



# Status of Household Food Security in Rural Areas at uThungulu District, Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa

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## Abstract

South Africa is one of the African countries that are sustaining the capacity to meet national food requirements; however, large-scale inequality and poverty mean that the majority of its people do not enjoy food security or adequate access to food. Promotion of rural development may be achieved by investing in public funding. The business of governmental institutions is to serve and address the needs of people by formulating and implementing policies that will enhance food security. Due to lack in lobbying power; many people are still food insecure because of inadequate access to food, irrespective of food availability. Agriculture is more prevalent in rural areas as the strategy to eradicate food insecurity and particularly crop farming. Land and access and ownership is a continuing challenge which also has a negative impact on rural production. Rural local municipalities mostly depend on governmental funding, which is limited due to poor service delivery and massive backlogs. While South Africa as a nation is food secure, rural households are not yet free from being food insecure. Food insecurity is a multi-sectoral issue that needs to be tackled by all institutions and sectors and should not only be aligned with the agricultural sector.

**Keywords:** Household food security, inequality, poverty.

## Introduction

Food security is an economic and social right enshrined in the South African Constitution, a vital aspect of well-being and socioeconomic development in poor rural and urban communities, and an essential element for achieving peace and prosperity in the region (Republic of South Africa, 2002). The majority of people who are affected by high unemployment and vulnerable to inadequate basic services are black people in rural areas. By 1997 the South African Government had formulated development strategies to strengthen or support vulnerable households through a programme of food support to assist marginalised communities (Breslin, Delius and Madrid, 1997). Domestic food products are being supplemented by food import options such as fuels and fertilisers, and this affects the access to food due to high costs. Basic services including education, health, food security, water and sanitation, are the responsibility of the State – however, these are systematically failing in South Africa and globally, particularly for poor people in rural areas. Evidence exists in that South Africa at the national level is still food secure whereas at ground level people are continuously food insecure (World Bank, 2003).

Ncube and Kang'ethe (2015) state that white people in South Africa are still a minority group, but still dominate as commercial farmers and are in control of the produce, with sky-rocketing prices that favour them as producers. Since the black majority have a poor socio-economic status, this leaves most of them vulnerable to food insecurity due to the fact that they lack purchasing power and ability to compete in the open market. For this reason the democratic government has paid more attention to prioritising public spending to improve food security



conditions, particularly among the historically disadvantaged, with programmes such as the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP), child support grants and pension funds for the elderly, and the work towards water and community public works programmes (Sekhampu, 2013).

Duncan (1999) indicates that the Southern African Development Community (SADC) governments' major challenge is to develop new ways and techniques for achieving food security which are consistent with the changed circumstances and with approaches to economic management which are different from those used before. Furthermore, he stated that despite this, the South African Government has enduring fiscal discipline, largely motivated by seeing long periods of inflation and the plight of some neighbouring countries which have resulted in large part from large fiscal deficits. Schonfeldt, Hall and Bester (2013) have a different view, saying that many South African families are faced with the harsh reality of being drawn deeper into poverty and food and nutrition insecurity in general. One of the reasons is that the country still has a complex combination of developed and developing areas in terms of its people, economy and infrastructure. Misselhorn (2009) asserts that the real problem is to address the food insecurity vulnerability, which is deep-rooted in structural socio-economic and governance factors that lead to ongoing livelihood failures and food insecurity. Therefore, the South African Government introduced Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), the objective of which was to improve black people's participation in the formal economy to address barriers of food security (Hamann, Giamporcaro, Johnston and Yachkaschi, 2011). Therefore, this study intended to examine the status quo of food (in) security in uThungulu District Municipality since this District is dominated by rural areas.

### **Factors contributing to food insecurity in South Africa**

South Africa is one of the countries that are sustaining the capacity to meet national food requirements; however, large-scale inequality and poverty mean that the majority of its people do not enjoy food security or adequate access to food (SSA, 2011). Van Averbeké (2007) argues that income distribution in South Africa was also highly unequal between rich and poor, leading to urban migration of black people and the transfer of poverty from the outskirts to urban areas. Aliber and Hart (2009) indicate that 32% of black adults from rural areas in Limpopo are involved in agriculture, which contributes to household food security. Kwa-Zulu Natal is predominated by rural areas where people are struggling to access food, and as a result the majority are food insecure. This is the third smallest province in South Africa, but it has the largest population. Most of these areas are associated with insufficient development and poor service provision and delivery (SSA, 2014).

The majority of food security projects have failed to accomplish food security in spite of huge investment by government, and many of them are unsuccessful because of some socio-economic constraints such as lack of even basic education. Smallholders' organisations were unable to produce enough food, and the majority of them lacked access to credit to start off with (Oni, Maliwichi and Obadire 2010). In the Eastern Cape and Kwa-Zulu Natal provinces, the majority of the rural population rely on government grants; this makes it difficult for them to be food self-sufficient. The employment opportunities are also limited and low wages lead them to be food insecure (Dodd and Nyabvudzi 2014). The provinces face a lack of or inadequate basic infrastructure and poor roads, shortages of water and electricity, inaccessibility to markets, lack of credit, inadequacy of education and health facilities, as well as a scarcity of job opportunities (Kataneksza, Riddhima and Gary, 2012). Unemployment in the KwaZulu Natal province is one of the major constraints that contributes to high levels of poverty and income inequality, and decreasing the overall quality of life of the people.

Kwa-Zulu Natal has established a Comprehensive Food Security Programme targeting vulnerable and food insecure households in rural areas, and vulnerable households were identified for relevant targeted food security interventions and social grants. The KZN government has mobilised traditional authorities and local government with provision of land and leadership to promote food production at a ward level (NDA, 2012). Kwa-Zulu Natal's female-headed households and rural populace are economically marginalised, and this always results in food insecurity where they are unable to purchase food while it is available.

**Table 1.1:** Percentage of households experiencing food inadequate or severely inadequate access by province, 2014

Province	2011	2012	2013	2014
Northern Cape	29.7	28.1	30.6	29.3
Mpumalanga	26.1	25.7	29.5	27.4
Eastern Cape	25	28	29.4	29.7
North West	32.9	34.6	27.7	39.6
Free State	22.7	23.7	26.5	21.8
<b>KZN</b>	<b>17.2</b>	<b>19.8</b>	<b>24.9</b>	<b>26.4</b>
Western Cape	23.4	21.3	23.3	25.5
Gauteng	18.5	18.4	17.7	14.5
Limpopo	13.2	10.2	8.7	9.1

Source: General Households Survey, SSA, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014

Table 1.1 shows that food access problems were the most severe in the Northern Cape, where 30.6% of households had inadequate or severely inadequate food access. KZN also shows a negative growth of households with inadequate or severely inadequate food access – 17.2 % in 2011 compared to 24.9% in 2013. These percentages of the nine provinces indicate that the South African populace continues to be food insecure, despite the fact that the country is known as being food secure at national level (SSA, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014). This indicates that South Africa's provinces are trying hard to reduce food inadequacy; however, some of the provinces find it difficult to improve the percentage of food adequacy, including KZN, the North West and Western Cape, as shown in the 2014 statistics. These figures suggest that the unemployment rate and income inequalities and poverty in many provinces are very high because of lack of availability and access to resources among especially the rural populace.

Faber, Witten and Drimie (2011) also state that in South Africa the lack of people producing food themselves or having low purchasing power in the market are the symptoms of being food insecure. Lack of entrepreneurship skills in rural areas is contributing factor perpetuating food insecurity because people are unable to produce for themselves and develop skills to generate income. All provinces need to develop strategies for the creation of jobs through realising agricultural potential, enhancing industrial development through investment in key productive sectors, promoting SMMEs and entrepreneurial development. However, Moyo (2007) in Zimbabwe and Alemu (2015) in South Africa maintain that rural communities are characterised by poor infrastructural conditions, including limited access to new technologies,

credit, storage facilities and transportation for inputs and outputs. This inadequacy leads to food loss and lowered food production that have negative implications for achieving food security. These factors indicate that rural communities lack institutional support services; as a result even subsistence farming would be characterised by low yields, which perpetuates food insecurity at household level.

## Methodology

The study was conducted in uThungulu District Municipality within six local Municipalities namely, Ntambanana, Nkandla, Mfolozi, uMlalazi, Mthonjaneni and uMhlathuze.

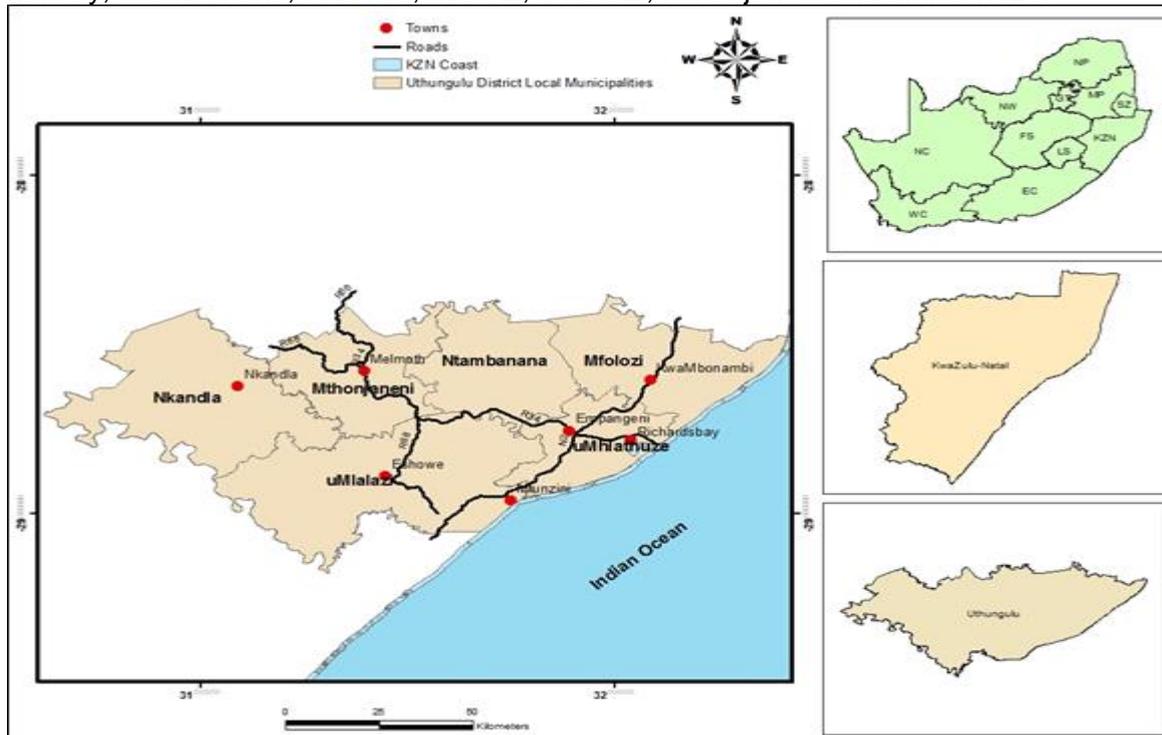


Figure 1: Map of uThungulu District Municipality

This District has mostly cultivated land and forestry thus forms the backbone of the rural economy, situated mostly on both sides of the N2 with large forestry areas found in the Mthonjaneni Municipal area in the north-eastern sector of uThungulu. Ntambanana and Nkandla Local Municipalities are mostly involved in subsistence agriculture as the livelihood strategy. However, the province of KZN was declared a disaster area because of the drought that is currently experienced, particularly uThungulu is the most seriously affected Municipality (uThungulu IDP 2016/2017).

The sample size of the main study was 147 respondents, 9 key informants from different government institutions and 11 focus groups. The sample size of this current study was 6 agricultural cooperatives (focus groups) and the total number of members for these cooperatives was 64 as well 2 key informants who were representative of two local municipalities.

## Findings and Discussion

Food insecurity is a great concern across the world; unfortunately developing countries are the most affected, where the levels of food insecurity are still unsatisfactorily high. The study revealed that the participants faced numerous challenges in sustaining their projects, to an extent that affected their food security status.



## **Socio-demographic profile as a contributing factor in food insecurity**

The study discovered that in order to understand food insecurity at a household level, it is important to recognise the impact of socio-demographic profile, because this has an influence on what kind of services and approach can be used to improve food security situation. The study findings revealed that poor socio-economic status of households has some negative implications on attaining food security and accessing services from governmental institutions. Willows et al. (2009) concur with the study findings that high levels of poverty, low levels of education success and labour force participation, dependence on social assistance and welfare as well as female headed households are associated with food insecurity. The study also revealed that females are more involved and affected by food in/security issues and also have limited access to institutional services due to gender inequalities that emanated from traditional patriarchal societal norms. However, Kraus et al. (2017) state that women are mostly more dedicated to healthy eating than men, and tend to eat healthily and healthy eating habits are more common amongst well-educated persons. It further indicated that the efforts of rural women toward ensuring food security are still not fully recognised, since they still have limited power to make decisions at household and community level at large. Beatty et al. (2014) concludes that low education, low income, low food knowledge, and low healthy eating self-efficacy are associated with food insecurity.

## **Support services for rural farming**

Agriculture is predominant in rural areas, and is well recognised as the tool to alleviate food insecurity and as a source of stable rural economy. The results indicate that the majority of the study population are involved in farming, particularly community and home gardens for subsistence purposes; however, very few for commercial purposes. Jablonski et al. (2016) point out that home gardens in some developed countries contribute to food security by increasing the production and sharing of food. This indicates that this rural population doesn't recognise agriculture as the source of economic support including job creation. Jablonski et al.'s (2016) findings supports the study findings that households including those that are low-income, do not do their primary food shopping at the closest available store because of lack of purchasing power. Furthermore, the study showed that one of the reasons that rural people did not commercialise their produce is because they are unable to produce enough to meet the demands of the market. The support from government was insufficient due to the fact that free seeds supplied by Department of Agriculture and Rural Development were not up to standard; on top of this, almost half of the study population did not receive seeds due to political issues.

In addition, most of the rural population believe that livestock is a traditional asset, and not for commercial use. Focus groups stated that the study area was very badly affected by heavy drought, and there were no relief programmes to assist rural livestock owners. Koppmair, Kassie and Qaim (2016) suggest that it is ideal to engage in diverse farm production which may promote diverse food consumption in the farm household because most rural farmers are often subsistence-oriented. It also emerged that rural agriculture is deteriorating due to inadequate support services from governmental institutions, such as financial input and agricultural equipment. While the youth are in the majority, they seem to undermine agriculture as a source of income and the major strategy to eradicate food insecurity in rural areas, instead referring to agriculture as "the dirty hands job". However, this indicates that the major rural development interventions of the government were agricultural programmes which are intended to improve food security at the grassroots level.



### **Political interference and its implications for support services**

The study also revealed that local governmental institutions such local municipalities are perceived as political institutions because the heads of these institutions are politically appointed. Available evidence shows that services or projects that are rendered by Local municipalities are politically aligned to score political points, and are not reflecting the needs of the local people. It further discovered that while UThungulu District is dominated by rural areas, these institutions are located in urban areas yet are recognised as institution that addresses rural needs. It has also been exposed that politicians as heads of the institutions take poor decisions that do not reflect the needs of local people. Allahdadi (2011) noted with concern that political interference is an obstacle to the smooth functioning of government due to the fact that politicians use projects and programmes as a means of political scores.

Available evidence portrays that local people are suffering due to the decisions of the heads of local municipalities because they have no expertise in community development or how to address community challenges. Ingle's (2014) findings that governmental institutions are poorly managed by political appointees because they do not possess expertise. It was further revealed that they plan for five years because their term of office is five years – if a new political party comes into power there is no continuity of programmes and projects. This indicates how instability and inconsistency of local municipalities hinders progress in alleviating food insecurity and poverty in general, as well as creating a poor image and giving investors reservations about investing in that particular area. The study discovered that ward councillors were meant to add value to improving the lives of local people, as they were elected to represent them in the local municipalities and to work together with ward committees as well as the local people. However, the evidence is that ward councillors failed to coordinate community projects set up by local municipalities or to mobilise local resources that will benefit local people. Warshawsky (2011) asserts that government departments are faced with complex situations affected by broader political and economic dynamics.

### **The effect of limited human resources on service delivery**

One of the major challenges of governmental institutions was the issue of understaffing and shortage of staff that have capacity and the skills required to serve communities. Key informants indicated that staff members were tasked to facilitate community projects, including agricultural projects, and conduct trainings on food insecurity alleviation with no expertise in the field of food security and agriculture. The results show that various institutions organise trainings and workshops to empower people with different skills – yet those training sessions were conducted by unskilled personnel. The local municipalities organised training for cooperatives, particularly to equip them with business skills and on how they can sustain their business in terms of using scarce resources effectively. Focus groups revealed that the people who are running cooperatives have no agricultural qualifications no expertise in the agricultural field and that leads to dysfunction of the cooperatives. However, Ramphela (2005) argues that South Africa's challenge is nepotism that has led to skills shortages, and this conduct results in poor service delivery. Key informants stated that unemployed youth and young emerging entrepreneurs were trained on crop farming and had to go back and mentor those young people who were unable to attend the training; but still these young people were unable to succeed due to lack of expertise and passion for agriculture.

Focus groups supported the views of the key informants in that they were also not satisfied about the support given by various institutions. Focus groups stated that there is a lack of support and mentorship from all the institutions. The focus groups revealed that as much as the various institutions provide trainings for cooperatives, they do not do a follow-up or a regular visit to check on the progress of developmental projects within the communities.



Furthermore, the results indicate that sometimes government officials render support to communities that are associated with certain political organisations, which is an ineffective approach to alleviate poverty and promote local economic development, particularly in rural areas. Mathekga and Buccus (2006) state that local municipalities have been associated with an issue of lack of technical skills and of properly trained personnel, resulting in poor service delivery.

Choo (2007) states that limited human resources and capacity means top management often lack first-hand experience of the problems affecting local people. This situation has meant it has not been possible to take advantage of talented employees who may have more experience with certain aspects of the project or programme being planned and implemented in order to meet community needs. All of this indicates that government institutions lack an effective strategy to support and mentor the cooperatives to benefit the people and eradicate poverty, and to empower them with skills so that they can work independently and effectively.

### **Limited financial assistance as constraints to food security**

This study indicates that local municipalities have a limited budget to render support to developmental projects. Key informants revealed that all six local municipalities in uThungulu District Municipality have their own food security projects – but most are not implemented because of limited budgets. It is clearly shown that although many municipalities have limited budgets, they also lack staff with the financial expertise to ensure that funds allocated for developmental projects are spent effectively and efficiently.

The members of the focus groups indicated that they are struggling to receive financial assistance from various departments of the government, including the Local municipalities. The focus groups members revealed that even if they apply for funding they do not qualify because they are unemployed; they were also unable to write a business proposal and did not receive any training on how to do so. Yaun et al. (2015) state that poor people are often excluded from formal credit, and that it mostly occurred among African states. Focus groups indicated that they did not have funding; whenever they want to distribute their produce they hire a car because they do not have assets such as vehicles and they cannot afford to buy them. Bruhn and Love (2014) have pointed out the importance of improving access to finance for low-income people as playing a major role in alleviation of food insecurity. Further worsening the plight of cooperatives hardest hit by lack of financial assistance, is the issue of political elites who are enriching themselves and their friends with State resources. The issue of financial assistance is therefore, still a challenge in rural development projects, and it hinders people from sustaining their businesses and fails to help them to eradicate food insecurity. Yadav (2014) that the rural populace, particularly in developing countries, is in need of credit, which means that microfinance programmes must make such credit available and motivate poor people to increase their standard of living through enhancing food security.

### **Impact of access to market on enhancing food security**

The study findings showed that rural entrepreneurs and small-scale farmers have difficulties in accessing and competing in a formal market due to limited resources including proper transport facilities, stigma towards rural products or produce and poor communication between commercial farmers. Timmer (2017) assert that it is crucial to note that it is impossible to understand challenges facing efforts to eliminate hunger without understanding the role of markets and the food marketing system. The results portrayed that the market determined the price for rural entrepreneurs and small-scale farmers. However, the price fluctuates and



this has a negative impact on their profits and made them to divert to informal markets. The findings confirmed that rural businesses lack programmes to assist them to learn how to compete in the market and training on networking with experienced and larger entities. Stifel and Minten (2017) noted that there is insufficient evidence of the impact of improved market access and lower transport costs on food security outcomes.

Furthermore, the study findings showed that particularly small-scale farmers are unable to meet the required standards of produce needed by the market, due to lack of storage and packaging facilities and branding their produce to attract the market. Furthermore, Stifel and Minten (2017) suggest that to achieve access to markets through improved rural road infrastructure is often seen as a promising way of improving the well-being of poor rural populations in developing countries. On other hand the results also showed that the government is trying to introduce rural entrepreneurs to the formal market. Be that as it may, the government does not have stable or confirmed programmes and policies that make the market and commercial farmers work together to improve the rural economy. These results indicate that rural people are food insecure due to inadequate access to formal markets. Food security will not be achieved by only producing for own consumption, however small businesses should produce more food for commercial purposes.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

There is a pressing need to improve food security by proposing solutions to eliminate challenges faced by rural communities. However, both government and the community have to play a role in order to create an environment that allows people to have access to food, produce more food for both consumption and commercial purposes, as well as have access to support services from the government. The government should look into other approaches to food security, such as intensifying livestock production and assist farmers to protect their animals against thieves as theft has discouraged some and left others without any livelihood. Community members should learn to take the initiative to come up with ways of improving their livelihoods and should avoid waiting for the government to do things for them. The implementation of monitoring and evaluation of food security projects and programmes in rural areas should be investigated together with assessment of the assessment of technology on marketing the product of rural agricultural cooperatives and networking with other stakeholders. The influence of politics in attempting to alleviate food insecurity in rural areas should be analysed and where this is negatively impacting food security, steps should be taken to redress this.

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