



## Hunger is growing, emergency food aid is dwindling

“Community kitchens crying out for help and support”

### EDP Report to WCG Humanitarian Cluster Committee 13 July 2020

#### Introduction

Food insecurity in poor and vulnerable communities in Cape Town and the Western Cape was prevalent before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic (CoCT Food Systems and Food Security Study, 2014; Western Cape Government Household Food and Nutrition Security Strategic Framework, 2016).

The pandemic has exacerbated food insecurity in poor and vulnerable communities in three ways:

1. **Impact of lockdown.** Lockdown, and curtailment of economic activities since end-March, has negatively affected the livelihoods of the ‘existing poor’, i.e. street traders, spaza shops, small scale fishers and farmers, seasonal farm workers, as well as the circumstances of the ‘newly poor’, through job losses and small business closures. A recent Oxfam report confirmed this trend worldwide: “New hunger hotspots are also emerging. Middle-income countries such as India, South Africa, and Brazil are experiencing rapidly rising levels of hunger as millions of people that were just about managing have been tipped over the edge by the pandemic”. (The Hunger Virus: How Covid-19 is fuelling hunger in a hungry world, Oxfam, July 2020.)
2. **Poor performance of national government.** Research by Prof Jeremy Seekings has shown that “the total amount of food distributed (through food parcels and feeding schemes) in the first three months of the lockdown was a tiny fraction of what was needed urgently – and was even a small fraction of what would ordinarily have been distributed without a lockdown. Because of the suspension of national school feeding, much less food was distributed in total under the lockdown than before it.” (Seekings, Failure to feed: State, civil society and feeding schemes in South Africa in the first three months of Covid-19 lockdown, CSSR Working Paper No. 455, July 2020.) Moreover, special measures put in place by national government have not timeously delivered the required relief (Seekings, Bold promises, constrained capacity, stumbling delivery: the expansion of social protection in response to the Covid-19 lockdown in South Africa, CSSR Working Paper No. 456, July 2020.)
3. **Unequal burden of disease.** As the recent Global Nutrition Report makes clear, “Covid-19 does not treat us equally. Undernourished people have weaker immune systems, and may be at greater risk of severe illness due to the virus. At the same time, poor metabolic health, including obesity and diabetes, is strongly linked to worse Covid-19 outcomes, including risk of hospitalisation and death.” The disease burden of the pandemic has further exacerbated food insecurity, especially in the identified ‘hotspot’ areas, through disruptions to

households in general and CSO food relief operations in particular through quarantine and isolation, spread of infections, fatalities, and bereavement. Community organisers have also had to deal with fighting the stigma of the virus, bitterly cold weather, winter flooding, psycho-social needs, violence and gangsterism, etc.

For the past three months in the Western Cape, food insecurity and hunger was partly assuaged through massive efforts of the Solidarity Fund, the Western Cape Provincial Government, non-Metro municipalities, private donors and civil society organisations – in other words, a genuine whole-of-society effort.

The Solidarity Fund distributed 31 579 food parcels in the Western Cape. The Western Cape Government has spent over R80m on humanitarian and food aid. The City of Cape Town has allocated R10m (albeit very slowly) to 55 NGOs for distribution of food parcels. Civil society organisations (CSOs), backed by private donors, provided over 3,1m meals and distributed 77 000 food parcels in the first 74 days of the lockdown (data compiled by the Western Cape Food Relief Coordination Forum). CSOs, mainly through Community Kitchens, continue to provide the bulk of food aid at the moment.

In the Western Cape, this effort is coordinated via the NGO-Government Food Relief Coordination Forum, convened by the EDP for this purpose.

#### **Determination of continuing levels of food insecurity and hunger in poor and vulnerable communities, and the need for ongoing humanitarian aid**

Both the Western Cape Government and CSOs have devised ways to measure and map food relief contributions. However, these systems ‘look backwards’ and are not able to provide ‘anticipatory evidence’ of possible humanitarian needs in the forthcoming months.

In addition, the DSD call centre, which at the beginning of lockdown received thousands of calls regarding food relief, and as such, served as a proxy measurement for need, was decommissioned as a conduit for food relief once the 50 000 DSD food parcels were fully subscribed. It therefore no longer serves as an indicator of food needs.

In mid-June, in a survey of NGO members of the Western Cape NGO-Government Food Relief Coordination Forum, 89% indicated that they were experiencing an increase in requests for food in poor and vulnerable communities. At the same time, 70% indicated that they were experiencing dwindling resources, due to donor and volunteer fatigue.

This coincides with the Western Cape Government and similar public bodies facing severe fiscal constraints and budget cuts.

On 7 July 2020, NGO members of the Forum were requested to provide more detailed feedback around food needs in poor and vulnerable communities: “Based on your own experiences and assessments, please forward concrete examples of any specific neighbourhood or community or institution or group of people whose emergency food needs are currently not being met or are potentially in jeopardy. Where possible, please provide a brief explanation of the circumstances and reasons”.

Written responses were received from 36 Forum members, covering approximately 50-60 neighbourhoods and local areas. Most of these are in the Cape Town Metro; however, there was some feedback about the hunger situation in Witzenberg, Central Karoo, George, Morreesburg, Graafwater, Ceres and Worcester, as well as on farms.

In addition, there was a discussion amongst Forum members on the issue of ongoing food needs at a Forum meeting on 9 June 2020.

The EDP has compiled a spreadsheet of the responses and has identified a number of specific themes and trends. While NGO responses are uneven and sometimes vague, and under conditions of Covid-19 pandemic not always directly verifiable, nevertheless *a picture emerges of the need for continued humanitarian support, specifically food relief, in poor and vulnerable communities.*

*Eight recommendations for action* are made at the end of the report. The themes are as follows:

### **1) EXISTING AID DOES NOT COVER CURRENT FOOD NEEDS**

Delft: “The Delft Action Network currently includes 40-45 community kitchens. There are currently requests from about 5-10 additional kitchens in the area to join the network. Budget constraints have precluded extending support.”

Bishop Lavis/ Kalksteenfontein: “I am currently working in quite a few areas as you are well aware of, one of them being an area called Kreefgat/ Golden Gate (which is also part of the Bishop Lavis cluster) which is a very impoverished area that often is not looked after.”

Strand informal sector areas: “Somerset West Community Action Network (CAN) can’t generate enough donations to cover the extra 700 plus people in need.”

Du Noon: “For some – this meal is their only meal for the day and they ask to take food home for supper.”

De Wet Road feeding scheme: An example where I have personally seen the numbers double, is De Wet Road Feeding Scheme, where Thaabet and his team feed over 1000 people daily a breakfast and supper meal. Before COVID 19, they served an average of 250 – 400 people 3 times a week a supper meal. On my last visit we assisted in feeding 1076 people and there was still people waiting. Fruit was the only thing leftover to hand out to them. Another small pot of food had to be cooked. Some people waited while others left with only 2 apples as a meal.”

Central Karoo: “A big personal concern is the rural communities and the limited food relief support to these communities. I had listed in the chat group of the meeting yesterday communities that are hardest hit in the Central Karoo. Farm communities and fishing villages have no support and municipal relief funds did not reach these communities.”

Morreensburg: “The first 3 weeks of lockdown SASSA gave food parcels but then these ended. There is a Disabled support group that works in Morreensburg and Jannie leads this group. It was contacted by DPSA (Disabled People SA), asking for a list of people with disabilities for support and food parcels. This is still to be realized and no parcels have been received so far.”

Lavender Hill: “WH4TN have fed people every day since lock down. 200 children everyday with no assistance from DSD or the city. People have donated supplies and food. There are 500+ children, not including the elderly and the disabled. Serving sites: 3 Ashley Court, Village heights and St Montague village. Experiencing politically driven support of other groups, but WH4TN has received no support even after speaking to the mayor. Resources are running dry. Where Rainbows Meet have assisted before as well as Black Sash and now there is no more support. The numbers are growing, children don’t have shoes and elderly also have nothing. There is a great need. WH4TN sought food parcels to see if they qualified but nothing still.”

Graafwater: “There are two Food Kitchens run by SCAC (Stop crimes against children) and the primary school that give food to children at school. Food Kitchen of SCAC only serves certain people not everyone. Food Parcels: Cederberg municipality had a supply of food parcels for over a month. When asked to distribute they found that the food was tampered with. People received less than it was originally. Farms in Graafwater and surrounding areas there is a great

need for food. People who distributed in the beginning have now not been able to anymore. Funds have run out. Everyone is dependent on funding.”

Worcester: “As far as the distribution of hampers are concerned, the feeding scheme of the primary school near me handed out their stock, but there was no coordination so some people got up to 4 hampers while those who really are in need didn't benefit.”

## **2) THE NEED FOR EMERGENCY FOOD AID IS INCREASING**

Masiphumelele, Ocean View and Redhill: “In Fish Hoek a network of 103 community kitchens (run by various NGOs together with independent community volunteers) has been feeding approximately 10,000 a day for the last 6 weeks - concentrated on the disadvantaged communities of Masiphumelele, Ocean View and Red Hill. As you highlight, resources are dwindling for all involved and we have two Covid hotspots as an additional challenge. Our distance from economic and industrial centers means employment is another challenge even at the best of times. Coupled with the failures in distributing UIF and TERS grants, we continue to see the need for food-aid increasing. On a more positive note, the network we have created is very structurally efficient and we are able to sustain our basic feeding program 5 days a week for approximately 40c per person per day. As we move forward we are looking to rationalise the amount of feeding we are doing but believe there is an acute need for around 5,000 people (or 5-6% of the population of these target areas). After rationalisation, the program will still require combined funding of R40,000 per month to ensure food security for the most vulnerable in our community. Any assistance you or your donors are able to provide for us would be gratefully received.”

Witzenberg: “Families are starving, struggling and urgently waiting for food hampers. The situation is VERY bad, we cannot feed our babies and our children are asking for bread, they need to eat. We are single Moms who have lost jobs.”

Makhaza: “We are working with the Makhaza CAN and started feeding a small group of people (35 vulnerable families), and the numbers of people who come to the soup kitchen are increasing (to date, 145 people daily). Most of these people have been rendered unemployed due to Covid-19, as they are informal or non-contractual workers. This "no work, no pay" system has left them without any means of income and the government's UIF or food parcels have not materialised either.”

N2 Gateway, Macassar Informal Settlement, Sophiatown, Overcome Heights, Steenberg, Retreat areas, Heinz Park, Delft: “We are funding ingredients for 28 kitchens preparing 72,000 meals a week. We are seeing real hunger and desperation in all the sites N2 Gateway, Macassar Informal Settlement, Sophiatown, Overcome Heights, Steenberg, Retreat areas, Heinz Park, Delft... Feeding lines are getting longer as more people are losing their jobs and or other feeding sites are closing down. also seeing the incredible impact on dogs in these areas too. Dogs lived on scraps of food – there are no scraps left. Dogs are just walking bags of bones and animal charities are not getting the funding and resources they need either.”

Elsiesrivier, Clarke Estate, Epping forest, The Range, Uitsig: “Needs as identified by the food initiatives: increase in totals of adults, kids are due to the increase in unemployment, non-payment of UIF and SASSA grant; no or minimal support from government structures like ward councillors; the prolonged closure of schools that use to provide a meal; funders and sponsors that are affected by the knock on effect of Covid-19 on the economy that are force to limit or stop their support; the conflicting politics in terms of sharing the available resources across borders; a need for an integrated community leaders approach to strategically unify, mobilise all efforts.”

George: “The local government support just short of 150 registered soup kitchens. There are additional soup kitchens opening on a weekly basis in the region, to try and help those who are unable to reach the government facilities and they have approached the Lions and the LoveGeorge Faith based organisation for resources to supply their need. We

have many out-lying communities, such as Groenvlei in Wilderness, where access to help is limited - these people are in dire need and have relied on Lions to help provide food. The Groenvlei region that we are currently helping has 10 homes. We have found in suburbs of George where there has not been a food need in the past, as people from these suburbs generally work and can support themselves, are now finding themselves unemployed and unable to meet financial commitments. This group of people has grown weekly, and now amounts to a crisis as they are not getting much aid from government, due to the residential location. We receive up to 100 of these informal requests for aid each week."

Schools: "PSFA also foresees that schools where we support with school feeding will be writing to increase their feeding numbers as learners return fulltime to school. Stock that they presently are receiving is not lasting at 50% because learners who usually did not participate in school feeding were now standing in the line to receive a meal. Food relief in my opinion remains a number one challenge of COVID 19, while access to government resources is the next major concern."

Ceres: "There is still a huge need for food kitchens. More mothers and children are in the queues these days. Social development just stopped with food parcels. When we enquired about this, they said it is because of the R350 SASSA grant. No real support was given farmworkers in terms of food relief. Don't understand the criteria the Witzenberg municipality used for this. In Pine Valley the lack of enough food resulted in domestic violence."

### **3) DONOR FUNDS AND RESOURCES ARE DRYING UP**

George: "The ongoing food needs in George. Recently received message from Carpe Diem school for the disabled, which the Eden Lions support frequently, indicating approx. 60 families with disabled children who are essentially "dying" of starvation. The school has been assisting them where possible, but their resources have dried up."

"Masiphumelele, Ocean View and Red Hill have been well served through the Mayor's Fund and private donors but we have seen a massive drop in donor and CAN funding as Donor Fatigue sets in. The Mayor's fund comes to an end at the end of this month - July. From August onwards we have no idea where to get further funding and many of the kitchens and other methods of feeding will just have to end at that stage. The story is simple but complex - hunger is going to dramatically increase as these funds dry up and donors are dramatically decreasing."

Ladles of Love (supplying to 400 partners in local areas in the greater Cape Town metro): "Our challenge is that providing the amount of food we are currently buying and producing is not sustainable going forward. The situation is no longer an immediate crisis but a long term economic disaster."

Ekuphumleni, Khayelitsha: "Running a soup kitchen and currently feeding 400-450 people a day from Monday to Friday. The need has grown so much and I'm afraid to say that we are gradually running out of resources slowly but surely."

Witzenberg: "We are experiencing donor fatigue. We used to receive vegetables every Friday from FoodFlow but this is ending in July."

Bo-Kaap: "The Bo-Kaap Covid-19 Community Response Team, a temporary body set up in March to assist with challenges around the pandemic and its social effects on our community has worked hard at raising funds and/or goods from residents and various sectors. With donors being quite stretched in trying to assist different communities, we are running out of funds to provide any more relief parcels. The contributions are used particularly for the most vulnerable residents who do not have any safety net and live from hand to mouth."

Heideveld: “Mothers of Justice is another project, situated in Heideveld that supports the only coloured squatter camp in Heideveld in addressing their social justice needs. They had to extend their feeding support to the broader community living around them when Lockdown started. What started out as 151 meals grew to over 750 meals daily. While they are a registered entity they have experienced a decline in funds and food support to the project. Hands are plenty but there is no stock to prepare. They have had to decrease their feeding days to try and make the stock stretch.”

Worcester: “My Food Kitchen is having some difficulties due to a lack of funders and donors, even with these food parcels the government is talking about we do not benefit nothing from them, so for the sake of the vulnerable people we could be glad if we can get any support in the name of social responsibility and the poverty relief.”

Worcester: “For Mandela Day, the church will feed 10 000 children in the community - all private donations. Planning to wind up the project end of August. Dit is a baie haartseer saak”

“PSFA is only able to support the attached community kitchens hopefully while we have COVID 19 funds till end July. As more people are retrenched and the unemployment figures rise, the lines at community kitchens are going to continue to grow longer. It cannot remain the responsibility of civil society to address the food relief crisis.”

#### **4) COMMUNITY ORGANISERS AND VOLUNTEERS ARE EXHAUSTED**

Helderberg: “This is all reliant on Somerset West Community Action Group and we already have to raise R17 800 per week. And it is not enough. The donations are 'by the seat of your pants' and after four months we are all exhausted. There only a few volunteers and I have 'used all the pages in my playbook'.”

Community kitchens (areas not identified): “In assessing each of these kitchens, they had been working non-stop during the lockdown and now found themselves with volunteers getting sick, burnout but the biggest challenge being a decline in donations and financial support.”

“SDR and SAH are oversubscribed. Sorry but today this is all I can manage. I am on the verge of burn out. 40 organisations/ areas on waiting list.”

#### **5) UNEMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY EXISTED BEFORE LOCKDOWN, BUT HAS INCREASED BECAUSE OF LOCKDOWN AND ECONOMIC CONTRACTION**

“The lockdown has put an end to informal livelihoods such as waste pickers.”

Helderberg: “In Nomzamo, Lwandle, Strand and Zola there are people without papers who are scared. Children are being fed but adults go hungry. People are unemployed and the collapse of the informal economy means there is no income. There is no opportunity for isolation and people feel helpless.”

BoKaap: “Added to the food parcels, we cook food regularly with perishable donations, that we distribute to residents, the homeless and to informal settlements. The informal settlement known as the 'Plaas' receives regular cooked meals, once a week bread donations, food parcels as well as bulk food that one of the residents there cooks. We adhere to strict financial governance practices and will ensure that any contributions are fully dispensed within the transparent accounting parameters under the auspices of a well-established, credible local NPO. Although the easing of the Lockdown has opened certain businesses up, many casual workers, small business owners or employees, and even big businesses have not called workers back or have retrenched workers. As expected, the most vulnerable, those without savings, UIF, etc have been the hardest hit. There are people in our community who have come into winter

with insufficient funds to cover the basic need of electricity. All of this has left us feeling quite helpless as we do not expect to receive funds to cover any needs after July. We are still praying and working on reaching our target for July.”

Bellville: “VRCID also assisted the Bellville CAN with requests that they received for food parcels. Most of these requests were from foreign nationals who could not make ends meet, because they could not work anymore. Many of them were uber drivers, nail technicians, hair dressers, bar men, waiters, etc. and could not perform their usual income generating tasks. We still have a group of foreign nationals on the streets of Bellville, who did not live on the streets prior to the lockdown. They ended up on the streets, because they could not pay their rent where they used to live (usually back yard dwellers in surrounding areas).”

Vredehoek: “We have so far identified a few vulnerable areas in our community. There is one specific block of flats that has mainly restaurant / bar workers and non-contractual workers living in it (14 households/units), and they have become food insecure. The majority are foreign nationals (not sure if documented or not) and the South African’s who applied for food parcels never received anything. The CAN has helped them out with vouchers and food donations from residents in Vredehoek, but this is not sustainable.”

## **6) THE RISE IN COVID POSITIVE CASES IS AFFECTING ENTIRE FAMILIES**

“In Macassar (which has the greatest number of COVID cases in the Helderberg) children are suffering from hunger when their parents become COVID positive and there is no food. They need support in the form of food parcels.”

PnP Feed the Nation Foundation: “The requests are numerous and I have attached some as examples (Fruit for Thought, Boksburg; St Paul's Primary School, Bo Kaap; BNI Dream Team; Imperfect Moms Foundation; Switch Fusion-Brackenfell. Many of these are outside of WC, but I’m just attaching as evidence that there is still enormous need throughout SA. There are many more coming through all the time and its generally very difficult for us to make the decision about which of the requests to support. From our perspective, during the first part of this crisis we were assisting people affected by lockdown – not by the actual Covid 19 pandemic. Going forward the impact of the pandemic will become more acute as the effect of the pandemic on people’s livelihoods will become more severe. Food relief will remain very important going forward.”

## **7) SENIOR CITIZENS ARE BEARING THE BRUNT**

Ekuphumleni CAN, Khayelitsha: “I just want to highlight that we are facing a dilemma that you all familiar with where Gogos have to feed a family of 15-20 with their grant money or there will be families who rely on a child's grant that won't even stretch so much and that's where we enter as a soup kitchen. If there could be food relief that would be great and we will be able to run our soup kitchen smoothly again.”

Bo-Kaap: “Careful criteria are used to distribute food parcels to those listed on our validated database. We have almost 400 residents on our database who require aid. This group consists of pensioners, many who assist with taking care of families, and the unemployed. From our inception in March, numbers increased from 280 to 385 and are still climbing, as more people have needed assistance. The cost of our parcels have gone down from R250 to R180 in order to stretch our resources.”

Unspecified area: “We have 100 seniors in our club we feed them daily, for the elderly to be taking their medication age 60yrs up to 83yrs old. We are a family and we ask humbly asking for some assistance as to help to make it possible please.”

### **Summary of Vulnerable Areas**

These are some of the identified vulnerable areas in which there is evidence of rising hunger and need for food relief.

- Bellville
- Bo-Kaap
- Central Karoo
- Ceres
- Clarke Estate
- Delft
- Du Noon
- Elsiesrivier
- Epping Forest
- George
- Graafwater
- Heideveld
- Heinz Park
- Helderberg: Nomzamo, Lwandle, Strand and Zola
- Khayelitsha
- Kreefgat/ Golden Gate, Bishop Lavis
- Macassar
- Macassar Informal Settlement
- Masiphumelele, Ocean View and Red Hill
- Morreesburg
- N2 Gateway
- Overcome Heights
- Retreat
- Sir Lowry's Pass Village
- Sophiatown
- Steenberg
- Strand
- The Range
- Uitsig
- Witzenberg
- Worcester

NGO members of the WCG/NGO Forum who responded to the survey have indicated some of the areas of need as well as the fact that they have knowledge of community kitchens needing support. Working with, and funding, these established NGOs will mitigate against some of the unintended consequences of providing food relief as these NGOs have established relationships with community organisers and kitchens, and can respond quickly and flexibly. They have pre-established systems that will need additional funding if their existing donor funding dries up.

CSOs provided over 3,1m meals and 77 000 food parcels in the first 74 days of lockdown. CSOs continue to feed thousands of people every day. If in the forthcoming months, for whatever reason existing CSO feeding schemes decline or cease, *the 'slow violence' of food insecurity may tip over to sudden hunger and potential anger*. This is a potential risk for any local or provincial recovery plans, regardless of 'mandates', 'fiscal constraints' and 'budget cuts'.

**It is recommended that:**

1. Provincial Treasury be approached as a matter of urgency to consider allocating part of the contingency reserve to emergency food aid.
2. The Department of Social Development engage with specific NGOs to assess their evidence, and to consider emergency allocations where warranted in identified vulnerable areas, to address the gaps that may exist.

3. Minister Fernandez be requested to contact the national Minister to request SASSA to provide data on the special Covid grant payments per municipal areas, in order to cross-check and correlate with evidence from CSOs. Without this data, we are 'flying blind'.
4. The food distribution data from the City of Cape Town Mayor's Relief Fund be made available as a matter of urgency, in order to cross-check and correlate with evidence from CSOs. Without this data, we are 'flying blind'.
5. The Department of Local Government be approached to request municipalities to provide a view on humanitarian needs including food relief in their areas.
6. The Department of Health be consulted for any evidence of malnutrition in health centres or districts.
7. Emergency food aid is not sustainable indefinitely. Communities and CSOs need to be engaged, and short-term community economic recovery projects and community food production programmes need to be prioritised.
8. Longer-term municipal recovery plans, and the WCG Recovery Plan, should include a focus on a food and nutrition system change agenda, to address the systemic food insecurity issues that existed prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

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