa. By bringing together the conclusions reached in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, I present the view that actions to address the double burden of malnutrition have been incommensurate to the challenge and that health is an under-exploited leverage point when it comes to efforts geared towards recalibrating the food system. I also attend to the limitations of the thesis by drawing attention to the political economy questions of the country's food systems that remain unanswered, and speak to the evidence gap that persists, i.e., why certain

[95] Photo elicitation is a creative process at the intersection of creativity and participatory and trans-disciplinary knowledge creation. A photo is a device to collect knowledge and it can also be, in participatory processes, an active tool for imagination and transformation.

problems are not politically prioritized - even as they are increasingly documented. Power - to achieve visibility, to shape knowledge, to frame narratives, and to influence policy – is at the heart of the struggles to fulfill the right to food and nutrition.

**CHAPTER 2: Summary**

*I was in the east end of London yesterday and attended a meeting of the unemployed. I listened to the wild speeches, which were just a cry for "Bread, Bread," and on my way home I became more than ever convinced of the importance of imperialism… We colonial statesmen must acquire new lands to settle surplus population, to provide new markets for the goods produced in the factories and mines. The Empire, as I have always said, is a bread and butter question. If you want to avoid civil war, you must become imperialist*. - **Cecil Rhodes**

This chapter sets the scene and context for the dissertation and presents a narrative on the substance of the research as being an interrogation/assessment of the 'balance of forces' that determine the existing 'effective reality' as experienced between the forces of food sovereignty and those of the globalising capitalist food system in the fight for the right to food and nutrition. Here the theoretical resources of discourse analysis, and supportive Marxist-informed political economy approaches such as food regime theory, and theories exploring the dynamics and historical evolution of the right to food and nutrition conceptually are marshaled in order to probe the manner in which the hegemony of 'food security' as the dominant policy paradigm has been constructed and maintained over time, and to understand the ways in which that hegemony is being renegotiated in the context of the contemporary 'global food crisis' and calls for alternatives.

Of particular relevance herein is the genealogy, content and development of 'food security' as the principal paradigm that has informed South Africa's food and nutrition policy interventions to date. Any investigation that seeks to understand why there now exists social movements devoted to displacing and/or replacing the 'food security' paradigm must be rooted in an understanding of the state's exercise of power in expanding and sustaining fields of market and ideological dominance. Discourse analysis that explains the strategic role of food (and agriculture) in the construction of the global political economy of food is key when advancing a human rights approach to food systems.

## Chapter 2: Fulfilling the Right to Food for South Africa: Justice, Security, Sovereignty and the Politics of Malnutrition

*Moyo, B.H. & Thow, A.M.T. 2020. Fulfilling the Right to Food for South Africa: Justice, Security, Sovereignty and the Politics of Malnutrition, World Nutrition 11 (3).*

### Abstract

Despite South Africa's celebrated constitutional commitments that have expanded and deepened South Africa's commitment to realise socio-economic rights, limited progress in implementing right to food policies stands to compromise the country's developmental path. If not a deliberate policy choice, the persistence of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms is a deep policy failure. Food system transformation in South Africa requires addressing wider issues of who controls the food supply, thus influencing the food chain and the food choices of the individual and communities. This paper examines three global rights-based paradigms – 'food justice', 'food security' and 'food sovereignty' – that inform activism on the right to food globally and their relevance to food system change in South Africa; for both fulfilling the right to food and addressing all forms of malnutrition. We conclude that the emerging concept of food sovereignty has important yet largely unexplored possibilities for democratically managing food systems for better health outcomes.

**Keywords**: right to food; South Africa; malnutrition, food sovereignty, food justice, food security

## 2.1 The double burden of malnutrition calls for a rethink of the right to food

World agriculture produces enough food to provide everyone in the world with at least 2,880 kilocalories per person per day, more than sufficient (Roser and Ritchie 2019). Yet, with all these available calories, malnutrition plagues billions all over the globe. Most low- and middle-income countries today are now facing a 'double burden' of malnutrition. While they continue to deal with persistent food insecurity and undernutrition, they are also experiencing a rapid increase in diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs), particularly in urban settings. It is now common to find undernutrition and obesity existing side by side within the same country, community or even household. There is growing recognition that food system challenges, embedded in politico-economic challenges, are key drivers of this global burden of malnutrition--in particular, a global industrial system that spurs homogeneity in production and consumption, externalises harms to health, social cohesion, the environment, and prizes cheap food (Swinburn et al. 2019).

The South African experience represents an extreme example of these global trends. The country is considered food secure at a national level, but large numbers of households within the country are food insecure (Hendriks 2005; Aliber 2009). As a whole, the country faces a structural household food insecurity problem, which is largely caused by widespread poverty and unemployment. An estimated 56% of South Africa's population lives in poverty (Statistics South Africa 2017) and almost 28% in extreme poverty below the government validated food poverty line of R585 per month (Statistics South Africa 2017, 14). Thus food insecurity within South Africa is not a short-term phenomenon, but rather a long-term, chronic threat that is grounded within various economic, political, social and institutional aspects of South African society. Almost two in five South Africans do not have enough money to purchase adequate food and essential non-food items. Statistics South Africa's General Household Survey reported that in 2014, 5.9% of South African households faced serious problems finding enough to eat, while 16.6% struggled to find enough to eat every day, and 13.1% of households reportedly experienced hunger (Statistics South Africa 2014).

The aim of this paper is to explore the 'right to food', in order to identify insights into achieving a just food system in which food insecurity and all forms of malnutrition can be effectively addressed in South Africa. Addressing the double-burden of malnutrition requires an integrated food system and a rights-based approach. Specifically, this paper analyses the relevance of three global rights-based paradigms for food policy-making in furtherance of the realisation of the right to access sufficient food and basic nutrition in the context of the double burden of malnutrition in South Africa: "food justice", "food security" and "food sovereignty". The realisation of the right to food requires multi-scalar action. Critical institutional engagements within legitimate national and international governance spaces are essential, so as to reclaim the public interest, redirect development strategies and promote policy change geared towards the realisation of the right to food and nutrition. Through this analysis, we hope to support policy practitioners, activist-scholars and human rights defenders to deepen their understanding of the dynamic and intricate nature of food systems and the conceptual basis for action on the right to food, in order to realise the right to food as premised on the South African Constitution in the context of the double burden of malnutrition.



**2.2 Power and injustice in South Africa's food system**

As supported by the Maastricht Guidelines on Violations of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the UN's Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), socioeconomic rights impose three types of obligations on states[96]. These include the obligation to respect, to refrain from interfering with the enjoyment of socioeconomic rights; the obligation to protect, to prevent violations of such rights by third parties; and the obligation to fulfil, to take appropriate legislative, administrative, budgetary, judicial and other measures towards the full realisation of

[96] The 1997 Maastricht Guidelines on Violations of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights built on the 1987 Limburg Principles on the Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and identify the legal implications of acts and omissions which are violations of economic, social and cultural rights.

such rights. The CESCR has interpreted the obligation to fulfil to incorporate the obligation to facilitate, provide and promote (General Comment No.3). General Comment No.12 and the FAO's Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realisation of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security seek to clarify the right to food. Generally speaking, statutes regarding food security and other food issues usually state public policy goals and principles, but rarely enunciate an individual (or collective) right to food. Similarly, it is difficult to see the value-add of the right to food guidelines in a context of a deep divide between the market-led agriculture trade liberalisation model on the one hand and calls for a human-rights based model on the other - which continue to characterize most food policy spaces. Increased corporate control over these spaces has further cemented this divide.

In the South African Constitution, the obligation to promote the right to food is not stated as a subset of the obligation to fulfil, but as a distinct obligation. In particular, the principles of universality, inalienability, indivisibility and interdependence are critical components of the human rights approach, which proposes that different rights are inseparable. However, although recognised as being multi-dimensional, the right to food is not usually conceptualised in this way and, instead, different components are usually independently measured, analysed or targeted by policy. Because of this, nutrition professionals in particular need to have an understanding of their countries' obligations – Constitutional or otherwise – for the fulfilment of human rights. More specifically they need to understand the meaning of a human rights perspective in the promotion of good nutrition and health.

The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) identifies four dimensions relevant to the right to food in policy formulation, namely – availability, access, utilisation and stability (De Schutter 2014)[97]. These are hierarchical in nature: Food availability is necessary but not sufficient for access; access is necessary but not

[97] It is important to also acknowledge that these dimensions mirror the four pillars (recently changed to six) of food security and therefore the linkages between the UN's framing of the right to food and the UN's framing of food security.

sufficient for utilisation; stability is necessary but not sufficient for utilisation (May 2020). As such, responding to food insecurity is complex in that some aspects, such as food itself, are economic goods that are privately produced and consumed, while other aspects, such as food safety, are public goods. While measures that delay the attainment of the right to food could be acceptable if these measures form part of a "progressive realisation[98]", measures that result in a regression would not. Aligning policy with a human rights approach requires that possible negative outcomes that follow from growth-promoting policies be assessed in terms of their consequences on the existing rights of citizens.

The late Professor David Sanders, a renowned African health activist, asserted that "malnutrition in particular is not a clinical condition, it is a political outcome which is rooted in global economic, political and social structures" (Sanders 2018). The causes of food insecurity and malnutrition in South Africa are rooted in inter-connected economic, social, environmental and political system failures (Drimie and McLachlan 2013). They are both causes and consequences of poverty, inequality and unemployment (Misselhorn and Hendriks 2017). Therefore, overcoming food insecurity requires a systematic approach and political will to challenge "vested interests, dominant ideologies, bureaucratic traditions, political cultures, and distribution problems in the food system" (Termeer et al. 2018).

The South African food system is highly concentrated and food retail in particular is dominated by a handful of powerful corporations closely aligned to global capital interests (Cherry-Chandler 2009; Hunt 2016). These powerful players in the formal and informal food economy are able to wield disproportionate influence and market power, effectively shaping the playing field in their favour (Greenberg et al. 2017). Rising food prices, globally and nationally, combined with the uncovering of alleged collusive behaviour (Staff Reporter 2018) by companies in the bread, milling,

[98] The concept of "progressive realisation" describes a central aspect of States' obligations in connection with economic, social and cultural rights under international human rights treaties. Article 2 (1) of the International, Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognises that economic, social and cultural rights are not always immediately realisable.

dairy and poultry sectors, has increased suspicions about possible abuse of dominance and other anti-competitive behaviour in South Africa's entire food value chain. Research by the Centre for Competition Regulation and Economic Development at the University of Johannesburg in 2017 showed that the food manufacturing sector is concentrated by stating that:

> RCL Foods and Astral have a combined 46% market share in the broiler meat production market (poultry); Rhodes Food group has a 66.3% market share in canned meats; and Tiger Brands has 48.6% market share of the retail value in the sugar confectionery market… Pioneer's White Star super maize meal brand has 25.3% of the market, and Tiger Brands' Ace super maize meal holds 22.5% in white maize milling. Pioneer Foods and Tiger Brands together held 56% of the breakfast cereal market in 2015-6, and 54.9% in baked goods (Mathe 2019).

At the beginning of 2020 the Competition Commission made public its Grocery Retail Inquiry Report which found a combination of features "that may prevent, distort, or restrict competition. In particular, there are three principal areas of concern that warrant remedial action, namely long term exclusive lease agreements and buyer power; competitiveness of small and independent retailers; and the regulatory landscape (Competition Commission 2019)." Market distortions restrict consumer choice and present significant barriers to economic participation by small and independent retailers. The South African food system is highly concentrated, and food retail dominated by a handful of powerful corporations closely aligned with the interests of property developers and global capital. The uncovering of several cartels by the Competition Commission in the food and agro-processing sector has shown that the liberalisation of the sector post-1994 has not served the purpose of increased competition and benefit to consumers as envisaged at the time. Instead, South Africa's transformation post-apartheid into a more neoliberal state and its re-entry into the global market ushered in the deregulation of agriculture and a more conducive environment for corporate control of agricultural land. This has transformed the relationship between the state and corporations, with the latter holding increasing

influence. Generally speaking, this corporate power is less pronounced in agricultural production and tends to manifest more in control of the supply chain.

### 2.3 South Africa in a global context

The current global food and agricultural system is heavily influenced by the visions and interests of international financial institutions, transnational corporations, and government agencies who collectively produce what scholars have called a "corporate food regime" (McMichael 2009). This corporate food regime has ushered in an increasingly undemocratic and unjust food system in the country, where one in four South Africans go to bed hungry (Oxfam 2014). The current nutrition situation points to a failed food system that is unhealthy for the population (Termeer et al. 2018). At present, there is no cohesive food system strategy for health in the country. And while momentum for change is growing in activist circles, academia, and among some policy practitioners, thus far the politicking is yet to effect the necessary changes at the national-government level that would lead to a nourishing food system for all. Following the global food and financial crises of 2007-2010, desperate calls for food system reform have sprung up worldwide[99]. Similarly, global recommendations for addressing the complex burden of malnutrition globally have coalesced around a food systems framework (HLPE 2017) which explicitly links nutrition with the processes through which we produce, collect, store, transport, transform and ensure access to foods (Belotti et al. 2018).

However, in South Africa, "few substantive reforms have been forthcoming, and most government and multilateral solutions simply call for more of the same policies that brought about the crisis to begin with: extending liberal ("free") markets, privatising common resources, and protecting monopoly concentration while mediating the corporate food regime's collateral damage on food systems and the environment" (Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck 2011). This is the food security vector--it

[99] For example, the EAT-Lancet Commission, a platform of scientists, suggests a radical dietary shift that would prove beneficial to both human health and the environment in the world. See: https://eatforum.org/eat-lancet-commission/

masks the racialized, gendered, and class practices that produce and enable not only food insecurity, but massive indigence and death. For the authors of the present paper, the dominant 'food security' discourse when discussing the political economy of food has become considerably implicated in the entrenchment of hegemonic notions about the causes and solutions to food insecurity.

South Africa's current challenge, to realise the right to food while also tackling a complex burden of malnutrition, has no simple solution. Some actors within the growing global food movement have a radical critique of the corporate food regime, calling for food sovereignty and structural, redistributive reforms, including land, water and markets, while others advance a progressive, food justice agenda calling for access to healthy food by marginalized groups defined by race, gender and economic status (Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck 2011). While progressives focus more on localizing production and improving access to good, healthy food, radicals direct their energy at changing regime structures and creating politically enabling conditions for more equitable and sustainable food systems. These groups overlap significantly in their approaches. In the following sections, we examine these three main rights-based paradigms and draw lessons for fulfilling the right to food and addressing all forms of malnutrition in South Africa.



### 2.3.1 Paradigm 1: Food Justice

Food justice scholarship straddles orientations of both reform and transformation while challenging the global food movement[100] to better centre power, history, and positionality in their advocacy. 'Food justice' as a concept focuses on the fact that injustices within the food system continue to disproportionately impact poor and working-class communities, particularly people of colour who have been traditionally

[100] The definition used for what I refer to as the 'food movement' (also known as the 'dominant food movement) is borrowed from Alkon and Agyeman (2011) who further expand on 'alternative food networks' (AFNs). These terms refer to a constellation of individuals, NGOs, alliances, initiatives, companies, and government entities arranged in affiliations of different intensities and scales to support food security efforts and sustainable farming.

marginalized and prejudiced (Werkheiser and Peso 2017). Further, when considering food justice from a global perspective, it is important to recognise that millions of subsistence producers all over the world still grow a significant portion of what they eat today. These practices are coming under pressure not only from the physical expansion of commercial production and its environmental spill-overs, but also through colonization of our very conception of governance itself. We must trace the ways in which institutions of "global governance" produce and circulate particular assumptions and ideas about food and agricultural issues - especially about the causes of food insecurity and malnutrition, the necessity of capitalist markets, and the roles of biotechnology and commercial agriculture. The presumption that all human relations can and should be optimised through mechanisms of competitive markets and commodity exchange has become a pervasive theme in contemporary thinking on governance.

Currently, the North American food movement has increasingly been at the forefront of using the term "food justice" in a discourse that aims to distinguish between an industrial food system and a more equitable, ecologically viable alternative. Food justice, which emerges from the environmental justice movement, has been successful as a concept that has guided the activist work of movements that work to "address injustices within the United States (US) food system" (Holt-Gimenez 2015). In particular, by confronting the structural problems - such as race, class, and gender relations--that limit access to food, food-producing resources (like land), and self-determination (Holt-Gimenez and Wang 2011), the concept also shares many goals of the international food sovereignty movement. However, food justice does not cancel the structural power of capital or challenge the very premise on which corporate personhood is made. Instead, it enables a discursive strategy that can help constitute resistance to the rule of capital.

The suggestion herein is that when we go beyond the confines of the US food justice movement and we look at 'food justice' in a global context it becomes subsumed within the food sovereignty narrative. The underlying rationale being the idea that 'food sovereignty' activists make justice demands which must be addressed

by the wider society and global community insofar as food supply chain systems structure food provisioning and/or undermine local farming systems, and also that if food justice is to be achieved, food sovereignty must be at the centre of any discussion of what a just food system must look like or how to get there. Food sovereignty insists on a non-hierarchical and participatory democratic control of food that locates control in local lived realities. This insistence of food sovereignty on participatory democratic control is significant. Essentially, it reflects the work of global justice movements to reformulate the concept of 'sovereignty'.

Similar to the food sovereignty struggle, the food justice movement invokes a commitment to communities exercising their right to grow, sell, and eat healthy food that is fresh, nutritious, affordable, culturally-appropriate, and grown locally with care for the well-being of land, workers, and animals (IATP 2012), it also emphasizes that these tenets should be led by the peoples most marginalised in the food system. In other words, demands and talk of a right to shape food policy by those at the bottom of the pyramid can unveil the dynamics and incentives that are central to the schemes of the corporate food regime that has designed the modern food system.



Over the past decade, the production and consumption of locally grown foods have become the clarion call for food movement advocates in Europe and North America, and also in countries such as Brazil, where the city of Belo Horizonte became famous for being "the city that ended hunger" thanks to pioneering "food as a right" policies and local farm-to-school programs (Gerster-Bentaya, Rocha, and Barth 2011), (Rocha and Lessa 2009). The policies and programmes piloted in Belo Horizonte and eventually adopted throughout Brazil, have demonstrated, over the past 25 years, the potential for significant gains in healthy food access and in farmer livelihoods, at relatively low cost (about 2% of the municipal budget is spent on food programmes) (World Future Council 2019). Yet, even so, it's been noted elsewhere that in Brazil smallholder farmers are actually being criticized as unproductive due to the efficiency-of-scale paradigm that has been embraced by the government (hiding contradictions deriving from land concentration) (Paulino 2014). This means that beyond the success-

story of the Belo Horizonte model, smallholder farmers are in need of stable land rights to produce food.

The food system characterising countries like South Africa has changed drastically as a result of the introduction of the globalised distribution of technology related to food production, transportation and marketing, mass media, and the flow of capital and services. Access to many new empty calorie and ultra-processed foods and beverages relates to current economic and social development. Contextually, a key factor on this issue is the modern systems of food distribution and sales, which reflect the enormous penetration of supermarkets throughout South Africa.

Street vendors play an integral role in the realisation of the right to nourishing food for urban South Africans, even in areas where modern food retail abounds (Battersby and Watson 2018). The informal food value chain which used to be responsible for the provision of food to the majority of the country's citizens is disappearing as the major source of food due to markets being replaced by domestic food value chains that function and look like the super predatory global chains. Countries in economic transition from undeveloped to developed, such as the BRICS[101] countries, are particularly affected and have an increased rate of obesity across all economic levels and age groups (Popkin 1994).

Generating food justice is not about a 'yes' or a 'no' to free markets. Instead, regulated markets are ethically desirable if they increase the possibilities for those small agents to develop their own economic potential (Bedford-Strohm 2012). In other words, liberalisation is ethically questionable if it is only an ideological symbol for protecting the interests of the powerful nations of the Global North. Poignantly, how market relations came to be and are maintained is seldom questioned. For the present authors, this is not inconsequential, for the assumptions of the food-security paradigm are deeply implicated in the perpetuation of relations of domination.

[101] BRICS is the acronym coined for an association of five major emerging economies in the world: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

Markets organise food systems according to exchange value at the expense of all other social, cultural and environmental values. They are procedurally unjust because they give actors say over economic decision-making in proportion to their purchasing power and access to capital for investment. This allots power to the wealthy warping food systems, and entire economies for the benefit of a privileged few.

Generally speaking, and juxtaposed with the abovementioned it must be noted that a concern for the present authors with the food justice paradigm is that it mostly seeks to expand access to and inclusion in a food culture whose basic claims and premises it has failed to credibly question. A food justice movement that takes seriously the problems of equity, health, and sustainability will need to start asking harder questions about what counts as good nutritious food, and who should get to define what counts as goodness and justice when it comes to food for low-income communities. All the same, a 'food justice' paradigm is becoming evident in South Africa, as seen through the equity-based approach adopted by the Healthy Living Alliance (HEALA)-–an alliance of non-governmental organisations (NGO's) with a mission to improve the health of an increasingly obese South Africa. HEALA currently has eleven member organisations, namely the Health Promotion and Development Foundation; Khulisa Social Solutions; Rural Health Advocacy Project, Section 27; South African Dentist Association; SA Paediatric Association; Society for Endocrinology, Metabolism and Diabetes of SA; Motse's Bone Vitality Centre; Treatment Action Campaign; Amandla.mobi; and the Dietetic Association. HEALA is calling for social and political will to back up advocacy efforts towards food justice and equity (Mbalati 2019). The alliance has undertaken to empower all South Africans to make healthy food and lifestyle choices to prevent obesity and non-communicable diseases. Campaigns revolve around advocacy for progressive policies and regulations that promote and protect health, dignity and lives of all people living in South Africa. These include, for example, campaigning for an increase in the Health Promotion Levy on sugary drinks, from 11% to 20% as recommended by WHO (Stacey et al. 2019).

The lack of access to healthy food is both a cause and a symptom of the structural inequalities that exist in South Africa. To decrease the rate at which people

are dying of non-communicable diseases will take more than these approaches to tackling the double burden of malnutrition. Food equity is part of the struggle to realise social justice for all South Africans. We have a food inequality problem in this country and the lack of effective food policy and regulation of the food and beverage industry is one of the primary drivers. But this is not so much a problem of lack--rather, it is one of poor regulation, presided over by a government that refuses to act decisively on behalf of its citizens.

### 2.3.2 Paradigm 2: Food Security

The 1943 United Nations Conference on Food, which would later become the United Nation's Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), is the one that began to enunciate what we now recognise as the concept of food security. At the time, FAO endeavoured to secure a new world order characterized by "freedom from want of food, suitable and adequate for the health and strength of all people" (Stacey et al. 2019). After the Second World War, a new international food order emerged, led by the USA (Friedman 1982). In this period, the issue of food became a central component of US foreign policy. However, by the time the globe was faced with the 1973 'food crisis' (precipitated in large part by a spike in global oil prices), demands for a new international food order in which food as a weapon of war and politics had become less prominent. This new order was now influenced by rapid technological change, such as the development of Green Revolution technologies that promised high yielding seeds.

As a concept, food security has "evolved, developed, multiplied, and diversified," since the 1974 World Food Conference (Maxwell 1996). Today, the definition of food security most commonly used is the one advanced at the 1996 World Food Summit which states that "food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to

meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life[102]" (FAO 2006). This definition stresses the right of access to food as the primary characteristic of just food systems but is neutral regarding the power relations that define systems that regulate access to food. In terms of food security, for example, food systems that are predicated on hierarchical and exploitative relationships between individuals, private companies and the state, is not explicitly identified as problematic.[103]

This understanding of food security has been criticised as serving primarily states, institutions, classes, and individuals who stand to gain materially from capitalist agrarian restructuring (Amir 2013). It is this hegemonic notion that links the realisation of the right to food with the extension of capitalist markets that are increasingly being rejected by social justice movements. This hegemonic understanding is advanced by dominant states like the USA and international capitalist institutions such as the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). For this reason, food security has been criticised as unable to provide a transformative framework for the global food system (Holt-Gimenez 2011). If anything, it is as a result of the aforementioned that the food sovereignty movement achieved a great milestone at the Food Summit in Rome in 1996 when it gave a militant critique of the liberalisation that has enabled 'food security' on a world scale, thereby linking food security and food sovereignty as slogans of 'each side'. The food sovereignty movement has a directly political agenda, to roll back the corporate assault on our food and farming systems, and to challenge the concentration of corporate power over food production and sales[104].

[102] Elsewhere it could be argued that the 1996 definition is increasingly being replaced by the 2001 definition that acknowledges social access too.

[103] Raj Patel (2009) points out, for example, that food security can exist even in coercive circumstances, e.g. in a prison, a dictatorial regime, or a patriarchal state. Thus, "[u]nder food security, the question of power in the food system never comes up - as long as access is guaranteed under some system or other, there's no problem".

[104] James, D., Bowness, E., Robin, T., McIntyre, A., Dring, C., Desmarais, A. A., & Wittman, H. 2021. Dismantling and rebuilding the food system after COVID-19: Ten principles for redistribution and regeneration. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* 10(2): 29-51. https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2021.102.019

Both the development discourse in which 'food security' is located and the neoliberal orthodoxy that governs our present are artefacts of modernity/coloniality. Food security is ostensibly concerned with securing populations that are at risk of death from hunger, but it repeatedly succeeds in failing. Food security distils the humanitarian impulse and desire to save the "other" but it is vitally important to acknowledge how "save" and "securing" are inextricably linked within this narrative. "Saving" the other is often intertwined with securing one's own position (of dominance) and saving (safeguarding) asymmetrical relations that often rely on securing subordination--usually through political technologies of securitisation. Therefore, the notion of securing the hungry is also meant to signal the presence of a "security" discourse that identifies hunger and the hungry as a threat to the political economy of food. Food security is the favoured approach of international organisations to ensure adequate food for populations, by focusing on the stability of the availability and accessibility of food. It is important, however, to be cautious about accepting uncritically the discourse/s of food security and to probe its effects and politics. Theoretically speaking, the word "security" is used in international discourses around war and crime as a reasonable-sounding cover for policies to which citizens might otherwise object. The food security narrative has not prevented the consolidation of the prerogatives of (racialized and gendered) capital, yet it has been successful in facilitating a place for agricultural corporations in providing "solutions" to the problem of hunger. FAO's estimations that as many as 25,000 people (Holmes 2008) lose their lives every day as a result of hunger and the millions more who remain significantly malnourished must be then seen as "collateral damage".

Despite South Africa's National Policy on Food and Nutrition Security, which was gazetted in 2014 (and is led by the Departments of Social Development and Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, housed within the Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation within the Presidency), food insecurity is almost never one of the key issues in political debate, even during the election cycle (Ledger 2016, 32). Nowhere in the popular media[105] or around middle-class dinner tables or in the

[105] I must acknowledge that this is slowly shifting particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

supermarket aisles will you find any indication that hunger is a real issue in South Africa, that it is everywhere and threatens the hopes that we have for our society, particularly through its impact on children (Ledger 2016). Significantly, while journalists and academics can document violations of the social contract between governments and their people, impacts fall most heavily on civil society and thus they have the strongest case for demanding accountability (McKeon 2017).

On average the cost of a healthy diet is 69% more than the unhealthy alternative in the country and as a result, a healthy, nutritious diet is unaffordable for most South Africans (Temple and Steyn 2011)[106]. The principal policy focus for food thus far has been to increase agricultural productivity and to liberalize markets allowing globalised trade. This focus has led to huge growth in the supply of agricultural produce, more calories becoming available, and prices declining for certain foods. "The availability of cheaper calories increasingly underpins diets creating malnourishment through obesity, and global competition incentivizes producers who can produce the most, cheaply, typically with environmental damage" (Benton and Bailey 2019). Eighty-five percent of all plantings of transgenic crops are soybean, maize and cotton, modified to reduce input and labour costs for large-scale production systems, but not designed to feed the world or increase food quality (Fresco 2003). No serious investments have been made in any of the five most important crops of the poorest countries--millet, sorghum, chickpea, groundnut and pigeon pea. Only 1 percent of research and development budgets for multinational corporations are spent on crops that might be useful for the developing world, especially in arid regions (Pingali and Traxler 2002).

All the same, while the right to food has been advanced in South Africa by inter alia, the South African Human Rights Commission, it must be acknowledged that it has

[106] According to the Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice and Dignity Group (PMBEJD), the average cost to feed a child a basic nutritious diet in South Africa increased from R723.71 in July 2021) to R824.14 in July 2022 (Abrahams and Smith 2022). Bearing in mind that the Child Support Grant is R480 and the food poverty line as calculated by Statistics South Africa is R624 per capita per month (latest April 2021) (Abrahams and Smith 2022). The Child Support Grant therefore becomes the perfect example of the government's lacklustre approach to fulfilling the right to food, which is uniquely unqualified for children in the country. Why is the grant set below the food poverty line and further below the average cost to secure a basic nutritious diet for a child in 2022?

not gone far enough to make linkages with farmers' rights. Internationally, the right to food and farmers' rights have, to a large extent, also lived rather separate lives, even if there are obvious links between them (Haugen 2014). Interestingly, Oxfam South Africa points out that in under five days, a top executive at South African supermarket chain Shoprite will earn more than a temporary farm worker on an average South African vineyard will earn in their entire working life (Patel 2018). Massive inequality such as this is only made possible through the exploitation of workers whose labour makes food possible.

A myopic focus on growth and jobs has provided corporations with undue influence on food supply policies, which often reflect a view that food security and nutrition issues will be naturally addressed by increased employment and GDP. Such policies often conflate food security with calories rather than a nutritious diet (Joubert 2013). Stakeholders working in agriculture and in health are disadvantaged in policy development due to their relatively low political influence compared to stakeholders driving an economic growth agenda. Addressing the power disparity between corporate interests and sustainable development and health agendas will require building civil society capacity and political will for health and right to food stakeholders, and planning for how to transition agricultural capacity away from products that contribute to the country's health burdens.



### 2.3.3 Paradigm 3: Food Sovereignty

The concept of food sovereignty has its roots in nationalist food politics of the 1980s (Edelman 2014), but globally (particularly in the South), food sovereignty emerged in the aftermath of structural adjustment programmes. In the early to mid-1990s activists were forced to grapple with a wave of free trade agreements as a result of which cheap commodities flooded most countries of the Global South and the consolidation of the agricultural sector (Anderson 2010). The call to sovereignty was and remains a conscious effort to bring power back to the state from deregulated markets and free trade regimes and as such, to bolster the rights and livelihoods of people. Food sovereignty can be understood as:

> … the right of peoples, communities, and countries to define their own agricultural, labour, fishing, food and land policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food-producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and their societies (Via Campesina 2000).

*La Via Campesina*[107] argues that the state is required to actualize higher order values held in the polity. This is similar to what Reus-Smit (1999) calls the "moral purpose of the state[108]." And if we accept, as he argues, that "different hegemonic ideas about the moral purpose of the state has given sovereignty different meanings in different historical contexts" (Reus-Smit 1999, 161), then we can come to an understanding of why *La Via Campesina* seeks to usher-in a normative foundation that differs fundamentally from what currently exists. As a critical social movement, *La Via Campesina* is aware that the modern state is constantly drawing from "culturally and historically specific beliefs" to inform its institutional choices (ibid.). The task of social movements like *La Via Campesina* then becomes the (re)constructing and the (re)creating of egalitarian imaginaries[109] through discursive strategies that enable justice and the ethical values of our society. This is particularly important for peasant

[107] La Via Campesina is the international movement which brings together millions of peasants, small and medium-size farmers, landless people, women farmers, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers from around the world. It defends small-scale sustainable agriculture as a way to promote social justice and dignity - opposing corporate driven agriculture and transnational companies that are destroying people and nature. The movement comprises about 150 local and national organizations in 70 countries from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas. Altogether, it represents about 200 million farmers. It is an autonomous, pluralist and multicultural movement, independent from any political, economic or other type of affiliation.

[108] Reus-Smit argues that societies are shaped by deep constitutional structures that are based on prevailing beliefs about the moral purpose of the state, the organizing principle of sovereignty, and the norm of procedural justice.

[109] It is fair to say that dominant global imaginaries - by which we mean the "common-sense" of state officials, NGO professionals, and general publics in the Global North – is crucial in constructing the imaginaries that govern our images of the hungry. The representation of the non-European *Other* as a violator of human rights and/or victim of human rights abuse remains dominant, and works against more nuanced understandings of injustice.

movements. Because peasants' ways of being were not totally colonized by the rise of modernity, their deep-seated cultural values of reciprocity still remain[110].

As a result, a food sovereignty lens is attentive to the ways in which the concentration of corporate power in the global food system has generated contemporary health crises. Such crises include the chronic hunger experienced by one in eight people worldwide, the majority of whom live in 'developing' countries (FAO 2018), the growing prevalence of non-communicable diseases associated with the spread of unhealthy western diets, as well as the health impacts of intensive pesticide use and agro-industrial production technologies on agricultural producers and affected communities amongst others. Pointedly, while there is a growing body of evidence related to trade, food systems and malnutrition, what remains absent from the literature is the ways in which the technical and political aspects of the global food value chain interact with domestic food systems to affect malnutrition and climate change.

Food issues are defined and framed through beliefs, ideas and knowledge about what is and/or what should be--in the context of the realisation of the right to food. Framing and messaging are now widely recognised as ideational strategies used by human rights defenders and food system actors to focus attention on particular issues (Benford and Snow 2000). Successful framing is "adopted as talking about the new ways of understanding issues" (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). This is the promise of food sovereignty, as it offers new insights for the double burden of malnutrition. On the other hand, regrettably, dominant framings such as neoliberalism often become so widely accepted that they are taken for granted as self-evident truths.

In South Africa, the food sovereignty concept has been embraced by activists and is gaining sway. Evidence for this is the establishment of the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC) which is attempting to initiate a campaign to bring

110 See: Scoones, I. 2021. Pastoralists and peasants: perspectives on agrarian change, The Journal of Peasant Studies 48(1): 1-47, DOI: 10.1080/03066150.2020.1802249

about greater awareness, create farmer networks, and fight for a fundamentally different food system--one that is more just, democratic and anti-capitalist. The SAFSC is a grassroots campaign that emerged in early 2015 in response to injustices prevalent in the country's food system and the need to further agrarian reform more broadly. That year, representatives from over 60 organisations met in Johannesburg to officially launch SAFSC at the Food Sovereignty Campaign Assembly (Cherry 2016). The gathering was spearheaded by the Solidarity Economy Movement and a grassroots NGO, the Cooperative and Policy Alternative Centre. It is an active, nascent campaign that is operating at a national level. The clearly articulated objectives of the campaign were first, to tackle the systemic roots of hunger and the climate crisis; second, to confront the state, capital and false solutions in South Africa; third, to advance food sovereignty alternatives from below to sustain life and survive the climate crisis; and lastly, to provide a unified platform for all sectors, movements, communities and organisations championing food sovereignty (SAFSC 2015).

Although there are many plausible avenues for connecting food sovereignty to human health, the empirical evidence based in support of this hypothesis is weak at the moment. A 2014 review of nearly 1500 articles speaking to food security, food sovereignty and health equity identified fewer than 20 reports involving food sovereignty (Weiler et al. 2014). This dearth of active scholarship may be due, in part, to the opposition that the food sovereignty narrative poses to existing institutions, food sovereignty complements the longer-term socio-political restructuring processes that health equity requires (Weiler et al. 2014). Alternatively, we also posit that South Africa has too small of a peasantry, due to the continuous processes of dispossession associated with long histories of land dispossession and the forms of farming and agriculture that have evolved during the different phases of a distinctly racialized form of capitalism and its legacies post-1994. Food sovereignty is about promoting the commons and advancing a value system that embodies solidarity and Ubuntu[111]. It's a missed opportunity in the fight against the double burden of malnutrition that the

[111] Ubuntu is a Bantu-Nguni term meaning "humanity." It is often translated as "I am because we are," or "humanity towards others," but is often used in a more philosophical sense to mean "the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity."

magnitude of importance of these pathways in different contexts has not been fully understood or embraced by scholars.

The above is particularly relevant given the growing attention paid to social determinants of health that go beyond a narrow set of views on the individual and encompass the health of communities and populations (WHO 2018). If supported by a credible evidence-base, these pathways could be important in linking aspects of food sovereignty to human health. If anything, food sovereignty analyses that examine the right to food and the double burden of malnutrition should place greater emphasis on the entire food supply chain. According to scholars "agriculture production is only the most distal locus in an increasingly complex food supply chain that includes postharvest storage and home processing; industrial processing; distribution, transport and trade; food retailing, marketing and promotion; and food preparation and consumption" (McClafferty and Zuckerman 2014) The increasing dependence on agriculture not as a source of food for direct consumption, but as source of inputs for the food processing industry (Pinstrup-Andersen 2013), means that the raw commodities produced by agriculture will have a diminishing potential to directly impact human health as compared to the processes that reshape and transform these commodities postharvest.



The growing domination in diets around the world of ultra-processed foods has undoubtedly had far reaching ramifications for human health. Efforts by the food sovereignty movement to restructure food supply chains may actually turn out to be more effective at improving human health than efforts to reform agricultural production practices or implement individual dietary behaviour change programs. Developing a law to ensure and safeguard the right to food and nutrition in South Africa has been a core proposal of the food sovereignty movement, and rests on the belief that the state should be taking up its responsibility to ensure its citizens have access to appropriate, affordable, nutritious food.

The South African government has bought into the corporate food regime's myths, believing that without corporate agriculture, there would be inadequate food

to meet the growing population's needs. However, the fact that one third of our food is wasted, that increased dependence on corporate agriculture is linked to the climate crisis, that the state of hunger in South Africa is not improving, and that most of the food that is consumed has poor nutritional quality, is reason enough to reconsider the current model in South Africa (Cherry 2016, 105).

Following on Amartya Sen's ground-breaking work, food sovereignty foregrounds entitlements and the fundamental redistribution of wealth and power through transformational political campaigns. This is why food sovereignty activists are not mere consumers but citizens demanding that their right to food be safeguarded from capital interests and their promotion of corporate profits at the expense of societal welfare. Sovereignty, like hegemony, is built and contested within state institutions, within market conditions, within the institutions of civil society, popular culture, and the language with which people understand their daily lives. In her study of Venezuela, where food sovereignty is enshrined in national law and is the focus of a national effort by both state and societal actors, Schiavoni (2015) found that diverse attempts to implement food sovereignty are happening both from above, by the national government, and from below, via citizen-led social institutions known as 'comunas', with dynamic interaction between the two. While this interaction is often tension filled, as a result of competing paradigms, approaches, and interests, the tension is the key to meaningful and sustained advancement of food sovereignty over the long term. Thus, building upon the work of Phillip McMichael, Schiavoni (2015) finds it helpful to conceive of food sovereignty not as a singular sovereignty, but in terms of 'multiple' or 'competing sovereignties', and looks at how these multiple sovereignties are interacting with one another across different scales, jurisdictions, and geographies. As Schiavoni (2015) puts it, "constructing food sovereignty is less about building silos and more about building relationships." Through this conception of Ubuntu, food sovereignty contributes to the debate of political philosophy to which justice is central. As a living ethics, Ubuntu demands an activism of solidarity and decolonisation in the face of what Vishwas Satgar calls an "imperial ecocide" (Terreblanche 2018). Ubuntu cannot be compatible with purely capitalist relations and the commodification of nature or inequality.

Nonetheless, amidst the above, we must acknowledge that in urbanising middle-income countries like South Africa, information needs for policymaking in the arena of food insecurity are particularly complex. While hunger and undernutrition persist in both rural and urban areas, the prevalence of overweight and obesity, and diet-related chronic diseases is also increasing in both. The ongoing debate in global policy circles on using the term 'food and nutrition security' to more adequately reflect the focus on nutrition that is implicit in the widely-used term 'food security' resonates in this context, where diet quality is an important dimension of food security. Features of the South African agro-food system, such as the dualistic nature of agriculture (well-developed commercial farmers alongside resource-poor smallholder farmers) and the deep penetration of supermarkets need to be taken into account as well. There are also divergent perspectives on the relative contribution of structural and behavioural factors to the food security situation in the country.

Food sovereignty recognises the right of consumers and countries to refuse technologies deemed inappropriate and to be able to decide what they consume, how and by whom it is produced. This means communities and populations must be free to decide on food produced in their own countries, without this being opposed as a restraint on trade. The concept demands the protection of consumer interests, including regulation for food safety and the accurate labelling of food and animal feed products for information about content and origins. Interestingly, for the South African case, what we seem to be calling food fraud in many cases is simply an outcome of lack of standards or enforcement of standards. Emphatically, following the listeriosis outbreak in the country, questions have now been raised about what is meant by "safe"? It appears that the government's interface and engagement with our food value-chain only revolves around production concerns and turns a blind eye to other junctions of the value-chain. Many of the issues that have prompted the emergence of the food sovereignty alternative internationally are deeply felt in South Africa too; evident in the inequalities, injustices and brutalities present in our food system. Global financial flows, land grabs, climate change and urbanisation have left millions with little access to food, livelihoods, or political recourse. A food sovereignty

paradigm offers an emancipatory stream in human rights discourse to guide the realisation of the right to food in South Africa.

### 2.4 Realising the Right to Food in South Africa

The right to food is enshrined in the South African constitution, and the approach that has been adopted by the ruling regime is one that attempts to work towards conventional definitions of 'food security'. Because of this, the call for explicit linkages between nutrition and health goals has largely been located within food security frameworks. A food system governance approach that would usher in a just and nourishing food system in South Africa remains elusive (Hendriks 2014). The state is currently funding multiple overlapping and duplicative programmes to address food insecurity in many different government departments. Distressingly, food insecurity statistics having been stagnant for a while are now heading in the wrong direction, and the double burden of malnutrition continues to rise.

The historical differences between the "food sovereignty" and "food justice" movements have shaped the scale, depth and context of their message in today's world. Food sovereignty, founded by peasant and subsistence farmers in the Global South, has grown to be an international rallying cry for equal, democratised food systems. Food justice, founded to confront structural racism and access to resources, has focussed on the distribution of food among the marginalised and poor and is yet to challenge the larger politics of food production. Interestingly, the many food justice movements largely located in the United States of America formed by actors excluded and marginalised from the modern food system mirror similar experiences of peasant farmers in the Global South, from where the food sovereignty movement emerged (Schiavoni 2009). In South Africa, there is an opportunity for both of these movements to build on the common ground they share, with food justice spurring short-term action and rights in domestic contexts, while food sovereignty movements support long-term national, regional and international networks and political action.

Although food access, policy reform, and both ethical and equitable consumption have taken centre-stage as important food system concerns globally, the question of justice and the food system reminds us not to approach these issues in a vacuum (Duffield 2007). We also suggest that the current conceptualization of food security can mask the systematic undermining of the capacity for self-reliance by the appropriation of the means of existence. In resisting food security because it is a technology of development, food sovereignty attempts to reclaim democratic politics. Rather than accept the technologizing of hunger and the assertion of a "responsibility to intervene" by NGOs and western governments, *La Via Campesina* member organisations claim their right to determine their own future. Food sovereignty activists argue that without a shared political stake in the food system, both producers and consumers remain passive recipients of policy, aid and subsidy (Pimbert 2009). Food sovereignty activists see the state as impeding knowledge, action and choice in the food system (Patel 2011), and thus the paradigm of food sovereignty has emerged to directly address, rather than obfuscate these inequitable relations.

Of significance, Patel and McMichael observe that food sovereignty presents an understanding of rights "whose content is not necessarily preordained by the state" (Patel and McMichael 2009). They add that the conception of rights advanced by *La Via Campesina* is "explicitly without content--the right is a right to self-determination" (Patel and McMichael 2009). This, of course, is not how we have come to understand rights. Normally, the state is seen as author and guarantor of rights. *La Via Campesina* suggests an alternative possibility. They accept the state's role as the guarantor of rights, but demand that the authorship of rights resides in communities (Patel and McMichael 2009). If the ultimate goal is the transformation of the South African economy to one that is inclusive, sustainable, and focused on true food security, limiting the activities of global corporations domestically offers an opportunity for the country to better align its agricultural production with the needs of its people while increasing participation of those traditionally marginalized. Planning should begin with a wide spectrum of stakeholders on ways to transition the use of agricultural land and produce to promote healthier nutrition.

Among the three global rights-based paradigms for food policy making discussed in this paper, only food sovereignty directly challenges the inequitable and unjust food system that exists in South Africa by pairing local and regional ecological agriculture with the large-scale organisation of campaigns to challenge the corporate food regime. In this way, food becomes a topic for expression of political agency - another capability that has been noted by Sen (1991). Agency's capabilities connote capacity to meet nutritional requirements, to be educated, to be sheltered and to be clothed; all these are needed for human rights at a general level. The right to food discourse in South Africa would benefit from further contextualization and adaptation of key tenets of food security, food justice and food sovereignty. However, with the co-option of the term "food security", it is becoming a concept of diminishing value for justice projects.

Significantly, the South African experience highlights that food sovereignty has different meanings. For some, such as grassroots movements and civil society organisations, it is primarily for environmentally sound and sustainable food production; whilst for other activist-scholars, it is primarily a vehicle to social justice whose point-of-departure is a way to support food producers' individual autonomy. As Marisela Chavez rightly points out, these are real differences but for all of them:

> It's about justice - for people and the environment. They believe that looking at agriculture through a different lens helps connect people to the understanding that it's not just about people respecting the environment, but also about people having a different relationship with each other (Werkheeiser and Piso 2017).

This is the promise of food justice in general and food sovereignty in particular - to bring together people working in different places on different particular injustices primarily to build solidarity networks of aiding one another. However, as Gottlieb and Joshi (2010) suggest,

> …putting together the two words food and justice does not by itself accomplish the goal of facilitating the expansion and linkages of groups and issues.

> Nor does it necessarily create a clear path to advocating for changes to the food system to address all forms of malnutrition or point to ways to bring about more just policies, economic change, or the restructuring of global, national, and community pathways.

Like other empty signifiers, for food justice to have intellectual and political value, it must both take advantage of the robust history of food politics and then move these politics forward toward more emancipatory goals. In particular, there is an opportunity in South Africa to more explicitly link these conceptions of justice and rights to access (and capabilities) related to 'nourishing' food, rather than simply production.

Current activism around food in South Africa can be described as still emerging. However, the public health community in the country is recognizing that food and food policies are major influences on health and health disparities, which suggests there is a window of opportunity for broadening human rights-based activism around food systems to include nutrition. Recent food advocacy has helped reframe public dialogue on the country's food system and public pressure is slowly triggering modest changes though not yet in food-related health outcomes. For example, at the time of writing the Competition Commission has recently concluded its Grocery Retail Market Inquiry which has resulted in major retailers agreeing to drop exclusivity clauses in shopping mall leases against small and speciality retailers with immediate effect (Dludla 2020). Public health history (de Camargo 2017) suggests that strong movements can play an essential role in achieving the transformation necessary to make healthy and affordable food available to all.



**2.5 Conclusion**

The elements of a human rights approach are already interwoven into many areas of food and nutrition policy research and analysis in South Africa. Issues of agricultural sustainability, property rights, hunger, malnutrition and information are all examples of where a human rights approach already has had an influence on thinking and

perceptions. However, the dominant policy approach has been one underpinned by a food security paradigm. In the face of on-going and increasingly evident injustices in the food system, and a growing double burden of malnutrition, it is clear that the realization of the right to food will require a paradigm shift in the production, distribution and consumption of food driven by a broader political, economic and social transformation. The core argument of this paper is that 'food security', while ostensibly grounded in a human rights discourse, simultaneously tends to be understood as realizable almost exclusively through capitalist markets - this is regressive for the right to food. The concept of food sovereignty offers an opportunity to extend and integrate action on the right to food and nutrition in South Africa. We borrow from the words of Raj Patel (2009) to conclude: food sovereignty consistently means a 'right to act'. Food sovereignty, even more than food justice, emphasizes autonomy and democratic control.

**CHAPTER 3: Summary**

*I have the audacity to believe that people everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for the minds and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits.* **- Martin Luther King, Jr**

Building on the previous chapter this paper asserts the need to democratise the South African food system so that those at the bottom of the pyramid have direct input into formulating food and nutrition policies at all levels. This claim is based on the universal rights "to honest, accurate information and open and democratic decision-making", which in turn forms "the basis of good governance, accountability and equal participation in economic, political and social life, free from all forms of discrimination."

Unless articulated clearly and consistently, and in terms that are relevantly and appropriately contextualised, food sovereignty juxtaposed to the right to food and nutrition can be a confusing concept that does not contribute to greater levels of food democracy. The United Nations agencies within which *La Via Campesina* has achieved some level of influence are those with moral and symbolic power in the international system; substantive decisions regarding the direction of the global political economy of food are taken elsewhere, and have, as noted in Chapter 2, been hostile to the interests of the poor and marginalized particularly in the global South. The effectiveness of the human rights system as a strategy for transformative change in the context of globalising capitalism is open to serious doubt. Further, as the case study of South Africa reveals, the potential that comes with the country's legal opportunity structure in-light of our vibrant human rights heritage is only the first step towards the fulfilment of the right to food and nutrition; achieving substantive and lasting changes requires confronting and overcoming vested political and economic interests; and this requires sustained mobilisation and activism.

## Chapter 3: Constitutionalism and the Right to Food - Towards transformative accountability in shaping food and nutrition policy in South Africa


### Abstract

*Objective:* To transform the discourse of the right to food in South Africa into practical policies and programmes that can address food insecurity and the double burden of malnutrition.

*Background:* The content of the 'right to food' and the multiple contributors to poor food access and malnutrition in South Africa make it difficult to operationalise the right to food. In particular, nutrition has not been regarded as a right in itself but, rather, as an element of health or an outcome of lack of access to food.

*Methods:* This is a policy analysis, designed to examine how accountability for realising the right to food could be effectively promoted to the benefit of food and nutrition security in South Africa. This comprised an analysis of policy documents and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders involved in South Africa's food and nutrition policy sphere – being stakeholders from government sectors relevant to food systems (Health, Agriculture, Trade and Industry, Finance) (n=21), the private sector (n=4), academia (n=10), NGOs (n=11) and farmers (n=2).

*Results:* Underscoring access to affordable 'healthy' food is necessary to ensure that the right to food does not simply ensure access to calorie-dense but nutrient-deficient food, with negative health implications. More effort is needed in South Africa to align the right to food with the pursuit of food security and sovereignty, and with nutrition security and improved nutritional outcomes. A food system that works for the whole country must be anchored in resilient livelihoods that are underpinned by comprehensive and sustainable approaches, with strong linkages between sectors such as agriculture and health.

*Conclusions:* To approach the transformation of food systems holistically, policy makers must democratise planning and include all actors working in and alongside food systems. A myriad of factors – including a lack of state interest, poverty and misallocation of resources – keeps the full potential of a nourishing food system from

being realised. There is an opportunity for reframing ‘access to sufficient food’ as food justice, and to placing increased attention on the social dimensions of existing food policies. This would include making nutrition outcomes more visible and advocating for a framework based on human rights for addressing South Africa’s hunger and malnutrition challenge.

**Keywords**: Right to food, OPERA Framework, South Africa, Malnutrition, Double burden, Policy, SDGs, Food sovereignty

### 3.1 Introduction

Malnutrition and food insecurity in South Africa exist despite the availability of sufficient food at the national level. This is due to inequities in food distribution and access to food, and to wider South African social inequity[112]. Over half of all South Africans are reported as food insecure, and nearly one in four children under the age of three have their growth stunted by malnutrition[113]. Poverty is a key contributor to poor nutrition; almost two in five South Africans do not have enough money to purchase adequate food and essential items, and according to Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) an estimated 21% of households experienced hunger in 2017.[114] Current diets are also environmentally and socially unsustainable[115], and the health burden induced by the country's diet is significant. In particular, obesity and other non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have risen rapidly, resulting in illness, preventable deaths and high healthcare costs[116]. In 2016, the Demographic and Health Survey reported that 68% of women were obese (BMI>30) and/or overweight (BMI>25), while 31% of men were classified as obese[117].



There is growing recognition that food security and nutrition are human rights

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112 Misselhorn, A. & Hendriks, S.L. 2017. A systematic review of sub-national food insecurity research in South Africa: Missed opportunities for policy insights. *PLoS ONE* 12(8): e0182399. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0182399

113 See: Sanders, D. & Reynolds, L. 2017. Ending stunting: Transforming the health system so children can thrive. In: Jamieson, L., Berry, L., & Lake, L (eds). South African Child Gauge 2017. Cape Town, Children's Institute, University of Cape Town. Available at: http://www.ci.uct.ac.za/ci/child-gauge/2017 (Accessed 8/05/20)

114 Stats SA Library Cataloguing-in-Publication (CIP) Data. 2019. Towards measuring the extent of food security in South Africa: An examination of hunger and food adequacy. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa. http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/03-00-14/03-00-142017.pdf (Accessed 5/05/20)

115 See: McLachlan, M. & Thorne, J. 2009. Seeding change: A proposal for renewal in the South African food system. Development Planning Division Working Paper Series No. 16, DBSA Midrand. Available at: https://www.dbsa.org/EN/About-Us/Publications/Documents/DPD%20No16.%20Seeding%20change-%20A%20proposal%20for%20renewal%20in%20the%20South%20African%20food%20system.pdf (Accessed 10/08/20)

116 Nojilana, B. et al. 2016. Persistent burden from non-communicable diseases in South Africa needs strong action. *South African Medical Journal* 106 (5): 436-437. ISSN 2078-5135. http://www.samj.org.za/index.php/samj/article/view/10776 doi:10.7196/SAMJ.2016.v106i5.10776.

117 See: Statistics South Africa (Stats SA). 2017. South Africa Demographic and Health Survey 2016: Key Indicators Report. Pretoria; Statistics South Africa.

issues[118]. A human rights approach offers a framework for addressing the underlying social determinants that contribute to food insecurity. Human rights are accompanied by legally binding obligations on states. Under the right to access sufficient food, individuals have a right to food that is available, accessible, adequate, and sustainable, and can seek to hold states and others to account for failures to protect or respect their rights[119].

The right to food is a basic international human right. In South Africa it is enshrined in Section 27 of the Bill of Rights, which includes an imperative to address malnutrition and promote good health[120]. This is supported by the right to nutrition for children (in Section 28) and prisoners (Section 35(2e)). This mandate is the responsibility of the government – namely the legislature, executive and the judiciary. As such, the South African state is obliged to progressively realise the right to food and basic nutrition, meaning it must ensure that the enjoyment of this right is consistently expanded over time, towards an end goal of a universal and full enjoyment of the right.



More than other social and economic rights, the right to food seems difficult to articulate in legislation and government responsibility[121]. While all social and economic rights are interconnected, the right to food is a multi-pronged 'wicked problem' that cuts across the functions of a range of government departments, including Health, Agriculture, and Trade and Industry. This lack of integration is

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118 See: Hilal, E. 2016. The Challlenges and Developments of the Right to Food in the 21st Century: Reflections of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. *UCLA Journal of International Law and Foreign Affairs* 20 (1): 1-44. &, Moyo, B. & Thow, A.M. 2020. Fulfilling the Right to Food for South Africa: Justice, Security, Sovereignty and the Politics of Malnutrition. *World Nutrition* 11 (3).

119 See: Ayala, A & Meier, B. 2017. A Human Rights Approach to the Health Implications of Food and Nutrition Insecurity, 38 *PUB. HEALTH REV*. 10 (32), Available at: https://publichealthreviews.biomedcentral.com/track/pdf/10.1186/s40985-017-0056-5 (Accessed 26/05/20)

120 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, (1996)

121 Durojaye, E. & Chilemba, E.M. 2018. Accountability and the right to food: A comparative study of India and South Africa, Food Security SA Working Paper Series No. 003. DST-NRF Centre of Excellence in Food Security, South Africa.

exacerbated by responsibility also being vested in local authorities[122].

The government of South Africa has adopted a range of instruments, policies and programmes aimed at improving national food security [123] (**Table 1**). However, legislation to realise the right to food is fragmented, and still remains outside the remit of any particular government department[124]. As such, in spite of varied initiatives and policies, the South African state is yet to operationalise the right to food in a way that delivers a nourishing food system that caters to all people[125]. There appears to be an overemphasis on production and utilisation within the country's food systems whilst the processing and distribution side, which is contributing to growing overweight and obesity, is being ignored.[126]

This study examines the potential to strengthen the realisation of the right to food and right to nutrition in South Africa, in the context of food insecurity and the double burden of malnutrition.



122 May, J. 2020. Integrating a human rights approach to food security in national plans and budgets: The South African National Development Plan, Chapter 2. In: Durojaye, E. & Mirugi-Mukundi, G. (eds). 2020. Exploring the link between poverty and human rights in Africa, Pretoria University Law Press.

123 Ibid

124 For more context, see: McLaren, D., Moyo, B., & Jeffery, J. 2015. The Right to Food in South Africa: An Analysis of the Content, Policy Effort, Resource Allocation and Enjoyment of the Constitutional Right to Food. The Socio-Economic Rights Monitoring Tool, SPII Working Paper 11

125 This experience is not unique to South Africa only. While we have seen the adoption of right to food laws and policies, most recently with Nepal, or ongoing processes in countries such as Scotland, Bangladesh, Malawi, and Costa Rica, there is still a huge gap between frameworks and implementation.

126 Kroll, F., Swart, E.C., Annan, R.A., Thow, A.M., Neves, D., Apprey, C., Aduku, L.N.E, Agyapong, N.A.F., Moubarac, J-C., Toit, Ad., Aidoo, R. & Sanders D. 2019. Mapping Obesogenic Food Environments in South Africa and Ghana: Correlations and Contradictions. *Sustainability* 11(14):3924. https://doi.org/10.3390/su11143924

**Table 1. Current and recent policies and initiatives relevant to food and nutrition in South Africa**

| Policy (title, year) | Lead Department | Strategic Objective | Other Key Departments and Social Partners |
|---|---|---|---|
| **CURRENT POLICIES AND INITIATIVES** | | | |
| The Southern Africa Development Community's (SADC) Food and Nutrition Security Strategy, 2015 – 2025[127] | Government of the Republic of South Africa (RSA) | The SADC Protocol on Health and the SADC Health Policy Framework 2000 commit to improving the nutritional status of the population in the region and addressing the SADC's long-term goals of eliminating poverty.<br><br>SADC member states have committed to meeting the nutrition targets in the Agenda for Sustainable Development by 2030 - in particular, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 (end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture) and SDG 3 (ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages). | All |
| National Development Plan: Vision 2030 (NDP), 2012 | Office of the Deputy President & Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) | Identifies FNS as a key element of both poverty and inequality. As a result the NDP makes reference to a number of steps that will improve food security, including the expanded use of irrigation, security of land tenure, especially for women and youth, and the promotion of nutrition education. | All |

127 The 2020 Synthesis Report on the State of Food and Nutrition Security and Vulnerability in southern Africa released in July indicates that about 44,8 million people across 13 SADC Member States are food insecure at the time of writing.

| Policy (title, year) | Lead Department | Strategic Objective | Other Key Departments and Social Partners |
|---|---|---|---|
| National Policy on Food Security and Nutrition for the Republic of South Africa (NPFSN), 2014 | Office of the Deputy President & DPME | Seeks to establish a multi-sectoral Food and Nutrition Security (FNS) Council: to oversee alignment of policies, legislation and programmes, co-ordination and implementation of programmes and services which address FNS; and draft new policies and legislation where appropriate. | DAFF, DSD, COGTA, DBE, DTI, DRDLR, StatsSA, provincial and local government, civil society and development partners |
| Household Food & Nutrition Security Strategy for SA[128], 2014 | Department of Social Development (DSD) | Aims to enhance production entitlements amongst subsistence producers; largely a subsidiary programme of the NPFSN (Aliber, 2015). | DPME, DAFF, DoH, local government, civil society |
| National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP), 1994 | Department of Basic Education (DBE) | Aims to improve the health and nutritional status of the poorest learners in South Africa. Its main objective is to enhance learning by providing a daily nutritious meal at school. The programme is of great strategic importance; it involves a large financial commitment from government, and reaches over 9 million learners. | DBE, NT, DSD, DPME, StatsSA, civil society, communities |
| Fetsa Tlala Food Production Initiative, 2013 | Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) | Seeks to promote food security and address structural causes of food insecurity, which continue to perpetuate inequality and social exclusion. | DRDLR, DWS, DTI, DSBD, NT, civil society and development partners |
| Social Relief of Distress Grant (food parcels), 2013 | DSD | Provides 'temporary assistance' through the provision of food parcels or food vouchers to distressed households for a period of three months, with the possibility of extending it for a further three months. Applications for grants are processed | NT, DPME, DoH, local government, development partners |

[128] The nature and the continued existence of this policy is unclear. It is uncertain by what means one can obtain a final official document of the policy. Interestingly, in 2014 the DSD circulated a draft discussion document for a Household Food and Nutrition Programme, which confusingly bore no resemblance to the Household Food and Nutrition Security Strategy. What happened to the proposed programme is unknown.

| Policy (title, year) | Lead Department | Strategic Objective | Other Key Departments and Social Partners |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | immediately upon application and successful applicants receive either the food parcel or voucher on the spot. | |
| National Environmental Health Policy, 2013 | Dept of Health (DoH) | Aims to identify development needs in environmental health, particularly for populations that lack awareness and services due to historical imbalances, by outlining environmental health services. Promotes intersectoral collaboration in the provision of environmental health services by integrating environmental considerations with the social, political and development needs and rights of all individuals, communities and sectors. | COGTA, DEA, DAFF, DTI, NT, DSD, local government, civil society |
| The Integrated Growth and Development Policy for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (IGDP), 2012 | Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) | Aims to transform and restructure the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors, historically dominated by a small number of large companies; and to ensure that constraints experienced in input supply, production and marketing are addressed cost-effectively and in a timely manner. | DRDLR, DWS, DTI, DSBD, NT, civil society and development partners |
| **PAST POLICIES AND INITIATIVES** | | | |
| Roadmap for Nutrition in South Africa, 2013 - 2017 | DoH | Sought to direct nutrition-related activities in the health sector by focusing on five strategies: (1) advocacy and technical support to integrate nutrition into relevant sector strategies and programmes; (2) positioning nutrition strategically within the health sector at national and provincial levels; (3) delivering | COGTA, DSD, DRDLR, DAFF, DTI, NT, development partners, civil society |

| Policy (title, year) | Lead Department | Strategic Objective | Other Key Departments and Social Partners |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | key nutrition interventions through appropriate action; (4) strengthening the human resources to deliver effective nutrition services; and (5) strengthening the information base for effective nutrition services. | |
| Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Obesity in SA, 2015 - 2020 | DoH | Aimed to reduce the prevalence of obesity by 10% by 2020 – through reforming obesogenic environments and enablers, while enhancing opportunities for increased physical activity and healthy food options in every possible setting, including healthcare facilities, early childhood development centres, schools, workplaces and the community at large. | DBE, DSD, DHA, civil society |
| Strategic Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs[129], 2013 - 2017 | DoH | Aimed to increase healthy eating habits in the population through accessible and affordable healthy foods. Included the development of an integrated communication plan to influence people across the life cycle to make informed food and nutrition decisions. | DAFF, DTI, NT, DBE, DSD, DHA, civil society, development partners |

Abbreviations: *COGTA (Dept. of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs), DAFF (Dept. of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries), DBE (Dept. of Basic Education), DEA (Dept. of Environmental Affairs), DHA (Dept. of Home Affairs), (DoH (Dept. of Health), DPME (Dept. of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation), DRDLR (Dept of Rural Development and Land Reform), DSBD (Dept. of Small Business Development), DSD (Dept. of*

129 The plan was largely informed by the 2011 Brazzaville Declaration on Non-communicable Disease Prevention, in addition to the Control in the Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases; and the South African Declaration on the Prevention and Control of NCDs.

*Social Development), DTI (Dept. of Trade and Industry), DWS (Dept. of Water and Sanitation), NT (National Treasury); StatsSA (Statistics South Africa)*

## 3.2 Methods

The primary research question for this study was: *How is the right to food – and action to achieve the right to food – conceptualised and understood in a "food systems and nutrition" policy and practice context, in South Africa?*

### Study design

A policy analysis was conducted, designed to examine how accountability for realising the right to food could be effectively promoted to the benefit of food and nutrition security in South Africa. This included analysis of policy content as well as in-depth interviews with key stakeholders involved in South Africa's food and nutrition policy sphere – being stakeholders from government sectors relevant to food systems (Health, Agriculture, Trade and Industry, Finance) (n=21), the private sector (n=4), academia (n=10), NGOs (n=11) and farmers (n=2).

This study's analysis draws on the OPERA framework developed by the Centre for Economic and Social Rights (CESR) which triangulates 'Outcomes', 'Policy Efforts' and 'Resources' to make an overall 'Assessment' in holding states accountable for the realisation of socio-economic rights[130],[131]. Effective social and economic policy is crucial for realising socio-economic rights, especially when considering the challenges associated with assessing progressive realisation against maximum available

[130] Significant progress has been made over the last two decades in clarifying the normative content of Article 2(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) – and this has been followed by the development of new methodologies seeking to monitor state compliance with economic, social and cultural rights obligations. In this paper, we acknowledge that there exist a range of new methodologies both qualitative and quantitative which have been developed to monitor the positive obligation to realise socio-economic and cultural rights globally. Each methodology has strengths in measuring a distinct aspect of the obligation but, as yet, no single methodology provides an overall picture of compliance. This analysis is inspired by one overarching analytical framework developed by the international non-governmental organization, the Centre for Economic and Social Rights (CESR).

[131] Centre for Economic and Social Rights. 2012. The OPERA framework. Assessing compliance with the obligation to fulfil economic, social and cultural rights, Economic and Social Rights Monitoring, p5. Available at: https://www.cesr.org/sites/default/files/the.opera .framework.pdf, (Accessed 5/05/20).

resources. Notably, through a policy lens, the obligation to realise a right is concerned with the conduct of the government and not only the results of its conduct. As such, this study acknowledges that looking at the outcomes of government policies alone is insufficient to establish a violation of its obligations. The point of departure for this paper is, thus, to delve into the 'adequacy' of policies relating to the right to food and nutrition.

**Data collection**

In November 2019, 48 semi-structured interviews, each lasting between 40 and 90 minutes, were conducted with key experts involved in South Africa's food and nutrition policy sphere, in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Pretoria and Port Elizabeth (Table 2). Potential interviewees were identified through a desk-based analysis of key stakeholders and snowball sampling. Recruitment was through formal letters of invitation to the heads of departments and organisations.



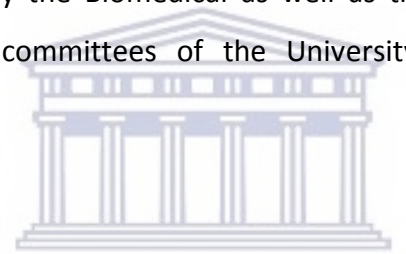
The interview schedule included questions on conceptions of the right to food by different actors; existing policy content and priorities across food system sectors; and opportunities to strengthen action on nutrition. Interviews were recorded and transcribed in full.

Interview data were hand-coded based on pre-determined codes derived from the OPERA framework (outcomes, policy efforts and resources), with additional codes inductively determined, including ideas and/or frames of understanding and political leadership. The coded data were thematically analysed with reference to the primary research question and the study framework. Two themes emerged: the framing and conceptions of the right to food, relevant to human nutrition; and perceptions of the government as the principal duty-bearer for the right to food. The results section is structured around these themes.

**Table 2. Summary of interviewees**

| Jurisdiction (n=48) | Agencies (n=48) | Sector (n=48) |
|---|---|---|
| International (n=1) | Government (n=21) | Agriculture (n=11) |
| National level (n=29) | | |
| Western Cape Province (n=5) | Academia/research | Trade/economics (n=7) |
| Eastern Cape Province (n=10) | (n=10) | |
| City of Cape Town (n=3) | Private sector (n=4) | Public health (n=13) |
| | Farming (n=2) | |
| | Civil society (n=11) | Human rights (n=17) |

The study was approved by the Biomedical as well as the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics committees of the University of the Western Cape (BM18/7/20; HS19/5/33).



### 3.3 Results

#### 3.3.1 The Problem: Understandings of the right to food and its operationalisation in the context of hunger and the double burden of malnutrition

All the interviewees indicated that the content of the 'right to food' and the multiple contributors to poor food access and nutrition in South Africa makes the right to food very difficult to operationalise. In particular, despite the provisions of Section 28 nutrition was not regarded as a right in itself but as an element of health or an outcome of a lack of access to food. Respondents highlighted a range of current policies implemented to address food access, including the school nutrition programme, social grants, and nutrition-focussed policies such as taxation of unhealthy foods (health promotion levy). There was an implicit consensus amongst interviewees that social grants are the main government approach to the problem of food insecurity and malnutrition.

Significantly, discussions on micronutrient supplementation, breastfeeding campaigns and food fortification revealed a limited recognition of a claim to a stand-alone right to nutrition. It appears that the only time a nutrition discourse is amplified is through nutrition-specific and 'siloed' approaches. However, respondents located within academia and civil society were clear that one of the major difficulties is the underlying factors and injustices that give rise to poor nutritional outcomes, and the subsequent challenge of defining policies and programmes that would encompass all the factors that need to be addressed to support both food and nutrition security.

> *"…[T]he human rights lens is so important. But what does it take, you know [to implement]? The Constitution has a lot of teeth but it's justice for some; … it's not justice for the masses."* (Interview 43, Academia, Human Rights)

> *"…[F]rom my perspective, it's very superficial because many of the supporting interventions that they would need to actually implement the food policies [for the right to food], are conflictual, or not there at all."* (Interview 18, Academia, Agriculture)



Interviewees further pointed to the fact that South Africa is food secure at an aggregate, national level but that there is inequitable access to nutritious and healthy diets. Participants from government and academia identified this inequality as reflective of unequal and inadequate access to other socio-economic rights. While the wealthy and the middle classes are able to access an abundance of diverse foodstuffs, working class and poor households rely on cheap, ultra-processed, high fat foods with refined cereals and high salt and sugar levels – if they have access to food at all. This results in a duality, walking a tightrope between avoidance of hunger or micronutrient deficiency and obesity and related NCDs.

Interestingly, it was unclear as to what the perceived normative value of the

codification of the right to food was for those interviewees who were supportive of human rights. They held the view that technically the right to food should be shaping government policy and expenditure but there was no clear mechanism or understanding of how to operationalise it.

> *"Well, the codification of the right to food in Section 27 [of the Bill of Rights] at least provides a framework. It provides a reference point that you can use for an argument, for a motivation, to persuade people that this is not just your own opinion, or a bit of research that you did. It is something that is recognised by the highest level and authority of the government. But obviously the [gap in] translation of what is written in that Constitution – whether it be food or health – and the actual tangible deliveries on the ground is, as you know, enormous and needs a huge amount of effort and time and resources."* (Interview 27, Civil Society, Human Rights)

> *"… [E]very child has the right to basic nutrition, meaning every child must have basic, essential nutrition immediately. Any child that doesn't have that is a violation of the Constitution. So if you were going to spend R100 million, you would prioritise R60 or R70-million of that on children, and that's literally what it means."* **(**Interview 34, Civil Society, Human Right)

Government interviewees highlighted that the National Development Plan (NDP) specifically mentions food security as a goal[132], and that the National Policy for Food and Nutrition Security builds on the NDP in seeking to establish a platform for increasing and better targeting public spending on social programmes that impact the right to food. However, activist scholars interviewed pointed out the larger economic issues necessary for achieving access to food, and particularly how economic growth might translate into improvements in the incomes of the poor and thus their ability to

[132] National Planning Commission. 2011. The Republic of South Africa. National Development Plan 2030. Our future – make it work, p357. Available at: www.npconline.co.za/medialib/downloads/home/NPC%20National%20Development%20Plan%20Vision%202030%20-lo-res.pdf (Accessed 5/05/20)

access nutritious food. This was identified as a critical area for investment. For example, "*[there is] really a very, very poor understanding of the way in which current parts of the system either support people's ability to access food or don't access food"* (Interview 25, Academia, Human Rights). Some respondents emphasised that the issue was access to affordable 'healthy' food, to ensure that the right to food did not simply ensure access to calorie-dense but nutrient-deficient food, with negative health implications.

> *"So if we have a look at policy in this country, it just seems to assume that all of these things are neutral; that people simply buy food and they make particular choices based primarily on their level of nutritional knowledge or lack thereof. And there is this awareness that yes, well, food is expensive and that people can't really afford to buy that much food, but otherwise there really is very, very, very little appreciation for the nuts and bolts that people go through in order to access food. Simple things like the cost of getting from point A to point B; [and] the nature of people's incomes and how that influences food decisions."* (Interview 25, Academia, Human Rights).



Other interviewees highlighted the economic ramifications of undernourished children, as one reason why the current approach – of effectively letting the market address the right to food – is not sufficient. For example:

> *"If children are going to be your future… the first 1000 days of a child's life, is one of the most critical, because that's when those newly developed cells are getting the most nutrition. So in South Africa, the prevalence of stunting amongst young kids is horrific. It's not high, it's horrific."* (Interview 27, Civil Society, Human Rights)

### 3.3.2 Food system transformation: Perceptions of the potential role of the government in achieving the right to food through policy

Overall, the interviewees indicated that more effort is needed in South Africa to align the right to food with the pursuit of food security/sovereignty with nutrition security and improved nutritional outcomes. There was consensus amongst participants that the government's approach to regulating the food system, together with the current perceived role of the state in achieving a nourishing food system for all, is best understood through two key policy responses that seek to address structural causes of food poverty and malnutrition in the country. The two mechanisms through which the state has framed its efforts are expanding employment opportunities and strengthening market competition. Expanding employment opportunities has been seen as the principal remedy for addressing the structural causes of hunger, together with social protection mechanisms such as the child support grant.



> *"So there are these two different ways. There are also destitute people, that's why they provide food parcels, social relief programmes; we address that as the government. And there's free food in early childhood development centres; and then also the Social Development Department has got what we call crisis developments, where they provide food to destitute people, people on the streets."* (Interview 2, Government, Public Health)

> *"So if government were, for example just to give out free formula in clinics and so on, that's important, but I don't think it should allow us to be distracted from the fact that parents can't feed their children in the first place, through proper food rather than just formulas and stuff."* **(**Interview 17, Academia, Human Rights)

The second mechanism, strengthening market competition, has been through, for example, enforcing competition policy and expanding state procurement from small-

scale suppliers in food retailing. Activists and human rights defenders located within the country's civil society sphere have called for action against the entrenchment of oligopolies throughout the food production, value and retail chains post-1994. While apartheid-era oligopolies in food production, value and retail chains have further continued to dominate the market to the detriment of smaller, independent and co-operative producers, consumers have also suffered.

> *"A lot of forward-planners have been very much anti-malls, anti big-corporations and anti-big marts, particularly from a land use perspective. And the main reason is because it's been so destructive on what we call micro land uses and destructive on small towns, destructive of main street operations – destructive and undermining small-scale operators."* (Interview 24, Government, Agriculture)

In South Africa however, social development policies have become conceptually delinked from not only one another, but food and nutrition security as a whole. During dialogues the contrast was between the majority of interviewees who framed the issue as technical and specific, and the few who argued that systemic change is needed. For example, a government respondent had the following to share:

> *"… we have to take seriously the idea that we have an entire food system that is failing. So our response isn't feeding more children. Our response is saying we're all suffering because of a food system that isn't working. So our children are an expression of our failure; they will tell us whether we're doing better or worse, but that doesn't mean that they are the be-all and end-all. They are the canary in the gold mine that is lying on its back."* (Interview 13, Government, Human Rights (Human Development))

Technical fixes alone will not solve the food security challenge and adapting to future demands and stresses requires an integrated food system approach. A few

interviewees located in academia emphasised this point by arguing that a food system that works for the whole country must be anchored in resilient livelihoods that are underpinned by comprehensive and sustainable approaches, with strong linkages between social development sectors such as agriculture and health.

The majority of interviewees noted that the food security and nutrition programmes that have done well with regards to accountability and budget expenditure have had clear objectives and have been housed within a single department; for example, the Department of Basic Education's (DBE) school feeding scheme. In addressing the perceived role of the government in achieving the right to food and nutrition, however, some respondents from academia indicated that although production shortages are not a driver of hunger at the level of national aggregate, the production of food by households who are food insecure, either for their own consumption or for sale, could contribute to increasing the volume and reliability of consumption, dietary quality, or increase household incomes.



Government participants also highlighted the multiple benefits of policy to support access to locally produced food – which would also support nutritional goals in terms of supporting access to fresh, minimally processed foods:

> *"We need to transform the manner in which our communities are able to meet their food needs…. I think we need to build policies that say people have capacities to use their natural assets to produce the food they need.* (Interview 26, Government, Human Rights (Social Development))

Regrettably, respondents from academia also revealed that in its efforts to realise the right to food, government has focussed its rhetoric nearly exclusively on one specific long-term structural element of food insecurity, namely land reform and access to food production capital. This has framed many initiatives around small-scale farmers

who constitute a very important but small segment of the right to food issue. These interventions/initiatives have happened at the exclusion of many other segments of the population, most notably the urban poor, whose access to food is dependent solely on their purchasing power. A fine balance is thus required between policies that influence and support producer supply, including rural infrastructure and agricultural research and development, but also target consumer demand and influence consumer access to safe, healthy and affordable food.

Nevertheless, an indication of where a government's priorities lie is best traced through its budget allocation measures and its prioritisation of social safety nets. Delving into this, respondents shared the following:

> *"You definitely wouldn't say the right to food is a priority in the budget. It doesn't stand out as having any level of priority in the budget… It's hard to see what the overall contribution of the budget is. You'd have to trace every food-related programme and then add it all up to see what it adds up to – and see if that makes any sense, or if it's even possible."* (Interview 34, Civil Society, Human Rights)

> *"I don't know that the social grant system was primarily motivated by anything to do with the right to food. I think what we had in South Africa was that we always had a pension grant and a disability grant in South Africa, but it was only for White people. So one of the first things the government wanted to do was to extend the pension grant to Black pensioners as well, and then the disability grant as well... I don't think that people said that it is specifically a strategy to address food insecurity."* (Interview 25, Academia, Human Rights)

Short of tracing the food-related budget items across various sectors, it is difficult to determine if, overall, the current policy landscape in the country supports or hinders local food production.

In discussing what it would take to achieve the right to food in practice, interviewees emphasised the need for a legislative framework to properly govern the country's food value chain. This would need a strong political commitment to addressing the double-burden of food insecurity and malnutrition and would require the design and implementation of comprehensive and effective national policy and programmes based on a sound situational-analysis:

> *"When we say that the state is the principal duty bearer, there are responsibilities in these duties to obey the law, to comply with the law, to ensure the fulfilment or the implementation of the international law or the Constitution… So I think government has some share of blame, and I also think civil society to my mind also has to share blame. We are not being active enough... we are not being progressive enough in terms of taking matters to court on the right to food. Locally, there's a dearth of case law on the right to food. We don't see much case law on the right to food. What is happening?"* (Interview 36, Academia, Human Rights)

> *"The state has, in various areas like education, set norms and standards which it couldn't comply with after setting them. So if you had to say you must set norms and standards for food security and nutrition and the state must ensure that these are funded with adequate provision for everybody… That explains why there has not been much traction for the piece of legislation we are talking about [need for right to food legislation]; because government people are asking why should we tie ourselves in tight corners? Why should we keep tying ourselves in loops... How can we reform the resource allocation formula of National Treasury in such a way that there is a dedicated allocation for food security and for nutrition which is given to various municipalities and people are held accountable? This is where you make the*

*state deliver, not where you say the state must develop legislation which we are going to use tomorrow to take the state to the Constitutional Court."* (Interview 32, Government, Human Rights (Monitoring and Evaluation))

### 3.3 Discussion

This study indicates that the perspectives of research participants reveal that policies in South Africa tend to largely frame food and nutrition security and nutritional wellbeing from the perspective of malnutrition as a health outcome[133]. This includes micronutrient deficiencies; undernutrition; and diet-related NCDs. In other words, nutrition is simply viewed as an immediate outcome of inadequate intake and disease. The underlying and basic causes of malnutrition, as depicted in the well-known UNICEF conceptual framework on malnutrition[134], are often neglected or ignored.

Generally speaking, some participants appear to have been concerned with a focus on the technical/superficial aspects of the right to food/nutrition debate, when the problem is the country's entire food system. The inherent injustices, including the location of power with big food industries and not with people, mean that a holistic approach to interpreting rights is needed in South Africa. This would entail identifying how various forms of social injustice overlap and interact with each other to create new forms of disadvantage and marginalisation for those at the bottom of the pyramid.



The role of the state in achieving the right to food through policy will only be realised when there is a benevolent government, prepared to do more, not less, to eradicate hunger – because hunger is about justice, not charity South Africa has strong legal institutions and practices, and socioeconomic policies that support public

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133 Thow, A. M., Greenberg, S., Hara, M., Friel, S., duToit, A. & Sanders, D. 2018. Improving Policy Coherence for Food and nutrition security and Nutrition in South Africa: A Qualitative Policy Analysis. *Food security* 10: 1-26. Available at: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs12571-018-0813-4 (Accessed 02/07/20).

134 See: Lenters, L., Wazny, K., & Bhutta, Z.A. 2016. Management of Severe and Moderate Acute Malnutrition in Children. *In* Black, R.E., Laxminarayan. R., Temmerman, M., et al., (eds.). 2016. Conceptual Framework of Determinants of Undernutrition. Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health: Disease Control Priorities, Third Edition (Vol 2). Washington (DC): The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank; Apr 5. Figure 11.1. Available at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK361900/figure/part2.ch11.sec1.fig1/ (Accessed 21/05/20)

provisioning, but has adopted a minimalist approach in regulating the food value chain and supporting local production and employment. As a result, a few corporations have accrued massive power both upstream and downstream, as well as in agriculture itself.[135] While these arrangements are often justified in terms of their cost efficiency, they also involve significant social costs paid by poor consumers.

The minimalist role of the state in the case of the right to food is also evident when compared to other socio-economic rights. This is because the realisation of the right to food relies on economic policies, among others, and cannot be sustainably met through public provisioning when the level of food insecurity is so widespread and its roots and nature are systemic.

The human rights framework utilised herein exposes the need for alternative governance arrangements in South Africa that allow for critical reflexivity, shared learning experiences and constructive evaluation of progress in re-visioning the entire food system. This reflects other findings driven by scholars like Drimie and Pereira and others working on food system governance issues and arrangements[136]. Juxtaposed with the food sovereignty paradigm, a human rights approach also offers a vital link between established and successful initiatives and emerging food and nutrition policy interventions, including strengthening accountability (see chapter 2).

As the critique of conventional market-based approaches to the right to food and nutrition become more mainstream, following the convergence of economic, social and environmental crises, it is possible that the food sovereignty discourse may emerge as capable of uniting various segments involved in the realisation of the right

[135] Greenberg, S. 2017. Corporate power in the agro-food system and the consumer food environment in South Africa. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 44 (2): 467-496, DOI: 10.1080/03066150.2016.1259223

[136] See: Pereira, L. & Drimie, S. 2016. Governance Arrangements for the Future Food System: Addressing Complexity in South Africa, *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development* 58 (4): 18-31. DOI: 10.1080/00139157.2016.1186438

to food and nutrition. There is generally a low level of understanding in the country when it comes to a human rights based framework in shaping food and nutrition policy. Politicising malnutrition will include shifting the conversation around food insecurity from a focus on agricultural production to looking at access to sufficient nutritious food. The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) emphasises that the key is to shift the food system from a focus on production to a focus on consumption, empowering those marginalised in the system and supporting diverse distribution efforts[137],[138].

Rather than problematising the ways in which food is produced and distributed as a violation of the right to food, food security policy and planning in South Africa is dominated by discourses of scarcity and production. The findings of this study have underlined that the uneven stakeholder relationships that are at the foundation of the persistence and deepening of hunger and malnutrition, past, present and future, are obscured by the way in which approaches to addressing food scarcity in particular are operationalised in various policy documents, such as the NDP. "Constitutionally speaking, 'access' to food is not sufficient. People also need access to productive resources and, most importantly, to power that enables them to challenge existing social and economic relations – establishing an alternative path rooted in food sovereignty[139]."

More importantly, this approach would provide an opportunity to interrogate the gap

[137] Distressingly, in the absence of a credible and coherent approach to addressing hunger and the double burden of malnutrition that would operationalise the right to food, South African food exported to other African countries is assumed to be good, despite there being no review board that 'approves' new products. In short, South Africa is exporting its unhealthy food system to the rest of the continent, undisturbed.

[138] Welsh, T. 2020. 'Radical Transformation': COVID-19 shows urgency for food systems policy shifts, Inside Development: Food and Nutrition. DEVEX. Available at: https://www.devex.com/news/radical-transformation-covid-19-shows-urgency-for-food-systems-policy-shifts-97579 (Accessed 02/07/20)

[139] Moyo, B. 2015. South Africa's new food and nutrition policy fails to address constitutional right to food. South African Civil Society Information Service (SACSIS). https://www.polity.org.za/article/south-africas-new-food-and-nutrition-policy-fails-to-address-constitutional-right-to-food-2015-02-27 (Accessed 02/02/22)

that exists in understanding food governance processes in South African cities, in particular how these processes intersect with a wider discourse on food system change. Crucially, equity is about engaging the multiple prisms of the food question and seeing how it can be forced onto the political agenda, especially when dealing with nutritional poverty in urban areas.

There is currently insufficient monitoring of the food programmes being provided by government, which means that the performance of these programmes in combating the double burden of food insecurity and malnutrition is unclear. At present, land reform and improving the agricultural sector appear to be the main focus of the government and there is no mention of the importance of a broader transformation of South Africa's food system.



It will be important for defenders of the right to food to confront the fact that the country's food system is depicted as ending with the production of food, rather than seeing production as just the beginning of the process that ultimately must ensure the nutrition of consumers, the nourishment of the nation. In the spirit of embracing a human rights based framework with regard to food systems transformation, the supply chains must be re-designed with nutrition and human health in mind. This can begin by supporting local systems with shorter, fairer and cleaner food value chains that address local priorities. To approach food systems transformation holistically, policy makers in particular must democratise planning and invite all actors working in, and alongside, food systems to be part of the effort.

### 3.4 Conclusion

The codification of the right to food and nutrition in sections 27 and 28 of the South African Constitution is yet to be mobilised to create a credible normative and legal foundation for addressing the double burden of food insecurity and malnutrition. A

myriad of factors including a lack of government interest, poverty and misallocation of resources keeps the full potential of a nourishing food system from being realised.

This study examined opportunities to transform the discourse on the right to food in South Africa into practical policies and programmes that can address the double burden of malnutrition. Drawing on a human rights framework[140], we propose that a combination of violation-based and dialogue-based [141] approaches is needed to overcome barriers to the implementation of the right to food in the country and to address different obligations of the government. This study indicates the need for the South African government to urgently reflect on its responsibility – its constitutional obligations – to the most vulnerable members of our society. Additionally, business also has obligations to respect, protect and, in the case of violations, provide remedies for the realisation of human rights. There is an opportunity for a reframing of 'access to sufficient food' as food justice, and for placing increased attention on social dimensions of existing food policies, including making nutrition outcomes more visible. There is also a need to advocate for a human rights based framework to address South Africa's double burden of food insecurity and malnutrition so that politicians in particular will increasingly be held to account if they choose not to act in the interests of promoting full access to nutritious food for all.



[140] See: Inter-Parliamentary Union. 2016. Human Rights: Handbook for Parliamentarians No. 26, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations. Available at: https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/handbooks/2016-07/human-rights-handbook-parliamentarians (Accessed 5/05/20)

[141] The dialogue-based approach does not take violations but non-realization of the right to food as the starting point. Elsewhere, it's been argued that institutionalized networks or alliances are needed of government officials, legal experts and civil society lobbyists to find creative and context-specific solutions and to implement the right to food at the national level on a step-by-step basis.

**CHAPTER 4: Summary**

*Malnutrition is not a clinical condition but a political outcome*. – **Prof. David Sanders.**

This chapter delves into how ideas spread through networks of intellectuals, public officials, activists and politicians on their way to institutional uptake in South Africa. As such, policy discourse and discourse analysis are employed in this paper as part of my political economy analysis, which enables me to get beneath the formal structures of the food value chain and reveal the underlying interests, incentives and institutions that enable or frustrate change in the country. Such insights are important if we are to advance challenging agendas around governance, economic growth and social development, which experience has shown do not lend themselves to technical solutions alone.

The expansion geographical scale and complexity of food systems, in the power of food corporations relative to nation states, and in the international rules governing national food economies has diminished the power of governments to influence food system activities, both within and beyond their territorial borders. With this in mind, key-expert interviews and desktop research were conducted in responding to the question of what are the characteristics of policy and politics in South Africa, with reference to the multiple burden of malnutrition? (Including the interface with economic and social factors). By conducting in-depth interviews with stakeholders in public, private and civil society sectors and also making extensive use of existing literature, I was able to review the nature and extent of the politics of malnutrition, the 'political-economic' causes of insufficient entitlements to food and the socio-cultural sources of nutritional deprivation; plus the mechanisms through which the right to food is supposed to be guaranteed by the South African government. Interestingly, delving into how 'political-economics' of food production and distribution operate, and socio-cultural issues of defining who has membership in the community and what constitutes adequate food, complicate basic human rights questions.

**Chapter 4: Understanding the characteristics and dynamics of the policy subsystem relevant for nutrition (governance) in South Africa.**

**Abstract**

*Objective*: This paper describes power and governance arrangements in food and nutrition policy formulation and agenda setting in South Africa while at the same time it zones-in on opportunities to increase consideration of the double-burden of malnutrition.

*Design*: We conducted a policy analysis, including analysis of policy content and in-depth interviews. Data collection focussed on: existing policy content and priorities across food system sectors; institutional structures for cross-sectoral and external stakeholder engagement; exercise of power in relation to food system policies; and opportunities to strengthen action on nutrition. Analytical frameworks focussed on power analysis underpinned the research.

*Results*: In a human rights framework, the violation of the right to food is a reflection of power relations as much as biological or behavioural factors. This paper uses the call for transformation in South Africa's food system as an entry point to examine the power dynamics involved in shaping the food and nutrition planning agenda that is inadvertently generating a food system that undermines the right to food. The argument is that politics and power are equally important in the direction of policy processes – however, policy is only one lever in a food systems approach and should not be seen as singularly important in eliciting change.

*Conclusion*: Existing policies have not established the mechanisms required to underpin policy alignment and coordination for addressing the double-burden of malnutrition. The institutional framework surrounding South African food policy is fragmented between different policy domains and centres of power.

**Keywords**: right to food, self-determination, power, governance, malnutrition, double burden, framework, South Africa, malnutrition, double burden.

## 4.1 Introduction

Agenda 2030 of the United Nations treats nation states as ultimately accountable for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); this is driven by the fact that the state is conventionally seen as the locus of political power. Yet when it comes to food and nutrition issues, the observable realities of the food system and its SDG priorities point to contradictory influences on the power of states within the global food system. Current food systems have many failings; and the failure to foster good nutrition globally has become increasingly obvious[142].

For nutrition particularly, creating transparency around reconciling the different interests of public and private sectors regarding food systems remains elusive[143]. Current global food system governance does not reflect the interests of the most vulnerable populations in society, but instead is tailored to the interests of elites and corporations[144]. As such, responding to the multiple burden of malnutrition and systemic right to food violations will require a reorientation of food system governance[145,146]. Food and nutrition policy challenges can be characterized as 'wicked' problems, emphasizing both the multidimensionality of the underlying problems, conflicting interests and unforeseen consequences in solving them.



[142] HLPE. 2020. Food security and nutrition: building a global narrative towards 2030. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome.

[143] Ibid

[144] See: Walls, H., Nisbett, N., Laar, A., Drimie, S., Zaidi, S. & Harris, J. 2020. Addressing malnutrition: the importance of political economy analysis of power. *Int J Health Policy Manag* x(x):x–x. doi:10.34172/ijhpm.2020.250; & Pereira, L. and Drimie, S. 2016. Governance arrangements for the future food system: Addressing complexity in South Africa. *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development* 58 (4): 18–31.

[145] Brunner, R., Steelman, T., Coe-Juell, L., Cromley, C., Edwards, C. & Tucker, D. 2005. Adaptive Governance: Integrating Science, Policy, and Decision Making. New York, Columbia University Press. &; Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition. 2018. Improving diets in an era of food market transformation: Challenges and opportunities for engagement between the public and private sectors. Policy Brief No. 11..

[146] An analytical concept of governance reflects the "range of political, organisational, and administrative processes through which stakeholders (including citizens and interest groups) articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, take decisions, meet their obligations, and mediate their differences (UNDP)."

A food systems approach clarifies that food cannot be dealt with appropriately when approached in the fragmented way that the institutional architecture of prevailing food governance encourages. This is because the food system involves many interacting subsystems and is at the confluence of other systems, meaning it cannot be reduced to narrow problem frames that do not address system intricacies. Candel (2014) argues that the food governance system should be made more coherent and harmonized, better integrated and coordinated, and more inclusive[147].

Responding to everyday hunger, the dual burden of malnutrition and the longer-term health effects of food poverty in South Africa thus calls for a re-think of the political and economic forces that have created food environments that leave many eking out an existence on cheap, unhealthy foods[148]. However before this can be achieved, more conceptual clarity of improved governance in the nutrition sector is required, including what it should entail and how it can be implemented and operationalized. Although no individual agency can be truly expected to take responsibility for the entire food system, the way food systems are framed as a policy issue through particular discourses, determines the policies and interventions favoured by the state to remedy the situation[149]. Adopting a political lens raises questions of power and influence in the food system, enabling analysis of the influence of dominant actors on food and nutrition policy[150]. To re-design food systems for better food and nutrition security outcomes, we need to understand the in-built tendency for powerful actors in the system to control the narrative framings that shape policy design. These narratives push back on attempted changes and thus maintain the status quo[151]. An

[147] Candel, J.J.L. 2014. Food security governance: a systematic literature review, Food Security 6 (4): 585-601.
[148] See: Claasen, N., van der Hoeven, M., & Covic, N. 2016. Food environments, health and nutrition in South Africa, Working Paper 34. Cape Town: PLAAS, UWC and Centre of Excellence on Food Security. &; Moyo, B. and Thow, A.N. 2020. Fulfilling the Right to Food for South Africa: Justice, Security, Sovereignty and the Politics of Malnutrition. *World Nutrition* 11 (3).
[149] Bene, C. et al. 2019. When food systems meet sustainability – Current narratives and implications for actions. *World Development* 113: 116-130.
[150] Pinstrup-Andersen, P. & Watson II, D.D. 2011. Food policy for developing countries: The role of government in global, national and local food systems. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
[151] Swinburn, B. 2019. Power Dynamics in the 21st-Century Food Systems. Commentary. *Nutrients* 11 (10): 2544. https://doi.org/10.3390/nu11102544

analysis of food systems must therefore include power as an aspect of political economy, in order to understand how power relations have developed and in-turn affected different food system actors[152].

At present, there is overwhelming evidence that the national food system in South Africa is in crisis[153]. Food and nutrition insecurity is a serious problem. At the time of writing, the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have seen food insecurity rates rise, with more than 40% of the population classified as food insecure in 2020[154]. At the same time, in the words of Stephen Greenberg (2016) "the increasing consolidation of the food value chain, both vertically and horizontally, acts as a contradictory force to the equitable distribution of power and profit within the food system[155]." Additionally, according to Drimie and Perreira (2016), "the spread of big retail food chains and fast food has also had an impact, increasing the availability of processed, high-energy, nutrient-poor foods, making them more affordable than fresh, healthy food[156]." This situation is further confounded by an agrarian system that remains "highly dualistic - with a commercial farming sector producing most of the food, juxtaposed against a large number of smallholder and subsistence farmers that remain marginalized from the dominant system[157]." The power of dominant actors is



[152] See: Anderson, A., Nisbett, N., Clement, C. & Harris, J. 2019. Introduction: Valuing Different Perspectives on Power in the Food System. *IDS Bulletin* 50 (2); Clapp, J. 2016. Food, 2nd ed., Cambridge: Polity Press; Howard, P.H. 2016. Concentration and Power in the Food System: Who Controls What We Eat?, New York NY: Bloomsbury Publishing; Andrée, P., Clark, J.K., Levkoe, C.Z. & Lowitt, K (eds). 2019. Civil Society and Social Movements in Food System Governance, Abingdon and New York NY: Routledge. &; Barling, D. and Duncan, J. 2015. The Dynamics of the Contemporary Governance of the World's Food Supply and the Challenges of Policy Redirection, *Food Security* 7(2): 415-424.

[153] Pereira, L. & Drimie, S. 2016. Governance arrangements for the future food system: addressing complexity in South Africa. *Environ. Sci. Policy Sustain. Dev*. 58: 18–31. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00139157.2016.1186438.

[154] Bridgman, G., van der Berg, S. & Patel, L. 2020. Hunger in South Africa during 2020: Results from Wave 2 of NIDS-CRAM, Working Papers 25/2020, Stellenbosch University, Department of Economics.

[155] Greenberg, S. 2016. Corporate Power in the Agrofood System and South Africa's Consumer Food Environment. Working Paper 32. Cape Town: PLAAS, UWC and Centre of Excellence on Food Security.

[156] Drimie, S. & Pereira, L. 2016. Advances in Food Security and Sustainability in South Africa. *In* Barling, D (ed), *Advances in Food Security and Sustainability* (Vol 1), Burlington: Academic Press, pp.1-31.

[157] Ibid & National Planning Commission (NPC). 2012. National Development Plan Chapter 6: An Integrated and Inclusive Rural Economy. The Presidency, Pretoria, South Africa.

often uninterrogated and reinforced in food and nutrition policy design[158]. This paper presents an analysis of nutrition governance in light of South Africa's commitment to fulfil the right to food and address the multiple burden of malnutrition[159]. In particular, this paper delves into the South African experience looking at the need for food system transformation which involves shifting power relations away from dominant actors who reinforce the embedded inequities and lock-ins that keep current unsatisfactory systems in place.

### 4.2 Methods

#### Study design

Building on the theoretical framing, this study used policy analysis methods to address the primary research question: *What are the characteristics of policy and politics in South Africa, with reference to the multiple burden of malnutrition? (Including the interface with economic and social factors).* We conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews (*n* = 48) with key actors engaged-in South Africa's food and nutrition policy sphere to obtain data.



#### Theoretical framing

We draw on Clapp and Fuch's (2009) conceptions of power for research on global food and agriculture governance, which lays out instrumental, discursive and structural power, as an adaptation of Lukes' (2005) 'three faces' of power[160]. These dimensions of power are often mutually reinforcing – discursive power enables the development, deployment and maintenance of structural and instrumental power. Instrumental

[158] Thow, A.M., Greenberg, S., Hara, M. *et al.* 2018. Improving policy coherence for food security and nutrition in South Africa: a qualitative policy analysis. *Food Sec.* 10**:** 1105–1130. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12571-018-0813-4

[159] See: National Policy for Food and Nutrition Security. Available at:

https://www.gov.za/documents/national-policy-food-and-nutrition-security-south-africa

[160] Clapp, J. & Fuchs, D.A. 2009. Corporate Power in global agrifood governance. Cambridge, MA: MIT

power involves wielding influence over others through direct action, fuelled, in part, by the use of resources[161]. Discursive power includes "controlling discourse, developing or challenging narratives, and establishing new norms[162]" whereas structural power is about defining the scope and institutional structures in which decisions are made (setting agendas and legitimizing participation)[163]. Additionally, power is also conceptualised as embedded-in and operating through institutional arrangements, or the "rules of the game[164]", both in visible and hidden ways[165]. It is of utmost importance that we seek to understand the power (im)balances between food systems stakeholders, the (dis)connections between formal and informal systems, and the critical role of women, youth and marginalised groups in food systems.

Building on the work of Foucault and his interlocutors (e.g Dean, 2010; Andree, 2007), Torangeau (2017) notes that there is another type of power not accounted for in Clapp and Fuchs' (2009) framework that goes beyond the focus on the conscious deployment of power by actors[166]. And this is where this research fails to use Clapp and Fuchs outlook in its entirety for a clearer power analysis in the South African food system, because in-tune with Torangeau, I am of the view that their framework falls short when looking into the constitutive power of norms and discourses, which have no immediate power source but rather permeate the governance environment as a result of previous power relations[167]. Examples of constitutive power include the inherent legitimacy accorded to some ontological or epistemological understandings over others[168]. In governance conflicts particularly, constitutive power can be critically

[161] Clark, J.K., Lowitt, K., Levkoe, C.Z. *et al.* 2021. The power to convene: making sense of the power of food movement organizations in governance processes in the Global North. *Agric Hum Values* 38, 175–191. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-020-10146-1
[162] Loc cit
[163] Ibid
[164] North, D.C. 1991. Institutions. *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 5(1): 97-112.
[165] Gaventa, J. 2006. Finding a space for change: A power analysis. *IDS Bulletin* 37 (6): 22-33.
[166] Torangeau, W. 2017. GMO doublespeak: an analysis of power and discourse in Canadian debates over agricultural biotechnology. Canadian Food Studies, 4(1), 108–138.
[167] Ibid
[168] Andree, P., Clark, J., Levkoe, C., Lowitt, K. & Johnston, C. 2019. Book Chapter: The governance engagement continuum. Civil Society and Social Movements in Food System Governance. Routledge. 10.4324/9780429503597-2.

important by, for example, according legitimacy to the knowledge of scientifically trained "experts" over the traditional knowledge of Indigenous peoples, fisherfolk, or farmers. Consequently, Gaventa's (2005, 2007) power cube assists me in offering depth to our understanding of power in relation to food and nutrition governance. Composed of the interrelated dimensions of spaces, levels, and forms, the power cube considers "how spaces for engagement are created, the levels of power (from local to global), as well as different forms of power across them[169]." The power cube has been used in a range of political settings and sectors by activists and researchers to map out power dynamics and identify possible avenues for social change and transformative action.

Discourses encapsulate multiple perspectives that locate power more firmly in ideas, rather than people, systems or institutions, and see power exercised through the ability to construct or control the framing or narratives around food insecurity and concerns regarding malnutrition in all its forms[170]. Notably, Foucauldian perspectives particularly emphasise the mutual embedding of power and knowledge in discourse[171]. Significantly, the concept of 'discourse' as underlying social action has been applied to the field of socioeconomic development and policymaking[172]; with scholars noting that "studying discourses can reveal power relationships in society as expressed through language and practices[173]."

To address the social dynamics more explicitly, we integrate concepts of social capital, which plays a critical role in the connection of people, the sharing of practices, and

[169] Gaventa, J. 2005. Reflections on the uses of the 'power cube' approach for analysing the spaces, places and dynamics of civil society participation and engagement. Participatory Methods, p6. https://www.particpatorymethods.org/sites/participatorymethods.org/files/reflections_on_uses_powercube.pdf

[170] Leach, M., Nisbett, N., Cabral, L., Harris, J., Hossain, N. & Thompson, J. 2020. Food politics and development. *World Development* 134. 105024. 10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105024.

[171] Foucault, M. 2012. Discipline and punish: The birth of prison. Vintage.

[172] Mosse, D. 2004. Cultivating Development: An ethnography of aid policy and practice. London: Pluto Press.

[173] Leach, M., Nisbett, N., Cabral, L., Harris, J., Hossain, N. & Thompson, J. 2020. Food politics and development. *World Development* 134. 105024. 10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105024.

the nature of mutual cooperation[174]. As such, the value of social capital can be assessed through the "networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit [in the food system][175]." The most common distinction established when discussing social capital is between bridging, bonding and linking. Putnam (2000) suggests that bonding social capital is good for 'getting by' and bridging is crucial for 'getting ahead' whereas linking is characterised by relations between those within a hierarchy where there are differing levels of power[176].

**Data collection**

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with 48 participants in order to collect data. Each interview was conducted in English lasting on average between 40 to 90 minutes, with key experts and professionals involved in South Africa's food and nutrition policy sphere, in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Pretoria and Port Elizabeth (**Table 3** – same data set as the previous chapter). Interviews were conducted in November 2019. Initial interviewees were identified through desktop research into key stakeholders in the food system, and further relied on snowball sampling. Participants were recruited through formal letters of invitation to heads of departments and organisations. The interview schedule consisted of a series of key, pre-identified themes with accompanying questions and prompts to allow for open discussions during dialogues, while ensuring all key research questions were covered. Questions included conceptions of the right to food by different actors; existing policy content and priorities across food system sectors; and opportunities to strengthen action on nutrition. Interviews were recorded (with permission) and transcribed in full. This study was approved by the Biomedical as well as the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape (BM18/7/20; HS19/5/33).

[174] Brauer, K. 2010. Social Capital, Definition of. *In*: Anheier, H.K. & Toepler, S. (eds). International Encyclopedia of Civil Society. Springer, New York, NY. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-93996-4_130
[175] Brauer, K. 2010. Social Capital, Definition of. *In*: Anheier, H.K. & Toepler, S. (eds). International Encyclopedia of Civil Society. Springer, New York, NY. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-93996-4_130
[176] Putnam, R.D. 2000. Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community. New York: Simon and Schuster.

**Data analysis**

The first author used NVIVO™ software to conduct thematic analysis. After familiarisation with the raw data, interview transcripts were imported to NVIVO and coded inductively and deductively. The codes and emergent themes were reviewed iteratively during the coding process by two other authors. Codes included:

1) discourses on food system governance (nourishing, priorities & possibilities),
2) the political economic context (social capital) and,
3) understanding spaces and forms of power (power types).

Data on nodes, code groups and quotations were exported onto Microsoft Word documents and documented in the results section that follows. Thematic analysis of the coded data was done with reference to the primary research question and the study framework. The first author led the analysis, in consultation with co-authors.



**Table 3: Summary of interviewees**

| Jurisdiction (n=48) | Agencies (n=48) | Sector (n=48) |
|---|---|---|
| National level (n=30) | Government (n=21) | Agriculture (n=11) |
| Western Cape Province (n=5) | Academia/research (n=10) | Trade/economics (n=7) |
| Eastern Cape Province (n=10) | | |
| City of Cape Town (n=3) | Private sector (n=4)[177] | Public health (n=13) |
| | Farming (n=2) | |
| | Civil society (n=11) | Human rights (n=17) |

[177] Private sector respondents were drawn from an industry association that represents Retail and Manufacturing member companies in South Africa and directly from two of the largest food corporations in the country.

## 4.3 Results

### Overview of findings

This analysis indicates that power in nutrition governance lies in the neo-liberal framing of the economy and society, which is driven by political and economic elites. Different views and interpretations prevail amongst experts about the nature of food and nutrition governance in South Africa, and consequently about the research and policies needed to address food system failings. We conclude that the characteristics and dynamics of the policy subsystem relevant for nutrition reveal that the concept of nutrition governance in particular, although widely embraced, remains poorly defined, and applied in different ways and usually based on a relatively narrow interpretation, limiting policy coherence and coordination.



### 4.3.1 Power differentials influencing current governance structures

#### a) Spaces where relevant decisions are made and power is exercised



Given the state of the South African food system and several powerful trends that seem set to continue, there is a high level of urgency required for change. It is almost a tired cliché to point that the country's food system is not shaped in the interests of the poor because their voices and perspectives are not present in many fora – parliament, board rooms, governing bodies, conferences and negotiations – which shape the food system. Without addressing politics, power and inclusion in the governance of South Africa's food system, policy reforms and investments in the food system risk deepening existing inequalities and worsen current food system challenges.

> *I don't know whether it's because of power relations or resources and so on, government just keeps swinging the corporate way… it's the big food that has government's ear, and civil society is virtually not there at all. – [Interview 17, Academia, Human Rights]*

*It takes a form that we cannot see. Let's just be very clear about that. Those things go on behind closed doors... at the end of the day they made their decision behind closed doors; when they published the results they said this is confidential... – [Interview 19, Civil Society, Human Rights]*

Interviewees from the health sector in particular noted that the primary accountability lever for the government to hold the food industry to account is through legal mechanisms that would prevent recent dramatic episodes of food borne disease accidents and outbreaks (which have raised concerns about the effectiveness of current food control systems in protecting the consumers). It is this strength of the legal levers that explains why public health experts globally consistently call for a regulatory approach to improve the healthiness of food environments[178], especially where existing deregulated conditions have created market failures, such as with stunting in children and obesity amongst adults in South Africa.

*I think our government policy around protection of the consumer - if we start there - around the health of the consumer and around ensuring that the consumer gets what they pay for, I think the intent behind all government policy is actually very good. I believe that we can be measured up and compared with some of the best in the world, and I think particularly because we do take our lead from the international benchmarks. I know that there's a strong referencing to the EFSA (European Food Safety Authority) and we also have strong referencing to CODEX that set the standards for food, and I believe that our Department of Health has the best interests of the public at heart. – [Interview 22, Private Sector, Trade]*

Our interviewees in the private sector indicated a preference for industry self-regulation and voluntary public-private partnerships, rather than mandatory

[178] See: Swinburn, B., Kraak, V., Rutter, H., Vandevijvere, S., Lobstein, T., Sacks, G., Gomes, F., Marsh, Tim. & Magnusson, R. 2015. Strengthening of accountability systems to create healthy food environments and reduce global obesity. The Lancet. 385. 10.1016/S0140-6736(14)61747-5.

regulations on the part of the state. This is a core aspect of laissez-faire neoliberal 'governmentalities' that most respondents found frustrating. Allowing corporations to set their own standards, has so far translated into further regression of the right to food and nutrition. Alongside, even while introducing some initiatives designed to improve product quality like the health promotion levy (HPL) in South Africa or to regulate front-of-pack labelling, government policies continue to enable the food industry to market their products with exaggerated or essentially misleading nutrient and health claims[179].

Respondents from civil society pointed out that one way in which we can identify who is running the system is by looking at who is accumulating the greatest benefit from it. There is a small group of companies that regularly report not just profits, but growing profits. These profits, when contrasted against the losses of both farmers and consumers serve as a proxy for the power of the food industry in the governance of the South African food system. Respondents identified the need to consider the influence of corporations in structuring consumer perceptions on food quality and health. A few large corporations currently dominate the agricultural sector and the production, distribution, processing and marketing of food and its subsequent products



> *… the big manufacturers who are actually sitting in the room… they're people that pay to be part of these discussions, just to find out about regulation – [Interview 39, Private Sector, Public Health]*

**b) Perceptions of who holds power and whose interests are represented**

With respect to how power dynamics emerge in the food value chain, and how they perpetuate food systems that favour dominant powerful actors, government

[179] See: Gonzalez, L. 2022. Here's why you should care about the food industry lobbying the health department behind closed doors. *Daily Maverick***.** 30 May. https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-05-30-heres-why-you-should-care-about-the-food-industry-lobbying-the-health-department-behind-closed-doors/

interviewees believed that government is central to the food system transformation agenda since it holds the main lever of decision-making power (i.e. authoritative or institutional power). However, what also emerged from the interviews is a sense that the state is unlikely to act towards food systems transformation in the absence of visible support and pressure from other actors because the interests maintaining the status quo are too strong and government appears to lack capacity.

> *I think we are asking the wrong questions to say what do we need to elevate nutrition to a higher level? As far as I am concerned, it is elevated… People have given us the ball and we are dropping it… we, the people who should be doing [it]… we don't know what to do. – [Interview 31, Government, Public Health]*

Participants revealed that the vast majority of value captured within South Africa's food system is by the retail sector, and this is contributing to poverty, inequality and food insecurity further up the value chain, particularly among producers. The overview of the food system here has to do with the structure that is the base of specific nodes of activity through which agro-food commodities pass and value is added, with a focus on corporate actors that operate across multiple commodity chains. Respondents pointed to an urgent need to examine who determines 'value' within the country's food value chain. The largest node of activity is wholesale and retail, followed by food manufacturing and then primary agricultural production.

> *Back in the days we used to have the market act or marketing act or something that prescribed the marketing boards and these boards used to prescribe the prices of food commodities, and then since we have done away with that, we now have a problem. We have a serious problem in terms of food inflation, because those that are in the food industry seem to have the market concentration or market dominance… I mean in the food market there are four big ones that are dominating at the moment. I think they hold more than 87% of the market share. – [Interview 29, Government, Agriculture]*

### 4.3.2 Incoherent governance

**a) Perspectives on the need for food system transformation as a governance challenge**

Participants from academia and civil society identified the path to food system transformation as dependent on fundamental changes to governance, rights and power relationships, and many were frustrated at the absence of alternative discourses to current economic thinking dominating our food system. In contrast, respondents from business alluded to the viability of public-private partnership fixes. Food retail corporations were singled-out by participants in academia and civil society as having become key players in food governance because of their increasing economic power - a trend that implies that corporations have also acquired authority or legitimacy as political actors. This is partly as a result of the unchallenged framing of the private sector and the market as beyond the state's legitimate remit when it comes to food systems. Discursive power is expressed in the capacity of corporations to influence policies and political processes through shaping of norms and ideas. According to respondents located in academia these strategies are then further used to convey the efficiency and effectiveness of private institutions and standards for the benefit of the public good.



> *So if you go and read the websites of the Monsanto's and the Zara's, etc. and the Unilever's, they pick up the food security language and the fear - and they promote that fear - how can we possibly feed that many people, because we [they] are the ones to do it ... the ones that are doing it... And that's the hegemonic discourse that has to be channelled into something else, because I firmly believe they are part of the problem, not the solution. So that's what food security can lend itself to... they use it tactically for certain leverage. – [Interview 16, Academia, Human Rights]*

Civil society respondents also pointed out that food security is not just about producing food, but more about access to food and affordability, arguing that local

governments in particular are compelled by the constitution to attend to food security challenges. The role of the district and municipalities should be largely to coordinate the efforts of key stakeholders such as the farming community, and departments such as Agriculture, Health, Water and Sanitation, and Social Development, among others, to work towards a common goal of ensuring food and nutrition security. The realisation of the right of access to food and nutrition is by no means a duty that is borne exclusively by national and provincial governments. The constitution allocates many functions to local government that offer points of leverage for municipalities to make meaningful contributions towards the creation of healthy food environments but the government is yet to fully engage the sustainability of food systems within cities, communities and organisations in all their complexity - economic, ecological, political and cultural.

> *... I think there is a sense of some powerlessness with more the implementers, because they don't get much say in it, so I think it is more related to the higher people and the minister that decides okay this is what's happening now, rather than the district being able to find out and say this is what we need; I'm not sure if that is working as it should. – [Interview 12, Civil Society, Public Health]*



> *The institutional framework has tended to push us towards still thinking about it in terms of national sufficiency… there is very little focus on the food system as a whole and there's very little focus on market structure and regulation. – [Interview 15, Academia, Human Rights]*

There is a gap in understanding how national commitments to nutrition are translated into sub-national implementation in South Africa. The split responsibility for food and nutrition policies between the ministries of Health and the Presidency has resulted in effective institutional homelessness for nutrition governance (i.e. with respect to food system policy) and the limited capacity and power of public health practitioners in particular to influence the policy reform process. Generally speaking, food system actors aren't formally mandated to stay cognisant of nutrition concerns and vice versa

the Health ministry has no mandate to intervene on food system aspects[180]. Running in tandem is the accountability challenge, resulting from the multiplicity of stakeholders and shared collective responsibility (or lack thereof) for results; and also the messaging challenge, as multiple narratives are evident with respect to food system issues and solutions.

**b) The different understandings/perspectives on the problems facing the food system**

Many non-equivalent representations of food systems by different actors were evident in our analysis, leading to different assessments of both the nature of the policy challenge (in relation to all forms of malnutrition and the right to food), and the nature of appropriate policy solutions with respect to the food system. It was evident that very little data was available on how food systems work at different levels and what their outcomes are. As such, only partial knowledge is available to help decision-makers influence the system and drive it towards more nutritious and food secure outcomes, in a complex context with multiple social, political and economic dimensions.



> *… You've got justice issues, you've got power, you've got control, you've got a lack of resilience, too few players, big players, you have questions about policy uncertainty … and maybe too much faith in policy. So I would see it also about perhaps some elements of it we don't know enough about its nature, its characteristics, and we're still coming to terms with that, as a society. – [Interview 43, Academia, Human Rights]*

[180] See: Thow, A.M., Greenberg, S., Hara, M. et al. 2018. Improving policy coherence for food security and nutrition in South Africa: a qualitative policy analysis. *Food Sec.* **10,** 1105-1130. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12571-018-0813-4

**c) Perspectives on what needs to be done to improve food systems governance**

All interviewees - despite having different articulations of the nature of the problem - identified that the current food system is not delivering acceptable food and nutrition outcomes, and that this represents an important challenge for South Africa. They also identified persistent challenges to achieving this as: the dominant paradigm, the changing nutritional context, and the challenge of the shared governance that will be necessary to achieve improved nutrition. However, dialogue with interviewees revealed two schools of thought regarding the orientation of solutions to create healthy food environments and address the multiple burden of malnutrition in South Africa. In particular, whether the responsibility of taking action lies with the individual (whilst the food industry offers more food choices) or with society (with the government providing societal leadership and advancing the right to food).

> *… So I think there's a constant blame-shifting thing going on about who's responsibility is it to implement and to figure out what's going on, so I think there is a lot of segmentation in the nutrition scene in government, and that's also one of the big problems why nothing gets done or decided-on. – [Interview 12, Civil Society, Public Health]*



With the exception of private sector respondents, a central narrative that was common amongst most participants was that the restructurings and reforms needed to redesign the food system towards more sustainability and regeneration are common with those that are needed to re-establish democratic responsibility in society. In this context, the role of the state as the principal duty-bearer of the right to food in the construction of food sovereignty was seen as critical. Interviewees highlighted a number of possibilities that could take place within our systems for the fulfilment of the right to food and nutrition through credible policy designs: better integration of smallholder farmers into the value chain, retail industry investment in nutrition and strengthening livelihood capacities. A broad call for a rethink on the policy levers required for food system transformation was also made. In reference to attribution of responsibility for right to food violations most respondents in civil

society and academia spoke of the need for an accountability framework to guide government and food industry engagement to address unhealthy food environments as part of a broader government-led strategy to address obesity and diet-related NCDs.

> *… Let's rather organise a different food value chain that doesn't go through corporate circuits. And then what are the alternative marketing channels we can develop? – [Interview 17, Academia, Human Rights]*

> *… The retail industry needs to… do this differently... can we actually make nutrition a much more central focus... have a better range of produce at better prices and somebody might be willing to experiment with it and I think by doing that we can start changing the understanding and the boundaries of the way people think… but I think the intervention has to be thought through a logical, situational-specific context that's tangible – [Interview 24, Government, Agriculture]*

> *I think we are misguided if we think policy is going to solve the question of the ills of the food system. I think it's going to be a range of policies that entwine in different ways that ultimately enable local level responses where these systems cascade and collide with people, we've got to be moderating and working in those places; that's why our cities are important and how do we enable cities… is it a food charter that we need, maybe? – [Interview 43, Academia, Human Rights]*



### 4.3.3 Trust and social capital in food system governance

Our analysis of interview responses did not find any indication of robust social capital or social networks contributing to the processes, rules, practices and structures (both institutional and discursive) through which power and control are exercised and decisions are made. Instead, respondents still placed emphasis on the need for social

movements and grassroots engagement with governance arrangements that would ensure that their "voices" are incorporated into the decision-making.

> *So there isn't that broader understanding and food security requires good management and good governance and the ability to engage with the community, you know, not the top-down things of you will do this and you will do that… I think that a lot of government problems are because they talk a lot but there is very little serious community engagement. – [Interview 27, Civil Society, Human Rights]*

We also found that the private sector is increasingly being held accountable by different stakeholders for its action or inaction; most notable in this regard has been the work of the Competition Commission. However, while reputational damage may affect profit margins due to reduced sales, or production costs may rise due to fines and compensation payments linked to legal non-compliance, most social costs emanating from business malpractice remain hidden. Addressing private sector relations with the state in the realm of food and nutrition governance, respondents with knowledge of the state's interface with business stressed the need for a more hands-on approach by government as it must engage all key stakeholders equally in the co-creation of a vision for a nourishing food system for the country.

In terms of the role of social capital in solutions, respondents pointed to the need for food systems and practices that are ethically grounded, scientifically verified, economically viable, and clearly communicated. What was evident from the interviews is that government, as the principal duty-bearer for the right to food, needs to acknowledge the context-specific nature of the social dynamics of food insecurity. The right to access sufficient nutritional food adheres to three intrinsic principles: the need to respect, protect, and fulfill human rights. To achieve a food secure South Africa, activist-scholars within academia suggested the government should lead legislative changes, the civil society sector should act as connectors between government and community members, the research sector could support food insecurity monitoring and evaluation, legal professionals should assist with the

framing of human rights terminology and citizens should drive the political agenda, holding government to account.

> *But what I would like to see more, is us investing in building capabilities of people to be food secure with minimal help from the state… So building capacities, livelihoods of people. – [Interview 26, Government, Human Rights (Social Development)]*

> *Unfortunately the government incentives are geared towards private enterprises, not social enterprises. And therein lies the problem. The answer, I believe, is social enterprises. People not with an economic imperative, but with a social imperative, implementing economic principles. … Social enterprises are more nimble… – [Interview 23, Civil Society, Human Rights]*

Human rights defenders in academia and civil society emphasised the fact that malnutrition is political because it's multi-causal in nature and requires a multi-sectoral response because economic or technical solutions will not suffice. But the political dimension of the challenge of food systems transformation needs to be better understood and better addressed. Political will is needed to confront existing power relations to generate needed changes in production, consumption, waste disposal and other activities in the food value chain.

> *It's more about the political will to enact it. That's the issue here… So the issue is not around a justifiable cause, which is what I think you're alluding to. It's the political will to look at and change the current model in its framework. – [Interview 23, Civil Society, Human Rights]*

**4.4 Discussion**

This study has demystified the influence of political and economic elites, and particularly large, formal food industry actors, on food and nutrition governance in

South Africa. In South Africa, exclusionary and narrow policy processes act to reinforce the values and interests of the more powerful actors and their networks. The dominant argument by policymakers in South Africa is that the agro-food system, built on the spine of large-scale commercial production can meet the market demand and also expand if need be[181]. The country's food industry is worth R600 billion and growing each year[182]. Most of the benefits of this big business, however, accrue to a relatively small group of companies, and over the past two decades this group has got smaller, and mostly richer[183]. If anything, "post-apartheid South Africa may be seen as a further example of where the formal political process has been opened-up to greater participation, yet both old and new elites have been able to maintain and gain power through economic decision-making[184]." This finding is consistent with previous research in South Africa as well as findings from other African countries[185].

This challenge of hunger and the multiple burden of malnutrition requires innovative responses and solutions that fundamentally reconsider the system as a whole and move it away from dominant actors that are currently advancing fragmented, piecemeal, and difficult to scale initiatives. In the absence of any worthwhile social capital contributing positively to efforts geared towards the fulfilment of the right to food - the politics of nutrition governance hinge both on government leadership and



[181] See: Ledger, T. 2016. Working Paper – Power and Governance in Agri-food systems: Key issues for policymakers, Trade & Industrial Policy Strategies (TIPS). *&*; Greenberg, S. 2017. Corporate power in the agro-food system and the consumer food environment in South Africa, *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 44 (2): 467-496, https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2016.1259223

[182] Ledger, T. 2018. An Empty Plate: Why We Are Losing the Battle for Our Food System, Why It Matters, and How We Can Win it Back. Jacana Media.

[183] Ibid. *&*; Greenberg, S. 2017. Corporate power in the agro-food system and the consumer food environment in South Africa, *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 44 (2): 467-496. https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2016.1259223

[184] Gaventa, J. & Runciman, C. 2016. Untangling Economic and Political Inequality: The Case of South Africa, in ISSC, IDS and UNESCO, *Challenging Inequalities: Pathways to a Just World*, World Social Science Report 2016, Paris: UNESCO Publishing: 70-3.

[185] See: Greenberg, S. 2017. Corporate power in the agro-food system and the consumer food environment in South Africa. *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 44(2): 467-496. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2016.1259223; Leach, M., Nisbett, N., Cabral, L., Harris, Jody., Hossain, N & Thompson, J. 2020. Food politics and development. *World Development*. 134. 105024. 10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105024. *&*; Moseley, W. and Battersby, J. 2020. The Vulnerability and Resilience of African Food Systems, Food Security, and Nutrition in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic. *African Studies Review* 63 (3): 449-461.

activism by civil society organisations. In general, food and nutrition problems in South Africa relate to structural flaws, such as poor or absent accountability, weak or missing participation or inadequate responsiveness of our food system actors. For the authors, an independent body similar to *Chapter 9* institutions[186] found in the Constitution, could develop clear objectives, a governance process and performance standards for all stakeholders to address the multiple-burden of malnutrition. Drawing-on our empirical evidence, we are also making the call for interventions and policies that promote social capital to address malnutrition and hunger. However, limited research has explored in-depth how social capital shapes the lived experience of food insecurity in the country[187]. More importantly, in-light of the trust deficit and the dominance of private sector actors in our food systems, social capital could play a key role in transformative and restructuring processes. Trust-based social capital promotes collaborative agreements, reducing transaction costs and allowing for cooperative solutions in "prisoner's dilemma type" situations[188].

This study has pointed to an opportunity for policymakers, activist-scholars and traditional academics to combat the lack of trust amongst the broad food system policy community in South Africa by actively creating 'new' deliberative food and nutrition governance spaces through embracing the "power to convene". Convening is a powerful tool available to leaders who want to address complex problems that cannot be resolved without shared responsibility and joint action. At the time of writing, a Community of Practice fronted by the Centre of Excellence in Food Security, meets regularly in the Western Cape and Gauteng provinces to discuss how to work together to bring change. Others are involved in the platform for multi-stakeholder

[186] Chapter 9 of the South African Constitution establishes a number of state institutions tasked with supporting constitutional democracy. The task of these institutions is to promote and protect those rights within the Bill of Rights which fall within their particular area. These are: the Public Protector, the South African Human Rights Commission, the Commission for Gender Equality, the Auditor-General, the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities, and the Independent Electoral Commission.

[187] For example, see: Nosratabadi, S. et al. 2020. Social Capital Contributions to Food Security: A Comprehensive Literature Review. Foods. 9. 1650. 10.3390/foods9111650.

[188] Sodano, V. & Verneau, F. 2006. Social Capital and the Food System: Some Evidences from Empirical Research.

dialogue convened at various spheres by the Southern Africa Food Lab (SAFL)[189]. Notably, the power to convene is not a new form of power. Rather, the concept enables right to food defenders and scholars to see governance opportunities and challenges in a new way[190]. "Convening takes place at the intersection of discursive and structural power, where it can be grounded in the power to reframe narratives through deliberation while enabling the construction of a new governance space[191]." The power to convene is associated with Gaventa's (2005) scholarship on claimed or created spaces, this is about resistance and solidarity with marginalised, non-state or non-market actors[192]. The realisation of the right to food and a coordinated response to the multiple burden of malnutrition in the country rests on the "power to convene" – a process-oriented approach that increases activist-scholar's capacity to mobilise; leverage different types of power; and integrate and coordinate, and build a systems-oriented vision by connecting across silos[193].

What is urgently needed in South Africa's food system are "nutrition champions". Many catalytic individuals are needed at different scales and places who are well-connected and trusted in their formal and informal social networks, having a footprint in the transfer of information, changing of perceptions and resolving conflicts; achievements that have proven essential to advancing the food and nutrition agenda in the context of fragmentation and competing interests between and within various stakeholders[194]. In the same vein, it must be acknowledged that identifying and

[189] See: https://www.southernafricafoodlab.org/

[190] Clark, J.K., Lowitt, K., Levkoe, C.Z. et al. 2020. The power to convene: making sense of the power of food movement organisations in governance processes in the Global North. *Agriculture and Human Values*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-020-10146-1

[191] Ibid

[192] Gaventa, J. 2005. Reflections on the uses of the 'power cube' approach for analysing the spaces, places and dynamics of civil society participation and engagement. Participatory Methods. https://www.particpatorymethods.org/sites/participatorymethods.org/files/reflections_on_uses_powercube.pdf

[193] Clark, J.K., Lowitt, K., Levkoe, C.Z. et al. 2020. The power to convene: making sense of the power of food movement organisations in governance processes in the Global North. *Agriculture and Human Values*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-020-10146-1

[194] Pelletier, D.L., Frongillo, E.A., Gervais, S. et al. 2012. Nutrition agenda setting, policy formulation and implementation: lessons from the Mainstreaming Nutrition Initiative. *Health Policy Plan* 27: 19-31. & Heaver, R. 2005. Strengthening country commitment to human development, lessons from nutrition. Directions in development. Washington, DC: The World Bank. & Pelletier, D. 2003. A framework for

constructing 'champion types' can appear to oversimplify the complexity that comes with food systems and fail to acknowledge the nuances that exist within and between individuals working to champion nutrition. Therefore, although much of the literature is discussed in terms of types of champions, lessons must be contextualised within each policy and practice environment to ensure appropriate strategies are adopted to support champions appropriately, at that moment in time. Heaver (2005), for example, identifies three levels of people to target for leadership support:

> … Decision-makers, influencers and clients. Decision-makers hold formal power to shape nutrition policy directly, and include politicians and senior civil servants. Influencers have no formal power in the policy process, however they are able to influence decision-makers… And lastly, clients, who are rarely able to influence policies and programmes designed for them and would benefit from an increased voice and more active participation in the policy and practice process[195].

This study has drawn on a wide range of stakeholder views to examine nutrition governance in South Africa and identify opportunities to strengthen governance for improved outcomes across nutrition, food security and the right to food. The main limitation of this study was the reliance on stakeholder interviews spanning a range of sectors, disciplines and perspectives. We found that understandings of the issue and key concepts varied widely, which is reflected in our analysis and points to an opportunity for dialogue (through convening) to strengthen shared understandings of food systems and nutrition.



improved strategies. *In* Gillespie, S., McLachlan, M. & Shrimpton, R (eds). Combating undernutrition: time to act. Washington DC: World Bank. *&*; Baker, P., Hawkes, C., Wingrove, K., Demaio, A.R., Parkhurst, J., Thow A.M. & Walls, H. 2018. What drives political commitment for nutrition? A review and framework synthesis to inform the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition. *BMJ global health 3* (1): e000485.

[195] Heaver, R. 2005. Strengthening country commitment to human development: lessons from nutrition. World Bank Publications.

### 4.5 Conclusion

Inequity in access to food and in the distribution of the socio-economic benefits along the value chain is a major negative outcome of the current global food systems' core activities[196]. At present, South Africa's food system governance faces significant challenges, caught between powerful stakeholders maintaining the status quo and its obligations for addressing the multiple burden of malnutrition and realising the right to food. State intervention and leadership is necessary to address these obstacles. Trans-disciplinary sectors must work collaboratively to ensure human rights strategies are incorporated into government agendas to ensure progress is made to address malnutrition and hunger in South Africa and contribute to achievement of the United Nations' Agenda 2030.



[196] De Schutter, O. 2019. The political economy approach to food systems reform. *IDS Bull* 50(2): 13-26. doi:10.19088/1968-2019.115

**CHAPTER 5: Summary**

*The people… take their stand from the start on the broad and inclusive position of bread and land: how can we obtain the land, and bread to eat? And this obstinate point of view of the masses, which may seem shrunken and limited, is in the end the most worthwhile and the most efficient mode of procedure*. **- Frantz Fanon**

A study of the politics of malnutrition unavoidably leads to a study of resistance and agency. Because of this, this chapter leans on postcolonial theory when contending with the question of what difference does food sovereignty make within broader political-economic transformations in South Africa? Postcolonial theory provides a useful analytical tool because of its insistence on the on-going significance of colonialism in today's world; its systematic interrogation of the nation-state; its critical attention to the power of representation and its attentiveness to gendered, racialized and classed practices to the exercise of power.



By going beyond the boundaries of positivist epistemology I was able to unpack the way in which hierarchies of power affect the most vulnerable in society. Hence, my empirical point of departure was to identify with the poor and marginalised in their struggle for 'food sovereignty'. By using 'empirical' I am referring to the lived realities of people as opposed to a theory. Therefore in referencing those at the bottom of the pyramid and their lived realities, I have rejected academia as the only and/or supreme site for the generation of knowledge. By identifying with the struggles of the poor and marginalised I illuminate the institutional, structural and epistemic violence unleashed upon them through the discourses and practices of 'food security'. My approach in this chapter puts into conversation imageries of the poor and marginalised that, generally speaking, would not normally be considered.

## Chapter 5: Photo-elicitation and the voiceless: Narrating the "lived experiences" perspective of informal street food vendors in Khayelitsha, Cape Town

*Moyo, B.H. 2021. Photo-elicitation and the voiceless: Narrating the "lived experiences" perspective of informal street food vendors in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, World Nutrition 12 (3).*

### Abstract

This research delves into the symbolic spaces and everyday practices of street food vendors in Khayelitsha, Cape Town - specifically, how traders interact and negotiate their agency within food systems of the poor and marginalised. A key objective for this study is to gain insight into street food vendors' understanding of the right to food and what it means for them as food system actors. Taking on a gendered lens, findings speak to informal traders existing in a complex space - caught somewhere between exclusionary urban politics, and waiting for the state to address the many governance and political bottlenecks that define the complex environment in which they operate. By focusing on symbolic experiences and actions of vendors in Khayelitsha, the study unveils the often invisible, ordinary, everyday realities of the vendors, through which 'social capital' is produced. The irrelevance of an actual constitutionally codified right to food for informality is also revealed through the qualitative essence of informal food traders' experiences of navigating a livelihood in the fluid and unstable context of the informal economy.

**Keywords**: right to food; South Africa; informality, street food vendors, food justice, food insecurity

## 5.1 Introduction

In social capital-poor countries like South Africa that have significant inequalities and poverty, the costs of public goods are often concentrated while their benefits are diffuse. Economic opportunity in contemporary South African society has been strongly patterned and shaped by the colonial and apartheid legacies of racialised underdevelopment. Three key legacies have been noted (Philip 2009): first, the centralized, vertically integrated monopoly structure of the core economy, with its highly skewed distribution of assets and capital; second, the racialised spatial legacy of township and homelands located far from economic opportunity; and third, the enduring legacy of inequality in the acquisition of skills and education. All of these contribute to a post-apartheid distributional regime marked by enduring poverty and some of the highest levels of income inequality in the world (du Toit and Neves 2014). The governing African National Congress (ANC) traditionally has its power base in the urban areas and because of this is particularly sensitive, not to the concerns of the vast underclass of the poor and the landless unemployed, but to those of the urbanized working class and business (Southhall 2014).



Addressing urban poverty in particular, will require strengthening the asset base[197] of the poor, including through improving human capital, augmenting social capital, and strengthening productive assets and household relations (Seferiadis et al. 2015). Potential threats to these assets, such as violence and crime, should also be addressed (Moser 1998). The informal economy offers an opportunity for strengthening the asset base of the urban poor. Social capital in particular is critical to this – the social networks based on norms, reciprocity and trust among the poor and marginalized (Pickvance 2003). Social capital here is recognized as a central basis of the urban economy, cultivated by the poor to sustain their livelihoods and withstand adverse trends and shocks (Rakodi and Lloyd-Jones 2002).

[197] "Assets" are broadly defined and multidimensional, including not only physical capital and financial assets, but also the knowledge and skills of individuals, their social bonds and community relations, and their ability to influence the policies and institutions that affect them. Low asset levels and the inefficient use of these assets are both causes and consequences of poverty.

Many workers in the informal sector who have few resources resort to informal street vending, as this activity has few barriers to entry. A total of 2,565,000 individuals worked in the informal economy in 2016 according to Statistics South Africa (Stats-SA 2015). This figure is far lower than in developing countries of comparable size, but is still 16 percent of total employment in the country (Skinner and Haysom 2017). Street traders contribute greatly to the overall economy of South Africa, as demonstrated by the R51.7 billion expenditure in the informal economy in 2004 (Social Law Project 2014). Despite its relatively obscure presence, street trading is one of the largest sectors of the country's informal economy (CDE 2020). Street trading/vending refers to the selling of freshly cooked foods, produce, packaged food, and other products, and the rendering of services such as cutting hair amongst others (Social Law Project 2014). Street traders are generally poor, unskilled people at the lower end of the socio-economic ladder. Informal trading has become a common feature in all urban areas in most major cities and smaller towns and wherever there is traffic such as at the bus stops, train stations, truck stops, and streets.

Most of the informal trading literature about the African context is located in debates that have to do with urban governance in a context of "societal disengagement" driven by extensive informalisation and democratic transitions (Lindell 2010). As a result of this focus there is a lack of attention given to informal trading as an everyday, ordinary practice in which traders renegotiate their existence particularly in South African cities. Ballard (2014) emphasizes that 'the poor' are not passive recipients of development, nor are they passive victims of practices that have caused their marginalization. And so, too strong a focus on the 'abject' situation of 'the poor' (Harvey 2012) - in this case informal street food traders - ran the risk of concealing the "dynamism, resilience, creativity and resistance of resource-deprived people" (Ballard, 2014:2) as they respond to a space characterized by complexity.

Notably, a food retail transition has accompanied the urbanisation process in South Africa, changing the landscape in which households and communities access food. Shopping malls and supermarkets have rapidly expanded into erstwhile underserviced, impoverished neighbourhoods (Kroll et al. 2019; Crush and Battersby

2016). Food retail thus offers a lens through which to explore social capital as a mediating variable for food and nutrition insecurity in the ever-changing informal economy. The introduction of formal food retail formats has been simultaneously argued as a driver of food accessibility and as a detriment to informal food economies established in lower income neighbourhoods[198]. Granted, supermarkets account for the greater proportion of food sales in the country; however, they remain a tiny minority of all food retail outlets, the vast majority of which operate in the informal food economy. Although there are no reliable figures for the number of informal food retailers in South Africa, some estimates put the number at around 100,000 spazas (informal convenience stores in residential neighbourhoods) and at 750,000 spazas plus street traders combined (Coetzer and Pascarel 2014). The existing evidence suggests that informal retail is dominated by food trade (Skinner and Haysom 2016).

Informal street trade has traditionally been a bigger component of informal sector employment for women, with an estimated 960 000 women working in the sector (Skinner and Haysom 2017). The role of women in street trade is significant not only due to the prevailing number of women engaging in this occupation (Ligthelm 2005), but because of their noteworthy economic contributions and their position as a vulnerable group. The majority of street traders in South Africa are black women who trade in a range of goods (WIEGO 2013; Mwasinga 2013), including sugar sweetened beverages, offals, 'street meat', processed meats, confectionary and biscuits, cigarettes, clothing, and fruit and vegetables (often produced by someone else). In Cape Town, street traders are working against political, social, economic and structural restrictions. They are socially excluded through others' negative perceptions of them, and political barriers experienced by street traders include lack of government contribution to their street trading endeavours, no security of tenure, restrictive legislation, limited government communication and lack of participation in

[198] One study estimated that between 2003 and 2005 the turnover of spaza shops in some areas was reduced by more than 20% because of the encroachment of supermarkets (van der Heijden and Vink 2013). The South African Spaza and Tuckshop Association has claimed that Soweto in Johannesburg lost 30% of its spazas between 2005 and 2014 as supermarkets entered the area (Dolan 2014). Another study found that the impact on small vendors of a mall development was generally negative and that those who survived did so by changing their business model (Ligthelm 2008).

decision-making affecting street trade (Battersby et al. 2016). Some of the prominent economic barriers include poor growth in the informal sector, high levels of competition with both larger, formal businesses and with other traders selling similar things in a saturated informal market, as well as limited access to financial support systems (Battersby et al. 2016). These bottlenecks hinder informal traders from growing their enterprises, supporting their families and exerting choice and control over their lives.

Food insecurity is the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food. The food insecurity situation in the country is hampering economic and social development; in particular, good nutrition is linked to investments in education, health, and other development sectors (Grosso et al. 2020). It goes without saying that the nutritional wellbeing of a population is a reflection of the performance of its social and economic sectors; and to a large extent, an indicator of the efficiency of national resource allocation (Bouda 2020). Over half of all South Africans do not have sufficient access to affordable, nutritious and safe food to meet their basic health requirements and achieve attainment of the universal right to food (Shisano et al. 2013). This trend is intriguing because all food security literature points out that South Africa produces and imports enough food to meet the basic nutritional requirements of all citizens. Poignantly, out of a population estimated to be close to 60 million, as many as 13.8 million South Africans, comprising mainly of women and children, fall below the national food poverty line (World Bank 2020)[199].

Food is at the heart of many social relationships and interactions. Food and nutrition represent two essential spheres of human life that can hardly be separated from their cultural context. Social relations can be reproduced and represented through food, and food conversely creates and shapes coherence and identity within and between societal units such as households, kin categories, age classes, professional groups, or informal associations. Social scientists and public health practitioners need to understand the factors these relationships play in wellbeing for individuals and

[199] The South African food poverty line (FPL), also known as the extreme poverty line, is set at R624 at the time of writing.

communities. Spaces where people obtain and share food are where they develop much of the “goodwill, fellowship, mutual sympathy, and social intercourse” that comprise growing social capital (Paul et al. 2019).

The local environment has a substantial impact on population health (Paul et al. 2019). The fulfilment of the right to food is determined not only by the basic availability of food, but also, by social, economic and cultural factors influencing dietary behaviours. The question of the right to food effectively captures how food relates to forms of deprivation including poverty (Fanzo 2015). The major factors that undermine the country’s realisation of the right to food and basic nutrition are directly or indirectly linked to the long history of social exclusion of black South Africans, the hallmark of the apartheid system for decades (Ledger 2018). Hunger violates human dignity; it is an obstacle to socioeconomic and political progress and is also linked to the failure of realising other rights such as the broad right to an adequate standard of living. The right to access adequate food as codified in the country’s Constitution goes beyond ensuring the absence of malnutrition or starvation and has within its scope “the full range of qualities associated with food, including safety, variety and dignity, in short all those elements needed to enable an active and healthy life” (Durojaye and Chilemba 2018). High levels of poverty and vast inequalities in South Africa make it difficult for many citizens to access food (Pereira and Drimie 2016). As such, the economic empowerment of the most vulnerable populations is critical for eliminating hunger. The consequence of inaction is that the most vulnerable members of the country are unable to realise a right that is enshrined in the South African Constitution (NIDS-CRAM 2021).

The majority of South Africa’s food insecure people reside in poor and working-class communities such as informal settlements, townships, peri-urban, and rural areas (Ledger 2018). Endemic poverty is expanding as the country’s population grows and the urbanisation process unfolds (Frayne et al. 2009). Under current conditions, the on-going failure of economic growth to lift the majority of people out of poverty is contributing directly to the inability of the urban poor in particular to access sufficient food, resulting in chronic food insecurity (Drimie and Pereira 2016).

In Cape Town's Khayelitsha informal settlement, urban poverty and closely related food insecurity are prevalent. To illustrate, a 2010 survey conducted by the African Food Security Urban Network (AFSUN) indicated that Khayelitsha suffers from high levels of food insecurity (with 89 percent of households surveyed sampled in Kuyasa and Enkanini sections experiencing moderate to severe food insecurity) (Battersby 2011). The same AFSUN study revealed the important role the informal food economy plays in the food security strategies of the urban poor in Khayelitsha. Further, it reported that while most of the sampled households had used supermarkets to access food in the last month, they relied more heavily on the informal food economy to access food on a daily and/or weekly basis (Battersby 2011). The more food insecure households were, the more likely they were to depend on the informal food economy (Battersby 2011). As such, it becomes evident that the informal economy emerges when formal institutions and operations fail to meet the demands of those living on social and economic margins.

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the roles and realities of street food vendors within the informal food system of Khayelitsha (the largest informal settlement in Cape Town) in order to better understand informal food trader's beliefs and practices about the constitutionally-codified right to food in South Africa and what it means for their lived experiences. This research builds on and adds value to informality literature by focusing on how street traders have experienced and responded to the right to food narrative as it relates to the food systems of the poor. By delving into the nature of local food and nutrition insecurity challenges, particularly for poor and marginalised populations, this research allows for domestic local conditions to inform and provide insights for national and global food politics and policy.



**5.2 Methods**

This research presents a narrative inquiry informed by an open-ended interview key and further draws on observational research in the form of photo-elicitation. The

findings of this research are presented through the key themes that emerged from a thematic analysis that was conducted to make sense of the narratives. Focusing on survivalist informal food traders and impoverished livelihoods, this paper aligns itself with socio-culturalist analysis (van Donge 1992) of economic action, in order to examine the imperatives and networks that underpin practices of generating, accumulating and managing wealth at the margins of the economy, within the post-apartheid distributional regime.

Research methodologies that were used for this study were narrative-based interviews, participant observations plus the utilisation of photo-elicitation. Narrative research is the study of people's stories in an attempt to get insight of their experiences and attitudes (Creswell 2014). The narrative-based component of this research had a right-to-food focus and asked respondents to tell their stories about what the right to food means to them and what their lived experiences have been as handlers and traders of food in Khayelitsha taking on a public health outlook. In the spirit of allowing narratives to develop, interview questions were open-ended and broad, giving respondents time and freedom to share and elaborate on their experiences (Wagenaar 2011). The use of photo-elicitation as a methodology enabled the researcher to produce different kinds of information that speak to the feelings and memories of interviewees (Harper 2002). The difference between conventional interviews and photo-elicitation lies in the way participants respond to the symbolic representations in photographs. In other words, photo-elicitation is the use of photographs to generate verbal discussion (Thomas 2009). These visual images can be produced by the respondent or by the researcher. In this instance, the author generated visual images that served as points of departure for dialogue, returning to interviewees and showing them the photos to elicit their responses. Photo-elicitation adds validity and depth, and offers new viewpoints (Bignante 2010). Much of the work and outcome of photo elicitation interviewing is a collaborative effort rather than an individual effort by the researcher and therefore involves joint theorizing, which occurs during the interview. However, the researcher still has a facilitative role, drawing out what is needed for credible dialogue and assisting respondents to frame

and formulate their answers (Jenkings et al. 2008). Triangulation between different sources of information (Bignante 2010) was attempted in order to increase rigour.

The interviews focussed on how participants understand the right to food and basic nutrition, the cultural context of their environment, and what their experience of local governance has been. In order to gain access to the street food vendors' natural environment, time was spent in locations where traders are known to engage in their occupation. Having spent a day observing the traders, the researcher considered all vendors they observed against a selection criterion for variation sampling. Notably, subjective sampling was employed to select the people that were included, making the research highly prone to researcher bias. However, qualitative research is rarely based on random samples and thus is usually not intended to be generalized to an entire population. In addition, this judgemental subjective component of the study is only a major disadvantage when such judgements are ill conceived or poorly considered; that is, where judgements have not been based on clear criteria and objectives. Vendors were selected to obtain as much variation as possible for each criterion. Variation was sought in terms of age, gender, education, years of operating in Khayelitsha, average income a month, and association/union membership. The street food vendors were then recruited during a second visit to the trading sites.



In addition, participant observation has to do with the researcher not only observing from an outside-view but also getting involved and engaging in the day-to-day activities of research participants in order to experience and have an in-depth understanding of the environment, social relations, events and ideals of the research context (Yin 2011). Field observations focused on specific aspects of activities of street food trading and participants' responses and actions to events and situations within their environment.

Participants were informed about the purpose, procedures, risks and benefits of the study to ensure that their autonomy was upheld. This autonomy became part of continuous discussion to iteratively test the privacy boundaries of certain information in order to avoid exploiting confidentiality agreements. Ethical management of

sensitive information was maintained by creating space for participants to express their emotions comfortably when recounting difficult circumstances around their struggle for economic survival. Ethical clearance for the study was granted by the Biomedical as well as the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape (BM18/7/20; HS19/5/33).

Data were gathered through participant observation and field notes. An initial semi-structured interview supported photo elicitation interviews about experiences of street trading and how these relate to well-being and a concluding participant check interview was conducted to confirm findings. After the initial interviews, a time was made with each participant to describe the role of the photos in the research project. All participants were shown a collection of photographs that revealed the people, objects, events and situations defining their experience of street food trading and how these experiences impact on well-being. The photographs were shown digitally and used as triggers to formulate photo elicitation interview questions pertaining to participants' understanding of the right to food. The interviews were not transcribed. Instead, all interviews were recorded, with participant permission, using a digital audio recorder. The semi-structured interview guide allowed for a discussion with the partcipants rather than a straightforward question and answer format. The photos depicted in the figures below are not all the photos that were used to elicit discussion, but represent a sample of the photos that were used.

The author participated in activities related to the buying, preparation, selling and eating of food traded by the informal food vendors situated in Khayelitsha's Site B area. Another geographical location where conversations took place was in the Makhaza section of Khayelitsha. There were also other interactions with a select few informal traders on the side of roads within the informal settlement. Neither the narrative-based interviews nor the participant observations took place in a structured manner but simply emerged as and when the moment was ideal. A major compromise in the current paper was that in light of the small sample size, a focus was placed on the social value contribution of these informal street traders to the realisation of the

right to food (as opposed to general framings and investigations regarding food security).

In order to analyse the data collected through narrative-based interviews and participant observations, thematic analysis was used. Thematic analysis uses the content of what is said to identify core themes in the narratives (Riessman 2005). Themes were identified on account of either repetition or if the research participants evoked strong emotion when talking about specific aspects of the narratives. The study sites were chosen because the areas are in a central zone defined by the railway station (in the case of Site B), adjacent minibus taxi ranks and nearby shopping mall complexes. Data were gathered in October 2019.

The study engaged a total of nine participants involved in the street trading of food in 'Site B' and 'Makhaza' in Khayelitsha. 7 women operating from Site B plus 2 males (a father and son operating separate businesses) from Makhaza were interviewed, exclusively in the Xhosa language. Because of this, a limitation of the study is that despite the author's Nguni-background[200], some of the information may not have been interpreted or captured within its intended connotations (undertones) as a result of the nuanced differences in the author's language, which is isiNdebele and that of the participants, which is isiXhosa. However, although the two languages are extremely similar, a Xhosa native speaker colleague assisted in those instances when the author was not certain about the meaning of the dialogue in the recordings.



In qualitative research, subjectivity and bias are considered natural and acceptable as long as they are acknowledged and looked at critically (Greenwood & Levin 2011). The author kept a journal during the research process, which helped manage some of the assumptions and biases, and offered an opportunity for critical reflexivity. The researcher also discussed and reviewed the findings with two other research collaborators to refine the themes and to articulate the findings represented by the photos. The qualitative essence of street food traders' experiences of navigating a

[200] Nguni people are a group of Bantu peoples who primarily speak Nguni languages and currently reside predominantly in Southern Africa. The Nguni people are Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele and Swati.

livelihood in the fluid and unstable context of the informal economy was captured in the thematic analysis that follows, which was carried out inductively. Whilst the right to food played a major role in this research, it must be recognised that this inquiry is essentially a study about human beings who have many needs (and were vocal about them) and that economic poverty cannot and should not be reduced to the realisation of the right to food alone. It must rather be understood, as supported by literature on 'food-ways', that food is a social artefact, used as a conduit for conversation, and food access is inherently linked positively and negatively at times to other vital issues and resources. The following thematic analyses delve into this.

**Study site**

Khayelitsha (which means "new home" in the Nguni languages), is one of the most populous townships in South Africa, and the largest in the Western Cape Province (Ndingaye 2005). It was officially established in 1983 by the apartheid regime in response to a severe housing shortage and perceived encroachment of a budding black urban population towards the City of Cape Town (Tshela 2002; Nqadini 2000). From a general human-development perspective and despite the overwhelming dominance of literature on Khayelitsha and informal settlements in general that depicts them as places of poverty, criminality and disease, the impression of the trading areas that became the study sites did not match such descriptions. While infrastructural and material poverty were clearly evident (Figure 1), the area gives an impression of a lively and vibrant community grappling with grave socioeconomic injustices. We should constantly remember that poverty and inequality struggles do not necessarily constitute people's and communities' self-perceptions and they should not be reduced to such descriptions.


*Figure 1: Informal food street stall in Khayelistha. There are many barriers to making a living through street vending; one of these is access to public space and public services.*



**5.3 Results and discussion**

**a) Insights into Khayelitsha's informal food-ways**



Fieldwork results yielded a solidarity rather than competitive economy; and while street food vendors were committed to maintaining their livelihoods through their enterprises, they also placed emphasis on the importance of upholding social cohesion among themselves as a community of street traders by abiding to the status quo and avoiding conflict. Interestingly, what repeatedly came through, from observations and conversations, is that people's choices and preferences for 'street-meat' were an important part of the informal food system of Khayelitsha and in particular were driven by a sense of tradition, nostalgia, and connection to cultural roots of heritage (the rural areas) where they come from. Additionally, customers who frequented the study-sites were conversing with the traders intimately and in some instances people referred to each other by name.

Although street vendors are invested in the production and selling of relatively safe food in Khayelitsha, there is still a need for basic sanitary facilities, such as running water and toilets within their working environments. The author observed participants struggling and having to constantly go back home to their dwellings at certain intervals to get water to cook with. Furthermore, it was evident that traders struggle to conduct business in harsh weather conditions due to a lack of urban infrastructure. Pointedly, none of the interviewees indicated that they used designated municipal trading stalls. Interviews with participants revealed that there is no proper coordination or consultation between the municipality or local government structures and the informal street food traders of Khayelitsha; the relationship that exists between the two is that of exclusion and negligence. In South Africa, local government strategies, such as the Local Economic Development framework, meant to support local businesses and stimulate economic growth, do not directly support the survivalist informal traders, especially the informal street traders selling cooked food in public open spaces and from temporary or mobile shelters within and outside urban areas. Another observation was that there is no energy transition in the informal street food sector, because of its heavy reliance on low quality energy sources like wood and charcoal in the face of a lack of any other affordable and reliable energy supply.



Street-food and the culture and rituals surrounding it appear to be reinforced by social ties in Khayelitsha. For example, during lunchtime there was communal eating, indicating the importance of sharing in this environment. Customers as well as street food traders always shared their plates, utensils, and the food itself. Thus, food plays a crucial and important role, not just as a source of sustenance or commodity for sale, but as powerful social currency that maintains cohesion and ensures food access is broadened (Figure 2).

*Figure 2: Second-generation informal food trader. Traders are an important part of the way food flows in urban areas.*

Although not observed, interviewees also spoke of offering an informal social safety net for hungry persons who were unable to afford food, in that they sell food on credit sometimes in order to ensure that consumers struggling with cash flow can cope. For the majority of women participants, the opportunity to street trade in food demands reciprocal responsibility towards the transformation of others' lives and for greater communal freedom and development, they said. The high value and meaning the women gave to social connectedness portrayed lived experiences espoused by favouring, at times, the communal good. This value can be likened to the African philosophy of Ubuntu[201].

Eating healthily insofar as nutrition is concerned was not a stated priority for respondents (Figure 3 and 4). However, there was mention of the importance of safety and hygiene. The underlying motive was that it makes better economic sense for street vendors to trade in highly processed and less healthy foods. On this note, a

[201]Ubuntu is an interactive ethic and way of being that speaks to human interconnectedness and the reciprocal responsibility held by a deep connection to others and through which people can come into their own (Cornell & Van Marle, 2005).

concern that emanated from observations was the danger of a diet too high in animal fats as a result of the abundance of unprocessed meats on offer in the settlement's informal food value chain.

*Figure 3: Lunchtime snack (intestines). Types of food items sold by informal food vendors and their nutrition knowledge were not ideal.*



All the same, Khayelitsha's street food traders remain adept at responding to the needs of poor and marginalised urban residents. For these consumers their income is erratic; they may lack access to reliable energy and storage spaces; and they use public transport or taxis, which limits the quantities of food that can be purchased and transported. Such challenges compel low-income households to rely and depend on street food purchases very often.

**b) Social Capital and the Urban Voice – Understanding the political economy of Informality**

For market and street traders of Khayelitsha, social capital – whether formally established through an association, or informal social networks – enables them to manage a competitive trading environment and to negotiate with local government and other powerful actors active in the food systems of the poor in Cape Town through collective action. The role of social capital in supporting traders' activities, together

with the inevitability of informal sector livelihoods, is well recognized by agencies such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) (Carr and Chen 2002), and informal workers' organizations are seen as key players in the pro-poor policy debates - unions, cooperatives,

*Figure 4: Inyama yenhloko (flesh of the head).*

associations or other representative groups (Chen et al. 2002). In particular, small micro-enterprises rarely influence decision-making to their advantage against established interests unless they are organized and mobilise (Rakodi 2003). In Site B and Makhaza, street food traders fell into two groups – those associated to formal associations like the Khayelitsha Station Informal Trader's Association (KSITA), recognized by the authorities, and those who gained their legitimacy through informal kinship, religious and other social networks. Established in 2011, KSITA is the official union of the trading community. As discussed by scholars like Alison Brown (2006), both types of groups offer a means for civic engagement with institutions and local authorities, but, as corroborated by the Khayelitsha experience, they often focus on self-help and fail to maintain long-term influence.

Conversations with participants on their attempts as street food traders to gain a platform for legitimacy to claim their rights as urban citizens revealed that some of their struggles are a product of both history and the political cultures that have

informed responses to current crises or need (Figure 5). Due to South Africa's inequality context, poverty in the country has historical, geospatial, regional, ethnic, and gender dimensions. The Khayelitsha case study demonstrated that for successful bargaining, street food trader social capital must have both collective, and individual, value. Social capital is normally viewed only as an individual asset that traders use to support their day-to-day trading (see for example Woolcock 1998). Conversely, in probing street food traders' own understanding of constitutionalism, it was clear that there is no effective legal or institutional framework (or a consistent attempt by local government) that 'conscientises' informal food vendors to mobilise and initiate collective action geared towards amplifying and highlighting the crucial role they play in the food systems of the informal settlement.

*Figure 5: Partners. Street trading has traditionally attracted less educated, poor urban women seeking cash employment who are least likely to find alternative employment elsewhere. However, men, squeezed from the formal labour market, are increasingly joining the ranks.*

### 5.4 Urban Governance and Institutions

The City of Cape Town introduced a revised informal trading policy in 2013, advocating for a 'thriving informal trading sector that is valued and integrated into the economic life, urban landscape and social activities within the City of Cape Town (City of Cape Town 2013: 8)'. Despite this, dialogue with participants about city-level government

actions revealed an ambivalent, if not actively hostile, approach to street food traders. Although participants weren't articulate about it, the Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) are completely silent on the issue of food planning and almost all Spatial Development Frameworks ignore the food system entirely. This results in a paradox whereby legislation that aims to promote social justice ignores the single biggest socioeconomic challenge faced by poor households. Crush et al. (2015) argue that, although the policy environment in Cape Town varies across parts of the city and between segments of the informal economy, 'the modernist vision of a "world-class city" with its associated antipathy to informality dominates, and informal space and activity is pathologised' (p15).

Indeed, the commitment by local/city governments to "spatial justice" in particular has become a contested arena, as it has proven problematic for the informal economy. The argument presented herein is that for informal street food traders and the owners of spazas in townships together with the poor households who depend on them for food, the current drive for "spatial justice" as detailed in the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (SPLUMA) gazetted in 2015 does not speak to the rights of these businesses to remain operational in their areas. Instead, there appears to be a move to close down businesses in the interests of 'modern' or 'organised' land-use zoning requirements. In the interpretation of "spatial justice" who has privileged access to space – and who has access to public space? There does not seem to be any clear conceptualisation in either SPLUMA itself or resulting


*Figure 6: Independent fruit & vegetable trader selling from the divisional island on one of the main roads in Khayelitsha. Most informal actors fall outside of government structures. Regulations on informal trade are often suboptimal, unfeasible and even punitive*

local government regulation of the strong spatial component of household food insecurity, or the importance of incorporating this issue into spatial planning.

Thus the governance and institutional landscape within which informal street food vendors operate has a profound effect on their representational space and the extent to which they can exercise urban voice. In this regard, two trends were evident in Khayelitsha that speak to the struggle around promoting more effective urban governance, with significantly different impacts for traders. On one hand, neoliberal philosophies have encouraged the withdrawal of city governments from direct service provision, moving towards privatization of essential services. Within this view of the 'modern city', the informal economy has little place, and the state is often hostile to street traders (Skinner 2019). This is a reflection of intrenched historical biases against informality, the Africa-wide modernisation agenda, and the power of large-scale food businesses to self-identify as partners-in-development (Battersby 2017). On the other hand, small informal enterprises have very little influence over decisions made by coalitions of public authorities and large private sector interests in Third World cities. In Khayelitsha, street traders' relations with local government can be described by a sense of ephemerality. Most of the referenced interactions with local government

were yesteryear accounts driven by a sense of nostalgia about the responsive posture of previous regimes/administrations. From a public policy lens, street food traders of Khayelitsha live in a legal vacuum outside and beyond the law. What the author experienced and made sense of was that within informal settlements there exists a spectral city government that is present but not active (Figure 6).

### 5.5 "Vuk'zenzele" - a narrative present amongst street food vendors

Khayelitsha has almost no jobs of its own apart from informal trade, such as unlicensed taverns known as shebeens, hair stylists and house shops, and scant tourism jobs. It is unsettling to think that, at the moment, the most promising economic path for Khayelitsha is to offer tourists a glimpse of the provisional landscape necessitated by crushing poverty, mass relocation, and government-enforced segregation. It is equally disquieting to realize that urban renewal efforts at normalizing the township's environment could reduce some of the appeal to those tourists. In this research journey, I came across the catch-phrase *"Vuk'zenzele"* which means 'wake up and do it yourself'. This vernacular term was constantly referenced in conversations about what the country's Constitution means for street food vendors - reflecting the ways in which informal traders create self-agency as they renegotiate their existence in conditions of marginalization. Street food traders of Khayelitsha are trying to make ends meet by engaging in what scholars have coined 'street politics' (Bayat, 2010), as they pragmatically respond to a lack of governance. In government policy documents, the informal sector is framed almost entirely as a source of employment and potential entrepreneurialism. While this is important, it is also necessary for informal sector policy to recognize the role that informal food enterprises in particular play in the food system that delivers food to the urban poor. The City of Cape Town needs to recognize the informal food vendors for the services they offer, including food security, and not just their role as a source of employment (Figure 7). Through a better understanding of the geography and economics of how

this sector meets the food security needs of the urban poor, it should be possible to refine policies, programmes and by-laws to enhance the sector.

*Figure 7: Weekly, the van from the farms arrives in dusty Khayelitsha, with offals, tripe and trotters for sale to street food vendors.*



### 5.6 Conclusions

While it was expected that street food traders would describe their struggles as resting on similar concerns to those outlined in scholarship and literature on informality, namely, lack of access to capital, poor infrastructure, lack of local government support and supermarket competition. However, in this case, what was apparent from the onset was that there exists a 'solidarity economy' in Khayelitsha. The solidarity economy is a response to the capitalist logic of expansion that continues to separate control over production from labour impacts and nature (Bennie and Satgoor 2018). The promise of the right to food appears to offer little to nothing for the street traders

of Khayelitsha who are deeply entrenched in an established economy that systematically suffers from formal political and economic neglect, mixed with societal ambivalence about its relevance. It survives on vibrant and dynamic "social capital" that is defined by reciprocity within the community based on trust deriving from complex social ties, networks and associations.

Key to understanding the contradiction between the purported importance of a codified right to food in the Constitution and the conspicuous absence of effective policy solutions on the part of the state is the structure and operations of the global corporate food regime. Globally, movements have arisen that aim to address the problem of hunger. Significantly, they are explicitly political in that they situate the causes of global hunger in neoliberal capitalism broadly, and more specifically in corporate control of the food system, lack of land and agrarian reform, ongoing land and resource dispossessions, and public policies that favour the global market rather than the interests of farmers and citizens who require access to affordable and nutritious food (Bennie and Satgoor 2018). As such, the solidarity economy arises out of this capitalist disarticulation, and aims to re-embed labour democratically within human creativity, production and nature (Wainwright 2014). From one point of view, the sharing and borrowing of food seen in Khayelitsha masks the extent of food insecurity amongst the urban poor and obscures the failings of urban food systems (Maxwell 1999). The household scale, the food retail geography of the informal settlement, and the community characteristics then all become vital considerations in determining food insecurity and developing strategies to address it.

It is also important to acknowledge that Khayelitsha was developed and planned as a residential dormitory township, and no provision was made for urban agriculture (Smit et al. 2016). Although there are some community vegetable gardens in the area, there was hardly any visibility of houses with vegetable patches, and none of the interviewees mentioned using gardens or being involved in urban agriculture for their food supply. This is similar to the findings of de Swardt et al. (2005) who found that only 3 per cent of households in Khayelitsha had home food gardens.

The discussed narratives of informality, social capital and governance have been central in fabricating a wholesome and meaningful reality of what the attainment of the right to food looks like for street food traders who are majority women in Khayelitsha. Khayelitsha is a physically, socially and politically variable and uncertain space, yet simultaneously filled with pockets of agency and hope. Although this research sought to understand what the promise of the right to food means for those actively involved in informal food systems of the poor, ultimately, instead it uncovered some of the often invisible, yet symbolic realities that knit together the fabric of this visibly fragmented space - ordinary, everyday experiences of the street traders themselves in a space defined by grave socioeconomic injustices and complexities.

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## Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion - The Right to Food and Nutrition and Self-Determination

*When I am hungry I want to eat one politician, hang another, and burn a third*. -

**Carolina Maria de Jesus, author of Child of the Dark.**

The main problem addressed in this study was how the fulfilment of the right to food and nutrition can be achieved in the era of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) within a complex South African food system that is generating negative outcomes, including for human health. This research was thus also a call for a broadening of the conceptual and theoretical terrain of food politics[202]: for an enlargement of what can be said about the politics of malnutrition, and specifically for deeper engagement with the complexities of rights, power, political economy and agency in transformation of the food system. In this dissertation, Marxist theoretical traditions and sociogenic frameworks underpinned my exploration of complex questions about the promise of the right to food and nutrition and its interrelations with hunger, poverty, power relations, statecraft and vulnerability. Furthermore, given that the food sovereignty narrative has evolved to articulate the rights of countries to determine food policies as well as the broader rights of communities and movements to influence the formal and informal institutions that govern food systems[203], this research has positioned malnutrition woes in particular as not simply being an indicator of agricultural praxis by delving into the continued, broader social and structural issues of access, equity and justice facing South Africa's food systems[204].



[202] Food politics refers to the social relations that impact the production, distribution and consumption of food. It has become a part of the popular consciousness in the last two decades.

[203] See: Claeys, P. 2013. From food sovereignty to peasants' rights: an overview of La Via Campesina's rights-based claims over the last 20 years, in *Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue*, New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1–11; & Chappell, M. J. 2018. Beginning to End Hunger: Food and the Environment in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, and Beyond. University of California Press.

[204] For a more nuanced discussion of the developmental ethics of food and nutrition security sensitive to variations in the institutional structure of capabilities relating to food access and adequate diets, especially with respect to the difference between urban poverty and the vulnerabilities of the rural poor, see: Sen, A.1999. Development as Freedom. New York: Alfred Knopf.

### 6.1 Reflections on the thesis

The papers that comprise the thesis address four key dimensions of policy relevant to the fulfilment of the right to food and our struggle with the multiple burden of malnutrition. The first, identifies constructive policy narratives to support achievement of the right to food and nutrition in the context of diverse policy paradigms in the food policy space. Second, is the investigation of the potential role of the codification of the right to access sufficient food and its implications for food and nutrition policy formulation. Third, was an analysis of power and governance issues that need to be addressed for better nutrition outcomes. Fourth, analysed food system dynamics of those at the bottom of the pyramid and what the policy landscape means at the margins of society. Contextually, the first three papers of the dissertation particularly addressed national scale policy discussions, and the fourth paper honed in on local government and trader policy and spatial planning aspects that impact on the fulfilment of the right to food not discussed in the first three papers.

Together, these four core chapters explore the possibilities, connectedness, and differences between public health practitioners, human rights defenders, government officials and private sector actors in how they envision change for better nutrition outcomes in the South African food system. Pointedly, the chapter on informality further helps illuminate the often-overlooked connections between human rights and the policy environment for informal operators as it shows that it is, at best, benignly neglectful, and at worse, actively destructive. There are three key questions that the study set out to answer that were addressed in the different chapters of the dissertation. These are reiterated below.

1. How is the right to food – and action to achieve the right to food – conceptualised and understood in a “food systems and nutrition” policy and practice context, in South Africa? - Chapters 2 and 3.
2. What are the characteristics of policy and politics in South Africa, with reference to the multiple burden of malnutrition? (Including the interface with economic and social factors ) - Chapters 3 and 4.

3. What are the roles and realities of key stakeholders, food traders, consumers, and people in general in the construction of food sovereignty within broader political-economic transformations? – Chapters 4 and 5.

Implementing a research project like this required both an understanding of the substantial work that has previously been done in the area of the right to food, political economy of food systems and food and nutrition security governance as well as theoretical approaches that could be used to fill-in the gaps of these previous studies[205]. The use of policy paradigms as an approach to describing the hegemonic nature of human rights and highlighting the geneology of 'food security' as the dominant narrative in the governance of food systems enabled me to introduce 'food sovereignty' and its emphasis on political self-determination as the point of departure for my research which seeks to counter neoliberalism within South Africa's food system[206]. Here, self-determination comes not from individual control over one's own food consumption, nor attempts to expand consumer choice to poor and marginalised communities. Instead, the food sovereignty lens advanced in this dissertation advances a notion of self-determination that pairs the politics of malnutrition with a discourse of a social movement intent on overhauling the corporate food regime from its roots.



Zoning-in food politics and development, current scholarship further reminds us that "international policy rhetoric around food and nutrition, including in the SDGs, is often driven by technocratic language and assumptions about incremental policy reform which obscure vital cross-cutting questions of power and politics[207]." By highlighting

[205] See: HLPE. 2017. Nutrition and food systems: a report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security. Rome, Italy: CFS; Fanzo, J. 2014. Strengthening the engagement of food and health systems to improve nutrition security: synthesis and overview of approaches to address malnutrition. Glob Food Sec 3 (3-4):183-92; Fanzo, J. & Davis, C. 2021. Global food systems, diets, and nutrition: linking science, economics, and policy. Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature; & Neuman, N. 2019. On the engagement with social theory in food studies: cultural symbols and social practices, Food, Culture & Society 22:1, 78-94, DOI: 10.1080/15528014.2018.1547069

[206] Rossett, P., Patel, R. & Courville. M. 2006. Promised Land: Competing Visions of Agrarian Reform. Oakland, CA: Food First Books.

[207] Leach, M., Nisbett, N., Cabral, L., Harris, J., Hossain, N. & Thompson, J. 2020. Food politics and development. *World Development*. 134. 105024. 10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105024.

the diverse ways in which food system transformation is necessarily and deeply political in South Africa, I have contributed to the large volume of research in this area that seeks to provide real world insights into governance for the fulfilment of the right to food and nutrition. The SDG process has raised the prominence of food and related issues in development and I have argued for the need to both deepen and extend the analysis of food as always political and never far from the broader questions of equity and sustainability with a particular emphasis on nutrition outcomes.

This dissertation has distinct intellectual merit in that it expands understandings of the importance of considering power and statecraft when advancing right to food and nutrition activism. This research also has implications for the world outside of South Africa in that it contributes to understandings of how food inequality is experienced and contested by marginalized individuals and communities operating within the constraints of food insecurity and economic and structural decay. Furthermore, the study contributes to a growing body of literature on the SDG's, and offers a critical examination of the realpolitik of right to food and nutrition activism in South Africa which is of particular relevance to other low and middle income countries. I achieve this by highlighting the importance and potential (somewhat unrealised) of food sovereignty as a framework for action.



Chapter 2 speaks to the potentiality of the growing food sovereignty movement in its various global manifestations to not only challenge the neoliberal socioeconomic order, but to also imagine viable alternatives to this current system. For food sovereignty advocates, the right to food (and nutrition) is directly connected to a particular understanding of food, one that sees it as a cultural commodity that should not be traded on a global scale without regard to the humans who produce and consume it. Crucially, from a food sovereignty perspective the right to food is built on a deep moral commitment that sees the right to self-determination as a necessary feature for living a life of dignity. It is my hope that this research can contribute to ongoing efforts to clarify areas of conceptual ambiguity within South Africa's understanding of 'food sovereignty' as it relates to food, health, human rights and community.

> "The food sovereignty approach can be distinguished as an 'epistemic shift' in which value relations, approaches to rights, and a shift from an economic to an ecological calculus concurrently challenge the rules and relations of a corporate or neoliberal food regime[208]." One of the most salient shifts has been in the value relations, justification regimes, and frames around the concept of food security as it has been challenged by new conceptualizations of food sovereignty[209]. Significantly, food sovereignty also pushes an ethical frame based on control over and access to food as an element of the confluence of economic, social, cultural, political, and environmental rights[210].

The above quote best describes the epistemic shift that is needed in South Africa and also offers the frame that connects food as a human right to the right to choose how and by whom that food be produced. And beyond advocating for a human rights approach to food systems governance, another important question for this research has been what it means to have the right to food. Because the South African food system is organised according to rationalities of efficiency and productivity with its basic imperatives being the ceaseless expansion of capital accumulation and profit, to talk of the right to food and nutrition (or the right to shape food policy) is to contrast it with a privilege. The modern food system has been architected by a handful of privileged people[211] and food sovereignty insists that this is illegitimate, because the design of our social system is not the privilege of the few, but the right of all.

[208] Wittman, H. 2011. Food sovereignty: a new rights framework for food and nature?. Environment and Society 2 (1): 87-105.

[209] See: Fairbairn, M. 2010. Framing Resistance: International Food Regimes and the Roots of Food Sovereignty. pp. 15-31. *In* Wittman, H., Desmarais, A. & Wiebe, N. (eds.). *Food Sovereignty: Reconnecting Food, Nature and Community*. Halifax: Fernwood; Mooney, P. H. & Hunt, S.A. 2009. Food Security: The Elaboration of Contested Claims to a Consensus Frame. *Rural Sociology* 74 (4): 469-497. *&* Windfuhr, M. & Jonsén, J. 2005. Food Sovereignty: Towards Democracy in Localized Food Systems. Bourton-on-Dunsmore, UK: FIAN-International; ITDG Publishing.

[210] Anderson, M.D. 2008. Rights-Based Food Systems and the Goals of Food Systems Reform. *Agriculture and Human Values* 25 (4): 593-608.

[211] To reiterate, South Africa has a dualistic structure to its food systems, with a regulated, largescale and industrialised commercial system dominating production and distribution, and a subordinate 'informal', unregulated smallscale system operating on the peripheries of the formal economy. This structure was historically racialised, with whites dominating the formal system and the black majortiy population creating the so-called informal system out of necessity for survival.

**Revisiting human rights as a tool to address food and nutrition insecurity**

As a result of the country's regressive trajectory on the realisation of the right to food and nutrition, this research has exposed how the food sovereignty narrative/movement in South Africa needs to further clarify and amplify on what it means to have a right to food. Drawing from the theorist Hannah Arendt, Raj Patel and Priscilla Claeys have attempted to clarify how the movement seeks to utilize human rights to advance its goals in-light of the fact that elsewhere the human rights framework has also been criticized for its tendency to individualize struggles and emphasize legal dimensions of justice, while ignoring issues of power[212]. Patel recognizes that the concept of rights may prove problematic for food sovereignty activists because both implicit and explicit in this demand is the claim that the state (or sovereign) is ultimately responsible for guaranteeing the right to food[213]. Drawing off of Arendt, Patel suggests that we need to begin with the idea of 'the right to rights.' Once we have established this we can then assert some sort of system of rights, and human rights in particular. On the other hand, Claeys is of the opinion that despite the critiques, rights discourse continues to resonate with the food sovereignty movement. According to her, some activists and academics that align themselves with the movement are working to subvert simplistic understandings of rights in favour of a more dignified, community-rooted, and radical alternative approach that captures the attention of national and international legislative bodies, while remaining useful to grassroots struggles[214]. However, she acknowledges that the strategic utility of this approach is a contested issue within the food sovereignty movement. This discussion section of the dissertation does not necessarily expand on the theoretical deficiency apparent in food sovereignty when it comes to its interface with the human rights framework but instead reflects on crosscutting findings from this study associated with constitutionalism as it relates to the struggles around the politics of malnutrition and the right to food.



[212] Patel, R. 2010. What Does Food Sovereignty Look Like, *In* Wittman, H., Desmarais, A. & Wiebe, N. (eds.). Reconnecting Food, Nature and Community, Halifax & Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, p191-193; & Claeys, P. 2015. Human Rights and the Food Sovereignty Movement. New York: Routledge.
[213] Patel, R. (Guest Editor). 2009. Food sovereignty, *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 36 (3): 663-706, DOI: 10.1080/03066150903143079
[214] Claeys, P. 2015. Human Rights and the Food Sovereignty Movement. New York: Routledge.

In Chapter 3 I showed that the food policy landscape is key to understanding governance achievements and failures, with respect to the right to food and nutrition. Post-1994, the South African government has adopted a macro-economic policy path that largely adheres to neoliberal precepts and eschews the possibility of more progressive transformation in the economy and society[215]. Bennie and Satgoor (2018) when making the call for a solidarity economy in South Africa interestingly highlight the fact that "key pillars of economic power have been left intact (post-1994), resulting in many social inequalities remaining firmly in place. The intensification of inequality as a result of the interaction of structures built up under apartheid with a globalising economy is starkly indicated in the case of food[216]."

Under a political economy of nutrition analysis, the human rights questions addressed in Chapter 3 helped us unpack some of the difficulties that are expressed at the moment of establishing and executing credible food and nutrition policies in South Africa. In this regard, the mysticism that currently defines the workings of our food system seems to stem from the fact that the state has been rendered ineffective because of a private sector that emerged as very influential. Notably, the control of food systems by national and transnational corporations is also tied to other important current problems such as policies on climate change, water stress, energy pressures and so on. To be clear, the problem highlighted in third chapter is that the policy landscape in the country is failing to adequately capture that it is not a shortage of food necessarily contributing to hunger and malnutrition. Following the COVID-19 pandemic in particular it has become more evident that, "in South Africa, hunger is a result of lack of access and getting enough calories and adequate nutrients is largely tied to income.

[215] See: Marais, H. 2011. South Africa Pushed to the Limit: The Political Economy of Change. London: Zed Books; & Satgar, V. 2008. Neoliberalised South Africa: Labour and the roots of passive revolution. *Labour, Capital and Society* 41 (2): 38-69.

[216] Bennie, A. & Satgoor, A. 2018. Deepening The Just Transition Through Food Sovereignty and the Solidarity Economy, *In* V Satgar (Ed.), The Climate Crisis: South African and Global Democratic Eco-Socialist Alternatives, Wits University Press, pp293-313. https://doi.org/10.18772/22018020541.19

> Beyond the high cost of healthy food, hidden hunger in the country reflects the limited availability of nutritious products in low-income and marginalized areas, the cost of energy for cooking and food storage, and lack of access to land for household food production[217].

Food policies are significant factors that influence food and nutrition security. The South African government has myriad policies and strategies in place hosted by different departments and with different objectives, some of which are in line with international policy frameworks[218]. Empirical data however indicates that "the potential of these policies and legislative mandates is undermined by inadequate and ineffective implementation as well as incoherent actions and interventions undertaken by stakeholders from different parts of the food system, and across different sectors[219]." For example, none of the government participants who were involved in this study were able to give guidance on the fact that South Africa has had for decades a series of national plans dealing with food insecurity, coordinated by 'task teams', but this process seems to have stalled. At the time of writing, a five-year National Food and Nutrition Security Plan was drafted in 2017, but respondents from government and pointedly the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), which is located in the presidency did not reference the 'National Food and Nutrition Security Task Team' or its 'Disaster Relief and Social Relief Management Programme'. As such, the conclusion drawn in this chapter is that South Africa's policy aspirations as they relate to the right to food and nutrition remain far from the real lives of many South Africans.



[217] See: Pereira, L. & Drimie, S. 2016. Governance Arrangements for the Future Food System: Addressing Complexity in South Africa. *Environment: Science and Policy for sustainable Development* 58(4), doi:10.1080/00139157.2016.1186438. & Patrick, H.O., Khalema, E.N., Abiolu, O.A., Ijatuyi, E.J. & Abiolu, R.T. 2021. South Africa's multiple vulnerabilities, food security and livelihood options in the COVID-19 new order: An annotation. *J transdiscipl res S Afr* 17 (1): a1037. https://doi.org/10.4102/td.v17i1.1037

[218] Boatemma, S., Drimie, S. & Pereira, L. 2018. Addressing food and nutrition security in South Africa: A review of policy responses since 2002. *African Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics* 13 (311-2019-687): 264-79.

[219] Swart, R., van der Merwe, M., Spires, M. & Drimie, S. 2020. Child-centred food systems: Ensuring healthy diets for children. *In*: May, J., Witten, C. & Lake, L (eds). South African Child Gauge 2020. Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape Town.

**Perspectives on accountability for change and transformation in the food system**

Building on Chapter 3 and the role of transformative accountability in shaping food and nutrition policy in South Africa, in Chapter 4 I delved into the governance aspect of food systems transformation, in which explicit attention is paid to decision making processes and their legitimation in governance processes, in other words: how decisions are made, who decides, who is in or excluded, what power inequalities are at play, and what – or whose – knowledge is in and excluded. The conclusions that could be drawn were that in order to meet food and nutrition security objectives, governance of the country's food systems needs to become more inclusive and flexible. There is evidence that outside formal governmental structures, the process of 'self-organisation' is occurring amongst different actors in the food system to address pressures that they are starting to face. Therefore, whether posed in the language of transformative potential, counter-hegemony, or oppositional action, criticisms of current right to food and nutrition activism in South Africa can be seen as falling into two general thematic areas. First of all, it is faulted with a failure to challenge existing economic structures through either practice or language. This is a major stumbling block due to the fact that it is important to acknowledge that following the advent of democracy there's been a neoliberal ascendance of private governance over public government which in-turn has resulted in the ills of the current food system. According to scholars, liberalisation and deregulation has resulted in increased concentration throughout the agro-food system in the country, with the balance of power shifting towards corporate retailers and brand owners and away from agricultural producers[220]. As substantiation, scholars further note that this has brough about "sharp contradictions in South Africa's food system across the spectrum, from patterns of land ownership and rural class relations to ownership and

[220] See: Bernstein, H. 2015. Commercial farming and agribusiness in South Africa since 1994. In Land Divided, Land Restored: Land Reform in South Africa for the 21st Century, edited by B. Cousins and C. Walker. Johannesburg: Jacana Media, pp. 104 - 119; Bennie, A. & Satgoor, A. 2018. Deepening The Just Transition Through Food Sovereignty and the Solidarity Economy, *In* V Satgar (Ed.), The Climate Crisis: South African and Global Democratic Eco-Socialist Alternatives, Wits University Press, pp293-313. https://doi.org/10.18772/22018020541.19 & Greenberg, S. 2010. Contesting the food system in South Africa: Issues and opportunities. PLAAS Research Report No. 42. Bellville: Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies.

control in the food value chain, and the associated social effects thereof. The result is that most of the production, processing, distribution and retailing of food is controlled by a small number of corporations with inordinate power in the food system, deepening the commodification of food[221]."

Therefore, it is in-light of the abovementioned that in Chapter 4 I make an appeal for human rights defenders to begin strategizing on how to work through the market rather than through government policy change alone. In doing so, they'll be able to credibly engage the difficult terrain through which citizens with food rights and entitlements are currently being replaced by consumers with food choices and responsibilities. To exercise autonomy within food systems, consumers in particular need to build networks and advocacy groups to exert pressure on major food producers and retailers. These advocacy groups will need to be able to define and quantify their demands and identify at what level they are being met[222] and when information is being manipulated. Exercising this self-determination is becoming increasingly dependent on political literacy.



A second line of criticism points out that activist scholars and right to food and nutrition defenders often fail to tackle existing social injustice in their current messaging and politicking. For example, "the current emphasis on food system localization obscures the intolerance and inequality that may be just as prevalent at the local scale as at any other[223]." Inequity within the South African food system, such as limited access to nutritious and affordable food, income disparities for food and farm workers, or disparities in accessing land cannot be addressed without addressing inequality within society as a whole. Therefore, a major concern of this dissertation is the inability of activist-scholars to confront the nexus of marginality and "othering"

[221] Bennie, A. & Satgoor, A. 2018. Deepening The Just Transition Through Food Sovereignty and the Solidarity Economy, *In* V Satgar (Ed.), The Climate Crisis: South African and Global Democratic Eco-Socialist Alternatives, Wits University Press, pp293-313. https://doi.org/10.18772/22018020541.19

[222] Iles, A. 2005. Learning in sustainable agriculture: food miles and missing objects. *Environmental Values* 14 (2): 163-183.

[223] Fairbairn, M. 2011. Framing Transformation: The Counter-Hegemonic Potential of Food Sovereignty in the US Context. *Agriculture and Human Values* 29. 1-14. 10.1007/s10460-011-9334-x.

perpetuated by corporate power and structural racialization within our food system and society as a whole.

Fundamentally, the increasing power of corporations within the country's food systems has continued and in some ways worsened the racial, gender, and economic inequities that have long characterized the food system and society more broadly. As such, integral to the understanding of current food justice and food sovereignty activism in South Africa is a history of the planned destruction of black agriculture, dependence upon racial categories and the coloniality of power embedded in our food production. Notably, the flourishing of academic interest in food systems over the last decade domestically has resulted in lamentably little attention to how race in particular intersects with food activism, or with food systems more broadly. To a large extent even food sovereignty as framed by the country's civil society organizations and activist-scholars has been undermined by this reality. Pointedly, for South African public health scholars and practitioners when it comes to advancing the right to food and nutrition the question of privilege and position particularly amongst white professionals and academics is often an understated but profoundly important issue. Evident from the fieldwork is that white public health practitioners emerge with confidence, resources, and a network, all of which reinforce them in positions of influence. One of the things that are preventing us from making progress in addressing hunger and malnutrition in the country is that the experts and people who are pushing the agenda are white. If we really want to create an enabling environment to get the attention of politicians and other powerful actors, the public health space needs to be seen as having transformed.

Granted, the budding sovereignty movement has retained its critical stance towards the neoliberal governance of food and nutrition. However, the type of political action currently recommended by South African food sovereignty organizations and activists is certainly tame compared to that undertaken by some of their international counterparts - I could not find a single call to commit civil disobedience - this is because they do not enjoy broad based support due to the racialised nature of South Africa's inequality woes, it is political nonetheless. The "concept of food sovereignty

clearly holds great potential for bringing attention to social injustice within the existing food system. As a frame created by some of the most marginalized people within the global food system, it facilitates attention to structural discrimination of all kinds[224]." Thus far, however, this transformative potential has yet to be fully realized in the South African context.

**Food sovereignty and everyday life**

The political economy of food sovereignty represents an authentic and in many respects a coherent alternative to the political economy of the capitalist food system although, at the same time, we must acknowledge that there remains certain key omissions and ambiguities in food sovereignty which distract from the cogency of its critique, as well as its coherence and universality of its appeal as a paradigmatic alternative. To illustrate, domestically the focus on the needs and priorities of smallholder/subsistence farmers has meant that the needs and priorities of 'workers' have been inadequately addressed. Thus far, no effort has been made to systematically integrate food sovereignty with broader movements for economic democracy. As a matter of political strategy, this is a significant omission in a capitalist country like South Africa, where farmers constitute a tiny percentage of the population[225]. Additionally, it is unclear whether food sovereignty explicitly aligns itself with post-capitalist movements, such as economic democracy, or whether it wishes to be a part of a movement for reformed capitalism. This particular ambiguity has in fact led to the current dangers the movement faces of passive revolution and co-option especially as regards to the fulfilment of the right to food and nutrition in the SDG era.

[224] Fairbairn, M. 2011. Framing Transformation: The Counter-Hegemonic Potential of Food Sovereignty in the US Context. *Agriculture and Human Values* 29. 1-14. 10.1007/s10460-011-9334-x.

[225] At the time of writing, according to the International Trade Administration (ITA) there are approximately 32,000 commercial farmers in South Africa, of which between 5,000 and 7,000 produce approximately 80 percent of agricultural output. See: https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/south-africa-agricultural-sector

Chapter 5 is the final empirical chapter and as such expands the view of the study to include the informal food system of the poor and marginalised. Here, the underlying motive was to de-centre 'food' as an object of study, placing social life and lived experience as the central point of departure for a critical analysis of the industrial capitalist food system and the search for alternatives. In this vein, this chapter discussed the efficacy of human rights as a vehicle for transformative social and political change, in the context of the considerable resilience of the informal food system in the country. I demonstrated that there are many reasons to be sceptical of the capacity of human rights to effect substantive change in the lives of the poor and marginalised – twenty seven years of formal human rights 'progress' have not coincided with substantive steps towards the eradication of forms of mass suffering and oppression that continue to plague South Africa. Hunger and malnutrition are worsening and at the same time the obesity pandemic has materialised as a new form of mass suffering with strong structural and systemic elements. Human rights instruments do little or nothing to address these phenomena, in the absence of structural change in the country's political economy. The chapter paints an interesting picture of informal street food traders in their eminently social, historical, and relational contexts. Everyday experiences of producing, obtaining, and consuming food are, quite literally, visceral manifestations "of multiple and intersecting processes that continually seek to subordinate the lives of human beings to the logic of accumulation, competition, wage labour, and the market. Struggles over the right to food and nutrition, therefore, can be seen as struggles over proletarianization and alienation; of the material and meaningful ways in which capitalism produces and transforms everyday life[226]."

Food sovereignty's "radical imperative is to consider social justice not simply as an additive property to a sustainable food system, but the very foundation from which such a food system must be built; corrections to historical and structural injustices are

[226] Figueroa, M. 2015. Food Sovereignty in Everyday Life: Toward a People-centered Approach to Food Systems, Globalizations, 12:4, 498-512, DOI: 10.1080/14747731.2015.1005966

among the essential preconditions before food sovereignty can be achieved[227]." According to Meleiza Figueroa (2015),

> the primacy of the social in the ideas and goals of food sovereignty seems to suggest that a reorientation in the critique of food systems is needed towards the social, and the organization of society as a whole. It compels us not only to interrogate the juridical, economic, and legislative structures governing the production and consumption of food, but to consider food systems first and foremost in terms of their social lives[228].

Through the use of an adapted photo-elicitation methodology Chapter 5 was able to shift the lens of analysis from food governance woes to people and everyday life at the heart of food systems. My approach that placed people at the centre of our food system takes into account how space, power, and meaning are implicated within the country's system, I engaged with the particular struggles and histories of a community, and identified the ways in which social transformations affect, and are affected by, the lived experience of food. This paper highlights the need for a reconceptualization of food itself: from a discrete "object" of research towards a relational conception in which food - and the experience of food - must be embraced as a kind of nexus in and through which social processes converge and interact.

A 'people-centred' approach to this research not only illuminated the power relations and injustices that lie at the heart of the food system, but also showed how the infinite array of struggles and aspirations that express themselves in the everyday experience of food are the raw material from which many possible paths to a just and sustainable food system can be built. The evidence of this small case study reinforces the findings in Chapter 1 that the fulfilment of the right to food in South Africa will require a paradigm shift in the production, distribution and consumption of food driven by a broader political, economic and social transformation.

[227] Ibid
[228] Loc cit

### 6.2 Strength and limitations of the study

This was a socially engaged, critical research project, with the goal of delving into the politics of malnutrition in South Africa. While it is possible that research participants chose not to fully disclose information during our interviews, or even to alter their answers in order to present a particular narrative, this is an unavoidable risk of qualitative or ethnographic research. In certain instances I was able to compare participants' responses to things I read or observed, but in the case of gaining insights into the realpolitik, my ability to verify answers was naturally quite limited. However, I did not get the impression that participants wished to mislead me, and between their answers and my other forms of data collection, I felt that the information reflected the perceived "reality" of the participants - which was my objective.

The novice researcher is encouraged to practice reflexivity at the beginning of one's research to help him/her understand the biases he/she has that may interfere with correct interpretation of what is discussed and/or observed. Researcher bias is one of the aspects of qualitative research that has led to the view that qualitative research is subjective, rather than objective. According to Carl Ratner, some qualitative researchers believe that one cannot be both objective and subjective, while others believe that the two can coexist, that one's subjectivity can facilitate understanding the world of others[229]. The underlying rationale here is that when one reflects on one's biases, he/she can then recognize those biases that may distort understanding and replace them with those that help him/her to be more objective. In this way, Ratner suggests, the researcher is being respectful of the participants by using a variety of methods to ensure that what he/she thinks is being said, in fact, matches the understanding of the participant[230]. Interestingly, on the other hand Breuer highlights the use of a variety of methods for knowledge production, including, for example, "positioning or various points of view, different frames of reference, such as special or temporal relativity, perceptual schemata based on experience, and interaction with

[229] Ratner, C. 2002. Subjectivity and Objectivity in Qualitative Methodology. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *3*(3). https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-3.3.829
[230] Ibid

the social context – these are key to understanding that any interaction changes the observed object[231]." Using different approaches to data collection and observation leads to a richer understanding of the social context and the participants therein.

Several limitations have been noted by researchers involved with using observations in particular as a tool for data collection. For example, scholars like Billie and Kathleen DeWalt noted that male and female researchers have access to different information, as they have access to different people, settings, and bodies of knowledge[232]. For them, it is important to understand that participant observation is conducted by a biased human who serves as the instrument for data collection; the researcher must understand how his/her ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality and theoretical approach may affect observation, analysis, and interpretation. Nevertheless, also important to acknowledge is that any field research involves a unique set of power dynamics between the researcher and the 'observed', and in the context of post-apartheid South Africa, these are influenced by the racialised inequality that characterises the broader society[233]. As such, beyond the limitations of this specific study, it should be noted that 'qualitative research' itself carries certain limitations. Prominent amongst these is its implication in the racist project of colonialism[234]. "Thus undertaking research with a critical stance involves certain tensions between the exploitative history of research (as an activity associated with colonial domination), the positionality of the researcher, and the social justice objectives of the research project[235]." And in the spirit of staying true to the history, militancy and advocacy of the food sovereignty movement, it was important to keep this challenge in mind at all times.



[231] Breuer, F. 2003. Subjectivity and Reflexivity in the Social Sciences: Epistemic Windows and Methodical Consequences. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *4*(2). https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-4.2.698

[232] See: DeWalt, K, M. & DeWalt, B, R. 2002. *Participant observation: a guide for fieldworker*s. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

[233] Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. 2005. Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research (Third Edit, pp. 1–32). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

[234] Ibid

[235] Loc cit

### 6.3 Discussion of cross-cutting themes

Four cross-cutting themes emerged from the research about a human rights based approach to the governance of the food system for better nutrition outcomes. First, there is a need for an explicit linking of democracy and food and nutrition security in the country. In particular, I expand on the hollowness of the right to food and nutrition as a potential political/policy lever. The human rights approach as it applies to food and nutrition policy issues in South Africa still constitutes a fairly blunt set of tools. Second is that there is the potential for looking at existing problems with a fresh perspective. However, the issue of power within country's food systems has been little explored empirically or theoretically to date, with researchers and practitioners who focus on various forms of malnutrition and food insecurity only for the most part starting to examine this topic. Understanding differential power and influence in the food system including in food and nutrition governance requires political economy research approaches.



Third, at the time of writing, the president has given little indication of what a post-COVID-19 compact in South Africa will entail, but a useful point of departure is to revisit the concept of social compacting, our experience of the concept, and what lessons can be drawn at this stage of our trajectory post-1994[236]. The idea of a social pact has been an elusive goal in post-apartheid South Africa. However, contemplating a new social pact in the country is not necessarily futile, if anything, for a number of reasons, the COVID-19 pandemic may have created the conditions for a viable social compact in South Africa[237]. A shift towards a more holistic approach to the content of food and nutrition policy is now needed in order to build food sovereignty but the political process also needs to change. The post-COVID compact presents a window of opportunity for a recalibration of our food system and its governance. Nevertheless, it is also important to acknowledge that regardless of how perfect public policy may

[236] Ramaphosa, C. 2020. Statement by President Cyril Ramaphosa on further economic and social measures in response to the COVID-19 epidemic. Union Buildings, Tshwane, Office of the President. http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/speeches/2020/cram0421.pdf

[237] Francis, D., Valodia, I. & Webster, E. 2020. Politics, Policy and Inequality in South Africa Under COVID-19, Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy: A triannual Journal of Agrarian South Network and CARES.

appear on paper, the realities of the political landscape in which it is developed and implemented will ultimately shape its impact. No policy is self-interpreting nor self-implementing. Significantly, the elements of a human rights approach are already interwoven into many areas of food and nutrition policy research and analysis in South Africa. Issues of agricultural sustainability, gender inequalities, property rights, and famine and information are all examples of where a human rights approach already has had an influence on thinking and perceptions. By juxtaposing the politics of malnutrition with the food sovereignty narrative, I hope this research results in additional food and nutrition issues benefitting from being cast under a human rights lens. The following brief analysis provides 'further considerations' for public health work in this field.

**a) The politics of malnutrition and the policy agenda**

An understanding of politics and its effect on food and nutrition governance is a thoroughly interdisciplinary effort and characteristics of such engaged food politics research include alliances between researchers and activists; strong contributions from policy practitioners; a recognition of different yet equally valid ways of knowing, and an active seeking-out of knowledge based on different vulnerability assessments[238].

> Much food and nutrition security research has attempted to find causal explanations for how material and structural poverty lead to deprivation that manifests in multiple ways. The conclusions often reflect the background and orientation of the researchers. The plurality of backgrounds (health, nutrition, agronomy, economics, sociology, among others) influences our understanding of what causes food insecurity and consequently of what we must do to deal with it[239].

[238] Anderson, M. & Leach, M. 2019. Transforming food systems: The potential of engaged political economy. *IDS Bulletin* 50 (2). Brighton: Institute of Development Studies. & Leach, M., Gaventa, J. & Oswald, K (eds). 2017. Engaged excellence. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies. *IDS Bulletin* 47 (6).

[239] Hendriks, S.L. 2015. The food security continuum: a novel tool for understanding food insecurity as a range of experiences. *Food Sec.* 7**,** 609-619. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12571-015-0457-6

Food insecurity and malnutrition is a problem with multiple manifestations. "Multiple contributing causes - social norms, individual behaviour and stages in the human life cycle, food availability and quality - all these things make it a 'wicked' problem requiring comprehensive approaches [240] ." The difficulty we face is in bringing convergence to our understanding of the varied experiences of human deprivation so as to improve our response to the problem[241]. The question of how people experience deprivation continues to perplex us and hamper our efforts to monitor vulnerability and food insecurity situations[242].

The author's investment in the food sovereignty frame is not only because it includes the right to food but due the fact that the narrative also mounts an assault on the neo-liberalization and industrialization of the food system and furnishes a vision of a more equitable model (see Chapter 2). As a political scientist working in food and health, I believe food sovereignty could provide just the ambition that right to food and nutrition movements are lacking at the moment. Currently the radical food movement tracks, exposes, critiques and challenges the discourse of food security. This is necessary work and is a key component of resistance and alternative meaning making. Marchione states that "overcoming malnutrition is enabled in an ideological context where basic economic and social needs and civil and political participation are recognised responsibilities of the state[243]." The politics of malnutrition have long been neglected in South Africa. The multitude of involved stakeholders at many levels, the invisibility of the dual burden of malnutrition and lack of access to healthy foods, and the imbalance of power between governments and multinational corporations, generate little accountability for commitment and delivery, and fuel the political economy of nutrition.

[240] Fairbairn, M. 2011. Framing Transformation: The Counter-Hegemonic Potential of Food Sovereignty in the US Context. *Agriculture and Human Values* 29. 1-14. 10.1007/s10460-011-9334-x.
[241] Ibid
[242] Headey, D., & Ecker, O. 2013. Rethinking the measurement of food security: from first principles to best practice. *Food Security* 5: 327-343.
[243] Marchione, T.J. 1999. The culture of nutrition practice in a new development era. *In* T.J. Marchione (ed), Scaling up, scaling down: overcoming malnutrition in developing countries. Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, p55.

The hunger and health problem in South Africa is embedded in a wider, more systemic failure to redirect food systems around public health nutritional needs. Institutional structures currently do not offer serious considerations about the 'big picture' for food, agriculture, health and the environment. Too often, ministries of health, environment, agriculture and trade, quite legitimately, take partial perspectives. Alongside an understanding of the politics of malnutrition presented herein I still stress the need for better knowledge of the politics of food and nutrition as part of the central contribution of this paper. There have been some positive advances in this field, and my ideas toward more nuanced perspectives of power and statecraft were explored in this dissertation. But recognizing that real political commitment for the fulfilment of the right to food and nutrition is still absent in South Africa, I still lack effective knowledge on what can best drive this commitment and turn it into action on the ground.



**b) The right to food and nutrition as a potential policy/political lever**



While policy frameworks have not been framed from a food sovereignty perspective, this dissertation has endeavoured to show the usefulness of using a food sovereignty lens in assessing some of the long-term implications of South Africa's right to food and nutrition policy frameworks and their ability to not only feed the hungry but to create more inclusive, participatory and sustainable food systems. With this in mind, Desmarais and Wittman argue persuasively that the food sovereignty narrative has a nuanced understanding of the right to food and nutrition in that it conceives of rights as collective and decentralized "with implementation depending not just on states, but also on communities, peoples, and international bodies[244]." But Claeys argues that the 'right to food' frame has failed to provide a space for critiquing capitalism and systemic inequality - issues that are central for food sovereignty movement actors.

[244] Desmarais, A. & Wittman, H. 2013. Farmers, Foodies & First Nations: Getting to Food Sovereignty in Canada, Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue, Yale.

For her, the argument is that frames are "contested, discursive, and strategic processes" out of which our notions of rights emerge[245]. The 'right to food' frame, she contends, has been shaped by other, more radical human rights frames, but still retains its essential insufficiently radical character[246]. And yet, ultimately, Claeys concedes that no frame can be wholly abandoned. However, one needs to be aware of how particular frames reflect particular economic models because without sufficient space to articulate alternatives to dominant capitalist production models, the differences between frames may be irreconcilable.

The research for this dissertation found that the budding campaign for food sovereignty in South Africa provides an illuminating case study of an attempt to institute 'counter-hegemonic' practices, including by developing human rights from the ground up and 'outside the state', while at the same time appealing to the state and to constitutionalism and international law to defend these re-defined human rights. The campaign must be commended for providing a corrective to the theoretical polarisation of 'top down' and 'bottom up' accounts in the sociology of human rights as experienced thus far in the country. In an article exploring the relationship between social movements, human rights and law, Kate Nash points out that sociologists commonly draw a distinction between 'top down' and 'bottom up' approaches[247]. For her, "'global constitutionalism' posits that 'there is a single human rights movement creating international law'. While potentially legitimated by responsiveness to universal needs, sociologists conceive global constitutionalism as a 'top down' view because it focuses on the role of elites and 'professional legal experts' in creating a unified body of international human rights law[248]."

To reiterate, it is not within the scope of this study to elaborate on human rights as a field of struggle or what "violences" the silence of orthodox human rights discourses

[245] Claeys, P. 2015. Human Rights and the Food Sovereignty Movement. New York: Routledge, p.97.
[246] Ibid.
[247] Nash, K. 2012. Human Rights, movements and law: On not researching legitimacy, *Sociology* 46 (5): 797, 798.
[248] Ibid

enable. However, in the spirit of making a contribution to third world approaches to international law the 'subaltern cosmopolitanism[249]' that resonates with the food sovereignty frame posits plural forms of human rights and of law, suggesting that these "can be developed by marginalised and oppressed peoples against hegemonic globalisation[250]." According to this approach, which is characterised by sociologists as 'bottom up', human rights particularly "enfranchise the marginalised when they are the products of local cultures and when they function in ways that are "local, living, and counter-hegemonic[251]." Pointedly, Nash is critical of the application of this "top down/bottom up" dichotomy to human rights, putting forward the argument that "it actually neglects the role of the state, which operates in 'the middle' between the local and the international, as well as the reality that human rights are rarely 'developed outside and against the state'[252]." Nash further asserts that "little is known about how particular social movement demands come to be articulated in the language of human rights, and how 'uses of human rights at the grassroots relate, if at all, to legal reform'[253]."

Through *La Vía Campesina's* activism, the concept of food sovereignty is now widely recognized and supported by many civil society and right to food and nutrition groups globally[254]. Interestingly, Fairbairn holds the view that food sovereignty "has already demonstrated great transformative potential as a vision statement and a rallying cry, as a means to stimulate thought and to inspire action[255]." The global food sovereignty

[249] Subaltern cosmopolitanism is a corrective to hegemonic cosmopolitan projects. Some examples of subaltern cosmopolitanism include the World Social Forum, international networks of alternative legal services, and artistic movements against imperialist cultural values.
[250] Loc cit
[251] Ibid, 799.
[252] ibid
[253] Ibid, 802.
[254] Claeys, P. 2012. The creation of new rights by the food sovereignty movement: The challenge of institutionalizing subversion, *Sociology* 46 (5): 844, 850; VC, 'The CFS', 12; Holt-Giménez, E. & Patel, R. 2009. Food Rebellions! Crisis and the Hunger for Justice*,* Cape Town, Dakar, Nairobi and Oxford: Pambazuka Press, 86; & Ziegler, J., Golay, C., Mahon, C., & Way, S. 2011. The fight for the right to food: lessons learned*,* Great Britain: Palgrave MacMillan, p352-6.
[255] Fairbairn, M. 2010. Framing Resistance. *In* Wittman, H., Desmarais, A. and Wiebe, N. (eds.). *Food sovereignty: Reconnecting food, nature & community*, Oxford: Pambazuka Press, 1-5.

campaign is slowly spurring policy and legal change in a select number of countries[256]. "In Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Mali, Nepal, Nicaragua, Senegal and Venezuela legal recognition to aspects of food sovereignty has been accorded, although in practise this recognition has often been qualified or ignored[257]." In juxtaposition to the problem of right to food violations and how best to address South Africa's multiple burden of malnutrition participants in this study were prompted to consider whether or not human rights language is useful to achieve progress and whether it is commonly used in practice and what it has to offer for a recalibration of the food system towards food sovereignty principles. Some public health practitioners viewed the right to food and nutrition as presenting a novel frame for public health professionals on the longstanding issue of food and nutrition insecurity, offering a sense of optimism to achieve progress. Human rights terminology could be described as challenging society and policymakers to consider their social conscience. However, although potentially useful in engaging stakeholders from sectors beyond public health, at present, the existing food security, nutrition and welfare community in the country is not consistently using the term human right to food and nutrition.

In order to gain traction, the issue of advocacy must be framed with more publicly palatable language which could translate to conscietizing the masses. It was clear that amongst participants, a broad consensus exists about what a human rights-based approach to addressing food insecurity stands for and the importance of achieving this. As such, advocacy and action to embed attributes of human rights into frameworks, policy documents and organisational actions should hence continue and be possible in the current context. My findings regarding the usefulness of a human rights-based framing corroborate international literature. Human-rights framing is

[256] Internationally, the Organisation of American States has recognised food sovereignty policies in some of its member states in the Declaration of Cochabamba on 'Food Security with Sovereignty in the Americas.' The Declaration does not itself advance food sovereignty as it encourages participation of food producers in markets and supports private-public investment as key to food security (AG/doc.5329/12 corr. 1, 14 June 2012).

[257] Claeys, P. 2012. The creation of new rights by the food sovereignty movement: The challenge of institutionalizing subversion, *Sociology* 46 (5): 844, 850; VC, 'The CFS', 12. & Ziegler, J., Golay, C., Mahon, C., & Way, S. 2011. The fight for the right to food: lessons learned, Great Britain: Palgrave MacMillan, p38.

already in place in legal and political sectors, but as Michael Freeman argues, "we must distinguish human rights from the legal rights of particular societies[258]." "While human rights-based rhetoric provides a mechanism to reframe 'problems' as 'violations"' and presents a stronger argument that it should not be tolerated[259], Chilton and Rose assert that in order to be effective, a clear consensus on the definition of the 'right to food' is required[260]." Further justification for the theory of human rights and why this framing should be used is required to convince stakeholders to support this language[261].

To achieve a nourishing food system that caters for all South Africans, study respondents suggested the government should lead legislative changes, the civil society sector should act as connectors between government and community members, the academic research sector could support food insecurity monitoring and evaluation, legal professionals should assist with the framing of human rights terminology and citizens should drive the political agenda, holding government to account. However, barriers to change included a lack of widespread awareness of what a human rights-based approach to tackling hunger and the multiple burden of malnutrition is, lack of enforceable right to food law as a mechanism for change, and a siloed working approach in governing a "corporatised" food sector not to mention the difficulties of articulating food sovereignty politicking for broad based support. In contrast, enablers included strong food justice advocates, community empowerment and capitalising on the acceptance and action on the 2030 SDGs.

**c) Assessing power in nutrition governance**

The domains of food sovereignty that I have identified and contended with in this study do not encapsulate every aspirational component of the food sovereignty

[258] Freeman, M. 2017. Human rights. Cambridge: Polity.
[259] Ibid
[260] Chilton, M. & Rose, D. 2009. A rights-based approach to food insecurity in the United States. *Am J Public Health* 99 (7):1203–11. https://doi.org/10.2105/A JPH.2007.130229.
[261] Loc cit

narrative as envisioned by the diverse peoples and organisations involved in this global movement. Rather, the empirical work produced in chapters 3,4 and 5 is an attempt to distill essential elements from this dynamic movement and from the body of scholarship on food sovereignty as they relate to the politics of malnutrition and the fulfilment of the right to food. Overall, the empirical evidence-base produced in this dissertation supports the hypothesis that the call for greater food sovereignty as an avenue towards improved human health is weak at the moment. This dearth of evidence, I suspect, is due, in part, to the opposition that food sovereignty narratives pose to existing institutions, including health governance organisations[262]. Power dynamics (and imbalances) within South Africa's food system have led to many ineffective and incoherent policy decisions[263], decisions which have failed to address malnourishment, leaving many people under-served, under-voiced, and unable to hold the powerful to account.

> Challenging the activities which lead to suboptimal outcomes for population nutrition calls for rigorous analysis of how power operates; only then can suitable structures be designed to ensure a more transparent and responsible exercise of power in those fora mandated to make responsive and effective decisions in the interests of tackling hunger and the multiple burden of malnutrition[264].



This dissertation has grappled with some fundamental questions and arguments on the topic of power "as held by distinct actors in key economic or political institutions broadly defined (elitism), or distributed between different groups (pluralism), according to how they access resources and enter coalitions[265]." However, important to highlight is that this research offers a distinct perspective that shifts the focus of

[262] Weiler, A.M., Hergesheimer, C., Brisbois, B., Wittman, H., Yassi, A. & Spiegel, J.M. 2014. Food sovereignty, food security and health equity: a meta-narrative mapping exercise. *Health Policy Plan* 30 (8): 1078–92. doi:10.1093/heapol/czu109

[263] Thow, A.M., Greenberg, S., Hara, M. et al. 2018. Improving policy coherence for food security and nutrition in South Africa: a qualitative policy analysis. *Food Sec.* 10**:** 1105–1130. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12571-018-0813-4

[264] Walls, H., Nisbett, N., Laar, A., Drimie, S., Zaidi, S. and Harris, J. 2020. Addressing malnutrition: the importance of political economy analysis of power. *Int J Health Policy Manag.* x(x):x–x. doi:10.34172/ijhpm.2020.250

[265] Ibid

power from something held by actors, to something that operates at a system level[266] and emphasizes the "predetermination of the behavioural options of political decision-makers" by the structure of the system[267] Of particular relevance here is Lukes' work on the three 'dimensions' of power[268], extended into the Power Cube model by John Gaventa as expounded-on in Chapter 4[269].

This thesis has provided insights into how power asymmetries in food and health systems are integral to government agenda-setting on food and nutrition issues. This is further substantiated by the fact that while conducting interviews with respondents, the conversation quickly moved away from discussing the data and evidence relating to the double burden of malnutrition in the country to discussing its underlying cause: the issue of power. This speaks to the hollowness of the right to food as a potential policy lever. Addressing this hollowness will require moving the right to food and nutrition debate away from the siloed confines of public health academics and practitioners who engage without making power in the food system an issue at the core of our hunger and malnutrition woes.

All the same, proposals for addressing hunger and the multiple burden of malnutrition in essence are about "interventions in a complex system, and whilst changes to a system's power distribution is effective for enacting systems change, work on complex systems shows that the most effective actions for achieving change involve addressing system goals and paradigms[270]." In other words, we must seek to understand and address the goals, power structure, rules and culture that inform the functioning and modalities of our food system. out of which the system arises. The paradigm in which

[266] Giddens, A. 1986. The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration. University of California Press, p30; & Fuchs, D. and Lederer, M. 2007.The power of business. *Bus Polit.* 9(3): 1-17.
[267] Fuchs, D. and Lederer, M. 2007.The power of business. *Bus Polit.* 9(3): 1-17.
[268] Lukes, S. 2005. Power: A Radical View. 2nd ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillian.
[269] Gaventa, J. 2006. Finding the spaces for change: a power analysis. *IDS Bull.* 37(6):23-33; & Powercube website. https://www.powercube.net/.
[270] Meadows, D. 2008. Thinking in Systems. Sustainability Institute.

food and health systems exist in South Africa is one of neoliberalism[271] - "an economic and political governing ideology with an inherent focus on shaping the regulatory environment in favour of the market[272]." "This neoliberal perspective considers the responsibility for health behaviours and outcomes, including of relevance here food access and choice and nutritional outcomes, to lie with the individual, neglecting to consider the broader structural factors that shape these behaviours and outcomes[273]."

Developing new nourishing food systems for all South Africans is urgently needed and to achieve this will demand new public health or economic governance models[274], and crucially, changes to stakeholder power and interests. Alternative system paradigms that may prove useful for achieving this include a human rights framing, which has considerable traction globally[275], but even moreso for the South African experience as it places emphasis and amplifies framings on equity and inequality[276]. More importantly, "the transformative change needed will involve a transdisciplinary approach appealing to - and capturing the imaginations of a wide range of stakeholders and groups[277]."



In linking power issues to nutrition governance and trying to make a connection with calls for food soverignty participants presented varied views, however a constant

[271] Milsom, P., Smith, R., Baker, R. & Walls, H. 2020a. Corporate power and the international trade regime preventing progressive policy action on non-communicable diseases: a realist review. *Health Policy Plan*, p1-16.
[272] Bell, K. & Green, J. 2016. On the perils of invoking neoliberalism in public health critique. *Crit Public Health* 26 (3): 239-243. doi:10.1080/09581596.2016.1144872101.
[273] Rushton, S. & Williams, O.D. 2012. Frames, paradigms and power: global health policy-making under neoliberalism. *Glob Soc.* 26 (2): 147-167. doi:10.1080/13600826.2012.656266104.
[274] Milsom, P., Smith, R. & Walls, H. 2020b. A systems thinking approach to inform coherent policy action for NCD prevention comment on "how neoliberalism is shaping the supply of unhealthy commodities and what this means for NCD prevention". *Int J Health Policy Manag*. 9 (5): 212-214. doi:10.15171/ijhpm.2019.113
[275] Buse, K., Patterson, D., Magnusson, R. & Toebes, B. 2019. Urgent Call for Human Rights Guidance on Diets and Food Systems. The BMJ Opinion. https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2019/10/30/urgent-call-for-human-rights-guidance-on-diets-and-food-systems/.
[276] Harris, J. & Nisbett, N. 2018. Equity in social and development-studies research: insights for nutrition. In: UNSCN News 43: Advancing Equity, Equality and Non-Discrimination in Food Systems: Pathways to Reform. UK: UNSCN: 57-63.
[277] Milsom, P., Smith, R. & Walls, H. 2020b. Op Cit.

recurring theme of concern for most had to do with the welfare and interests of children. Proposals during discussions to protect the young and vulnerable against super predatory capitalists working in the food system resonated with food sovereignty principles. Notwithstanding the need for further research, there are current lessons to learn from a number of countries wherein civil society mobilisation and activism has translated to "bottom-up" demands for better health and nutrition outcomes. In so doing challenging power structures in various contexts [278]. In particular, this dissertation draws its inspiration from succesful right to food and nutrition movements elsewhere, particularly in India[279] (Right to Food Campaign) and Brazil[280] (Policy of 'Zero Hunger').

**d) Unpacking the need for a new social compact**

At the time of writing, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought a new urgency to the choice before us regarding the SDGs era. Even before COVID-19, solidarity was already steadily dwindling in many countries. The rise in populism and inward looking nationalist agendas has meant that, generally speaking, governance is now more difficult due to a heigtened sense of unfairness and the pseudo-solutions to the crisis that have been at the centre of many government interventions. In South Africa, there is now "a growing disconnect between people and the democratic institutions that govern, with many feeling left behind and no longer confident that the system is working for them. An increase in social movements and protests and an ever deeper crisis of trust fomented by a loss of shared truth and understanding" as demonstrated in the recent 'food riots' that engulfed the KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng provinces have

[278] Milsom, P., Smith, R. & Walls, H. 2020b. A systems thinking approach to inform coherent policy action for NCD prevention comment on "how neoliberalism is shaping the supply of unhealthy commodities and what this means for NCD prevention". *Int J Health Policy Manag.* 9 (5): 212-214. doi:10.15171/ijhpm.2019.113

[279] Krishnan, P. & Subramaniam, M. 2014. Understanding the state: right to food campaign in India. *The Global South.* 8 (2): 101-118.

[280] Mendonca Leao, M. & Maluf, R.S. 2014. Effective Public Policies and Active Citizenship: Brazil's experience of building a food and nutrition security system. Oxfam International, ABRANDH.

resulted in what has come to be termed the "politics of the mall" by scholars[281]. Malls in particular have become the epicentre of everyday economic life in post-apartheid South Africa and this failed economic development strategy has resulted in the persistence of poverty, unemployment and inequality.

> Research by Jane Battersby reveals that just before the democratic era began, in 1992 less than 10 percent of all food was sold via the large supermarket chains in South Africa. The neighbourhood spazas and shops together with the informal sector are where we bought most of our food in 1994. Only 10 years later, 60 percent of our food was supplied via the supermarkets. By 2010, 68% of all food was sold via the supermarkets (the highest in the world) and by 2017 75% of all groceries were sold via the supermarkets - the rest was distributed via the informal sector[282].

What the July 2021 "food riots" and subsequent mall looting in South Africa has signalled for us all is that even though local governments in particular have no explicit powers to determine the supply of food; by actively promoting "mallification" and "supermarketisation", this sphere of government has inadvertently been the primary drivers of restructuring food distribution to the majority of South Africans since 1994[283]. Significantly, this has also become synonymous in the minds of local politicians with "local/township economic development". In a country marked by extreme and growing inequality, loss of secure access to food further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic has become a reliable bellwether of political instability and violence in South Africa. Hunger and malnutrition have become the piercing expression of broken social trust - there are reasons to believe that in South Africa, inadequate care for children and women in particular plus insufficient health services are important factors leading to malnutrition, especially in poor and rural households, which are more likely to be social grant recipients. A new social compact is now needed in the country - a social contract that is not only about our rights and freedoms necessarily as stated in the Constitution, but also about how we fairly distribute the

[281] See: Swilling, M. 2021. "July 2021 and the Zumite sedition and the emerging 'politics of the mall'", *Daily Maverick,* 21 July.
[282] Loc cit
[283] Ibid

costs and benefits of what we produce and consume as a country and about a broader definition of welfare. “It is clear, however, that a fair distribution of cost and benefits of what we produce and consume is not being achieved, since empirical studies show that inequality is increasing[284].” Significantly, the issue, as Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz has argued, is that inequality stands to ruin democracy itself[285]. Stiglitz holds the view that inequality is a choice - the cumulative result of unjust policies and misguided priorities[286].

The COVID-19 pandemic and its economic consequences have brought the problem of food and nutrition insecurity to the fore in South Africa. In this context, the governance of food and nutrition concerns has become an urgent matter of solidarity that must not be left to the rules of market exchange. In the spirit of finding a new social compact for better nutrition outcomes in the food system the creation of relationships that find expression in the development of collective agency, generating new forms of acitivism and political mobilisation capable of making a further contribution to the satisfaction of justice needs emerging around food and nutrition is needed. Notably, “in the same year as record production figures (2020), the country experienced an increase in hunger, as identified in the National Income Dynamics Study – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (NIDS-CRAM)[287].” Granted, “this wasn’t necessarily an issue of food shortage or a rapid increase in food prices. It was mostly because people were out of work and had reduced means to buy food[288].” However, at the time of writing in 2021, South Africa is again enjoying another season of an abundant harvest[289]. Still, this doesn’t mean everyone in the country is or will be guaranteed the right to food and nutrition. There are long-standing challenges with

[284] Fairbairn, M. 2011. Framing Transformation: The Counter-Hegemonic Potential of Food Sovereignty in the US Context. *Agriculture and Human Values* 29. 1-14. 10.1007/s10460-011-9334-x.
[285] Stiglitz, J.E. 2012. The price of inequality: How today’s divided society endangers our future. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. ISBN: 9780393088694; & Stiglitz, J.E. 2015. The great divide: Unequal societies and what we can do about them. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. ISBN: 9780393248579.
[286] Stiglitz, J.E. 2015.The great divide: Unequal societies and what we can do about them. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. ISBN: 9780393248579.
[287] For more see: https://cramsurvey.org/
[288] Ibid
[289] Sihlobo, W. 2021. “South African riots and food security: why there’s an urgent need to restore stability”, *The Conversation*, July 14. https://theconversation.com/south-african-riots-and-food-security-why-theres-an-urgent-need-to-restore-stability-164493

income poverty in South Africa and the extent to which the poor and marginalized are able to afford nutritious food. Ultimately, if we carry on ceding control of the food system to private corporations, they will continue to make decisions that maximize their profit over decisions that address hunger and malnutrition.

As the government continues to roll out multiple overlapping consultative processes and responses to the pandemic, there is currently a great incentive for further collaborations between different stakeholders, particularly to work together to create a process that is inclusive of marginalized voices in dealing with hunger and malnutrition. I see a great potential for this momentum to translate into further transformative work within the food system as the voices at the power tables continue to broaden. With the support of a wide network of partners (provincial, national and local), the post-COVID 19 era has the potential to be transformative for the politics of malnutrition and the fulfilment of the right to food. Indeed, this outcome is by no means guaranteed as they're numerous other policy incentives informing the government's outlook including budgetary austerity and many competing priorities, but never before has food and nutrition insecurity had such a high profile as a cross-cutting public policy issue with so many diverse champions now.



A new social compact geared towards transformative food system change to address hunger and malnutrition and fulfill the right to food for all will require a strong and united food movement that is capable of organising and mobilizing at the state, national and private levels, and that ultimately aims to produce the conditions required for food sovereignty. This includes the restraint of private sector influence in the public sphere, just access to food, health equity, fair and living wages, land access, non-exploitative rural economy and environmental stewardship amongst others. Such a movement would therefore need to also encompass grassroots and advocacy organizations that are anti-racist, anti-capitalist and feminist, and that are oriented toward a new economy of and for human rights, food and nutrition justice.

## 6.4 Conclusion

The potential for food as a powerful lever for social analysis and change has been demonstrated in this dissertation and is also well recognized in the food sovereignty movement. Activist-scholars and human rights defenders working in food sovereignty use food and the food system as a platform for a wide array of justice-based critiques of society, and as a way to center communities' fight for survival and self-determination. The discourses on food sovereignty and its interface with the right to food and nutrition offer powerful insights of how food systems can support or undermine oppressed communities, but this discourse has not sufficiently engaged in fine-grained examinations of particular food policies as opposed to larger critiques of oppressive societies. Conversely, those working to craft and improve food policies have also insufficiently engaged with the ability of food systems to affect communities and individuals.



Self-determination is an ambiguous concept without a clear definition or agreement on what entities can possess it. Rather than national sovereignty or some other competing concept, self-determination in this dissertation has referred to the concept as it is often used in food sovereignty discourse, which is one focused on the survival, flourishing, and just arrangements of communities, viewed through a lens of food systems. The research on which this study is based, particularly interviews carried-out with activist-scholars and human rights defenders reveals a sophisticated understanding of the fact that insofar as echoes for self-determination in the food system go, the human rights strategy has value and is effective; both as a matter of political practice, and as a form of further diffusing and advancing the food sovereignty narrative. At the same time however, the experience with the codification and institutionalization of the right to access sufficient food and nutrition in South Africa has at best been highly variable as there is weak institutional capacity coupled with the fact that the government is orientated towards meeting the needs of capital interests above those of its own populace. As such, policy-design and legislating for the right to food and nutrition remain at risk of being reduced to mere symbolism in the fight against hunger and malnutrition in South Africa.

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**Appendices**

Interview schedule – Governance and Policy

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

As we have mentioned, the aim of this research is to improve understanding of food policy making. The interview has three sets of questions: first, we will ask about current processes and people who influence food policy making; second, about potential opportunities for consideration and achievement of nutrition and food security policy goals in food policy making; and third, about policy opportunities to address specific commodities associated with NCD prevention or risk.

To begin with, could you please tell us about your role and professional interests relating to food policy?

In this first section, we would like to ask your opinions regarding current food policy making in South Africa.



1. What do you see as the major nutrition and food consumption issues in South Africa?

    a. In your experience, what are broader challenges related to food and agriculture in South Africa?

2. From your observation, what do you think are current government objectives with respect to policies and laws on food, agriculture and food systems?
(Under nutrition? Food security? Obesity? Jobs? Rural development?)

    a. Who has responsibility for operationalizing the different objectives, within government?
    [Prompt: sectors and jurisdictions, incl. subnational]

[e.g. you mentioned rural development: who has responsibility for operationalizing this?]

b. Are you aware of any objectives or regulatory frameworks that relate to the informal food system in SA? [i.e. informal vendors, spaza shops, small retail outlets, small scale production]

c. Have you observed any tension between the responsibilities of different government sectors and/or levels in relation to food / food systems?

d. Do you think that nutrition is a priority for government policy making? Why or why not? Does this differ across sectors?

3. How would you explain the implications of the constitutional provision for the right to food in Section 27 of the Constitution?

a. In your opinion, what is considered as "sufficient food" in section 27?



b. How would you explain the implications of the constitutional provision for the immediate realization of the right to food and nutrition for children in Section 28?

c. How do you think the right to nutrition for children in Section 28 differs from the right to food, given that the Constitution already recognises the right of everyone to have access to sufficient food?

d. What kind of food policies do you think are necessary for achieving the right to food, in practice?

e. What do you think the concept of food security means? Have you heard of the concept of food sovereignty? What do you think food sovereignty might add for South Africa, in terms of achieving the right to food?

Now we would like to talk about structures within government related to food, agriculture and food systems:

4. From your observation, what approaches are currently in place to coordinate and consult on food system policymaking and implementation across government sectors?

   a. From your observation, what approaches are currently in place to coordinate and consult on food system policy making and implementation across levels of government [i.e. in other words, coordination across national, provincial and municipal govts]?

   b. What formal avenues are you aware of for external consultation by government with citizens, civil society and the private sector regarding food policy?

   c. Have you observed informal approaches for input?



5. Who are the main actors (people or organizations) with interests in food policy making in South Africa?

   a. In your opinion, which actors would you say exercise power to influence the policy process? How?

We understand that nutrition is only one of many objectives that are taken into account when making food policy decisions. From a public health perspective, we are looking to increase the attention to nutrition in making food system policy. In particular, to increase access to healthy food in poor communities.

6. What do you see as opportunities to develop governance structures or approaches to consultation, to ensure that nutrition is taken into account in food policy making in SA? (Prompts: could health be in the room?)

a. In your opinion, what coordination or engagement mechanisms are needed in which sectors, to increase focus on or consideration of nutrition in food policy making?
[Prompts: sectors like Agriculture (DAFF), Industry (DTI), Social development (DSD), DPME in the Presidency, health etc?)
[Prompt: across jurisdictions? Provincial or municipal level?? Across different provinces?]

b. Could civil society have more input into food system policy making? If so, where? How?

7. What capacities are needed in which sectors or levels of government, to increase focus on or consideration of nutrition in food policy making?
[Prompts: capacities in Agriculture (DAFF), Industry (DTI), Social development (DSD), DPME in the Presidency, health etc?)
[Prompt: across jurisdictions? Provincial or municipal level?? Across different provinces?]

8. What types of evidence or information would be helpful to increase focus on nutrition for food policymaking, and for what sectors?

9. Reflecting on this conversation, what do you see as the barriers to increasing consideration of nutrition in food policy making in SA?

The last set of questions focus on specific commodities. In our earlier research we found challenges in access to healthy food in poor communities, and identified some specific commodities that are associated with poor nutritional quality diets – limited

access to fresh fruit and vegetables, cheap low quality poultry, and an overabundance of high sugar foods and beverages.

We are interested in identifying specific points of potential policy change to improve nutrition outcomes in South Africa, with respect to the food supply, and particularly the value chain – production, processing, distribution, and retail

Specific to fresh fruit and veg:

10. When we looked at the supply – we found that producers had trouble getting access to markets, and the quantity of supply was insufficient in poor communities. We found that the sector is dominated by large scale, formal producers, with geographically distant supply due to high consolidation. We found very few small scale producers, close to consumers. We also found that retailers are buying direct from producers, and that metropolitan wholesale markets are shrinking, being bypassed. Less options for small producers, strengthens market power of existing producers and retailers.



- What challenges have you seen in fruit & veg supply?
- Can you think of policy opportunities to improve access to fresh fruit and veg?

  [prompt: national/provincial/municipal policy]
- What might be barriers to this type of policy change?

Specific to poultry:

11. When we looked at the supply – we found that poultry availability was very differentiated, with a lot of high fat chicken cuts and off-cuts, like packaged 'skin and fat', and that quality supply was limited in poor communities.

When we looked at supply chains, we found that with increased trade, domestic producers are under a lot of pressure, despite being very competitive (e.g. in terms of

feed conversion rates). They have deepened their forays into the 'fifth quarter' – stuff that would normally be considered waste.

We also saw formalizing of supply chains for live birds, which tend not to be thought of as part of food system – usually previously egg-laying 'spent hens' (formal sector) and then sold into the informal sector by cull-buyers and now quite a bit of consolidation and more attention in recent years to biosecurity (e.g. quarantining of trucks).

- What challenges have you seen in poultry supply?
- Can you think of policy opportunities to improve access to low fat poultry?

  [Prompt: national/provincial/municipal policy]
- What might be the barriers to this type of policy change?

Specific to high sugar foods and beverages:

12. When we looked at the supply – we found that high sugar foods and beverages were very cheap and heavily marketed, with widespread availability in poor communities.

SA is a large market with a significant transnational presence in SSBs. E.g. Coca cola has 50% of domestic soft drink market (although bottlers are local). These companies are conscious of health concerns and diversifying. There are also a lot of imported high sugar foods, particularly from Asia. There are also a diversity of 'second tier' brands – refresh, tiza etc – which tend to compete on price. Also very small/regional third tier brands, or supermarket private labels. Lot of competition in retail market – in low-income communities there is significant competition on price for second and third tier brands. Barriers to entry for beverage production are quite high (expense in setting up). In contrast, for high sugar foods, barriers to entry are low, so there are also many small manufacturers. Lots of small packaging in bulk buy, intended for resale – being sold to vendors in informal sector. Similarly, there is lots of small-scale distribution of

SSBs. Supermarkets really stepping in and competing on price with own-brands, which are often cheaper than water.

- What challenges have you seen in regulating the supply of high sugar foods and beverages?
- Can you think of policy opportunities to reduce consumption of high sugar foods and beverages?

  [Prompt: national/provincial/municipal policy]
- What might be the barriers to this type of policy change?

Interview schedule: *Photo-elicitation and the voiceless: Narrating the "lived experiences" perspective of informal street food vendors in Khayelitsha, Cape Town.*

**Record for each of the participants:**

| **Name/ Pseudonym** | **Age** | **Gender** | **Education qualification** | **Resident in Khayelistha** | **Average Income a month** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| - | - | - | - | - | - |
| - | - | - | - | - | - |

1. What in this image do you see? What is happening in this picture?
2. Is there anything in this image that speaks to your understanding of the right to food? Are you aware that you have constitutionally-enshrined right to food?
3. Do you feel the right to food is justly respected and promoted in this image?
4. In your own words what would you say are the obstacles you face in your ability to get good nutritious food?
5. What are the factors important to you when deciding where to shop for food? Where does the food you sell come from?
6. Do you feel that you have power and autonomy in the food system that you work in?
7. Can you tell me if people here consider the food available to them culturally appropriate?

*Probes for use in refining questions with respondents*

- When I asked you about…, what were you thinking about?
- Can you tell me in your own words what this questions means?
- In thinking about…, what comes to mind?
- How hard was that to answer?
- I notice you hesitated before you answered – what were you thinking about?

End.