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Editorial

Covid-19 and the case for a citizens' basic income grant in South Africa

by Vishwas Satgar

With Covid-19 and the lockdown there is no room for denial of how large parts of South African society suffer. High-income earners have gone online, fridges are stocked and uncertainty is mitigated by healthy bank balances. Low-income households are writhing with anxiety at job losses, are pushed into hunger by the suspension of income-generation opportunities, even in the informal economy, and informal settlements do not have stocked fridges.

We are a society marked by a racialised and gendered social class divide; a cruel society, even 26 years into post-apartheid democracy.

However, the irony of our situation is that we have had black rule in post-apartheid South Africa. The African National Congress (ANC) has led the post-apartheid order and it has nothing short of a strange commitment to black lives.

On the eve of lockdown, the Minister of Education, Angie Motshekga, on national television, trumpeted that "our people have coping mechanisms" thus implying all will be well. This "we know best" attitude gave South Africa a glimpse of the disconnect between the ruling party and lived realities. The reams of economic data on racialised and gendered inequality in South Africa speaks for itself as a counter to ruling party arrogance.

A few years ago we were told ANC cadres did not struggle to be poor. Due to their mythic role in a complex struggle, involving sacrifices by people from all walks of life, they deserved a post-apartheid dividend; we owed our liberators. And of course, they cashed in on this with rampant looting. It is time the mangled, hypocritical and tortured soul of the ANC-led alliance, which is there for all to see, gets a speedy send-off.

However, before then and just maybe somewhere

in the Kafkaesque world of the ANC, driven by jostling self-serving factions, there is a residue of genuine concern for black lives and South Africa in general. Just maybe, in the decisive leadership being provided on Covid-19 and ostensibly out of concern for us all, it is capable of understanding that now is the time to give concrete expression to the living hope of the many. This of course does not mean authoritarian populism Malema-style, but rather there still might be an intellectual capacity to grasp the opportunities for strategic transformative change.

Covid-19 and the space for transformative change

While South Africa has been busy coming to terms with the shock of lockdown, two important developments have taken place.

First, the shift towards systemic state intervention to enhance the societal response to Covid-19. Despite the silo approach to governance and competition between Cabinet ministers to shine, and with strategy being about what your ministry can bring to the challenge, some important shifts in state practice are happening in the midst of incoherence and uneven capability.

Announcements by state armaments parastatals, Denel and Armscor, that they would be repurposing production for ventilators, sanitisers and even converting military vehicles into ambulances is a welcome shift from arms production in a time of crisis.

Such a breakthrough confirms the potential of repositioning these enterprises to also play a part in producing renewable energy technologies and public transport systems for the just transition to avert a 2°C increase in planetary temperature and bring down South



Africa's carbon emissions.

Minister of Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation, Lindiwe Sisulu, announced she would be commandeering all water resources in the country under the control of water boards, water associations and other mechanisms. Through ministerial control she effectively ensured water as a public good was now nationalised in terms of government control.

Minister Sisulu was also at pains to clarify that water used by the government would be compensated. In a water-constrained country, in which 62% of water resources are controlled by commercial farmers, this is a crucial move to ensure the water needs of citizens are met during Covid 19. Her rollout of 41,000 water tanks (only 17,631 had been delivered by 9 April) and commitment to use schools as sources of clean water for communities is a crucial crisis management intervention, but has to be tracked and monitored by communities. Many of these communities have been denied water due to mismanagement, corruption and failed ANC government leadership, including during South Africa's drought.

Similar potential exists with integrating public and private health into a functional, affordable and citizen-driven system. But the leadership provided by the minister of health will determine the fate of our post-Covid-19 health care system.

Reframing the role of the state

Nonetheless, all these systemic shifts, actual or potential, are crucial to reframe the role of the state to allocate structural capacities and resources to meet societal needs. More can be done in post-Covid-19 conditions, given the struggles from below, to also ensure these changes bring workers and society into these processes. In other words, we shift from state provisioning to democratic provisioning including democratic public utilities.

But will these shifts endure as we confront the dramatic impacts of Covid-19, economic recession and climate crisis? Or will South Africa merely revert to a financialised market-centred script that has benefited a few corporations and a few wealthy individuals? The battle lines are being drawn right now as we grapple with our post-

Covid-19 future. Despite the outcome, what is clear is that the arguments for climate emergency measures have just been strengthened in the midst of the pandemic.

Finance capital is not standing back and is trying to shape a post-Covid 19 world. This relates to the second important development in this conjuncture. On Friday 27 March, Moody's followed two other credit rating agencies and downgraded South Africa's sovereign debt rating to junk. This means the cost of borrowing for South Africa is on its way up and will increase financial stress. These credit-rating agencies are part of a globalised disciplinary complex protecting the interests of globalised finance and the Dollar-Wall Street regime. They do not care what the needs of countries are except to ensure return on capital. They are also dubious and certainly not the bastions of creditworthiness integrity, given they were giving triple-A ratings to Wall Street finance houses before the crash of 2008-2009.

South Africa has been in the grip of global finance for too long and has had to forego its democratic commitments to its people, to ensure the "sovereign interests" of global finance come first. Moody's and credit rating agency downgrades have laid the basis for austerity macro-economic policy; cutbacks in state social spending and a further squeeze on the precariat coming out of Covid 19. This will be disastrous. We have to break the grip of global finance on the South African economy now.

In the midst of the global pandemic there is space to break with a one-size-fits-all approach in economic thinking so we can innovate, be bold and heterodox in how we deal with economic and climate challenges. Liberal globalised capitalism and its finance-centred economic orthodoxy has been suspended in this crisis. Credit rating agencies, creditors and multi-lateral institutions and neoliberals in the state will want to bring it back from the dead after the pandemic. This is not going to be easy given the state of the world economy and the challenges facing the three main economic centres that drive global capitalism.

China, US and the Germany-led European Union



China will have to rethink its role as a globalised economy in this context. Also, dependencies built on China for essential medical goods, inputs and other critical manufactured goods are certainly going to be rethought by importing countries, given the prospects of more pandemics and climate shocks. It would be naïve to think a China-centred low-wage manufacturing world is returning after Covid-19.

The US is currently in turmoil and will be the worst impacted Western country by current trends. Trump will realise his wish of making the US great in everything, including Covid-19. On 7 April, the US had more infections (367,650) and already had more deaths (10,943) than 9/11 (about 3,000 at the Twin Towers).

The US spent trillions on the war on terror ([according to Brown University's](#) Costs of War project almost \$6.4-trillion), one of the longest wars in the modern world. Yet Trump and the ruling class are playing partisan games with the Covid-19 response and are merely willing to make modest concessions.

The trillion-dollar stimulus plan, while providing for \$1,000 cash transfers to adults and \$500 to children is an immediate relief measure, merely about \$500 billion. A lot more will go to small business and mainly big business like airlines and shipping for bailouts.

Like 2007-2009, business is going to win again in terms of state support, affirming a neoliberal truism: the people are not too big to fail.

However, the US is still in the upswing of Covid-19 infections, unemployment is skyrocketing, a global recession has kicked in and climate shocks like wildfires in California are coming soon in the summer.

The US has already incurred massive costs due to climate crisis-induced tornadoes (including over Easter weekend in Louisiana) and hurricanes (Harvey cost \$125-billion). A few more of these extreme weather events will certainly induce fiscal limits and also challenge the capacities of the US state, in the midst of dealing with Covid-19 or its aftermath.

Quantitative easing, the favourite monetary policy tool of the US state, from printing money to the Federal Reserve purchasing financial securities, is going to face limits with synchronised systemic crisis tendencies hitting at once. Moreover, Trump's divisive politics also

makes the US dollar and US government bonds risky as a safe haven. China might also, given worsening domestic economic constraints, cash in on US bonds to re-adjust its own economy.

Germany, the strongest economy in Europe, is also facing serious challenges. Already in 2019, it was experiencing a slump in economic growth. The steep drop in car exports has placed major stress on one of its leading manufacturing sectors. Massive layoffs of metal workers were instituted and have continued in the context of Covid-19. Retail and commercial industries are also facing massive contractions, bankruptcies and retrenchments.

The stimulus package of the Merkel government is inadequate and still heavily credit-driven, providing a debt-based lifeline to stressed enterprises. The European Union is facing closed borders and an ineffectual European Commission in terms of co-ordinated and effective fiscal policy. Unconventional economic tools, measures and responses are coming to the fore.

South Africa's Covid-19 state managers have thrown existing fiscal resources, within key institutions, such as the IDC, Department of Agriculture and small business relief funds towards failing businesses. Tax relief and unemployment benefits (a temporary employee relief scheme) have also kicked in with the UIF making R30-billion available. Just before lockdown the [Climate Justice Charter](#) process called for stronger mitigation measures such as a substantive basic income grant, together with the trade union federation Saftu. This has also been echoed by the C-19 People's Coalition.

[Many economists and academics](#) have questioned the lack of stronger mitigation measures and have also called for a citizens basic income grant (BIG) to be considered in the context of lockdown.



What will South Africa be like if a substantive BIG is implemented now?

If South Africa implements a substantive basic income grant during the pandemic, a cash transfer to all citizens of R4,500 per person, per month, and subject to progressive taxation if your income exceeds R20,000 per month (currently South Africa has about 7.6 million taxpayers), these are its implications.

- Providing a means to address hunger – about 14 million people went to bed hungry in South Africa in 2019 and we can assume this increased with the suspension of livelihoods when lockdown kicked in. In rural areas, 80% of 700,000 farm workers (plus their families — about 2.5 million people) experience hunger, given the exploitative wages earned (the minimum wage is R18.68 per hour). About nine million children receive a nutritious meal during school, but under lockdown this has been compromised in various parts of the country.
- Provide a cushion for unemployment – before South Africa's lockdown, and based on the narrow definition of unemployment, 5.9 million were unemployed. It is estimated that between 900,000 and three million more workers will lose their jobs due to the lockdown. According to the International Labour Organisation, due to digital technologies, global value chains and other structural factors, unemployment is very likely to go up on a global scale in the foreseeable future. For South Africa, the much-vaunted Fourth Industrial Revolution is certainly a strategy to displace labour.
- Handwashing and sanitation will be enabled – about 1.4 million people living in informal settlements do not have access to water in their homes or yards. Almost three million (of 19 million) in rural areas lack access to a reliable supply of water.
- End precarity — 2.6 million in the informal sector (and about 60,000-90,000 waste reclaimers, who save municipalities about R750-million a year in landfill costs) and an additional one million domestic workers, are all precarious without benefits including unemployment benefits.
- Increase the redistributive bargaining power of labour – by ending dependence on low-wage work. The fragmentation of labour unions has weakened their institutional power to ensure higher wages and non-wage benefits. This was reflected in the minimum wage secured of (R20.76 per hour) R3,653. Other categories without powerful union densities or unions earn less, such as domestic workers (R15.57 per hour) and public works programmes (R11.42 per hour). A higher wage floor based on a BIG of R4,500 and with workers having pooled household income, gives labour greater bargaining power.
- Increase household income and fiscal stimulus — South Africa has 18 million very poor households (about nine million in rural areas) that have five members with a total monthly income of R2,600. Many of these households are highly indebted. Social grants mitigate this situation for 17.6 million beneficiaries but not all these households have grant recipients. Moreover, the child-support grant (R445 per month covers 12.5 million children), old-age grant (R1,860, or older than 75, R1,870, covers 3.5 million people) and the disability grant (R1,860 covers just more than one million people) are just not keeping pace with increasing living costs. A family of four needs at least R2,500 per month just to cover food staples. Competing needs for transport and now sanitisers and soaps place immense pressure on such limited resources. More income in households will also have impacts on aggregate demand and kick-start the economy.
- Fiscal consolidation – currently the state spends R162.9-billion (2018/2019) on social grants. This is meant to go up to R202.9-billion in 2021/22. The Unemployment Insurance Fund, even after allocating its R30-billion for Covid-19, has R160-billion in investments. A BIG can also be funded through a wealth tax based on income, inheritance and land, as well as a progressive carbon tax on wealthy consumers and carbon-intensive industries. All of these resources can be consolidated together with all grants into one consolidated BIG budget, effectively laying the basis for a “post-work”



society.

- Institutional rollout — to all South Africans through consolidating biometric information contained in Sassa, SARS, the Home Affairs department (based on identity document data) and from banks. In this regard, either Sassa and/or the Post Office could be crucial mechanisms to achieve the disbursement, including digitally.

If South Africa does not embrace the BIG in the context of Covid-19, together with other public goods, this will be a serious historical mistake and a missed opportunity for a more emancipated future.

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Time has come to build an emancipatory future

South Africa cannot continue a lockdown and confront this pandemic without stronger mitigation measures like a BIG. In the midst of Covid-19, Spain is the first country to commit to rolling out a BIG as a response to the crisis and this will be a democratic systemic reform that will persist beyond the pandemic.

The BIG has a history that goes back to the Enlightenment. In the 20th century, many experiments and forms of BIG interventions have been tried since the 1970s in the US, Canada, Kenya, Namibia and Finland. Each of these trials were based on specific parameters: target groups, social objectives and levels of income.

All the research shows positive outcomes when assessing the social efficacy for the BIG. This has ranged from more investments in human development, less stress, lower health costs, greater labour market leverage for workers and less food vulnerability. In the context of the climate crisis and deep just transition the BIG is an absolutely necessary democratic system reform to enable the ecological restructuring of our society without harming those least responsible for the problem.



International News

Covid-19 crisis brings to light the need for a much stronger public sector

Subin Dennis



The situation is such that the public sector, long maligned by neoliberal economists and weakened by governments beholden to neoliberalism, is playing a major role in the fight against coronavirus. It is a sign of how bad things are when the editorial board of the Financial Times, the world's leading business newspaper, carries an editorial calling for "radical reforms... reversing the prevailing policy direction of the last four decades." The FT editorial of April 3 has advocated, among other things, a more active role for governments in the economy, ways to make labor markets less insecure, and wealth taxes. The FT's editorial board, increasingly concerned about saving capitalism from itself, had written about the need for "state planning" and a "worker-led economy" last year in August. But the April 3 editorial has garnered much more attention since it comes amidst a massive crisis. By now, it has become obvious that substantial state intervention in the economy—frowned upon by the apostles of neoliberal economics—is back to the center stage across the world.

The situation is such that the public sector, long maligned by neoliberal economists and weakened

by governments beholden to neoliberalism, is playing a major role in the fight against coronavirus. Its role would have been much more effective and wide-ranging if it hadn't been hit hard by decades of fund cuts and waves of privatization. Nevertheless, with the ineffectiveness of private production with profit motive as its driving force to handle a crisis becoming more evident, the public sector, production with state direction, and some amount of planning are making a major comeback.

Public health care

The case of the sectors that are directly concerned with health care provision is the most conspicuous, with the inadequacies of private health care during a crisis becoming evident to even right-wing leaders.

We see Boris Johnson, the prime minister of the UK, repeatedly talking about the need to protect the National Health Service (Britain's publicly funded health care system). He even said, "There really is such a thing as society," contradicting Margaret Thatcher, his conservative predecessor who batted for pure individualism in 1987 by saying "There is no such thing as society."

Britain and many other countries in Western Europe have had relatively robust public health care systems. In many of these countries, such as Italy, Spain and the UK, public health care systems have suffered in recent years because of fund cuts and privatization of public facilities. Apart from the policy vision of the leaders of these countries themselves, they also came under pressure from the technocrats of the European Commission, who repeatedly demanded spending cuts on health care. Along with the easy-going attitude displayed by many of the Western governments in the early weeks of the coronavirus outbreak, such weakening of the public health care systems have made their response to



the coronavirus outbreak a more arduous task. For now, the governments of Spain and Ireland have temporarily taken over their private hospitals to deal with the crisis.

The case of the United States, with its private, insurance-based health care system, is far worse. Not only was a sufficient number of testing kits unavailable in the United States for months, but the costs of testing and treatment remain prohibitive for a large section of the population, particularly to the 30 million uninsured and 44 million underinsured. This means that many people simply wouldn't be able to afford to get tested and treated, endangering the health and lives of themselves and others.

The difference between the United States on the one hand, and China and South Korea on the other, comes readily into the picture here. Testing and treatment for coronavirus is free in China, which was crucial in the country's success in bringing the epidemic under control. South Korea has done extensive testing, which was made available for free. Treatment costs were covered by the government and the insurance companies.

The importance of the public sector, however, goes much further

In times of crises such as the present one, which is comparable to war, the ability of economies to produce (or at least source) and distribute things becomes critical. Two kinds of things assume particular importance: Essential things that are necessary for the immediate sustenance of the people. These include food and medicines, and in turn, the things necessary to produce them. If there are large gaps in the supply and distribution of these things, there would be a famine. If the gap is smaller, there would still be many unnecessary deaths. Even leaders who are otherwise callous

about starvation deaths would be concerned about such an eventuality during a crisis, because social tensions that could rise as a result of this would make it even more difficult to tide over the crisis, whether it is a war or a pandemic. During the Second World War, Britain resorted to rationing to solve this problem. The people of India were squeezed to finance the Allies' war in South Asia with Japan, and the result was the Bengal Famine, which took the lives of 3 million people.

The kind of things that are necessary to tide over the crisis. During times of war, armaments would be the most crucial among these. In the case of the coronavirus crisis, the main things would be items like ventilators, masks, hand sanitizer, gloves and medicines to treat the symptoms. Large gaps in the supply of these things would be disastrous. In the case of a war, such gaps could lead to defeat in war. In the case of a lethal pandemic, people would die in huge numbers, as we see right now. We could say this is an industrial famine of sorts contributing to the casualties, with countries unable to make ICUs, ventilators and masks fast enough in adequate quantities, and in many cases, to set up hospitals and quarantine facilities quickly enough. It is in this context that leaders of government who ideologically disagree with state intervention in the economy are seen taking direct action in commandeering private companies to produce necessary things.

Thus we see Donald Trump, who had initially resisted the pressure to use the Defense Production Act—a wartime law—to mobilize private industry, finally using the law to direct General Motors to produce ventilators. The government of Italy directed its only producer of ventilators, Siare Engineering, to ramp up the production of ventilators for the country, and sent engineers and other staff members from the Ministry of Defense to help with production. The company canceled all its orders from abroad



to produce for the country. Countries with a large public sector, robust industrial capacity, and the ability to effectively intervene in the market would be at a considerable advantage here. That is the case with China, which put the state-owned China State Construction Engineering to work to construct two emergency quarantine hospitals at breath-taking speed. The state ensured the flow of products such as grain, meat and eggs into the Hubei province while it was under lockdown, and coordinated the production and distribution of masks and other medical products. Once the outbreak within the country was under control, it began supplying masks and ICU equipment to other countries in need.

India, a large country with a poor health care system, does not have enough masks and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for its health workers. The number of ICU beds and ventilators available in the country is very low. For a population of 1.34 billion, it only has 31,900 ICU beds available for COVID-19 patients, according to the country's Health Ministry officials. To compare, Germany, with 82.8 million people, had 28,000 ICU beds as of mid-March.

If the number of COVID-19 patients in India surges, hospitals and their critical care facilities will be overwhelmed. The public sector Bharat Electronics Limited has been asked to produce 30,000 ventilators to meet the urgent need. Hindustan Lifecare (another public sector company) and the Rail Coach Factory under the Indian Railways are going to manufacture ventilators. The public sector Ordnance Factory Board (OFB), which the government has tried continuously to weaken in the recent years, is now producing masks, sanitizer and coveralls for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). It has also developed a ventilator prototype and is preparing for production. Within India, it is the state of Kerala that has dealt with the pandemic in the

most effective manner. In the Left-ruled state, which has resisted the policy of privatization pushed by successive central governments, public sector companies are manufacturing hand sanitizer and gloves, and have raised the production of essential medicines. Kudumbashree, a massive government-backed organization of women's collectives with 4.5 million members, is making masks, which the public sector is helping distribute. Mass organizations of youth and popular science activists are pitching in by making hand sanitizer. Volunteers supported by a state-led initiative have developed a respiratory apparatus that could free up ventilators.

It is not as if making masks, sanitizers and gloves requires advanced technology. But industrial capacity is needed to churn them out in large numbers, or at least large mass organizations, class organizations or collectives that can mobilize people to manufacture them. The inability of the United States to even ensure the supply of such items stands out in this regard. Four decades of neoliberalism seem to have led not only to the undermining of industrial capacity useful for public purposes, but also to the hollowing out of collective energies.

Need for production capabilities and societal control over them

In short, the lesson is that in times such as these, a society needs two things.

It needs production capabilities. During a time of crisis, if a country doesn't have the necessary industrial capacity, it will be in trouble even if it has money to buy if the other countries that do have the production capabilities block the export of the required goods. This is what is happening right now to so many countries, such as Italy and Serbia. (In the mad scramble for resources, there have even been reports of countries offering higher amounts to



buy masks ordered by other countries, and of some countries even seizing shipments for themselves.) Not only is industrial capacity needed, but some excess capacity is also required in some crucial areas. As the public health expert T. Sundararaman pointed out recently, the public health care system needs to have unused capacity, which will allow it to expand and take on the extra load when there is an emergency. Excess industrial capacity in China, which is often seen as a problem (including by sympathetic observers), turned out to be useful, with the country being able to manufacture essential goods to not just meet its own demands, but also that of other countries. But relying on market forces doesn't give any guarantee of industrial capacity being built up. The kind of production capabilities built without planning would be haphazard, and may not cover the needs of an emergency when it presents itself. India, which adopted a strategy of substantial economic planning during the first few decades after independence, only to abandon it in the recent decades, is witnessing this to its peril right now.

The society, or the state as the representative of society, needs to be able to control the production facilities. When a crisis hits a country with production capabilities in the private sector, the state can invoke emergency powers to bring them under control. But it would be a painful process, especially in countries where the private corporate sector is not used to submit to discipline. Given the enormous influence that the corporates have over the state itself, the state might try to prolong having to invoke such emergency powers, as was seen in the United States, and that could have disastrous consequences. India has the worst of all possible worlds—cronyism is rampant, industrialization has not taken off (whether it is because of cronyism or in spite of it need not detain us here), and the public sector has been undermined. Even when the

state is trying to play a more active role, its efforts could be undermined by private firms acting in their own self-interest of maximizing profits. This was seen in the United States, where private companies were engaging in price gouging, by selling masks that are normally sold for 85 cents for \$7, leading to the New York state governor to call upon the federal government to nationalize the acquisition of medical supplies. He said that the U.S. government should order factories to produce masks, gowns and ventilators; otherwise the situation would be impossible to manage. The state using private facilities can be costly as well, as was seen in Britain, where the National Health Service is paying 2.4 million pounds per day as rent to private hospitals for 8,000 beds.

Does calling for more domestic production capabilities that the state can control mean that every country should be left to fend for itself? Certainly not—every country cannot produce everything; smaller countries would find it particularly difficult. International trade would be needed for countries to procure things that they cannot produce for themselves. But as the developments of the recent months show, today's trade regime has nothing to do with solidarity, and it provides no guarantee of countries being able to access goods during an emergency. This is no accident. Lack of solidarity is embedded in the way capitalism has developed, with the bulk of the world's wealth concentrated in the hands of a few countries, and within countries, in the hands of the super-rich. This system has to be overhauled for a regime of solidarity to emerge. Production and its fruits becoming less concentrated in some regions of the world and in the hands of a minority would pave the way for power relations to be less unequal, which is a precondition for real solidarity among people and societies.

Along with socialized health care, an immediate



stop to privatization, and a stronger, expanded public sector should become part of the transitional demands of the left as we search for an exit from the pandemic crisis.

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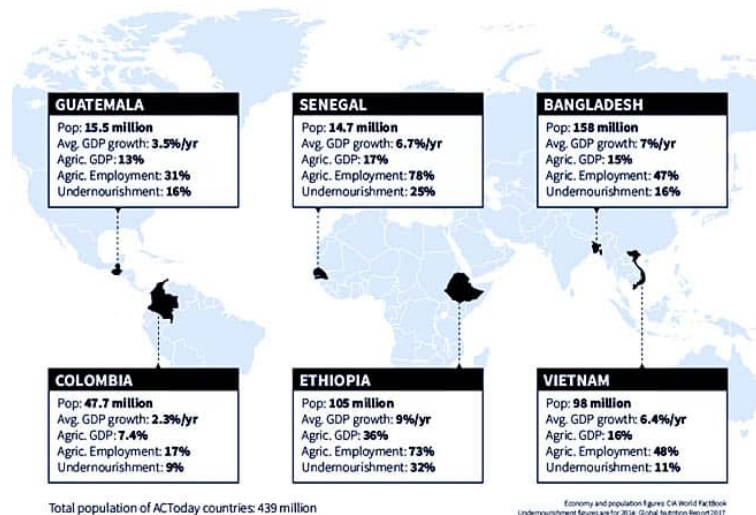
Covid-19 disrupts food systems; global hunger crisis looms

Francesco Fiondella

According to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, the COVID19 pandemic is impacting the world's food systems and disrupting regional agricultural trade and value chains. The FAO has warned that food shortages are a real risk in the coming months.

The rapid global spread of the virus poses a worrisome add-on threat to millions of people living in countries already vulnerable to food insecurity, malnutrition and natural disasters, including climate-related disasters. This global health crisis will test our food and trade systems in ways never experienced before.

To help us understand this complex interplay of risks, I spoke with Michael Puma, who is the director of the Center for Climate Systems Research at Columbia University's Earth Institute. Puma studies the susceptibility of the global food trade network to natural disturbances, including climate variability and change, and works on the food-security focused Adapting Agriculture to Climate Today, for Tomorrow (ACToday) Columbia World Project. He has focused on characterizing the food supply portfolio of the six project countries (see map below) to understand dependencies on trade of major crops and the implied, associated trade of key nutrients.



Q. What does the food supply portfolio of these six countries look like? How do they balance domestic production with import dependencies and how do these decisions affect their climate risk profiles?

As the COVID-19 pandemic is demonstrating, food supply chains are complex. They have numerous components, each of which can be vulnerable to climate-related disruptions. Disruptions in production, processing, transportation or even buying behavior can negatively influence food availability and prices. In fact, there is substantial concern at the moment about how the loss of migrant workers will impact food production.

Supply chains are also at risk, as they represent pathways through which the virus can be spread. These risks, if not mitigated, can lead to hardships associated with food insecurity, including malnutrition and even famine. As part of ACToday, we are working to highlight such vulnerabilities and identify ways of de-risking food systems.



Q. Are there different or unique concerns between rural and urban poor households?

Generally, concerns on the food security of both rural and urban poor households are centered on food accessibility, which is affected by a range of factors—from declining household incomes to spikes in local food market prices. New efforts are needed to examine detailed interactions within the food supply chain. My colleagues and I are working to qualitatively characterize risks due to coronavirus in multiple sub-Saharan countries, including Senegal, from smallholder farmers and small shopkeepers all the way up to supermarkets and global retailers and traders. Our goal is to explore various scenarios associated with the current crisis and to then map vulnerabilities at multiple levels, from the global level down to the details of domestic supply chains.

Q. What are the implications for international and national trade and social protection policies and responses?

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Bank and many other institutions have recognized the need to ensure stability and confidence in global food systems. One of the keys is to develop and implement a set of best practices to avoid reactionary and overzealous protectionist measures that could disrupt global trade. To this end, the FAO is compiling past policy responses – including both their advantages and disadvantages – to better inform potential policy interventions in food systems. (See this analysis by the FAO)

Q. In the coming weeks and months, what are going to be some indicators you'll be keeping an eye out for?

In the coming weeks, I will be watching key food price indicators, including the International Grain Council's Grains and Oilseeds Index (GOI) and the FAO's Food Price Index (FFPI)). To track local level concerns, the World Food Programme has developed a Hunger Analytics Hub which includes a monitor for local market food prices. For crop production, I will be watching GEOGLAM, the crop monitor for G20 Agricultural Market Information System.

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National News

Covid-19 pandemic: an opportunity to press the reset button on capitalism?

Bert Olivier

If ever there were a golden opportunity for humankind to press the proverbial reset button regarding the unsustainable way in which we live, it is now, in the midst of the global coronavirus crisis. The pandemic has brought economies worldwide to a virtual standstill and, in the process, given us clear skies and a glimpse of what the planet would be like without our species. And, regrettably, it appears — from numerous videos and news reports — that the world and its (other) creatures would be better off without us. Just this morning someone sent me a picture of a group of cats, in which one stood on its hind legs and told the rest: “They were called ‘people’ and they walked like this!”

That just about says it all. What a sorry state of affairs to have to admit that the human species’ short-sightedness, greed, and intent on amassing heaps of money, even if it means it is at the cost of the very condition of our continued existence — nature — have brought us to the brink of societal collapse. Many scientists — like this one — have stressed that it is humans’ “intrusion in nature” that has generated the transfer of the novel coronavirus to our species, and that — unless humans backed off — it would happen again.

In 2010 David Harvey, an authority on Marxist studies, wrote about the limits nature poses for capitalist expansion in his book, *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism*. He did so in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, and then already he remarked that: “... there is a wide-ranging field of concern, of political anxiety and

endeavour, that focuses on the idea of a crisis in the relation to nature, as a sustainable source of raw materials, as mere land for further capitalist (urban and agricultural) development, as well as a sink for an increasing stream of toxic waste.”

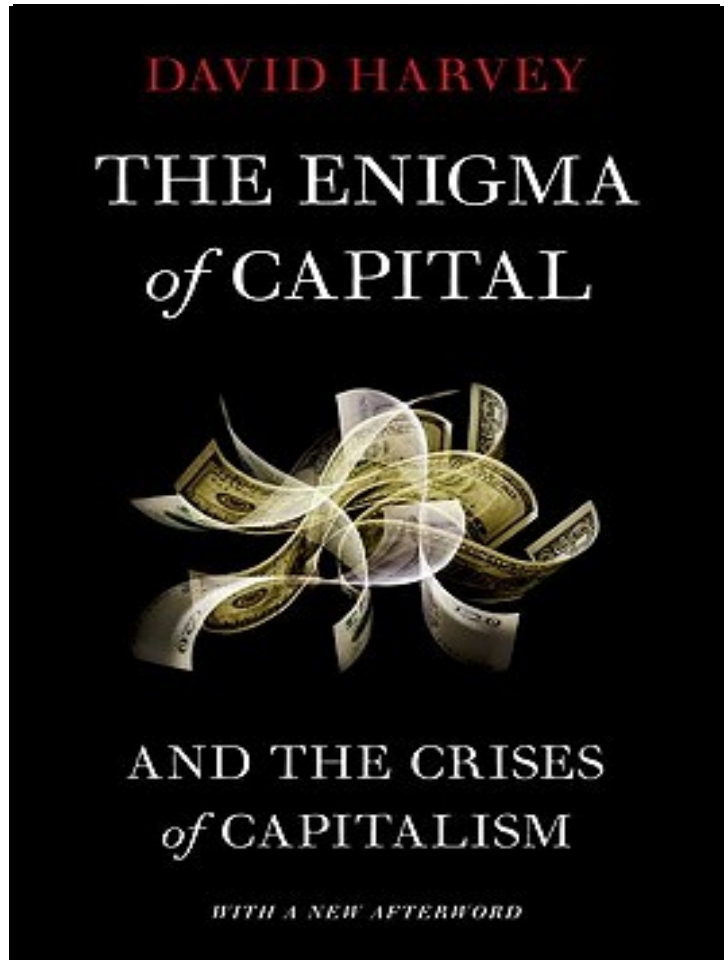


Image from: <https://mg.co.za/article/2020-04-27-covid-19-pandemic-an-opportunity-to-press-the-reset-button-on-capitalism/>

A little further on, his words assume an almost prophetic tone: “There may be an imminent crisis in our relation to nature that will require widespread adaptations (cultural and social, as well as technical) if this barrier is to be successfully circumvented, at least for a time, within the framework of endless capital accumulation. The fact that capitalism has, in the past, successfully navigated around natural barriers, and that it has often done so profitably since environmental technologies have long been



big business and can certainly become much bigger ... does not mean that the nature question can never constitute some ultimate limit.”

I would wager that the novel coronavirus constitutes an incontrovertible sign that such a limit has been reached. I know exactly how supporters of capitalism — including Big Pharma — would react: “It’s just a matter of finding a vaccine, and we’ll be on our way again!” And I would respond: “Read what virologists and other medical authorities have stated, time and again, that the difficulties posed by this coronavirus for the development of a vaccine are indicative of problems further down the line, because already — compared to its viral predecessors, like the SARS and MERS viruses — it has presented structural problems that did not exist before.”

The point is: the evolution of such viruses will not stop here. Difficult as it is to tame the coronavirus, the next one may prove to be even more evasive, because — as Charles Darwin taught us — everything evolves to overcome threats in its environment, and viruses are no exception.

Here, too, Harvey seems to have been prophetic regarding the probable emergence of the new pathogen that has paralysed the dominant economic system: “What we call the natural world is not some passive entity but, as the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead once put it, ‘a system in perpetual search of novelty’. To begin with, tectonic movements beneath the Earth’s surface generate instabilities that give us earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis and other events, while instabilities in atmospheric and oceanic circulations give us hurricanes, tornadoes, snow storms, droughts and heat waves that have all manner of human consequences, albeit unevenly distributed, both geographically and socially. Furthermore, trading upon and profiting from human disasters induced

by natural events is far too frequent a feature of capitalism to be taken lightly.

“While human action has successfully eliminated the bubonic plague and smallpox, it now has to confront entirely new pathogens and diseases such as HIV/ Aids, SARS, the West Nile virus, Ebola and avian flu, to say nothing of the potential for a new mutated influenza pandemic of the sort that killed millions back in 1918. Climates have long been subjected to a whole range of forces that uncomfortably mix together human-induced and non-human elements in such a way as to make it difficult to determine which is which, even when the very best scientific minds are collectively put to work to figure out the global climatic consequences of human action. While the effects are indisputable, the full range of consequences is almost impossible to determine.”

In the light of all of this, what are the chances for humanity to come to its senses and ditch the disastrous capitalist system for something better — whatever one might call that — something that would factor our indissoluble relationship with nature into economic relations? Even without having read Harvey, I would not be optimistic. People are fundamentally too attached to entrenched habits and customs (even bad ones: witness, patriarchy) to let go of these, even if their continued existence depends on it. Already companies the world over are champing at the bit to get going again, although I must add that some seem to have taken the lesson of the coronavirus seriously, up to a point — for instance, some airlines have announced seating and disinfectant regimen changes that would make it safer to fly.



Critical thinking is required

In 2010 Harvey was not optimistic about fundamental change, with good reason, which hinges on the inability of institutions such as universities to integrate truly critical thinking into the courses on offer. The reason? Universities are in the ideological grip of the hegemonic economic system (which has the political system over a barrel), and will, therefore, not allow truly critical thinking to seep into economics and accounting courses. Harvey insists that it is "... only when these critical ideas [are] carried over into the fields of institutional arrangements, organisational forms, production systems, social relations, technologies and relations to nature that the world would truly change."

Furthermore, as far as universities go, Harvey has more to add: "The repression of critical and radical currents of thought — or, to be more exact, the corralling of radicalism within the bounds of multiculturalism and cultural choice — creates a lamentable situation within the academy and beyond, no different in principle to having to ask the bankers who made the mess [in 2008] to clean it up with exactly the same tools as they used to get into it."

This may not seem to pertain to the coronavirus crisis, but it certainly does insofar as capitalism is at the basis of the encroachment on nature — need I remind anyone of the utterly stupid eradication of the world's forests to plant palm trees for palm oil, and to make way for soya-bean production? This is what has affected the habitat of wild animals which, because they are placed under stress, are more likely to shed the viruses they carry and infect humans. Hence, and I shall not mince my words here: capitalism is the enemy — not only of poor people, but of all people, as well as other living

creatures. Here is a lengthy excerpt from Harvey, in which he pulls no punches (take note, university administrators, if you have the guts to do what is right and just):

"But the current crop of academicians, intellectuals and experts in the social sciences and humanities are, by and large, ill-equipped to undertake such a collective task. Few seem predisposed to engage in that self-critical reflection that Robert Samuelson urged upon them. Universities continue to promote the same useless courses on neoclassical economic or rational-choice political theory as if nothing has happened and the vaunted business schools simply add a course or two on business ethics or how to make money out of other people's bankruptcies. After all, the crisis arose out of human greed and there is nothing that can be done about that!

"The current knowledge structure is clearly dysfunctional and equally clearly illegitimate. The only hope is that a new generation of perceptive students (in the broad sense of all those who seek to know the world) will clearly see that it is so and insist upon changing it. This happened in the 1960s. At various other critical points in history, student-inspired movements, recognising the disjunction between what is happening in the world and what they are being taught and fed by the media, were prepared to do something about it. There are signs, from Tehran to Athens and on many European university campuses of such a movement. How the new generation of students in China will act must surely be of deep concern in the corridors of political power in Beijing.

"A youthful, student-led revolutionary movement, with all of its evident uncertainties and problems, is a necessary but not sufficient condition to produce that revolution in mental conceptions that can



lead us to a more rational solution to the current problems of endless growth. The first lesson it must learn is that an ethical, non-exploitative and socially just capitalism that redounds to the benefit of all is impossible. It contradicts the very nature of what capital is about.”

As far as a generation of critically thinking — and importantly, critically acting — students is concerned, I am happy to say that I have always taught my students, from undergraduate to doctoral level, of capitalism’s injustices (after all, as Socrates taught me, philosophy serves the truth, and not any ideological system), and several of them have become highly articulate critics of this deplorable system. Moreover, their very way of living testifies to their deep understanding of capitalism’s depravity, and of its cultivation of greed in people, not least students in business schools and economic faculties at universities.

The time for such a critical student generation to advocate for the urgency of a transition to a life-promoting economic system has never been better than now, when the coronavirus has brought our world, and its problems, so clearly in focus.

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Covid-19 stimulus package is a missed opportunity

Duma Gqubule

President Cyril Ramaphosa’s R500 billion economic stimulus package was skilfully and deceptively presented to the nation as the real thing. But behind the ballpark figure and the sleight of hand that was supposed to dazzle, a cold and clinical analysis reveals a package that has a pitiful allocation towards

the most vulnerable people in society. It provides a woefully inadequate humanitarian response for millions of South Africans who go hungry every day.

Finance Minister Tito Mboweni held the line and ensured that the basic contours of the austerity budget that he presented to Parliament two months ago will remain intact. In other words, the new Covid-19 package will have a limited impact on the budget. Above-the-line measures, which refer to government spending that has a direct impact on its levels of debt, were limited to R160 billion or 3.2% of gross domestic product (GDP). But R130 billion of this amount will be financed by a reprioritisation of spending within the envelope of the austerity budget.

This means that the National Treasury will slash an additional R130 billion from provincial and local grants to provide social infrastructure (including housing, water and transport) on top of cuts of R100 billion that were announced in February. The government will take away R230 billion from infrastructure spending in impoverished areas with one hand and give back only R50 billion in social grants with the other hand. The impoverished will get a social relief of distress (SRD) grant of R325 for only six months while the quality of public services in their areas will continue to decline.

As a fiscal stimulus refers to the injection of new money into the economy, the treasury’s net contribution to the stimulus package is only R30 billion or 0.6% of GDP. A reprioritisation of existing government spending within the context of an austerity budget is not a fiscal stimulus. Austerity plus austerity is not equal to a stimulus.

Within the G20 group of the largest advanced and emerging market economies, the average spending on above-the-line measures is 2.9% of GDP,



according to the twice-yearly International Monetary Fund Fiscal Monitor report. In the adjustment budget, which Mboweni will present soon, the treasury will provide new estimates for state revenue and expenditure, which are based on a revised GDP growth figure. The February budget was based on a GDP growth rate of 0.9%.

Decline in state revenues

However, the government's poorly designed and hastily assembled stimulus package will have little impact on GDP growth. The economy is still expected to contract by between six and 10 percentage points in 2020, which will result in the loss of millions of jobs. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the experience of the global financial crisis and past epidemics suggests that state revenues fall even more sharply than a GDP contraction during a recession.

In the wake of the global financial crisis, state revenues in South Africa collapsed by 3%, which was twice the 1.5% GDP contraction. Assuming a GDP contraction of 6%, the likely treasury estimate, state revenues could decline by 9%. This could result in a R230 billion increase in the estimated budget deficit to about R600 billion, equivalent to 13.8% of GDP from an expected 6.8% two months ago. A more plausible 10% GDP contraction would result in a R324 billion increase in the budget deficit to about R700 billion, equivalent to about 14.5% of GDP.

In February, the treasury said South Africa had a net debt of R2.9 trillion, which was equivalent to 57% of GDP. This was not a high number by international standards, even when benchmarked against other middle-income emerging markets. Adding debt of R600 billion to an economy that shrinks by 6% could result in a net debt-to-GDP ratio of about 70%.

In a recent paper, Mike Sachs, a Wits University

adjunct professor who was previously a deputy director general at the treasury, called for the government to use its entire balance sheet – a financial statement that provides a picture of the state's assets and liabilities – to bail out the economy. The assets on the national balance sheet include almost R2 trillion in the Public Investment Corporation (PIC), the asset manager of the Government Employees Pension Fund (GEPF) and the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF).

After the collapse and subsequent recovery of shares on the JSE stock exchange since the start of the year, the PIC had assets worth about R1.9 trillion at the end of March, according to my estimates. The GEPF had assets of about R1.6 trillion. And the UIF had a surplus (assets minus liabilities) of about R130 billion. The National Revenue Fund, an emergency buffer within the budget, has assets of about R240 billion, according to the treasury. The Reserve Bank has foreign exchange reserves of more than R800 billion.

Sachs said the UIF surplus could be wound down to zero. The GEPF could have a payment holiday and release R75 billion a year. The NRF cash balance meant that the government could finance itself without borrowing on bond markets for about eight months. "The participation of the Reserve Bank in quasi-fiscal operations should not be ruled out," he said. Quasi-fiscal operations refer to printing money. South African financial institutions also have assets of more than R8 trillion, a portion of which could be steered towards developmental investments (and not the bailout of state-owned companies) when the economy recovers.

Covid-19 quotas

Despite having such a vast national balance sheet, deep capital markets and a Reserve Bank that can



finance a stimulus, Ramaphosa said South Africa had approached international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank for funding. The IMF provides funding for countries that have problems with their balance of payments (BoP), a statement that records a country's financial transactions with the rest of the world. It has a new Covid-19 funding window that has about \$100 billion (R1.9 trillion) – almost the size of the South African budget – for all its 189 member countries. The World Bank has a funding window of \$14 billion (R266 billion), equivalent to 13% of the South African budget, for all countries.

Based on its quota, South Africa could borrow up to \$4.2 billion (R79.8 billion) from the IMF. But it is unlikely that one country would get such a large allocation from the Covid-19 window, which has received 102 applications. To use its quota, South Africa would probably have to also borrow through the normal window, which would involve a dreaded structural adjustment programme. These programmes have punishing conditions that have impoverished many countries in the Global South and in Europe. It is not clear why South Africa should take an IMF loan that would also expose it to foreign exchange risks owing to currency depreciation.

Additionally, South Africa does not have a BoP problem. It has a healthy level of foreign exchange reserves. Although the country had capital outflows of R100 billion during the first quarter of 2020, it has a floating exchange rate, which has absorbed the shock without having to deplete its reserves. The rand has depreciated to R19 against the dollar from R14 on 1 January. Abebe Aemro Selassie, the director of the IMF's African department, said last week that South Africa's strength was its very deep and liquid domestic capital markets. "Relative to most emerging market countries, it generates

its financing need for the government largely domestically and in its own currency. So that

is really a major source of strength that South Africa has."

Grants and food poverty

Although some of the details of the stimulus package are sketchy, Ramaphosa provided a breakdown of the government's planned expenditure of R160 billion. It would spend R50 billion on increased social grants, R20 million on public healthcare and R20 billion on water and sanitation, sanitising public transport and providing food and shelter for the homeless. There were also tax measures for businesses that would cost R70 billion. The Department of Social Development had partnered with the Solidarity Fund and community organisations to distribute 250 000 food parcels over the next two weeks.

However, the R50 billion allocation to impoverished households is pitiful in a country where 30.4 million people and 64% of black Africans lived in poverty in 2015, according to Statistics South Africa. The allocation accounts for only 10% of the R500 billion package. In other countries, such measures that transfer income to impoverished households have accounted for up to 50% of stimulus packages. The R325 monthly grant is below the food poverty line of R561. The humanitarian relief in the form of food parcels is woefully inadequate in a country where 13.8 million people (25% of the population) lived below the food poverty line in 2015.

Vishwas Satgar, an activist with the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign, says: "The grant for the unemployed is inadequate to meet food needs. It locks the unemployed into a means-tested process [a means test determines who is eligible for assistance], which is going to be a bureaucratic nightmare. We need a basic income grant now. The



food measures do not inspire confidence. South Africa has about 30 million people in food stress. Distributing 250 000 food parcels will reach

only one million people. The response has been too little and too slow. It does not recognise the scale of the problem.”

Rampahosa said the government had set aside R100 billion for the protection of jobs. But it was not clear whether this commitment referred to above-the-line government spending or the UIF unwinding its surplus. There were no other details. He also announced a R200 billion loan guarantee scheme in partnership with major banks, the treasury and the Reserve Bank. The scheme will support more than 700 000 firms and three million employees.

Smoke and mirrors

There are different ways of looking through the package’s smoke and mirrors to determine what should be counted as real stimulus. The Financial Times newspaper wrote: “Excluding the reprioritised funds and the business loan guarantees, which do not need upfront funds, the package is worth 3% of GDP.”

There is also the view that it may be disingenuous to count loan schemes as stimulus because “the loans may or may not happen.” In an editorial, Business Day newspaper wrote: “There’s no guarantee that this is the amount that will eventually flow into businesses. Commercial banks will presumably not simply discard their usual risk-assessment standards. They might also judge that companies that were solvent before the lockout, well into its fourth week, are no longer so.”

A similar \$400 billion scheme in the United Kingdom, which has an 80% government guarantee, has

gotten off to a rocky start with loans of only \$1.2 billion advanced during the first three weeks owing to complicated application processes and strict lending criteria.

A Swiss loan scheme with simple processes has been held up as a model. But it has a 100% guarantee, which means that the banks are distributing state grants.

Peter Attard Montalto, head of research at financial services research firm Intellidex, says the tax revenue deferrals should not count as stimulus because “they are part of the same fiscal year”. If the reprioritisation of government spending, the loan guarantee scheme and the tax measures should not count, what is left of the stimulus package? The government will soon have to top up its package as the jobs bloodbath intensifies and the humanitarian crisis deepens.

United States congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez says the coronavirus pandemic has “taken all of these slow-moving crises that we have already been experiencing in the United States and basically pressed fast-forward on every single one”. The same applies in South Africa as Covid-19 has put the spotlight on the country’s multiple crises in health, public transport and social security.

The biggest problem with the stimulus package is that it is a band-aid solution that is designed to offer temporary relief, after which we will return to normal. But as Indian author Arundhati Roy says: “Nothing could be worse than a return to normality. Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.”



Figure 17 April 2020: From left, Minister of Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation Lindiwe Sisulu and President Cyril Ramphosa at the department's Covid-19 command centre in Johannesburg. (Photograph by Gallo Images/ ER Lombard)

Originally posted at: <https://www.newframe.com/covid-19-stimulus-package-is-a-missed-opportunity/>

Up to eight million may benefit from Covid-19 basic grant

Andisiwe Makinana

Six to eight million unemployed South Africans stand to benefit from government's newly announced R350 grant relief scheme to mitigate against Covid-19 poverty. Of the R15bn that the government allocated to welfare grants this week, R13bn will go towards increases in existing grants and R2bn will go towards relief for unemployed people. The social security agency is also planning to move away from distributing food parcels to a new digital system where cash will be provided through bank accounts, e-wallets and e-vouchers. The department of social development told parliament on Thursday that it was still working on the modalities of how the R350 grant relief would be disbursed but the department was confident that it will be ready to make the payments early next month.

Minister Lindiwe Zulu said her department will urgently finalise the criteria and timelines for the scheme and that they were building capacity to make sure they have the correct people benefiting from it. The department's Brenda Sibeko, a deputy director-general for social security, said the grant is targeted at people with no income, not receiving a child support grant and not benefiting from the Unemployment Insurance Fund and the National Student Financial Aid Scheme. "We do recognise that six months is not adequate and there has to be a whole lot of other interventions that are done," she said. Following the declaration of the lockdown, the department of social development requested the National Treasury to increase the child support grant because it is the smallest amount (R440) of all the grants paid by the state, said Sibeko.

It also targets children from poor households, and in the context of Covid-19, those households became poorer because some of the caregivers would be people who work in the informal sector, some unemployed and others working piece jobs, unable to earn an income during this time. "We were very pleased with the generosity of the president in deciding to include all of the other grants to make sure we augment the income of the different households," said Sibeko. "We had wanted much more money than that [for the child support grant] but we recognise that the number of beneficiaries [18 million] — and to add about six to eight million beneficiaries in the informal sector, it would not be possible to give them a higher amount of money. "So the R350 is what we were able to get and Sassa will start distributing," she said.

In this regard, executive manager for grants administration Dianne Dunkerly said the new payment system would be ready "in a matter of days" but most likely over the weekend. "We would be able to pay the money into a bank account,



e-wallet or some cash type mechanism so that we can stop the food parcels. It would be a much more effective way to get money to people quickly,” she said. Applications for the new basic income grant are also being done by phone. This is part of Sassa’s plan to move away from food parcels to a new digital system where cash will be provided through bank accounts, e-wallets and e-vouchers. Currently, food parcels are distributed to central points for collection and, where feasible, to individual’s homes. The agency says the traditional method of delivering food parcels was not effective.

Sassa CEO Totsie Memela said they hoped to start issuing the e-vouchers to those who have applied after next week. She said due to Covid-19, Sassa had already moved from a paper-based process to a call centre-based process but is now planning to introduce an automated process for individuals applying for grants or who had queries about the system. MPs from across the political party spectrum didn’t seem convinced with the shift to the digital system and called for Sassa offices to be reopened. They raised concerns around access but also said some people may not be able to do applications over the phone without the assistance of agency officials. MPs also spoke against what they called “the politicisation” of food parcel distribution, claiming that councillors were accused of either selling the parcels or diverting them to their homes.

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Climate Justice News

Coronavirus: which governments are bailing out big polluters?

Chloe Farand

Across the world, carbon-intensive industries are lining up for state aid as the coronavirus pandemic continues to hammer the global economy.

With people staying at home to slow the spread of the disease, global oil demand has slumped by a third, hitting producers hard. Climate campaigners are calling on governments to make relief for the fossil fuel industry dependent on tougher climate action. In the rush to protect businesses and workers from the impacts of the public health crisis, though, some polluters are being bailed out with no strings attached.

In a historic deal, a group of major oil-producing countries, Opec, and allies including Russia, on 12 April agreed the biggest ever cut to oil supply to stabilise energy markets and end a price war between Moscow and Saudi Arabia. Yet prices continued to slide. A report by Influence Map, which analyses corporate lobbying on climate policy, found the oil and gas sector to be the most active globally in lobbying governments for financial support and deregulation in response to Covid-19.

This, it found, was particularly the case in the US, Canada and Australia.

Which governments gave them what they wanted? Here is a round-up of the various types of support to polluting sectors introduced by the world's largest economies.

US

Donald Trump has been determined to support

the energy sector ravaged by oil prices and falling demand, putting pressure on Opec members to agree to cut production. At home, the Trump administration instructed the Strategic Petroleum Reserves to be filled to the maximum of its 30 million barrels capacity to “alleviate financial hardship” on the energy sector. The Department of Energy said it intended to make an additional 47 million barrels of storage capacity available. The Covid-19 bill clocked up a gigantic \$2 trillion to help workers and industries impacted by the pandemic. It includes \$61bn in relief for airlines, including \$50bn for passenger airlines, split evenly between loans and grants to pay employees, and \$8bn for air cargo carriers. The bill includes \$17bn for companies deemed critical in maintaining US national security – largely set aside for one company, Boeing, which was already under pressure over two deadly crashes before the pandemic.

Solar and wind power businesses did not get the access to tax credits they had sought under the package. Right-wing US organisations lobbied against proposed tax incentives for green programmes. “Climate change is not an immediate threat to humanity,” they wrote. Oil and gas companies do not directly qualify for economic support under the bill.

Elsewhere, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced a sweeping relaxation of environmental rules in response to the pandemic. This follows lobbying from the American Petroleum Institute.

Oil and gas lease sales are going ahead as usual while three states – Kentucky, South Dakota and West Virginia, have passed legislation increasing criminal penalties on protests disrupting or damaging fossil fuel infrastructure.



China

Provinces across China have taken measures to keep people in work and prop up small businesses but nationwide relief measures have been on a much smaller scale than in other major economies.

As the number of new reported cases in China came closer to zero, five new coal-fired power plants totalling 7,960 MW were approved for construction between 1 and 18 March – more than the total for 2019 which saw the approval of 6,310MW, according to Global Energy Monitor. Coal consumption has bounced back in China in recent years and the amount of coal power capacity under development increased even before the Covid-19 outbreak. At the end of February, provinces gave the green light to 34GW of new coal power, despite existing overcapacity. It is not yet clear if all the new approved plants will be built. While early indications suggest Chinese officials could be turning towards heavy-industries to reboot the economy, Beijing is also considering “new infrastructure” investments such as 5G, high-speed railways and electric vehicle charging points as part of the recovery efforts. Environmental supervision of firms could be simplified and in some circumstances temporarily suspended to help companies resume production, according to an official from the ministry of environment.

Russia

Russian prime minister Mikhail Mishustin announced a \$4 billion fund to support the economy and key industries. The package includes tax breaks for hardest-hit sectors including air transport and tourism and the expansion of subsidised loans to businesses. Oil and gas state-controlled companies, Gazprom and Rosneft, could be allowed to delay paying dividends, Radio Free Europe reported. The

collapse of the price of oil, Russia's main export, has left the economy particularly vulnerable. The government is aiming to subsidise the shortfall in oil revenue. Mishustin said the central bank would compensate the currency market if the price of Urals oil dropped below \$25 per barrel. The mechanism has previously been used to compensate oil companies for the shortfall in export revenue when oil was sold domestically below global prices. “It should now also compensate for the decrease in federal budget revenue,” Mishustin said. Despite the contraction in oil demand and continued cheap supply, Mishustin insisted the Russian oil industry was prepared for volatility.

Canada

The province of Alberta, home to extensive tar sands extraction, has been leading Canada's bailout of the oil and gas sector. The provincial government handed out tax relief measures for its struggling industry, suspending fees collected by the industry regulator to the tune of \$79 million. A ministerial order also suspended a number of environmental reporting requirements until mid August.

Meanwhile, the Business Council of Alberta and oil and gas companies have demanded the federal government postpone a planned increase of the carbon tax and the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers lobbied for a suspension of nationwide environmental rules. However the Trudeau administration chose relief measures with an environmental slant.

On 17 April, Justin Trudeau announced \$1.2bn to clean up orphan and inactive oil and gas wells in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia to maintain jobs. The federal government is creating a \$750 million emissions reduction fund to support oil and gas sector investments in reducing emissions, particularly methane. Environmental campaigners



have warned oil and gas could get stealth subsidies through relaxed rules to Canada's export credit agency, the Export Development Canada (EDC). As part of its response to the pandemic, the Canadian government significantly extended the scope of EDC's work. Under the new rules, EDC will be able to support transactions domestically as well as abroad. The agency's liability limit, previously capped at \$32 billion, has also been lifted. EDC has a record of supporting Canada's oil and gas sector export abroad. It provided an average \$10.6 billion a year to oil and gas projects from 2016 to 2018, according to Oil Change International. The Canada Account, which supports export transactions deemed of national interest including the Trans-Mountain pipeline, is also benefiting from the liability cap lift. The government also waived ground lease rents for 21 airports authorities until the end of the year as part of a support package for air travel.

Australia

The federal government is pushing for the expansion of coal mines to keep people in work during the coronavirus-induced economic slowdown. Resources Minister Keith Pitt said the expansion of Acland thermal coal mine, in Queensland, was "even more" more important now the coronavirus pandemic is hammering the economy. The Queensland government has so far refused to approve the expansion despite pressure from mine operator New Hope, which is expected to exhaust coal reserves by September. In South Australia, the government suspended exploration and licence fees for the mining, oil and gas sectors. The relief will extend the licence fee deadline to 31 December. Energy and mining minister Dan van Holst Pellekaan announced a 12-month waiver of committed expenditure for all mineral exploration licence holders.

UK

The UK government is resisting calls from the aviation sector for a bespoke bailout package. Airlines trade association IATA has led a global lobbying campaign demanding governments immediately reduce all charges and taxes and provide airlines with specific support funds. IATA has also been pushing regulators to relax rules so airlines can issue travel vouchers instead of refunds, allowing for a surge of passengers when travel restrictions are lifted. In a letter to airlines and airport executives, UK chancellor Rishi Sunak said bespoke government support would only be available as "a last resort" and after companies had exhausted other funding options, such as raising money from shareholders.

But on 6 April, British low-cost airline group EasyJet received a \$737 million loan from the UK government after warning it was running out of cash – although it managed to pay £60 million in dividends to its largest shareholder. Despite strong commitments to climate action, the Bank of England has allowed the debt of BP, Shell and Total's subsidiary companies to be eligible for support under the banks' boosted corporate bond purchase scheme.

European Union

EU member states have agreed that the union's response to the pandemic must be aligned with the green transition and its European Green Deal. Writing in Climate Home News, 17 environment ministers called for the Green Deal and its carbon neutrality goal to provide the pathway for economic recovery. But across the union, carbon-intensive sectors are still benefiting from relief.

The European Central Bank rolled-out a €870 billion (\$781bn) emergency bond-buying programme to stabilise the euro zone economy until the end of



the year – the equivalent of 7.3% of the euro area's GDP. Initial analysis of the bonds purchased in the last three weeks by Influence Map shows the programme included bonds issued by oil majors including Shell, Eni and Total – with some of the bonds purchased maturing between 2024 and 2034. The EU Commission has also started to approve airline bailouts aimed at easing companies' liquidity crunch. Loan guarantees have been made available in Sweden. Belgium deferred concession fee payments for its major airports. The French and Dutch governments are in talks with Air-France KLM for state support. Germany is also in talks with Lufthansa to provide state aid with loans and equity investments. In Austria, the government is also in talks with Lufthansa, the parent company of Austrian Airlines, to provide state aid for the airline only if the money supports emissions cuts.

Meanwhile in France, the National Assembly has approved a \$21.4bn package to rescue its strategic industries, largely focused on aviation and automobile majors such as Airbus, AirFrance and Renault. The text requires recipient companies to include social and environmental objectives in their business models in line with the Paris Agreement, but gives no further conditions. Environmental NGOs have accused the government of writing "a blank cheque" to some of the country's largest polluters. The powerful European automotive lobby group, ACEA, has called on EU institutions to provide liquidity support for companies, suppliers and dealers.

The automotive sector is also lobbying for the union to drop a tightening of CO2 regulations aimed at raising fuel efficiency. "This not the time to think about further tightening of the CO2 regulation," VDA president Hildegard Müller told the Süddeutsche Zeitung.

India

India's minister of petroleum and natural gas Dharmendra Pradhan struck a deal with the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (Adnoc) to deliver more cooking gas supplies as part of a scheme to support women living below the poverty line. Pradhan said he had given Adnoc its assurances India would buy crude oil from the company to replenish the country's strategic petroleum reserves.

Brazil

The Brazilian government has opened negotiations on an emergency loan package for energy distributors, according to Reuters. The government has also postponed all electricity auctions in 2020, including for renewable and green power. Experts say this could benefit the country's natural gas plants, which will become more competitive in the next auction rounds.

Argentina

The Argentinian government has pledged an additional \$100 billion for public work investments for road works, construction and large infrastructure projects. Argentinian newspaper Perfil reported the government had entered negotiations with oil-producing provinces and companies to reinstate a support price per barrel to halt a production collapse.

South Korea

Despite plans for a Green New Deal and an objective to reach net zero emissions by 2050, the government is opening an \$825 million emergency credit line to the country's biggest coal plant manufacturer, Doosan Heavy Industries & Construction Co. Environmental groups are seeking an injunction against the bailout, seeking to make the



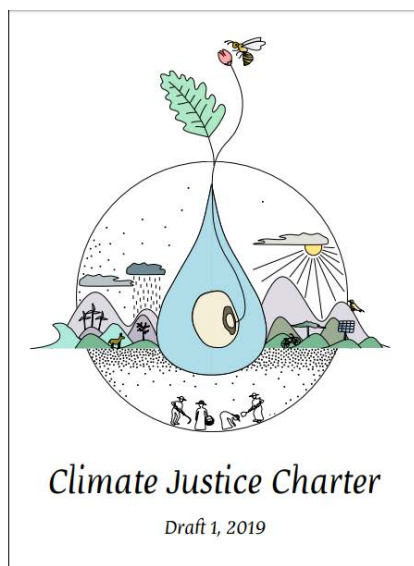
relief contingent on the company's transition away from coal.



Tar sands in Alberta, Canada. (Photo: Kris Krüg/Flickr) (<https://www.climatechangenews.com/2020/04/20/coronavirus-governments-bail-airlines-oil-gas/>)

Article originally posted on: <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2020/04/20/coronavirus-governments-bail-airlines-oil-gas/>

Climate Justice Charter



The climate justice charter is a set of principles to lead the country into a climate just future. This draft was written with contributions from various activists around the country, from various sectors. After a year of round table discussions in 2019 with stake-holders from media, drought affected communities, youth activists, environmental and social justice activists, faith based organisations and labour.

But we need more contributions, we want this to be a people's charter, and for this to happen- we need you all to read it, critique it, edit it, and contribute to it. Share it with your friends and make sure your voice is heard. It is now a google document to make it easier for you to access and leave a comment!

The climate justice charter can be accessed at :
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uh3s7B-8minK9a1oQ4hT8YO8GOzALlovH92BwGP-wVRQw/edit?usp=sharing>

All comments must be in by May 1st, 2020.



The Food Sovereignty Campaign

Earth day message: advancing climate justice and food sovereignty during covid-19

We celebrate Earth Day to remind us all that the more harm done to our life giving planet the more it will strike back. Disrespecting the delicate and beautiful web of life on planet earth has given us Covid-19 and the worsening climate crisis. Despite the tragic loss of life, Covid-19 has reinforced planetary awareness: we share a common problem, we have one home and one humanity. This breakthrough has not been made with the climate crisis. In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic tornadoes have battered the US, wild fires are happening in parts of the Netherlands, massive flooding in Kenya, all reminding us that extreme weather climate shocks have not gone away. Yet the climate crisis, as an urgent and shared problem, which has to be dealt with now, is not part of our planetary consciousness.

While we all scramble to deal with a deadly virus in our midst, at 2°C, 3°C and 4°C degrees increases in planetary temperature we will be in the same position, except we will be dealing with intense heat everywhere, including collapsing food, water, health care and life giving support systems. Ironically, Covid-19 is helping to prevent this from happening. It has demonstrated the following:

- The fossil fuel industry is not more important than sustaining life. Hence oil demand has dropped, oil companies are going bankrupt and global carbon emissions are declining as a consequence;
- Governments can act to advance lifesaving emergency measures. Economic institutions

can be repurposed, health care systems can be bolstered, social relief can be given and new economic ideas can flourish to bring benefits to all

- Societies can rally human solidarity to sustain life, including building food sovereignty pathways and distribution systems to meet community need.

In this context, the struggle to overcome Covid-19 is also a struggle to intensify the climate justice and food sovereignty struggle to advance a deep just transition. The Cooperative and Policy Alternative Centre, a vibrant alliance partner of the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign, co-founded the Climate Justice Charter process a year ago. It has involved inputs from across society through roundtable dialogues, online engagements, activist think pieces and a national conference. We invite all in South Africa to work with us to finalise the draft climate justice charter by mid-May. We must not lose the opportunity Covid-19 gives us to lock in transformative systemic changes that will address both crises. Please go here (<https://www.safsc.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Climate-Justice-Charter-Draft1-2019.pdf>) to access the draft Charter and send us your input. Also engage with the online document here <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uh3s7B8minK9a1oQ4hT8YO8GOzALlovH92BwGPwVRQw/edit?usp=sharing>

President Ramaphosa announced a historic R500 billion stimulus package last night. The government has deployed both monetary and fiscal policy measures to enhance socio-economic mitigation. We welcome this. However, it is important for us to keep the following in mind when making sense of this so we do not slip into a 'big man' or 'messiah' version of what's going on or worse, start licking the boots of the ruling party. We need perspective. First, the ANC government was given



a monopoly on state power due to the nature of the pandemic and the lock down. Hence it has to lead the state, a weak and corrupt state that it has constructed through decades of reckless and self-serving leadership. Second, the draconian lock down of society and economy has had devastating consequences and necessitated a massive stimulus response, which places the economy on life support while strengthening socio-economic mitigation measures. Third, sensible governments the world over have also attempted to balance the public health response with extraordinary socio-economic mitigation measures, some even going as far as spending almost 20% of GDP, freezing rents and mortgage payments and introducing substantive cash transfers to citizens. Fourth, many voices across South African society have raised concerns with the inadequacies of the socio-economic measures of the first phase response of the ANC government, including the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign's concerns that the food pandemic will kill people first rather than Covid-19. The government had to respond.

The many details and aspects of the ANC government's stimulus package was not clear in the President's speech, reflecting a problematic approach to crisis management. We now have to follow every Minister to work out what this is all about. We strongly believe brush strokes and cursory overviews of what government is doing is not enough when major announcements are made. However, with what has been shared we are concerned about the following:

- Borrowing from international financial institutions must not lock in structural reforms that reinforce the power of finance over the South African economy;
- The ANC government has not built a welfare system, as per section 27 of the South African

constitution. Instead we have a 'management system of the poor' through social grants to ensure desperation is disciplined. Social grant disbursements also reinforce a low wage economy at the heart of persistent inequality; it ostensibly deals with the 'poor problem'. The top ups on social grants announced fall short of meeting basic food needs of households. A current basket of essentials for a household of four costs R3408.

- A commitment to R350, for a social relief distress grant for the unemployed is inadequate to meet food needs. It locks the unemployed into a means tested process which is going to be a bureaucratic nightmare and will not be solved any time soon. Going forward we will continue to campaign with informal traders, unemployed peoples movements and children's organisations for a non-means tested basic income grant, including in six months' time when the government will stop such a benefit. We need a basic income grant now and to ensure we can handle the socio-ecological restructuring to deal with the climate crisis. We call on society to sign our peoples referendum for a #BIGNOW: <https://copac.org.za/peoples-referendum-bignow/>
- The food measures announced by the President do not inspire confidence. South Africa has about 30 million people in food stress. Distributing 250 000 food parcels over the next two weeks, through SASSA, the Solidarity Fund and other partners amounts to reaching 1 million people (assuming a household of 4). This is not enough. Moreover, SASSA's role in cash transfers and vouchers are very susceptible to corruption and political patronage. This must be done in a transparent manner. We reiterate our demands that the Solidarity Fund needs to work in active partnership with civil society, local government has to be brought in to reach local communities and the armed forces (military, navy, air force



and even the police and fire fighting services) need to be brought into the process to distribute food under the watchful eye of local community and faith based leaders. We also call on supermarkets to enable peoples pantries and solidarity buying <https://www.safsc.org.za/public-statement-demand-for-supermarketchains-and-government-to-enable-peoples-pantries-and-solidarity-buying/> and <https://www.safsc.org.za/peoples-pantry-petition-and-call-for-solidarity-buying/>.

- Moreover, the President did not announce he was unlocking the food commons – microfarmers, community gardeners, small scale farmers, subsistence fishers and school feeding schemes which are a crucial source of food in communities. We will continue campaigning for this to build community, village, town and city food sovereignty pathways in the midst of this crisis. We call on the public to assist the process by providing details about the food commons here <https://www.safsc.org.za/foodcommons-map/>.
- The President's announcement of an additional R20 billion for water and sanitation infrastructure in local government is welcomed but there are gaps in water delivery on the ground. These resources have to reach communities in need. As it stands our online water stressed communities monitoring tool has 33 communities in urgent need of water and infrastructure support. See <https://www.safsc.org.za/water-stressedcommunities-map/>

We do not agree with the State President and his government's vision of what kind of economy should come out of the Covid-19 pandemic. His dream of 20th century carbon centric industrialisation betrays his lack of an emancipatory ecological consciousness. He and his government are out of step with what the earth requires now. His Ministers have been giving licenses to mining companies, are

allowing greater pollution from Sasol and ultimately are reinforcing a carbon based minerals-energy complex. This is the future we do not want coming out of the Covid-19 pandemic. In coming months, we will do the following to open up a different conversation in South Africa:

- Launch a popular education document on a climate science future for South Africa to inform the public on the dangers we face as Southern Africa heats faster than the rest of the continent;
- We will take steps to unite and consolidate the building of a Climate Justice Charter Movement;
- After we finalise the Climate Justice Charter for South Africa, we will, based on this peoples document, launch a Climate Justice Deal and Recovery Plan for South Africa.

Full statement originally posted on: https://www.safsc.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/FInal-Earth-Day-Message_22Apr2020.pdf

Food Sovereignty Campaign calls for peoples' pantries and 'solidarity buying'

Shani Reddy

The South African Food Sovereignty Campaign, which has been campaigning against food injustices in the country for the past six years, sent a proposal to President Cyril Ramaphosa, relevant ministers and CEOs of supermarket chains this week.

Currently, the government relies on the corporate controlled food system, such as large supermarket chains, to ensure that people are fed. Such supermarkets provide an essential service, but many South Africans cannot afford to purchase goods from them. Although the lockdown makes it difficult to get food to communities in need, the



organisation says that getting food to people who need it can be done by using in-store peoples' pantries as collection sites and "solidarity buying" every time a person goes to a supermarket. "Most supermarkets have a reach across the country, including urban and rural areas. Government police services and the defence force are at the direct interface with communities.

"Sustaining a peaceful situation is proving to be difficult in many poor communities. To assist, police and soldiers can keep the peace by playing a central role in distributing solidarity goods," the statement said.

In the proposal, the organisation demands the following from supermarket chains and government:

First, every supermarket chain sets up a peoples' pantry in each of their stores. "This will be a collection system in every supermarket for consumers to donate a bag of groceries, medical and other essential goods (priced ethically). All stores are to provide a free 'peoples' pantry bag' at the entrance so it is clearly visible, with promotional information and signs so consumers are aware of this choice." This option should also be available online.

Secondly, "these supermarkets must work with the government to ensure the food reaches food stressed communities". The organisation is demanding that police and the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) play a central role in distributing the 'peoples' pantry bags' or solidarity goods.

Moreover, local faith-based and community leaders should monitor that this is being done and the "government must publicly account for this in the messaging from the Disaster Management Command Structure".

Thirdly, food donated by urban supermarkets must be sent to rural supermarket pantries.

Fourthly, these supermarkets must keep accurate records of donated foods and should include information on where the food is distributed. These records must be kept in order to be audited after the pandemic. The South African Food Sovereignty Campaign also demands access to this information should they require it.

Finally, the organisation is demanding that all unsold fresh goods in supermarkets be given to employees of the supermarket.

Nearly 40 organisations have endorsed these demands, including Engineers Without Borders Wits and the African Centre for Biodiversity. The organisation has initiated a petition, which already had nearly 700 signatures and will keep going until these demands are accepted.

Food Forward South Africa has put measures in place to ensure that they escalate food provisions to all their most vulnerable groups across the country in the coming months. This includes "facilities and centres for the aged, orphans and vulnerable children, people living with HIV/Aids, disabled persons, the homeless, as well as vulnerable women," says the organisation. According to Food Forward SA, "providing optimal nutrition is critical in maintaining a strong immune system at this time". FoodForwardSA has launched a special R50-million appeal to be able to "scale and provide critical food provisions to our most vulnerable groups across the country".

The organisation is appealing to the public to either make a financial donation, or to donate non-perishable foods and toiletries. There is a detailed financial needs list and grocery needs list available for those who are able to donate. South Africa has significant levels of food inequality and hunger. Nearly a quarter of South Africans go to bed hungry



each night, according to a South African National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. The lockdown makes the problems of food inequality and hunger worse and South Africans are keen to assist through donations. Earlier this week, Maverick Citizen reported that communities are desperate and struggling for food. The importance of supermarket chains and government collaborating to assist with feeding those in need cannot be understated.

Supermarket chains did not respond by the time this article was published.

Originally posted on: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-04-08-food-sovereignty-campaign-calls-for-peoples-pantries-and-solidarity-buying/>

Public statement and press release: Covid-19 Lock Down and worsening food crisis in the country

On the 20th of April, the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign released a public statement and press release, addressed to the president and relevant ministers, the state is as follows:

Re: Covid-19 Lock Down and Worsening Food Crisis in the Country

While we commend the government's efforts to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic, the lock down has not been accompanied with adequate socio-economic mitigation measures. South Africa is one of the most unequal countries in the world and with major food stress amongst big parts of its population. About 14 million people went to bed hungry before the lock down. With social grants inadequate to meet the food needs of households (17.6 million), about 4 million informal sector workers (including street

traders, domestic workers, waster reclaimers, car guards etc) living from hand to mouth suddenly losing income generating opportunities and high structural unemployment at about 5.9 million posed to jump to about 9 million, the country is facing a food crisis involving about 30 million people. This is a big challenge.

From all assessments we have done and reports received from grassroots communities, governments response to food needs has been inadequate. The Solidarity Fund has centralised resourcing and 3 weeks into the lock down it has not been able to effectively ensure food supply, through food parcels. The food crisis is going to persist as long as we have the Covid-19 pandemic. The Solidarity Fund is far from blunting the edge of desperation and hunger. Politicians handing out food parcels is not helping the situation and it politicises the crisis.

Democratise the Solidarity Fund

We demand that all politicians desist from handing out food parcels. Moreover, the Solidarity Fund (SF) must work closely with local government to identify community organisations that can facilitate food distribution in grassroots communities. In addition, it needs to call for a partnership with NGOs willing to support food distribution. It also needs to work with the armed forces (army, navy, military and police) to ensure food parcels are distributed in specific communities, while monitored by local faith based and community leaders. We also would like greater transparency on food parcel pricing and its nutritional content. Moreover, we believe the Solidarity Fund must also be open to receiving proposals from small and micro-level community farmers that need resources to jump start production again as part of food sovereignty and agro-ecology pathway building.



On the 6th of April, we sent this public call , <https://www.safsc.org.za/public-statement-demand-for-supermarket-chains-and-government-to-enable-peoples-pantries-and-solidarity-buying/> , to government and supermarkets to ensure the promotion of peoples pantries and solidarity buying. We wanted ethical pricing for solidarity packages that could be bought by consumers and placed in supermarket peoples pantries. These solidarity packages could then be distributed by the military and police to communities in need, while monitored by local faith and community leaders. We have not heard back from government and since then, supermarkets have been looted in Mitchells Plain and Nelson Mandela Bay. As the situation worsens supermarkets will become targets for desperate households without any sources of income.

As Democratic Leaders, Talk to Us

We would appreciate a response from government on this proposal.

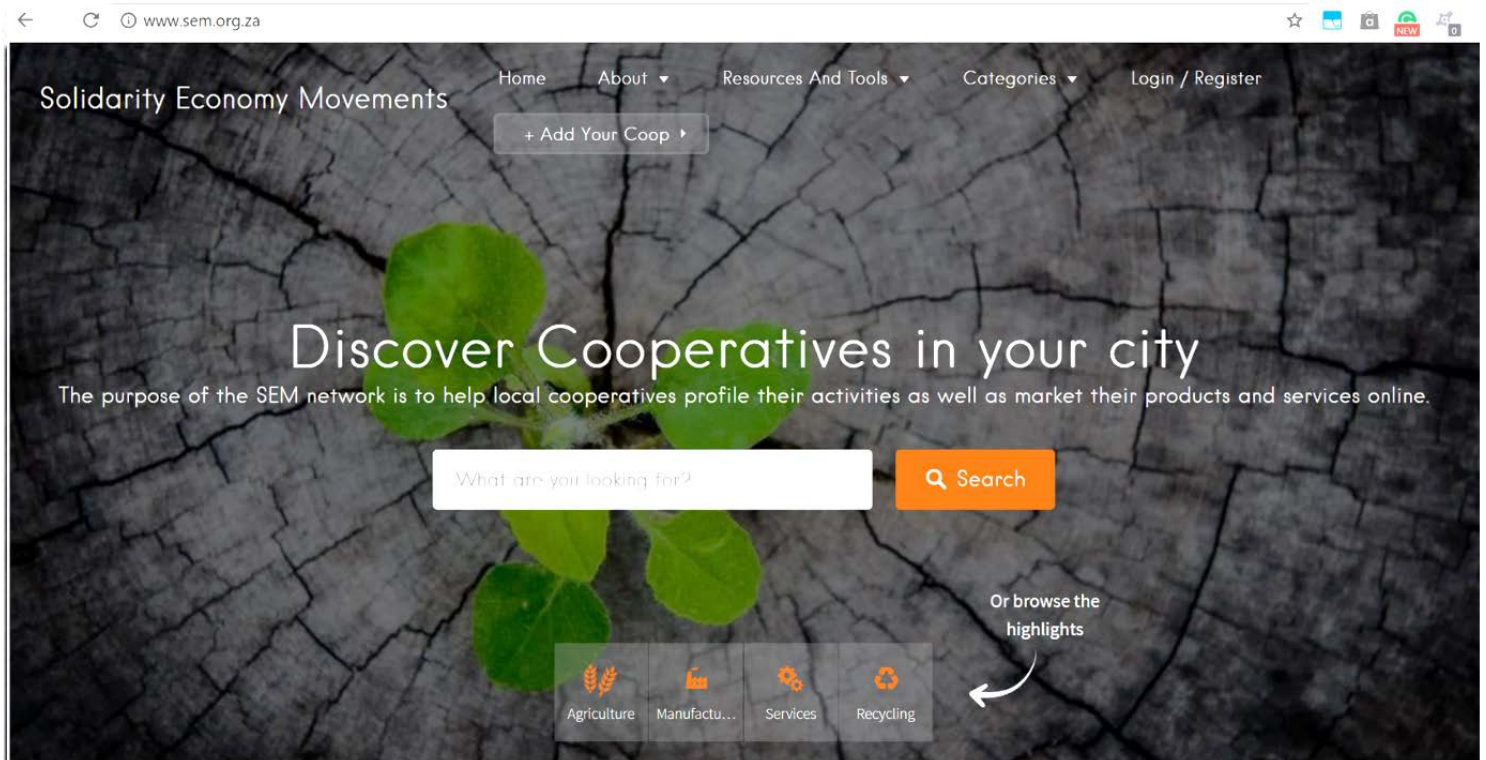
The government has also failed to appreciate that thousands of community gardeners, small scale farmers, community feeding schemes and subsistence fishers are central to meeting the food needs of many communities. The lock down of the localised food commons has meant produce is wasting away while people starve and many families dependent on fishing cannot survive. This is an unacceptable situation. While the Minister of agriculture has earmarked finance for small scale farmers this excludes thousands of small and micro scale food producers. The financing set aside for small farmers also does not assist household and community food sovereignty pathways based on food sovereignty. School feeding schemes which provide hot meals to about 9 million children have also been stopped in most provinces, with the Western Cape being an exception.

Unlock the Food Commons

We demand the government unlock the food commons – community gardens, small scale farmers, community feeding schemes and subsistence fishers. We need a clear pronouncement that these local food producers are part of essential services and will also be supplied with essential health equipment. We also believe the Minister of Agriculture needs to dedicate a significant stream of the financing for small farmers to community based micro and small scale farmers, households and agroecology support NGOs. All school feeding schemes should be reinstated under public health guidelines.

Together let's ensure that the Covid-19 pandemic is not also a food pandemic. We need decisive leadership now to prevent social collapse through starvation. We have also started a peoples referendum on basic income grant #BIGNOW for South Africa (available here: <https://copac.org.za/peoples-referendum-bignow/>) Many governments in the world are doing everything in their power to mitigate the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic and lock downs on the lives of their citizens while rising to the public health challenge. The South African government needs to do the same. We need bold, innovative and heterodox thinking now!

The statement is linked at: https://www.safsc.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Press-statement_Worsening-Food-Crisis-20.04.2020.pdf



The Worker Cooperative Campaign

Call to Cooperatives: Join the Solidarity Economy Movements Website

The Co-operative and Policy Alternative Centre has launched a Solidarity Economy Movements website to serve as a marketing platform for co-operatives in South Africa. The website is a useful tool for all cooperatives as they can register and create a profile of their cooperative, describe their activities and market their products and services online at no charge.

The aim of this website is to promote the Solidarity Economy by providing citizens who want to support cooperatives with a portal that allows them to search for cooperatives near them.

Based on the idea of the Solidarity Economy the aim is to transform production, consumption, savings and ways of living to sustain life and advance transformative values in their practices.

We invite all cooperatives to register on the website by following these simple steps:

-Type the following address into your internet browser: www.sem.org.za

-Click on the block in the top right corner '+ add your coop'

-You will then be asked to register so type in your email address and choose a password

-Fill out all your coop details and press 'submit'

Share this link with co-operatives you know so that we can strengthen this platform for building the solidarity economy in South Africa.



Activist Resources to Advance the Solidarity Economy from Below

Seminars and workshops available for viewing on Youtube.

Democratic Marxism public lectures

Nivedita Menon: a feminist political

thinker Nivedita presented two theory seminars titled *Reading Counter Hegemonic Futures*, these seminars brought together readings largely from India from the early 20th century and to the early 21st century, which envisage alternative, emancipatory futures from different perspectives:

Theory seminar 1: https://youtu.be/J_s7KRuBIZ4

Theory seminar 2: <https://youtu.be/qeGv8ysrLnc>

Silke Helfrich: an activist, author, scholar and speaker focusing on the commons

Silke presented a public lecture titled *Free, Fair and Alive: the power of the Commons for societal transformation*.

Public Lecture: <https://youtu.be/mxPy6YTbHMA>

Quincy Saul: organiser, translator, musician and illustrator and Ecosocialist

Quincy gave a lecture on the Emergence of Ecosocialism

Lecture & questions: <https://youtu.be/oTRHcMvaWdY>

Left Dialogue Forum

On 13-14 March 2020, Copac brought together activists from South Africa and the world to discuss papers submitted for the forum, under the title: Towards a New Internationalism. The workshop was recorded and all sessions are available for viewing at the following links:

Welcome, Introductions and Objectives: <https://youtu.be/wStja5VnZZo>

Session 1: The Conjuncture of Crisis: Rising authoritarianism, fascism and the politics of hate. (Nivedita Menon, Ingar Solty, Zelda Holtzman, Vishwas Satgar): https://youtu.be/x-GZ_8MZJmg

Session 2: For a New Internationalism 1: Learning lessons from anti-apartheid solidarity and movement building – Lisa Brock (Skype), Gunnett Kaaf, Natalya Dinat: <https://youtu.be/Beh7iNJ4jaU>

Session 3: For a New Internationalism 2: Worsening climate crisis: How do we build and advance a global Climate Justice movement – (Patrick Bond, Ferriell Adam): <https://youtu.be/lHUFr1Vgsag>

Session 4: Renewing internationalism 3: Towards a new international political vehicle? – Quincy Saul, Mamdouh Habashi, Heikki Patomäki (Skype): <https://youtu.be/cntoGOgi0n4>

Session 5: Workshop of proposals

Answers to these questions

(i) What lessons can we learn from historical experiences of internationalism?

(ii) Why do we need a renewed internationalism today?

(iii) How do we build convergence between the Eco-socialist International, 5th International process and the World Party initiative?

(iv) How do we take the conversation forward on a new internationalism?

<https://youtu.be/DjpHYTYGG0M>



Climate justice charter Activist School

On 16-17 March, Copac hosted a climate justice charter activist school with key climate justice activists from across the country, particularly from drought affected areas. The activist school was recorded and all sessions can be viewed at the following links:

Welcome, background of charter and COVID-19 updates: <https://youtu.be/62CvS75MDbM>

Assessment of CJ Charter engagements and perspective document on building a CJ network/movement: <https://youtu.be/mDkBJjeOf2Q>

Final CJC resources and million signature campaign for endorsements: <https://youtu.be/dzTCUnzSyuQ>

Solidarity action with drought affected communities: <https://youtu.be/PiffKk4ZYnE>

University CJ assemblies, divestment and decarbonisation: <https://youtu.be/nAT3a6P0HHU>

Criminalising fossil fuel corporations, CEO's and chairpersons: <https://youtu.be/UEfgojkT6vo>

May day #GridlockCarbon: https://youtu.be/Fc_oYe8bZ0

Climate justice camp and gridlock Cape Town: <https://youtu.be/6ilCbS5Vcol>

Just transition - Science: Francois Engelbrecht: <https://youtu.be/LLf0hJzB6GI>

Participant reflections: <https://youtu.be/Bu-vOSr7hyOU>

Expanding your activism on social media

Tips for posting:

- Always stick to the science about climate change. There are a number of websites and organisations who do good research on climate change, and have facts you can tweet. Use these facts and stats in your tweets. But make sure to move away from jargon and technical

language, make the science accessible



- Look at existing narratives on social media, and link this to climate change. For example, any climate shock happening such as cyclone Idai, link that to climate science and climate shocks. Follow existing trends on social media. Also use current affairs to bring light to climate change alternatives. For example, use load shedding to promote socially owned renewables.
- Create FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out) for your events. When there is protest action or events, always create hype around the event and make people feel like they are missing out. Live stream on Facebook, and do live stories on Instagram to create in the moment FOMO.
- In addition to science, also post first person experiences of climate shocks, these are powerful and will gain a lot of retweets.
- Always link climate change issues to bread and butter issues. So when there is a hike in food prices, link this to drought (as an example).
- Ride on other hashtags, like political events. If there are indabas and manifesto launches, tweet about them and link to climate change.
- When dealing with trolls, don't waste energy. You can usually tell if they can be swayed, or if they are just trolling. If they seem to be able to be swayed, refer them to websites and other links that are helpful.

Technical tips:

- Use social media curating sites, to make your activism easier. For example, sites like Creator Studio, Content Creator which will allow you to schedule posts ahead of time
- When making posters, always use organisational colours to create unity on your feeds



Challenges:

- With limited resources, social media can become a big job for 1 person to do
- To make a big impact on social media, some budget is required, and for some organisations that is difficult to put together. There are prices attached to boosting posts and promoting tweets.
- There is a prevailing narrative that climate change is an elite, white concern, as climate justice activists we must constantly fight this narrative and always work to gain interest in our own causes. We must reclaim and decolonise the struggle for climate justice.



contact us

We invite organisations and activists to make contributions to the Newsletter by writing stories, contributing photographs or cultural contributions, such as poetry, art, songs etc.

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All back issues of the Solidarity Economy News are available on our website.