



## INVESTIGATING THE HOUSEHOLD-FOOD-SECURITY MODEL IN THE EASTERN CAPE

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*Section 27 of South Africa's Constitution states that every citizen has a right to access sufficient food and water. In reality, however, a large number of citizens live in a state of constant food insecurity. The Integrated Food Security Strategy of South Africa (IFSS) (Department of Agriculture 2002) defines food security as physical, social and economic access by all households at all times to adequate, safe and nutritious food and clean water to meet their dietary and food preferences for a healthy and productive life.*



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AS BONTI-ANKOMAH (2001) argues, this definition implies that individuals will either produce enough food through their own efforts, or that they will be able to access markets where they will be able to afford to buy food. Food security is obviously of critical importance for any country. Hunger and starvation can quickly lead to uprisings, civil war, political instability, migration, and cause significant long-term economic damage.

This paper examines the Household-Food-Security-Model (HFMS), which has been piloted in rural and peri-urban households in South Africa's Eastern Cape Province since 2009. The HFMS is a pro-poor development model that aims to address the food challenges faced by households that can be regarded as 'insecure' in terms of their access to adequate and safe food and water. By equipping households with knowledge and skills relating to small-scale and

subsistence farming, as well as other means of ensuring food security, the model aims to alleviate food insecurity in the province, one household at a time. Although still in its pilot phase, the HFSM offers a number of crucial lessons: these suggest that citizen involvement in meeting basic needs is critical, and that there are creative and constructive ways in which communities can participate in development. The HFSM also shows that the participation of households in ensuring their own food security is highly likely to contribute to alleviating poverty, unemployment, malnutrition, and other socio-economic challenges faced by communities throughout South Africa. Indeed, the model shows that focusing on households provides a basis for sustainable and lasting development.

The paper begins by painting a picture of the state of food security in South Africa. This is followed by a description of the model and its impact in the Eastern Cape. The paper ends with a discussion of the challenges linked to the model and makes a number of recommendations.

## FOOD SECURITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Poverty and food insecurity in South Africa dates back to the 19th and the 20th centuries, when colonialism and apartheid barred black South Africans from owning land and running their own agrarian businesses. Poverty and food insecurity increased because black people no longer had the means to produce enough of their own food (Department of Agriculture 2002). The consequences of those policies continue to shape the lives of most South Africans. Access to adequate food is routinely beyond the reach of the country's many unemployed people and poverty-stricken households.

Like many other countries, especially in Africa, South Africa is battling with food insecurity, ill health,

poverty, unemployment and crime. According to Statistics South Africa (2011), South Africa's population in July 2011 was 50.59 million, and 13.5% of the population (6 829 958 people) were living in the Eastern Cape. Furthermore, the 2002 IFSS reported that households in the Eastern Cape were among the poorest in the country (Department of Agriculture 2002:22–23). Poverty in the Eastern Cape is exacerbated by weak disaster-management systems, inappropriate farmer support and a general lack of purchasing power — about 70% (almost 1 million) of the 1.33 million households in Eastern Cape spend less than R1 000 a month, and only about 100 000 households spend more than R3 500 per month. Most households in South Africa depend on income from salaries, but in the Eastern Cape more people rely on government grants than on salaries (Eastern Cape Socio-Economic Consultative Council 2011:3). Additionally, poor households tend to spend most of their money on food and are acutely affected by food price increases.

It is important to note that efforts have been made to alleviate food insecurity. In 1994, for example, the state's Reconstruction and Development Programme prioritised food security as a way of addressing the plight of the disadvantaged, especially black South Africans. This saw increased government spending on school-feeding schemes, child-support grants, and free health services, pensions for the elderly, land reform and farmer-resettlement programmes.

More recently, the government, through the Department of Agriculture, has supported the Massive Food Production Programme whereby communities make their land available to the government. In return, the government provides farming inputs and pays workers a wage for their labour. After harvesting, the communities receive an agreed percentage of the produce and the

government takes the rest. Unfortunately, the programme has been one of the more unsuccessful attempts to address food security. Mosilo Kuali of Alfred Nzo district in the Eastern Cape shared her views on the model. This is what she had to say:

My family was part of the government's Massive Food Production Programme in our community in Matatiele. The government came and addressed people, got the land from the people and promised to share the maize with the owners of the land. The government bought fertilizers, chemicals and also hired a tractor for ploughing. All the labour was paid for by the government. I got angry when all the owners of the land were offered 10% of the maize harvested and the government took the maize away. We did not get any feedback on what had happened to the maize taken by the government. I was hurt that our soil was ploughed and destroyed by chemicals. The 10% allocation of the maize was too small and the model was disempowering. The households were left poor and did not improve their lives. The Household Food Security Model is suitable way to promote self-reliance. Other people on the Massive Food Production Programme ended up burning their maize fields out of frustration and anger when they realised how much they had lost in comparison to the efforts they put in.<sup>1</sup>

While Ms Kuali points to the weaknesses of the programme, the experience proved to be a wake-up call for many households, renewing their commitment to working on their own land and benefiting fully from what they produce.

Other government interventions have also had their challenges. For instance, the school-feeding scheme in the Eastern Cape lost large sums of

money because it relied on intermediaries. This changed when the government decided to give the money directly to schools. Now, instead of being ineligible for large tenders linked to supplying a provincial or district-level feeding scheme, households that are actively involved in producing food in an area can provide their local schools with food. Besides boosting the nutrition of school children, and having a positive impact on their school performance, this brings obvious benefits to the households involved, and this, in turn, is of benefit to the wider community.

Thus, it is critical that programmes aimed at improving food security focus not only on national, provincial or even community-level interventions. Food security needs to be established at household level, and householders need to be at the centre of building a purposeful and beneficial food-security system, using a bottom-up approach whereby households participate in contributing to their own food security. The positive impact on households will improve food security at community, ward, municipality, district and provincial levels. If all households were targeted with growing some of their own food, the availability and affordability of food would improve.

Such a situation has the potential to instil a sense of independence, self-reliance and to encourage sustainable livelihoods and living patterns. In other words, households can be seen as the entry point for education and the development of skills, values and attitudes. They can also be viewed as the foundation of social, economic and spiritual development. Households are therefore an excellent target for development interventions if a lasting and sustainable impact is to be made on people's lives. In this regard, the HFSM is an effective and sustainable programme. Well-trained, empowered and self-reliant, the households that form part of the pilot

programme participate in decision making, planning, and implementation of food-security interventions. Households feel motivated and empowered by being able to secure their own food, and this offers a basis for a true and meaningful development.

## THE HOUSEHOLD-FOOD-SECURITY MODEL

The HFSM offers households in rural and urban communities the necessary skills and knowledge to meet their food, nutrition and livelihood needs. It achieves this through the formal training of a number of students who then impart their knowledge to households that are exposed to food insecurity. Households that participate in the programme are mobilised and empowered to break the cycle of poverty and food insecurity. Freed from this yoke, these households then influence their neighbours and knowledge, skills, information and experience are gradually transferred and shared throughout communities.

The HFSM is being piloted in the Eastern Cape district municipalities of Alfred Nzo, Amathole, Cacadu, Chris Hani, Joe Gqabi, and O.R. Tambo and also in parts of the Nelson Mandela metropolitan municipality. The South African Institute of Distance Education initiated the programme in partnership with the University of South Africa, which offers the programme as an accredited course (at NQF Level 5).

The programme was introduced to the Eastern Cape NGO Coalition in 2009, which in turn invited its member organisations to become involved in designing, planning and analysing how the model could be rolled out in the province. Writers, facilitators and mobilisers were selected, and together they visited communities in these districts to find out whether they wanted to take part in the programme. The communities then identified and selected possible students, and encouraged other

community members to support the project by, for example, raising awareness about the model, linking students on the programme to households and, importantly, obtaining political support for the programme.

During the 12-month programme, each student works with five households in his or her community, and studies the following six modules, transferring the knowledge gained to the households:

- \* Introduction to household food security
- \* Introduction to methods of working with households
- \* Sustainable natural resources use
- \* Food behaviour and nutrition
- \* Optimising household food production
- \* Food resources management

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The HFSM has a number of strengths. First, it targets the household instead of the wider community. Second, the programme works closely with community members, NGOs and government departments on designing the training, as well as on monitoring and evaluating the model. Third, a new set of students is recruited each year—the more participants that are recruited, the more households will ultimately be reached. Fourth, households receive the support and skills development that they need to move beyond the dependency and survivalism of food insecurity. Fifth, the improvements in householders' lives that are already evident have encouraged policy makers and

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development practitioners to consider new perspectives on development. They are beginning to focus less on commercial food initiatives and support mechanisms and this is, in turn, beginning to change the mindsets and attitudes of influential people and gatekeepers, persuading them to accept and appreciate households as a key starting point for ensuring food security. Essentially, each household involved in the programme is equipped to understand issues around food security, nutrition, health, environment, and their livelihoods, as well as to assess and analyse their livelihoods and take the necessary steps to improve their lives. The households acquire practical skills such as growing their own vegetables, soil care, composting, pest and disease control, and different ways of processing the food they grow.

### THE IMPACT OF THE MODEL ON HOUSEHOLDS

Thus far, the model has managed to transform households in the following ways:

- \* More than 60% of the households that have participated in the model have improved their food security by growing vegetables or being involved in projects that generate income.
- \* Households have enjoyed producing their own food, and some have sold the surplus and earned extra income ranging from R300 to R800 per month.
- \* Both individuals and neighbourhoods have benefited, and overall community health and well being has improved.

- \* Food production has improved the physical, mental and emotional health of the individuals involved, leaving a lasting positive impact on them as well as on the physical and social space of their communities.
- \* Urban communities particularly value the community-building benefits of the model and growing their own food.

### THE IMPACT OF THE MODEL ON STUDENTS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The impact on students and local communities include:

- \* In 2009 and 2010, 560 students were registered and working in approximately 22 sites in Eastern Cape with the support of 16 tutors, and gained knowledge, information and skills related to food security.
- \* Since each student works with five households, 2 800 households were reached and assuming an average of six people per household, approximately 16 800 people benefited from the programme.
- \* Over 20 young people obtained employment as a result of their involvement in the HFSM.
- \* Students who have completed the programme are looking for ways to proceed with their studies and have asked for a Level 8 food-security course to be offered in the near future.
- \* Students and tutors in the Amathole, Chris Hani, Alfred Nzo and OR Tambo districts are replicating what they learnt in the programme by establishing community vegetable gardens, supporting schools to establish gardens and mobilising their communities to ensure their own food security.
- \* Land that had lain fallow for years because people had lost interest in farming is now being used productively.

- \* A new batch of skilled people is being groomed in communities to mentor, train and support community farming initiatives.
- \* The participatory and interactive nature of the programme has helped some of the NGOs involved in the HFSM to improve and strengthen their food security-related programmes.

## THE IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local government supported the programme by paying for its community development workers (CDWs) to register as students on the programme. The programme has helped CDWs to significantly improve their skills and to contribute to the food production, preparation, storage and processing skills within households and communities. The support of the local government in the Eastern Cape is evidence of the confidence that local government has in the HFSM. This will go a long way towards involving and empowering more and more households to participate in the process.

## CHALLENGES LINKED TO THE MODEL

Key challenges identified in the implementation of the HFSM are:

- \* Even though students' fees were subsidised (R100 per module per student), some still found it difficult to pay the R600 needed for course fees.
- \* The Eastern Cape is vast and, until there are trained people in every community, it will be expensive to monitor and support the implementation of the model.
- \* The costs of the programme increased as a result of inflation and fuel-price increases, and the programme did not have enough funds to meet some demands for support and monitoring visits.
- \* Some students, especially unemployed youth, dropped out of the course—resources used on them were wasted and the impact that it was hoped they would make was lost.
- \* Most people have limited access to land and those who do have access seldom hold title deeds. Thus, those who have realised the importance of farming, and have acquired the necessary knowledge and skills, still face the challenge of securing access to land.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are offered for anyone planning to replicate the HFSM in other areas. They are drawn from feedback given by students and tutors who participated in the programme, as well as from other stakeholders such as NGOs.

- \* According to Freyne et al. (2009), food security should be promoted in both urban and rural areas because food insecurity is not only relevant to rural areas; the model should therefore be extended to urban and peri-urban areas too.
- \* Students on the programme should be linked to an NGO or CBO; continuous supervision and monitoring from a tutor and an NGO is likely to increase the impact of their work.
- \* Organisations involved should plan to provide internships or work placements for students who complete the programme.
- \* Learning materials should be translated and simplified for the different literacy levels found in communities. Posters, learning aids and DVDs should be developed and participatory-learning methodologies should be improved to fit the target audience.
- \* A more advanced course should be introduced for the students or others who would like to further their studies of food security.

## PUTTING PARTICIPATION AT THE HEART OF DEVELOPMENT// PUTTING DEVELOPMENT AT THE HEART OF PARTICIPATION

- ✳ The government needs to provide funding as well as political and technical support to households that benefit from its land-redistribution programme so that they remain food secure; the HFSM could be scaled up to meet this need.
- ✳ Interventions that are aimed at increasing income security (such as social grants) need to be maintained to reduce the vulnerability of households while longer-term measures such as the HFSM are put into place and become established.
- ✳ Additional funding is needed to effectively implement the model throughout the Eastern Cape and other provinces in South Africa.
- ✳ The HFSM aligns with the government's policies and strategies on food security. The government should therefore consider investing in the model and linking it with relevant policies and strategies in government departments such as Agriculture, Social Development, Education, and the sphere of local government.

- ✳ Establishing and strengthening partnerships will help in replicating and scaling up the model so that it can have a lasting and widespread effect.

The HFSM has shown that there are huge benefits for households and communities that participate in addressing the problem of food insecurity. Focusing on the grassroots provides a sound basis for sustainable development as it ensures that the impact is felt in every household. The HFSM presents many opportunities to transform the food security situation in South Africa, both in urban and rural areas, because it addresses issues relevant to household food security, nutrition, and capacity enhancement. The successes, challenges and lessons learned should be used to improve and refine the model to meet the needs of food insecure households in South Africa.

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### NOTE

- <sup>1</sup> Interview with Ms Mosilo Kuali conducted by ECNGOC, 18 October 2011.

## CONCLUSION

There can be no doubt that participatory local governance in South Africa is in need of revitalisation. As various contributions in this publication have highlighted, current institutional mechanisms to promote participation and pro-poor development are frequently weak, often do not function in the way they were intended, lack strong accountability features and have been appropriated by the politics of the day. Patronage politics, weak leadership, weak capacity (both human and financial), mismanagement and corruption continue to be challenges undermining the ideal of inclusive, participatory local governance. In addition, the mindsets and attitudes of public officials leave much to be desired and there is little routinised public accountability in the system. The solution to a local government system that is in distress lies in a combination of institutional, political and community-focused interventions, primarily aimed at addressing the underlying governance challenges. Thus, tackling the ‘governance deficit’ head-on is critical to reinvigorate participatory local governance.

Critically, participatory local governance should have a substantive meaning and exert influence on planning, resource allocation and implementation. Instead, the practice in many municipalities is seemingly one of ‘going through the motions’ and ensuring compliance with the technical legislative requirements which, ironically, are designed to facilitate substantive public participation in terms of both process and outcomes. This negates the fact that communities are different and so are their experiences, needs and dynamics. Both in design and in administrative practices, a blanket approach to citizen engagement in municipalities does not encourage citizens to exercise their civic duty and actively engage with the state. Participation in local governance is a human right, and its realisation lies in the creation of meaningful spaces for citizen engagement and expression of voice, beyond those provided for by current legislation.

The central call of this publication is to ‘put participation at the heart of development//put development at the heart of participation.’ Needless to say, the relationship between public participation and developmental outcomes is not a simplistic one. There are many different, often contradictory and conflicting, voices and interests that need to come into conversation with each other and with ‘hard’ constraints related to finances, capacity and environmental realities, amongst others. But as the introduction to this publication highlights, it is exactly that conversation – the opportunity to engage in what Amartya Sen (2009) calls ‘public reasoning’ about development alternatives – that ought to lie at the heart of participatory local democracy.

This requires a shift in the dominant paradigm, coupled to a fundamental shift in power relations. Both the state and communities need to appreciate the intrinsic value of engaging each other in planning, implementation and monitoring of local development and embrace the notion of active citizenship. The state should no longer act (or be expected to act) as a

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deliverer of development, making communities passive recipients and beneficiaries of the development process. Rather, both groups need to view each other as development actors and co-producers of development. To breathe new life into this revamped notion of participatory local governance, innovative ideas and practices need to be explored and tried out. This publication has offered a number of insights and methodologies related to community-led initiatives for engagement with the local state and for local development, collaborative planning, social accountability tools and other models for community involvement in local development. It is by no means exhaustive in its analysis or in the tools and methods presented, but it is nonetheless a valuable offering for anyone open to exploring innovative approaches and models that aim to enhance participatory local governance. The contributions are based on existing practices and emerging areas of work of member organisations of the Good Governance Learning Network (GGLN). Individually and collectively (including through the production of this *State of Local Governance* publication), member organisations of the GGLN seek to contribute to the advancement of participatory, democratic and developmental local governance in South Africa.

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