



Production, availability and accessibility are critical areas that may hold the key to unravelling food insecurity in South Africa, which produces plenty of food to go around. PICTURE: ASSOCIATED PRESS

Struggling in the midst of plenty

SOUTH Africa is noted for its diversity in race, culture, ethnic groups and beautiful landscapes. With this great diversity, history and accomplishments, the provision and access to basic food for a dignified standard of living has remained out of reach for many for a very long time.

Food production, availability and accessibility are critical areas that may hold the key to unravelling the food insecurity in the country.

A careful observation of scientific information reveals that South Africa produces enough food to feed herself and beyond, yet large sections of the population remain food insecure.

Imbalances in resources allocation and distribution, a legacy of the capitalist-driven economy has been implicated in the inequities in food deprivation in many areas.

The South African situation can be described as "people struggling in the midst of plenty". The majority of citizens experience hunger and food insecurity year round.

These individuals are battling with poverty and getting enough of the basic staples to feed their families is a constant struggle. Even with social assistance programmes, many families struggle to feed their members. According to a report by Fin24, the minimum cost of feeding a family of five per month was R146.57 in 2015. The social grants programme gives R753 per month to indigents. That leaves a hunger gap.

The challenges associated with food compounds as the population swells in urban areas due to rapid urbanisation. About 39% of the population live in urban areas. The pattern of the South African urbanisation is fuelled by rural migrants fleeing climatic stress, unemployment and deprivation to seek greener pastures in cities.

The rural informal areas in South Africa are underdeveloped due to the structural history of apartheid and racially biased land tenure and food policies. They are characterised by poor sanitation, dilapidated houses, deprivation and non-functioning schools and health facilities.

According to the Statistics SA, rural-urban migration is mainly temporary and work is the major reason for moving. Young rural residents are attracted by the availability of lucrative jobs in industry and service sectors and migrate to urban areas.

Unfortunately, with low education and employable skills, the majority of rural-urban migrants are unable to secure profitable jobs and end up in urban informal settlements with conditions similar to or worse off than their places of origin, hence joining the urban poor.

In 2015, Stats SA reported that urban informal and rural informal areas have the highest share of households that experience food insecurity (36% and 33%, respectively). Residents of the rural-informal and urban-informal are mainly black South Africans.

Time for SA to restore the food imbalance, writes

Dr Sandra Boatemaa



A man eats a burger at a restaurant.

In celebration of World Food Day today, themed "Change the future of migration: Invest in food security and rural development," I want to reflect on what investments can be made to improve food security, social and economic development in rural South Africa. While the drivers of food and nutrition security and rural-urban migration are complex, investment in research, agricultural infrastructure and community resilience can contribute towards improvement in rural livelihoods.

Through research, local communities can draw up rural-development programmes based on the needs and priorities of their provinces and municipalities. Baseline studies can concentrate on segregating the population of individuals who migrate. In rural South Africa, there are landless farmers, smallholder farmers (less than 400m² of land) and aspirational migrants (individuals with some education or money).

Programmes

The migration motivations for each of these sub-populations are different. The majority of the youth population does not have farming skills due to education and child labour policies that prevented them from partaking in agricultural activities as children.

Research can investigate new attractive ways to build agricultural skills among the youth to address the challenge of ageing farmers.

Second, both short- and medium-term investments to support increased agricultural productivity can also be pursued.

Increased funding and political commitment will build on current programmes, such as the Beta Tlala Food Production Initiative, Sustainable Household Food Security Programme, Micro-Agricultural Financial Institutions of South Africa and Land Reform.

These programmes provide small-scale farmers help with land and water rights, improved seeds and farming techniques, planting and installation of irrigation instruments.

Addressing water and land rights through policies can motivate farmers to invest labour, time and other resources they own into agriculture.

Rural livelihoods can also be improved through a better functioning of markets.

The food industry in South Africa is dominated by giant food companies rural farmers do not have access to.

The government can establish and/or implement policies to create an environment for emerging and small farmers to tap into these main markets. Provision of transport avenues for rural small-scale farmers can improve access to markets that they can reliably sell more produce at higher prices.

Through mobile technology, farmers can be provided with real-time market prices for their produce. Access to markets can boost productivity and encourage farmers to invest in their own businesses, increase quality and quantity of yield, diversify their produce and strengthen food security.

In addition, South Africa can continue to build community resilience through supporting social protection programmes to enable vulnerable people to withstand natural and economic shocks that increase food prices.

These initiatives can strengthen and expand existing formal and social protection initiatives such as the school-feeding programme, social assistance grants and food baskets implemented by the government. They can also increase access to those who need it and address the difficulties qualified individuals experience. Also, community resilience can be built through provision of health, educational infrastructure and diversification of rural economies. For example, agricultural processing industries can be created to ensure that the bulk of the wealth remains in the rural areas.

Unless rural areas are transformed, rural-urban migration will grow despite best efforts. Unfortunately, pursuing rural development is expensive and requires trained people who live in or near cities. We can always outline to-do lists for government to pursue, but development starts with individuals and communities initiating change. The question is whether rural or urban commitment and dedication to self-development can put pressure on the authorities and unfair systems to transform.

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