



Collaboration and alignment – way forward for SA food security

10 June 2016

Fact: The South African constitution, the highest law in the land, says citizens have the right to adequate food access. Fact: SA, a developing country, needs to improve its economy for growth, wealth equity and global competitiveness. With an economy based on free market principles, there is limited government intervention on pricing. Now consider food security as it sits right in the middle of these competing positions.

The complex issue of food security was a core theme at the Discussion Forum on [Pulses and Food Security](#), an event aligned to the United Nations' International Year of Pulses 2016 (IYP 2016). Held from 2-3 June 2016, the forum was hosted by the [National Science and Technology Forum](#) (NSTF), sponsored by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and partnered by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) and AGT Foods Africa.

UN's International Year of Pulses 2016

The IYP 2016 focuses on the nutritional benefits of pulses – as part of sustainable

About pulses

Pulses are the dry edible seeds of certain plants in the legume family. This includes chickpeas, lentils, dry beans and dry peas.

Pulses provide a concrete example of crops that provide better food security. They are:

- Nutrient rich and an inexpensive source of protein
- Shelf-stable which means low food waste
- Can be grown in marginal areas and many are drought-resistant
- Beneficial to animal and soil health, very water efficient, and support biodiversity

Find information, tool kits and educational material on:

www.pulses.org,
www.fao.org/pulses-2016/en/ and
<http://iyp2016.org/>.

food production for food security and nutrition.

While pulses provide an introduction to food security, the issues around food security go beyond this crop.

Understanding food security

In 1996, the World Food Summit defined the multi-dimensional nature of food security: “Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”

Dr Tobias Takavarasha, the UN’s Food and Agricultural Organization Representative: SA, highlighted some of the global challenges:

- The world population will reach 9.1bn in 2050, with 70% living in urban areas. Food production must increase by 70% to meet demand.
- Food security is also challenged by food loss (due to pests and waste), climate change, droughts and floods, and poverty.

SA’s systemic competing interests

While access to food is a human right, food is also a commodity. The competing interests don’t end there – they are embedded along the food value chain.

Consider the apportioning of SA’s agricultural land. Mr Sibongiseni Ndimande, DAFF Deputy Director: Food Security Policy Analysis and Development, noted that SA has only 12% agricultural land that is high potential, 22% suitable and 66% considered marginal lands. Yet prime agricultural land is lost to mining in SA. And there is no law that protects agricultural land as exists in other countries.

While the amount of agricultural land is being reduced, SA’s population is going up – and that includes the number of people with inadequate access to food. (It rose to 14,1mn in 2014.) This doesn’t only have a present-day impact. Malnutrition in children causes irreversible damage with a lifelong influence on the individual and implications for the labour force.

Hunger in SA

- 14.1mn citizens have food access challenges.
- The poor spend over 66% of their income on food.
- Food prices increased by 9.8% in March 2016 – with a significant negative impact on this income group

(Information provided by DAFF.)

Human resource challenges are part of the food security challenge. Ndimande noted that less people are farming full-time.

Drought has also affected food security, with agricultural production falling by 14% since the fourth quarter of 2014. Preliminary estimates indicate that the 2016 maize crop will be 25% less than 2015 – and maize meal is a food staple. The crop value chain is also integrally connected to other food chains, such as poultry which feeds on maize. Consequently, an unprecedented 3.8mn tons will need to be imported.

The solution? While we need to keep the economy moving it cannot be at the expense of food security. Ndimande says it comes down to collaboration.

SA's integrated Food Security Strategy (IFSS 2000)

DAFF is currently finalising the food security implementation strategy, IFSS 2000. The pillars consider various factors such as:

- Improved nutritional safety nets (eg school food programmes)
- Improved nutrition education including about pulses
- Investment in agriculture
- Improved market participation
- Promoting smallholder producers for the Government Food Purchase Programme
- Food and nutrition risk management (including prioritising investment in research and technology development)
- Improved access to information

Call to input into the IFSS 2000

The IFSS 2000 has various platforms for multi-stakeholder involvement. Contact Sibongiseni Ndimande at sibongiseniN@daff.gov.za for more information.

Recommendations

Following are some of the recommendations that came out of the NSTF discussion forum:

- The need for more communication between producers, distributors and consumers so that expectations are aligned.
- Collaboration – not only across the food chain but between government and the private sector and between government departments.
- The recognition of indigenous knowledge systems around food security.

- The urgent need for investment in R&D.

The NSTF will release a full discussion report within two weeks.

Currently individual [presentations](#) and [video clips](#) are available.

Spokesperson: Ms Jansie Niehaus (Executive Director: NSTF) Speakers that addressed the forum can be contacted through the spokesperson at the contact details below.

About the NSTF

The [National Science and Technology Forum](#) (NSTF), established in 1995, is a broadly-representative stakeholder body for all SET and innovation organisations in South Africa, which seeks to influence policy formulation and delivery.

The [NSTF Awards](#) are unique in SA, recognising the outstanding contributions of individuals and groups to SET and innovation.

The science bursaries page www.nstf.org.za/bursary/ provides information on bursaries and bursary providers for science, engineering and related studies.

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