



SAFSC

SOUTH AFRICAN FOOD
SOVEREIGNTY CAMPAIGN

Hunger is a crime against humanity!

Verdict

People's Tribunal on Hunger, Food Prices and Land
7th -9th May 2015

Introduction

In the context of South Africa's deepening food crisis, the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign hosted a three-day People's Tribunal on hunger, food prices and land at Constitution Hill, Johannesburg. The Tribunal received testimony from 21 grassroots voices (women and men small scale farmers, cooperatives, mining affected communities, trade unions, waste pickers, retrenched workers, the unemployed, students, youth), from different parts of the country, and ten food and land experts including researchers, academics and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

The Tribunal sought to confront the denialism, indifference and disregard for the food crisis in South Africa. Through this platform we confronted the brutal realities of hunger and affirmed the **dignity, power and moral force** of the hungry and landless in our country. This we believe is a turning point for food politics and agrarian transformation in South Africa: hunger challenges our humanity and therefore **we are all the hungry, we are all the landless until we resolve the food crisis!**

'Hunger' in our society is experienced differently and named differently. According to the hungry bearing testimony it exists as:

- 'genocide of the mind';
- 'the middle name of South Africa';
- 'the thief of our dignity';
- 'an empty stomach';
- 'what the politicians refuse to see';
- 'food crisis because of neoliberal policies';
- 'a special smell and is cruel in the household'.

Verdict on food corporations

South Africa's food system is highly concentrated and controlled by powerful food corporations. For instance, 20% of commercial farms account for over 80% of food produced and four big retailers sell 55% of our food.

Based on testimony, we declare **food corporations** guilty of **perpetuating hunger, a crime against humanity**, through:

- **Contributing to income inequality in South Africa:** Income inequality is a cause of hunger for which food corporations and capitalism in general is responsible. Many working class and poor households spend up to 80% of their income on food, and food prices are increasing. On average male farm workers earn R667 per month and females R458 per month. The median wage rate in South Africa is R3033, well below the ILO's minimum living wage of R4500. Half of NUMSA workers earn less than or R4850 per month. Poverty wages mean no food choice and a struggle to survive as living costs increase, such as electricity and transport.
- **Treating food as a commodity:** Commodified food is inaccessible and unaffordable for the millions of unemployed in South Africa. Healthy food is completely out of reach if it has to be bought from food corporations. Moreover, retrenchments and job losses have constrained household incomes making it impossible to buy food, and hence hunger stalks many families.
- **Profiteering from food:** Staple food prices such as wheat and maize have been pushed up by corporations. In retail, market power is used by four corporations to keep prices high. In general staple food prices increased by 50% between 2013 and 2014. A basic food plate increased by 12.4% between 2013 and 2014. On average there has been a 6.5 % increase in food prices annually.
- **Price fixing:** Bread is a staple for most South Africans. SASKO bread made R825 million profit in 2013 alone. Price fixing is rife to make more profit from staples. Price fixes, such as the big four bread producers, were caught in 2007/2008, but they have been doing this for years. Bread prices have not come down despite oil prices coming down.
- **Using waste to make profits:** One-third of food is wasted across the food value chain. This amounts to 9 million tons. In addition, 30% of agricultural produce goes to waste. Instead of feeding human beings corporations condemn them by dumping 'wasted' food. This ensures profit rates are managed as supply is controlled through 'waste'.

- **Using crisis to make profits:** A globalised food system, under corporate control, will be susceptible to shocks from climate change, biofuels production, speculation and oil prices. Corporations have and will use such shocks to increase prices making food expensive and increasing hunger.
- **Passing on suffering to women:** More women go hungry than men in South Africa. Women are carrying the burden of feeding their families such that they are skipping meals, eating expired food, borrowing from loan sharks and sacrificing their food portion to feed the family in poor households. Women and workers earning poverty wages eat unhealthy food because there is no choice and this imposes sickness. All of this brings intense desperation, trauma and health problems into hungry families.
- **Stealing the future of our children:** There is a high prevalence of stunted growth and malnutrition amongst children in poor households (nearly 1 in every 3 young children under the age of five is physically and mentally stunted and underweight). Children are not given nutritious food and cannot learn in schools. Children steal food out of desperation, sometimes ending up in jail; they stop schooling and skip critical medication due to a lack of food. The corporate-controlled food system is stealing their future.
- **Controlling seeds and farming resources:** Seeds and genetic resources are now commodities for profit making. This makes the price of seeds and farming inputs very expensive for small scale farmers, communities and households.
- **Using the media:** Billions of Rands are spent on marketing fast food and industrial food diets. The media is hired by food corporations to ensure these foods are mainstreamed. At the same time, fast food is killing our food cultures, increasing obesity and destroying genuine social relationships.
- **Expanding into our communities:** Retail chains and shopping malls are expanding into our communities to promote unhealthy and expensive food. These businesses extract wealth from communities such that local resources are not circulating for development, employment creation and community building.
- **Commodifying food at universities:** Many students at universities are hungry, which constrains their ability to study and improve academic performance. Dining halls throw away food and students do not receive their loan funding on time, which contributes to hunger.

We demand from corporations:

- An end to fat cat salaries of food corporation managers and a living wage for all workers in the food system.
- An end to profiteering from food, including price fixing of staples.
- A halt to the invasion and conquest by ‘supermarkets’ of our communities.
- We demand universities put in place feeding schemes for poor students.
- End profiteering from seeds and farming inputs required by small scale farmers.
- Greater responsibility from the commercial media for their role in promoting unhealthy fast food and industrial food diets.

Verdict on the State

Based on testimony we declare the **state responsible and complicit in perpetuating hunger, a crime against humanity, through the following actions:**

- **Neoliberal economic policies:** The economic policies of the ANC state have increased inequality between the rich and poor, which has expressed itself in race, gender and class terms. Together with the lack of basic services like water, health, housing and electricity, the struggle for food is a serious survival challenge for many.
- **Undermining water resources:** Water is essential for food production yet the state is compromising our water resources through promoting mining, mismanaging water resources and only ensuring a rich minority benefit from water.
- **Promoting and supporting mining:** Mining is leading to dispossession, another version of the 1913 experience. Mining companies are grabbing fertile land and water resources such that communities lose land for livestock grazing and cultivation. Mining is also poisoning land, water and polluting the air around communities. Some of the most fertile land in the country, in Mpumalanga, is threatened by mining. Government policies and corruption is feeding into this new dispossession.
- **Lacking a commitment to adapt and mitigate our food system to climate change and shocks:** Despite the state developing long-term mitigation scenarios it is not doing enough to deal with the future impacts of serious droughts expected in the south and west, as well as extreme rainfall in the east. It is allowing industrial agriculture to continue deepening ecological crises including climate change.

- **Promoting export-led agriculture:** Allowing export of food while 14 million South Africans go to be bed hungry and while food locally is not affordable. At the same time, the poor have to contend with monotonous and unhealthy diets, while grants are not substantial enough to deal with increasing living costs including higher food prices.
- **Failing land and food policies:** Only 7% of land has been transferred under the land reform program since 1994. The support for small scale farmers is inadequate while support programs impose GMO seeds and chemical fertilisers. The state is ignorant about the value and importance of agro-ecology for small scale farmers and it does not give farmers a choice to advance agro-ecology. In addition, corruption is widespread in land reform and fishing programs. Fishers in this country are not recognized and their interests are ignored. Food garden programs are also inadequately resourced, including community works programs such that there is insufficient support for cooperatives grown out of these programs. There is no sustainable support in communities for hungry households and children (1 in 10 children are hungry in some communities), while nobody is being held responsible for fetal alcohol syndrome. There is also no common nutrition standard. Instead the state has fragmented, piecemeal and ineffective food policies currently numbering 17 policies, despite the fact that 46% of the population is food insecure.
- **Promoting Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) seeds and crops:** GMO seeds and the deadly chemicals they require are expensive. Only the rich can choose not to eat GMO maize. Almost all maize crops are GMO in South Africa. GMO maize which is a staple makes us the only country in the world that is eating these crops without informing consumers and citizens. This takes away food choice and is a serious threat to the health of the people and this will increase health costs. At the same time, there is no recognition of cheaper and safer alternatives from grassroots communities such as agro-ecological seedbanks and no attempt to listen to the hungry.
- **Failing top down farming and cooperative development:** Over 100 000 cooperatives exist in South Africa but with an extremely high failure rate despite the over one billion rand that has been spent over the past few years. Many farming cooperatives are not receiving adequate cooperative education, farming training and finance. Local governments are corrupt and unresponsive to the needs of small scale farmers, cooperatives and household food producers.

We demand from the state:

- Support for water harvesting, quality access to services (water infrastructure and supply) and water use rights for food production;
- Provision of support for local community markets and production based on food sovereignty.

- An end to state imposed chemical and GMO seeds on small scale farmers.
- A Food Sovereignty Act to ensure we affirm the right to food, diversify the food system, promote agro-ecology and the solidarity economy.
- Jail sentences for food corporation executives that collude on price fixing and we want 'food profiteering' to be declared a crime under South African law.
- A national nutrition standard and investigation into the nutrition content of food. In schools we demand a higher protein content in school feeding schemes to end stunting.
- Food waste in the corporate controlled food system be monitored and exposed.
- An end to the alliance with capital including ending land dispossession through mining, GMO promotion, unsustainable export agriculture, fracking and the ocean grab.
- Land must be given immediately to the people for agroecological production.
- Food aid has to be introduced for children and poor households linked to promoting food sovereignty in communities and households.
- Full disclosure on the science of GMOs and an immediate ban based on the precautionary principle.
- Recognition of waste pickers and the role they play in limiting the waste of resources in our society.
- Support and respect for street traders.
- A commitment from government to address the needs and interests of fishers and to restrict the monopoly power of corporations in the fishing industry.
- An end to corruption in land reform and greater responsiveness from the state to the needs of small scale farmers for extension support, for organic seeds and inputs, agroecological training for farmers and cooperatives and financial support.

As the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign we declare on the way forward:

We will continue the hunger tribunal process as a mobilizing tool of the hungry and landless. It will serve as a platform for raising popular awareness and educating citizens about the food crisis and food sovereignty alternatives.

We will affirm our own voice and power as we struggle against those responsible to be accountable.

We will consider boycotts of retailers who profit from essential foods, GMO products and media, including newspapers like *Sunday Times*, who are indifferent to the cause of the hungry and landless.

We will continue to advance food sovereignty as an alternative to the corporate-centered notion of food security and as a means to diversify the South African food system.

We will struggle against trade and industrial policies that perpetuate the globalised food regime.

We will continue to deepen and build alliances to advance the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign including linking informal traders with small scale farmers and cooperatives as part of the solidarity economy. At the same time, we will consciously organize and mobilise youth and women; while raising awareness amongst children about these issues.

We will champion a deep just transition, in the context of climate change and increasing energy costs, to ensure we shift the energy system towards renewable energy. In this regard, we support the United Front Civil Society Conference on the electricity crisis.

We will encourage local and nutritious food production from local food sources to feed families and communities. At the same time, we will support local food cultures that are more appropriate and nutritious. All of this part of our effort to end dependence and control by the corporate controlled food system.

We will struggle to ensure land reform for food production and consumption such that we advance the rights of women, food sovereignty and the solidarity economy. In this struggle we will affirm agro-ecology as a science, which draws on farmer knowledge and traditional food production practices.

We will assist small scale farmers with agroecological training, to build seed banks, develop organic compost, sustainable water management systems and establish member-driven worker cooperatives for farming, bakeries, consumer stores, people's restaurants and local community markets.

We will celebrate and learn from self-sustaining communities and the successes of small scale farmers, local farming networks, cooperatives and community markets as examples of alternatives to commercial industrial agriculture and corporate controlled retail. We will celebrate the transparency, ethics and commitment to community need of these alternatives.

We will claim our right to food contained in the Constitution and other international human rights instruments.

We will continue to ensure popular education around the food crisis and struggle for food sovereignty alternatives as part of our communities.

We will create our own media to advance mother tongue, people's culture, share experiences of hunger and raise awareness about food sovereignty alternatives including traditions of bartering and solidarity markets.

We will struggle for a transformative and just transition to a democratic eco-socialist society. The struggle for food sovereignty will be a key wedge to move us in this direction as we build people's power from below.

In the light of the above we call on religious organisations, civic organisations, trade unions, youth, student, children and other progressive sections of society to join the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign.

Food Sovereignty is a Right!
No to Hunger!
Yes to Dignity!