1 Food Activism and Policy in South Africa

Introduction

Despite South Africa's pledge to fast-track action towards food security, the severity of hunger is troubling as 6.8 million of the population remain underfed (StatsSA, 2019a: 8; *Global Hunger Index*, 2019). Even though over the last two decades there has been some improvement in this barometer, the country is witnessing a surge in a new form of malnutrition, obesity, which now plagues 31.1 per cent of males and 59.5 per cent of females (Cois and Day, 2015: 2; Hunter-Adams *et al.*, 2019). The rise in obesity, coupled with insufficient diversity of diet, has been a major contributory factor of non-communicable diseases including cardiovascular ailments (Tugendhaft *et al.*, 2015). This negative development is an indication that the hard-won political battle fought by many against the apartheid regime has not translated into food security for the country's population (Nkrumah, 2018a).

Indeed, the contribution of citizens towards the liberation struggle imposed a political obligation on the country's leadership to ensure their right to food (RTF). This obligation was clearly articulated by Nelson Mandela (1993; own emphasis) when he mooted that '[w]e do not want freedom without *bread*' and 'our liberation should guarantee human dignity, freedom from want, freedom from deprivation'. Yet, twenty-five years after the country's turn to democracy, the realisation of RTF remains elusive (Chakona and Shackleton, 2019).

On the legal front, following the country's negotiated transition to democracy in 1994, it adopted what could be referred to as one of the most progressive constitutions in terms of safeguarding civil/political and economic/social rights. It is one of very few constitutions globally which codifies RTF by making citizens' access to food justiciable (Nkrumah, 2019a). To be exact, the country's constitution obliges

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the government to take all reasonable measures to ensure that every individual has food security or adequate access to food.

Despite this landmark constitutional and political commitment, widespread chronic hunger persists in rural and urban South Africa (Hatcher *et al.*, 2019). Why is this the case, and how can this sorry state be undone? Put differently, what factors underpin the strong rhetoric and yet weak commitments for RTF in South Africa? Do existing concepts, policies and institutions hinder or facilitate individual and household attainment of this universal aspiration? This book responds to these burning questions by analysing conceptual frameworks relating to food (in)security, key issues and challenges, and finally a review of socioeconomic policies which can facilitate people's access to food.

While several factors may be seen as the underlying causes of the current state of widespread hunger, it may not be farfetched to indicate that there is lack of understanding or conceptualisation on what food security implies and what measures are needed to facilitate its realisation. This inspiring and lively book argues for a rehabilitation of the notion of 'food activism' as a conduit to improving household food security in South Africa. It contributes towards an improved understanding of the RTF, triggering discussion on the need for adoption of a more comprehensive instrument backed by a specific institution to improve people's access to adequate food. Its point of departure from existing and on-going research on RTF is a recognition of five hypotheses: (i) RTF is attainable if the state adopts the needed legislation, sets up the right institution and provides the necessary resources for the effective operation of this institution; (ii) RTF deserves to be entrenched in one comprehensive instrument and not be fragmented and operationalised piecemeal among different government departments; (iii) given that there are many variables (unemployment, HIV/AIDs, rising food prices) militating against poor households in their attempt to access food, there is the need for the establishment of a unified government department, to achieve the RTF more holistically; (iv) issues surrounding RTF must be prioritised in the national agenda as food insecurity threatens the mental health of expectant mothers and development of foetuses; and (v) RTF is inevitable as it is meaningless to codify civil/political or other socioeconomic demands (such as education) when one is famished (Mandela, 1993).

All these hypotheses raise discursive questions on the content of existing policies which purport to achieve zero hunger, and the

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effectiveness of the institutions tailored to achieve these objectives. In keeping with contemporary thinking on the intricate nature of RTF, the book draws upon various disciplinary perspectives, and ultimately adopts Sen's (1982) entitlement theory which conceptualises food security as a human right. The book illustrates that in the context of evolutionary thinking, food insecurity in (South) Africa and beyond is not tied to the insufficient yield or scarcity of farm produce in the local market, but rather the insufficient ability of households to access cash to buy or land to cultivate their own food. These arguments are presented in simple language, to enable not only the development expert to understand the approach to be adopted in promoting food security agenda in the (South) African context, but also for the poor and famished to understand their inherent RTF and how they could press for it. In doing this, a case study of food activism across four continents is discussed, with specific emphasis on India's Right to Food Campaign. These cases may serve as blueprints for advocates of food security to emulate in their attempt to concretise and advance citizen's RTF in (South) Africa and beyond. Of importance is the discussion on the rationale behind the very limited mobilisation around RTF in the country and how public action could be used to influence the adoption of a food security instrument to improve the nutritional needs of the poor, especially pregnant women who have been excluded from mainstream social grants. The strength of the book further lies in its discussion of how a strong constitutional and political mandate at the national level has not translated into food security at the individual and household levels.

It needs to be said that South Africa is neither short of policies asserting to end hunger, nor institutions claiming to have the mandate to improve access (Hatcher *et al.*, 2019; Garekae and Shackleton, 2020). Why, then, is this book advocating for a renewed focus on RTF? The answers are directly linked to the abovementioned hypothesis. Simply put, this book is striking in three main ways: first, it uses a human rights approach to assess public policy. It challenges human rights activists and scholars to transcend issues of procedural justice in order to analyse distributional justice and the complementary role of socioeconomic policy; second, by using a human rights framework, the book analyses the shortfalls in public polices and how they can be triggered to address gender biases, income inequality and poverty. The book therefore makes an enormous contribution to scholarship

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as it focuses on empowerment, the process of participation, poverty, equality and human well-being; and third, it surveys RTF from the standpoint of people, by assessing the nexus between poor socioeconomic policies and their impact on community, household and individual food security.

Historical Background to Food Insecurity: Facing an Unequal World

Hunger is not a contemporary phenomenon. It dates back to the biblical story of Joseph in Egypt when he predicted in Pharaoh's court that there would be seven years of bounty followed by seven years of scarcity (Rogers, 2019). This could be seen as a typical early warning system to addressing food insecurity. Subsequently, the falling of manna from heaven to replenish the Israelites fleeing from Pharaoh in Exodus can be considered as the first form of food security intervention (Bruni, 2019). Besides these biblical legacies, there are traces of food insecurity which persisted before the Hellenistic period (between the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC and the emergence of the Roman Empire). As far back as 66 BC, thousands of Romans stormed the house of then Roman consul, Marcus Cicero, in demand for food, which more prosaically, could be interpreted as a classic illustration of food activism (Alkon and Cadji, 2020).

In recent times, however, food security climbed the global agenda in the 1970s in the wake of its impact on development programmes, especially in the Global South (Heucher 2019). Nonetheless, over the last decade, it has become evident that interest in the subject has waxed and waned partly due to the evolving nature of the variables underpinning food insecurity and the evolving concept of development more broadly. Simultaneously, there has been a slow but steady shift in the conceptualisation of food security by refocusing the debate towards individual and household access to (in)sufficient food rather than (inter)national or regional food supply (Jun *et al.*, 2019). Even though some scholars have attempted to swing back like the pendulum from consumption to supply issues, in the case of South Africa, the focus of attention has been on the poor, the food insecure and other vulnerable groups since the state is food secured (Claasen and Lemke, 2019).

When framing the issue of food (in)security and undernutrition, especially within the context of Sen's capabilities approach, it is useful

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to assess the content of public policies through the lens of human rights standards. Human rights are framed not merely as inherent rights entrenched in a collection of legislations, but as ethical norms, and they form the foundations of political and legal commitments which have been codified as (inter)national standards and, thus, gained legitimacy as universal values. It goes without saying that basic rights are inextricably linked to capabilities which allow people to enjoy a meaningful living condition. Specifically, due to their importance in enhancing the dignity of individuals, these rights should not only be entrenched in every (inter)national instrument but serve as a guiding compass for all political regimes. The decision to use a human rights framework is reinforced by the South African 1996 Constitution which adopts human rights language in several of its provisions, especially within the Bill of Rights. In addition to serving as a useful benchmark for measuring state accountability and compliance with its treaty obligations, human rights criteria considerably overlap with the capabilities approach in their human-centred analysis.

Akin to other rights, RTF is entrenched in a plethora of international and regional human rights instruments, and at the domestic level, the 1996 Constitution.[1] These instruments set out an expansive framework of norms relating to the duties of states and rights of individuals (and households). According to the 1966 International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, to which South Africa is a party), there are three key conditions necessary for the realisation of the RTF: maximising the use of food for effective nutrition, improving physical and economic access, and enhancing availability.[2] In particular, article 11 of the ICESCR avows that a state could be said to be food secured when every individual has economic and physical *access* to sufficient food or the means for acquiring it at all times.

Nonetheless, legal provision is not the only means of realising rights, and guaranteeing rights in documents does not ultimately translate into practice. The enforcement of rights cannot be attained through legal

[1] These instrument include the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1966 International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1981 African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

[2] South Africa became a party to the ICESCR in 2015.

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protection alone. Ensuring food security is a key policy objective for any regime. But, from a human rights perspective, alleviating hunger is not merely a policy objective, rather it constitutes a legally binding duty to adopt legislative and other (reasonable) steps to ensure its fulfilment. Indeed, access to adequate food is determined by a plethora of conditions stretching from the quality of accessible products, availability of suppliers, opportunities to produce one's own food and prices of food in the markets, to household incomes. This, in turn, is based on the existing social strata which ensure that all have a means of acquiring food. It is, further, dependent on the availability and fair distribution of opportunities and resources such as land, water, farming instruments and access to work as a means of generating income.

The RTF, is basically an inherent right of households and individuals to have access to the means (through acquisition or own production) to feed themselves, rather than the right to a basket of mere grains or a particular number of calories. The various regional and (inter) national human rights instruments, therefore, impose an obligation on states to adopt and operationalise suitable food security interventions, which could be done by putting in place the necessary social arrangement. It is for this purpose that human rights instruments place a duty on states to *fulfil* the enjoyment of rights and not merely *promote* and *respect* them, either by refraining from or forestalling third parties from hindering the enjoyment of individual access. In the context of South Africa, these positive duties to *progressively realise* and *fulfil* are specifically important as millions are denied the right to access adequate food, and this trend can only be reversed through pragmatic policies and interventions which target poverty eradication and enhance development (Devereux, 2016). The duty to *fulfil* involves a positive obligation, which encompasses taking proactive policy measures (to ensure that people have adequate access to food), rather than the obligation not to breach this right. The instruments prescribe the duty of *conduct* and *outcome*, underscoring that states must adopt proactive steps to ensure that citizens are not starved (De Vos and Pierre, 1997). The ICESCR, in this light, however, does not spell out a specific set of measures to be adopted.

Like one's toothpaste, soap and sandals, food is a commodity to be acquired in the market, and this obliges duty-bearers to ensure that they are sufficient and reasonably priced in the market to be accessed by the poor. Human rights instruments like the ICESCR specifically affirm

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that the steps to be adopted by states should be tailored towards making the food basket affordable, and not merely to available. The state can achieve this objective by managing or regulating several factors which are driven by market forces such as market distribution, wages and prices of grain and other agricultural commodities. For this reason, the underlying argument of this book is that states have (inter) national obligations to operationalise food programmes, monitor the prices of food or provide the poor with the means of generating income or land for own production. It is important to underscore that these recommendations should not be seen as an act of charity by the state, but an overarching duty imposed by (inter)national instrument on the government to prioritise the food needs of its citizens, even though they do not explicitly set out specific policy regimes or policy choices (including the level of market intervention) to be adopted or implemented. To substantiate this final assertion, the chapter turns to assess some of the theories underlying food security and how the present definition of this concept came about.

Theories of Food Security?

Since the 1974 World Food Conference (WFC), the notion of food security could be seen as evolving in three phases: (i) focus on individual access to food; (ii) food as the most fundamental of all human needs; and (iii) impact of poverty on food security. A brief discussion of these three phases will be useful.

Individual access to food: This first phase took place mainly in the period 1975–85 (UN, 1975). Within this era, the term *food security* was defined by the WFC as constant supply and availability of basic foodstuffs to offset fluctuations in prices and productions, as well as sustaining a steady expansion of food consumption (Gerlach, 2015). The definition placed emphasis on supply, import stabilisation of schemes, proposals for global food stocks and a concern with national self-sufficiency (Ram *et al.*, 1975). These issues undoubtedly occupied centre stage in early scholarly work on food security. Nonetheless, from the onset, it was evident that insufficient food supply at the (inter)national level inextricably trickled down to household and individual food insecurity, as scarcity of food increases the price of available food, thereby (in)directly impacting on the capability of the poor to access these commodities (Hawkes, 1974). But this cannot be said of

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a regime which has sufficient food and yet millions are starved. One literature which can be considered as leading the crusade towards shifting the question of food access from the national to the individual level is Sen's (1981) *entitlement approach*, which argues that hunger is not caused by inadequate food in the market, but lack of means to access it. Yet, this literature was preceded by several others in the 1970s which echoed similar sentiments (Brown and Eckholm, 1974; Harrar, 1974; Rosenfeld, 1974; Ram *et al.*, 1975; Pimentel, 1976). For this reason, one cannot justifiably make the claim that inadequate food supply is the cause of food insecurity (especially in the context of South Africa), without citing lack of entitlement or access as an immediate causative factor. In contemporary times, it has been more suitable to primarily define food insecurity as lack of entitlement, with production (at best) serving as a means to an end, either by driving market prices down indirectly for consumers and directly for food producers (May, 2018). Yet, uncertainties remain, especially in terms of whether the basis of assessment should be at the household or individual level. Whereas one camp has positioned intra-household resource and power allocation as the central focus of their assessment, others place individual food security in the front line of analysis. Indeed, the first camp acknowledges the significance of intra-household concern, with focus on health conditions of mothers and children (Kirkpatrick *et al.*, 2015; Burke *et al.*, 2016; Grobler, 2016; Li *et al.*, 2016; Sriram and Tarasuk, 2016). The disparity, nonetheless, lies in whether intra-household concerns are seen as more desirable assessments of health conditions or caring capacity or issues within the scope of food security. On the other hand, most sub-Saharan literature agrees with the notion that individual access to food in a household is mostly tied to the access they have to household income, as well as the control they exercise over the resources in the household (Chakona and Shackleton, 2017). Hence, the effect of hunger can be dire, especially on the reproductive health of women and growth of children. In this sense, while acknowledging the complex relationship between the (inter)national, provincial, household and individual levels, most contemporary definitions of food security zero in on individual entitlement. One definition which has adequately captured this development, and thus is widely cited, is a World Bank (WB, 1986) policy study which defines food security as access by all individuals to sufficient food at all times for a healthy and active life. This explanation draws a vital difference between transitory

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(short term) and chronic (long term) food insecurity. The emphasis here is on individual food security, or one's (in)constant access to adequate food for active participation in society and not simply for survival.

Food as primary need: Triggered by concerns of famine in Africa in the early 1980s, the second phase occurred largely after 1982. Following Maslow's (1943) theory of needs, the conventional perception of food security within this era was of food as a lower or primary need. Food was viewed as an essential element to enhance stable and enduring strata and organisation of social life, and was essential for survival and basic to all human needs (Campbell, 1990). Yet, in recent times, the assumptions underpinning this perspective have been challenged. It has been identified that short-term nutritional consumption and food (broadly construed) is merely one of several aspirations individuals seek to attain (Regassa, 2011). According to some scholars, since food is not an ultimate objective, people often devise and follow a plethora of adaptive or coping strategies especially in times of drought (Campbell and Trechter, 1982; Corbett 1988). One observer argues that for people living in rural area and confronted with famine, forestalling food insecurity is not one of their policy priorities (Jodha, 1991). To buttress this assertion, de Waal (1991) and Webb (1993) add that, in order to avoid having to sell their animals or to preserve their seeds for cultivation in their own fields, Sudanese and Ethiopians respectively preferred to endure a substantial level of hunger during the 1984–5 Darfur famine. This conclusion seems to purport that the hallmark of this era was the quest of people to starve now in order to forestall future hunger. In other words, the essential feature of this generation was the management of risk and vulnerabilities. Hence, a society within this era was seen to be food secured only when it had established internal structures which would enable it to withstand shocks or threats to its available food resources for tomorrow or posterity. This practice brings to bear three classifications of households within this regime: (i) fragile households – those prone to shocks; (ii) resilient households – those who quickly bounce back from shocks; and (iii) enduring households – those who continuously maintain food security (Webb, 1993).

Impact of poverty on food security: This final phase may be tied to scholarship from the late 1990s to present times. It is dominated by scholarship which assesses poverty on two fronts: subjective analysis (feelings of deprivation) and objective analysis (the conditions of

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deprivation) (McCurdy *et al.*, 2010). These two models have been replicated in recent scholarship on poverty in rural areas. For instance, while Bhattacharya *et al.* (2004) speak of poverty as predictive of poor nutrition, Morrissey and colleagues (2016) link child malnourishment to family income. The most common definitions of food security within this phase could be grouped into three main categories, usually construed as: (i) nutritionally sufficient, reliable and a timely supply of food (Donkin *et al.*, 2000; von Braun and Tadesse 2012); (ii) intake of less than 80 per cent of daily average requirement of calories (Powell and Bao 2009); and (iii) target levels of intake (Korenman *et al.*, 2013). Suffice to say that definitions framed in these contexts are problematic, on two grounds. First, they lack qualitative analysis, and second, the concept of nutritional sufficiency poses a problem. Nutritional requirement for any person is determined by factors such as individual's behaviour, environment, work load, weight, health and age. Estimations of needed nutrition for children and average adults with similar activities might differ from one person to the next. This projection can even be further complicated by including adaptation strategies. It is, thus, a challenge to precisely estimate caloric requirements for different categories within the population. These discrepancies appear to underscore Maxwell's (1996) projection that nutritional needs must be considered as value judgements. Granted that this deduction is correct, it triggers a puzzling question: whose assertion is correct? In other words, who is to make value judgements for nations, communities, households and individuals? As this question lingers, it suffices to consider some of the global institutional definitions which have been ascribed to food security and whether they really capture the essence of this somehow elusive concept.

Global Institutional Response to Food Security

Attempts by the international community to provide a comprehensive definition and a binding instrument to achieve RTF could be seen as evolving in five stages. The first, spanning from 1972 to1980, was marked by severe famine in the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and other parts of Africa (Watts, 1991). The rarest and most striking characteristic of this crisis was the similar failure in harvest and massive grain imports by the Soviet Union which led to doubling of international grain prices (Spinoni *et al.*, 2015). This setback could not be addressed

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by existing institutional structures as this was a global food crunch and exacerbated by institutions ill equipped to address the issue. In order to strengthen the global food security regime and enhance the prospect of states to overcome this challenge, an institutional overhaul was undertaken. The first step was the enhancement of the capacity of the WFC to monitor global food stocks, trade and production (Ram *et al.*, 1975). Following the recommendation of the WFC in 1974 for specific food agencies, the UN General Assembly in 1975 established the World Food Council to monitor production, while the Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS) and World Food Security (WFS) were also set up to ensure availability of food at the global market for procurement by states (Shaw, 2010). Interestingly, this period of conceptualisation and operationalisation of food security interventions occurred in an era which equally witnessed greater global attention being given to poverty and rising inequality in development discourse. Thus, key issues which dominated this regime were unemployment, basic needs projects and integrated rural development agendas. These themes were forcefully outlined in McNamara's (1973) groundbreaking Nairobi speech and the subsequent 1976 International Labour Organisation's adoption of the notion of *basic needs* (Palmer, 1977).

The second phase occurred in the early 1980s when debates about hunger and poverty attained prominence in nutritional literature and later found their way into other scholarly works. It was evident that although individuals required access to food, the production of food alone was not a guarantor of access or consumption. Even though the 1980s witnessed a broad range of scholarship on food security, their relevance or impact in shaping policy was brief. Yet, one literature which survived the test of time was Sen's (1981) notion of entitlement which was instructive in taking the debate forward. In its quest to contribute to global food security, the European Community within this same year launched an action plan which led to the mapping of food programmes in four select African countries (Clay, 1983). In an attempt to shift the focus of food security, the landmark research of Reutlinger and Knapp (1980) was funded by the WB whereas the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) framed an eclectic definition of food security which placed emphasis on stability, production and specifically access in 1983 (Reutlinger and Knapp, 1980; Mechlem, 2004). All these attempts unfortunately coincided with the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) structural adjustment programme (SAP) which prioritised

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external and internal liberalisation, macroeconomic stability, fiscal balance and debt management over basic needs and poverty reduction (Nkrumah, 2017). In view of this situation, the urgency for practical food security intervention faded, even though hunger and needs ideas have improved.

The third phase may be tied to development in 1984 to the latter part of 1980. Two striking features within this era are worth citing. First, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and relevant international human rights agencies in 1987 successfully refocused global attention on the negative (socioeconomic) impact of SAP on developing and less-developed countries, especially those in Africa (Cornia *et al.*, 1987). Second, the 1984–5 famine in Africa paved way for renewed interest in mapping for the causes of food insecurity, which resulted in the WB report on poverty and food security. Major players such as the FAO, WB and European Commission launched food security surveys in several African countries (Lele and Candler, 1984; Ndegwa, 1985). Other landmark scholarly works emerged which clearly delineated the difference between safeguarding entitlement or protection against shocks, and promoting entitlement or enabling individuals to have lasting food access (Longhurst, 1988; Mellor, 1988; Weber, 1988).

The early 1990s marked the fourth phase of the international community's attempt to comprehensively alleviate hunger. The publication of *World Development Report on Poverty* (WB, 1990) could be considered as the main feature of this era, particularly as it highlighted poverty eradication as the panacea for citizens' food insecurity. What, however, exacerbated the drift away from poverty was the shift in the factors underpinning hunger in the early '90s. The mass starvation in this phase was triggered by war as opposed to the traditional cause of famine, namely drought (Nkrumah and Busingye, 2017). While starvation caused by drought could, to some extent be managed with considerable efficiency, the issue in this context relates more with ensuring constant food supplies in a fragile political environment fraught with policy and social breakdown, and not so much with national food crisis per se (Nkrumah and Viljoen, 2014).[3] For instance, at the height of apartheid in the early 1990s, with widespread arrest,

[3] The early 1990s was an era of mass atrocities in several African countries, stretching from Rwanda, Southern Sudan, Angola, Liberia and Somalia to apartheid South Africa.

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torture, maiming and arbitrary execution of black South Africans, the country remained food secure at the national level (Rogerson, 1993). Consequently, several donors favoured poverty reduction programme (inequality) studies to the detriment of food security interventions (or assessments) even though both strongly overlap. For whereas food security was somewhat considered in this fourth phase, the emphasis was placed on linking overseas development assistance (ODA) to the management, rehabilitation and development of – and ultimately establishing codes of conduct for – the disbursement and use of ODA in a politically unstable environment (Mundy, 1992).

It must be noted that hunger did not completely disappear from the global agenda as starvation was not wholly eradicated at this stage. Issues relating to hunger, and specifically undernutrition, were kept in the public eye by two events: the 1990 World Summit for Children and the 1992 International Conference on Nutrition (Shaw and Clay, 1998). These symposiums, coupled with the widespread starvation within this phase, incited the WB to adopt two interventions, the 1993 *Conference on Actions to Reduce Hunger* and 1995 publication titled *Strategy for Reducing Poverty and Hunger* (Shaw, 2007).

The last phase commenced in the mid-1990s and can be said to have thriven until now. Concerns of food security were once again propelled to the global agenda due to revived spikes in food price. It goes without saying that the prospect of pro-hunger policies seems to have witnessed a surge in this era. This brings to bear whether the focus should be placed on sustaining access or consumption, which were dominant in the 1980s, or drift back to food availability, especially in light of Malthus' (1798) hypothesis that population will outgrow food production. These issues were highlighted in the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome, as participants were divided and hotly debated these issues (Shaw and Clay, 1998). Far from direct food access, actors at the summit (the public, negotiators, pressure groups, academic, commercial interests and civil society) pressed for the inclusion of different concerns, in particular, the impact of political change, trade liberalisations, globalisation, genetic manipulation and biodiversity on food availability and access. The resulting outcome, being the 1996 *Declaration and Plan of Action*, however, adopted a balanced approached to all these issues, with emphasis on human rights to food. The document sets out state commitments in this domain and laid a foundation for debates on measures

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towards forestalling food insecurity, such as buffer stocks, disaster preparedness, fair trade, access to income, rural development, sustainable agricultural practice and poverty reduction. For instance, the call for buffer stocks was aimed at (p)reserving sufficient food during bumper harvests which could be used to offset price fluctuations or hikes in times of food scarcity. The document concluded by mandating the FAO Committee on Food Security to monitor states' compliance with their national action plans (NAPs) to alleviate chronic hunger. It is within this context that the next section considers South Africa's NAPs to alleviate the plight of the food poor (chronically hungry). But before that, a brief assessment of contemporary definitions of food security beckons.

Contemporary definition of food security

As discussed previously, while food insecurity was historically conceptualised as inadequacy of supply or production, a growing number of scholars challenged this notion in the early 1980s and '90s when aggregate supplies increased and undernourishment persisted (Longhurst, 1985; Sarris, 1985; Mellor, 1988; Staatz *et al.*, 1990). Drèze and Sen (1989) countered that being well fed is based on several capabilities such as participating in household decision-making, being well informed and being healthy. By analysing the environmental, institutional and socioeconomic conditions which underpin individuals (in)ability to assess and consume food, their thesis opens up an assessment of the causes and constraints confronting food security. This capability approach greatly influenced international debate by shifting the traditional FAO (1975) definition of food security as '[a]vailability at all times of adequate world food *supplies*' to 'when all people, at all times, have physical and economic *access* to sufficient food, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs' (FAO, 1996; UN, 1975; own emphasis). Evidently, the latter definition breaks food security into five pillars: *stability*, *utilisation*, *adequacy*, *access* and *availability*. Whilst this definition is quite distinct from the notion of RTF, the two are closely aligned. Akin to the latter definition of food security, the RTF is conceptualised as 'the right to have *regular*, *permanent* and *unrestricted access*, either directly or by means of financial purchases, to quantitatively and qualitatively *adequate* and sufficient food' (OHCHR, 2019; own emphasis).

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Needless to say, the capability and human rights approaches overlap in setting out overarching frameworks for accessing remedies which could mitigate the multidimensional and multisectorial causes of food insecurity at the individual and household levels. These conceptualisations are key as they open up a fairly distinct policy framework in terms of the indicators used, and how the units of analysis and objectives are set. The conceptual definitions underscore the paradigms which create a narrative by providing reasons for selected policy responses, mainly through the listing of the various constraints and required remedies for overcoming undernourishment. Without essentially considering the causes of insufficient consumption of calories, the dual (capability and human rights) approaches give due regard to nutritional policies and programmes. They further support investments which enhance aggregate production even without due consideration to who the beneficiaries might be, by creating a narrative of chronic hunger as the end product of poverty, unemployment and insufficient welfare system. This individual-entered approach has sprouted as an overriding notion in recent times, informed policy-framing and endured among many stakeholders in the Global South and beyond, including South Africa.

South Africa: Policy and Rights

It is important to indicate at the onset that the adoption of the contemporary FAO (1996) definition of food security came only two years after South Africa's transition to democracy and coincided with the adoption of the country's Constitution. The shared year of birth of the FAO's overarching definition of food security and South Africa's 1996 Constitution, however, has not translated into advancing the RTF at the local level. The persistent hunger and malnutrition plaguing millions is underpinned by a chain of factors, spanning household asset base, livelihoods and occupational status, gender, spatial and geographic locations, the structure of households and demography (Nkrumah, 2019b). The demography of the country reflects inequality on the basis of class and race. For instance, in contrast to their white compatriots, black South Africans have a higher fertility rate and lower life expectancy.

The impacts of inequalities between white and blacks are most visible in the educational system. Whilst blacks constitute 81 per cent of the total population with whites making up 7.8 per cent (StatsSA,

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2018: 8), only 3.4 per cent of the black population aged between eighteen and twenty-nine are receiving tertiary education, as opposed to 18 per cent of their white counterparts in this category (StatsSA, 2019b: 2). Lack of access to higher education may inevitably hinder one's prospect of efficiently competing in the job market, which will substantially impact one's living standing, especially in terms of overcoming food insecurity. A case in point: whereas only 1.7 per cent of unemployed persons in 2018 had tertiary education, followed by 34.2 per cent of those with a secondary-level education (SLE), about 57.1 per cent of those with an education level below SLE were unemployed (StatsSA, 2019c: 7). With South Africans being net buyers of food, unemployment or lack of exchange entitlement exposes one to persistent hunger, with rural and (peri)urban black populations being most vulnerable (Chakona and Shackleton, 2019). In the context of food security, exchange entitlement implies exchange of endowments such as labour or skills for food. The lack of access to wage not only impacts the household dependency ratio, but also their accessibility to nutritious food.

In a country like South Africa where there is hunger in the midst of abundant food supply, Sen's entitlement approach is specifically instructive. In 2017, the country recorded a 24 per cent increase or 62.9 million tonnes in agriculture production as compared to 50.8 million tonnes in 2016 (SA Government, 2019). Arguably, this aggregate increase could be said to have emanated from the commercial sector, as smallholders are ill equipped to cultivate adequate crops or keep animals. While some steps are being taken towards commercial farming, agricultural support services to smallholders remain relatively weak. A typical example is that of the 15.6 per cent households involved in farming, only 11.1 per cent received government support, with 7.0 per cent receiving dipping/livestock vaccination services and a meagre 2.2 per cent receiving agricultural training (SA Government, 2019).

A discussed in Chapter 6, many households are confronted with food insecurity due to insufficient land, unemployment, widening inequalities and meagre wage which has hindered their ability to acquire nutrition. Exchange entitlements have further deteriorated in recent times due to massive retrenchment in the public and private sectors (which has impacted on many households), coupled with increases in value-added tax (VAT), and the rising cost of living and food prices

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(SARS, 2018).[4] As growth in the banking, manufacturing and mining sectors decline, there have been massive job losses in these sectors, resulting in an increase of 127,000 unemployed persons by the end of 2018 (StatsSA, 2019c: 7).

Given that South Africans are generally net food buyers, the state may adopt three key strategies as a means of enhancing exchange entitlement: reducing food prices, adjusting wages or providing free staple food to the poor. Further, leveraging the imbalance between wage and food price ration could be attained by: (i) ensuring that food prices do not unduly escalate; (ii) extending state procurement to small-scale farmers while enforcing competition in the food market; and (iii) creating and expanding employment opportunities as an important drive towards food security (Battersby, 2012; Nkrumah, 2019c). Yet, policy measures such as stabilisation of prices through price ceilings, management of food reserves and raising minimum wages have fallen through the cracks in the framing of food interventions, thereby eroding exchange entitlements and generating considerable price hikes. To this end, Chapter 4 examines the lack of regulation in the food market – especially in low-income townships and local markets – which have resulted in these areas becoming food deserts, and with poorly served retail stores.

As demonstrated in some sub-Saharan Africa countries, self-sufficiency is the basic means of overcoming hunger among rural communities. This form of farming, conventionally defined as the ability to meet one's consumption needs from one's own production instead of purchasing, however, has not been a thriving source of livelihood in South Africa, as the majority of the population lack land for this purpose. Besides land, the lack of own production may be tied to lack of training and provision of agricultural materials such as pesticides and tools to boost food production. The country's agricultural sector is often categorised into large-scale/commercial, on one hand, and smallholder/subsistence/traditional, on the other. In light of the output of the former, comprehensive strategies and programmes have been crafted to provide improved state assistance to farmers in this arena, even though a disproportionate percentage of the population cannot afford the food produced by this sector (DoA, 2002; Nkrumah, 2018b).

[4] From 1 April 2018, VAT increased from 14 per cent to 15 per cent.

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Additionally, there is no coherent policy measure to enhance subsistence farming as a conduit to direct food access, particularly as it is traditionally believed that it cannot play a substantial role in alleviating hunger (Nkrumah, 2019b). Presumably, this pessimism may be linked to the fact that women constitute a disproportionate percentage of subsistence farmers. Clearly, this belief calls for an urgent need to assess the gendered dimension of traditional farming. At the practical level, one may somewhat link the decline in subsistence farming to the growing rural–urban migration. Invariably, the ones left behind are either too old, too young or less enthusiastic to engage in farming, and with the very few who do, often perceiving it as a form of coping strategy or to supplement their dietary needs.

Urban farmers are also confronted with insufficient access to lands and water for cultivation, as well as a plethora of legislations which proscribe some from planting crops or rearing particular kind of animals in some municipalities (Nkrumah, 2019c). To this end, while only 4.5 per cent of households in Gauteng created backyard gardens, this figure declined in Western Cape where only 2.8 per cent are involved in agricultural activities (StatsSA, 2018: 58). In light of its importance in improving food access among rural and urban households while addressing poverty through selling of surplus food supplies, subsistence farming should be considered as an important element of an overall strategy to alleviate hunger in rural or urban centres.

In stark contrast to other forms of entitlement, one of the essential means through which South Africans access food is social assistance, with the social relief of distress (SRoD) grant providing short-term relief in the form of food parcels or vouchers to those in desperate need and yet disqualified from conventional grants. While salaries serve as the major source of income for 65.4 per cent of households, government cash transfers remain the only source of income for 44.6 per cent of individuals (StatsSA, 2018: 6). According to StatsSA (2018: 6), 57.4 per cent of households in Limpopo and 59.3 per cent in the Eastern Cape rely on grants rather than wages or other forms of income. Yet, 19.2 per cent of households in Mpumalanga, 22.7 per cent in Eastern Cape and 23.2 per cent in Limpopo depend on remittances for sustenance (StatsSA, 2018: 6). To this end, Chapter 4 pays considerable attention to some of the positive impacts and barriers confronting the effective distribution of social transfers, particularly as this form of entitlement serves as the lifeline for many.

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A major component of state policy linked to production-based entitlement is the land reform programme and associated support programme. Even though some have mooted that it will increase food production, there is no guarantee that land redistribution will translate into improving the lives of the poorest of the poor who constitute a greater percentage of hungry households (Levin and Weiner, 1996). Whilst the question of land repossession has been a running theme in many scholarly and political debates, the nexus between inadequate access to land and chronic hunger has rarely (if at all) been clearly articulated as a particular policy aspiration. The few who have somewhat highlighted this link can be grouped into two camps. The first argues that a section of the population are simply not interested in smallholding (Altman *et al.*, 2009; Battersby, 2012), and the second argues that while large tracks of land are available and accessible, those who wish to expand production are ill-equipped and/or hindered by inadequate support services (Altman *et al.*, 2009; Hendriks and Olivier, 2015; Nkrumah, 2019c).

In addition, even though people enjoy civil/political and economic/social rights, these have not evolved to the enjoyment of food security, especially as millions battle with job cuts, unemployment and lack of land for production. It goes without saying that this development has contributed to rising levels of social conflict and dissatisfaction in several parts of the country, particularly around mining areas, inner cities and university campuses (Nkrumah, 2019d). It can be argued that food insecurity may be an underlying factor to the numerous social discontents, otherwise termed as the 'uprising of the impoverished', even though hunger has not been a pivot around which activists seek for policy reform.

Invariably, behind the upsurge of wage strikes and dissent are issues of alienation, poverty and hunger in the midst of decadence and opulence displayed by historically advantaged white capitalists and newly advantaged African National Congress (ANC) elite. In light of this, Chapter 6 explores why South Africa, gaining reputation as the 'protest capital' of the world, has not yet witnessed nationwide food activism despite rising food prices (Runciman, 2017). The chapter interrogates this with reference to a data set of activism, with specific reference to citizens' discontent spanning from 1994 to 2004, merged with a corresponding set spanning from 2004 to present (SAPS, 2019: 151). The data will be sourced from the annual report of the South

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African Police Service which captures a yearly crowd (peaceful/violent) incident. In doing this, the book will summarise the key features and evolutions of social movement in South Africa since the collapse of apartheid, especially as some have triggered political contestation and influenced policy reforms.

The central question of the succeeding chapters is, how can citizens bring about food policy reform in South Africa? As part of responding to this overarching question, detailed case studies are incorporated here from India and South Africa. Drawn from two different regions, the cases will have three emphases: (i) why and how contemporary citizens of these countries resort to activism as a means of addressing social injustice; (ii) whether dissent really triggers reform; and (iii) whether the ways of mobilising around food and political cultures share much across regions and geography. The chapters demonstrate that a golden thread which runs through both cases is that growing inequality underpins citizens' discontent and associated insecurities. The lesson drawn from the case study in India is that food poverty and food activism mainly occur out of a growing disenfranchisement and sense of alienation on the part of disproportionate percentage of the population. Based on a human rights framework as a tool of analysis, a key conclusion of the book is that one aspect of activism (for instance demonstration) alone is not sufficient to bring about policy reform; rather it must be backed by other forms of activism such as advocacy, litigation and lobbying of key policy actors.

Synopsis: Structure and Scope of the Book

Rarely do many books conclude in the uncluttered manner they first begun, and this is no different. This book started with an aspiration of solely concentrating on the disjuncture between policy rhetoric and practical implementation as a way of moving human rights debate on South Africa's food (in)security forward. The initial thought was to write a book which contrasts, from a human rights perspective, the policy and institutional gaps as the sole constraints exacerbating individual and household's undernutrition. Yet, as this first chapter progressed, it became more and more clear that it was imperative to step back and frame a theoretical framework for analysis before shifting to human rights instruments, national policies and their implementation agencies. It became gradually necessary to further attempt to exhume

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the historical and sociocultural contexts within which households and individuals who are the bearers of chronic hunger and undernourishment exist. Subsequent chapters discovered that food insecurity is not restricted to a particular location, rural or urban, but cuts across provincial and gender boundaries. Once this projection was accepted, an overarching question which kept arising as being the rational starting point in this book: why is South Africa nationally food secured, and yet millions are food insecured? Ultimately, an issue that initially seemed to be a preliminary question – something to be swiftly dispensed with before addressing policy and institutional gaps – became *the* issue which gave the general discursive direction to the book by shaping its theoretical and legal analysis. This is the background which provides the book its all-encompassing triangulation of the state, the poor and nongovernmental organisations in constructing a discourse on food (in)security.

Though remaining keen in contesting the policy and institutional failures in this arena, the book has a broader scope. It provides a wider discursive analysis into critical undernutrition issues, from the cause(s) of chronic hunger to planning and policy interventions. Aside from the conclusion, the book is partitioned into three focal parts.

Part 1: Rudimentary Phase to Food Activism

Part 1 is composed of four chapters – the present introductory chapter and chapters 2, 3 and 4. The chapters are foundational as they serve as the philosophical and normative basis of how food activism is conceived. This introductory chapter traces the evolution of the concept of food (in)security. Chapter 2 provides the building blocks for a theoretical survey of food activism, supported by a comparative analysis in order to shed light on the conditions and properties in which it emerges. In Chapter 3, the book surveys the strategies applicable in food activism. In the process, the Right to Food Campaign (RFC) was picked on the basis of its abundant techniques blending different forms of activism (stretching from litigation, demonstration, advocacy and lobbying) to influence the adoption of India's 2013 National Food Security Act. The chapter, as a result, serves as a blueprint for activists and advocates in and beyond South Africa on how to launch dissent or political contestation in a regime which lacks political will to promote the RTF. Chapter 4 highlights how non-state

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actors can act in the interest of the famished by coercing an unwilling government to adopt proactive legislation and effective institutions to improve food insecurity. The major focus here was an analysis of the strategies used by a thriving activist movement to trigger political will. The chapter draws on the *Abahlali baseMjondolo*, #FeesMustFall and Treatment Action Campaign in seeking to understand why South Africa has not yet experienced large-scale mobilisation around food security. This is against the backdrop of the country's activist judiciary, rampant dissents and several nongovernmental organisations purporting to have food security mandates. The chapter concludes by setting out the reasons why the famished have not mobilised to hold the state accountable for their insufficient access to food as protected by the constitution.

Part 2: Setbacks to the Right to Food

Part 2 has three chapters which focus on interrogating the various policy and institutional constraints in alleviating chronic hunger. Chapter 5 argues that the evolution of RTF into a justiciable right at the national level has been met with several challenges. It assesses some of the legal impediments or claw-back clauses militating against the operationalisation of the RTF, and concludes that in order to enhance its enforcement, access to food needs to be linked to other socioeconomic rights (water, health, education and social security) which together hold the promise of radical transformation in democratic politics. Chapter 6 argues that problem of food insecurity is exacerbated by the lack of, or poor communication between, relevant government departments responsible for this entitlement. The aim of this section is to provide an in-depth analysis of these problems and interrogate possible remedies for addressing these burning issues. Chapter 7 discusses the various challenges that rural and urban smallholders face in accessing land for food production. It interrogates the question of land expropriation in contemporary debates and questions whether transferring land without compensation from previously advantaged (white population) to previously disadvantaged black Africans is the panacea for alleviating poverty, inequality and persistent hunger. It concludes by defusing the prevalent notion that persistent hunger is something experienced only by rural folks and that urban residents are immune from this condition.

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Part 3: Strategies to Overcoming Hunger

Part 3 has one chapter, which focuses on making a moral claim for the hungry. The central question is: do states and affluent members of society have a moral obligation to provide for the impoverished? What happens if some are willing to assist and yet others are not? Should the state impose poor tax on the affluent in order to provide for the underfed?

Part 4: Policy and Institution to Strengthen Right to Food

Part 4 comprises one chapter, organised around interrogating whether there is the need for extra legislation in addressing food insecurity, primarily in light of the plethora of policies alleging to do the same. If the answer is in the affirmative, which instrument is best suited for this purpose and what features must it possess? Chapter 9 argues it is necessary to close the policy and institutions gaps by adopting an overarching instrument to address the three-part challenge of unemployment, poverty and inequality. But what if the state is unwilling to take this step? The chapter concludes by elaborating on the various courses of action which could be taken by (non)state actors towards the adoption of a unified food security instrument and institution.

In essence, it is not the objective of the book to offer a decisive theory on how to respond to the issue of food insecurity in South Africa. Instead, it is to provide a discourse on the short-, medium- and long-term measures which could be adopted to address persistent hunger. The book seeks to construct a plausible account of economic and social legislation which could be operationalised to enhance individual and household access to food, but invariably leaves the question of how to eradicate food insecurity open to deliberation. Thus, instead of conclusion, the book ends with an epilogue.

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