

**THE GENDERED DIMENSIONS OF FOOD
SECURITY IN SOUTH AFRICA:
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Vasu REDDY

Chief Research Specialist

Relebohile MOLET'SANE

Director

Gender and Development Unit

Human Sciences Research Council

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Produced by: V Reddy and R Moletsane

Contact: Dr Miriam Altman
Executive Director, CPEG

E-mail: maltman@hsrc.ac.za

Tel: +27 12 302 2402

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Acronyms and abbreviations

CPI	consumer price index
DoA	Department of Agriculture
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFSNTT	Integrated Food Security and Nutrition Task Team
IFSS	Integrated Food Security Strategy for South Africa
LDCs	less developed countries
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MDG-1	Millennium Development Goal One
NVF	New Variant Famine
PEAP	Poverty Eradication Action Plan
PSLSD	Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development
RD	Rome Declaration
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SPFS	Special Programme for Food Security
Stats SA	Statistics South Africa
UN	United Nations

Executive summary

This short study provides a broad literature review of the gendered dimensions of food security in South Africa with recourse to the current critical literature focused on South and Southern Africa, and to a lesser extent, Africa. The study embraces a qualitative approach, and provides an exploratory and descriptive design aligned to the gendered context of food security. A focused understanding of local meanings and contextual issues that impact on and influence the relations between gender, policy, and food insecurity is generated by this study. The report is structured according to four focal thematic nodes: (1) the socio-political context of gender and food insecurity, (2) the policy context, (3) some theoretical approaches to food security, and (4) concludes with some programmatic and policy interventions.

The results of the study demonstrate that there is a gap in our knowledge about the gendered dimensions of food security, necessitating further research into the empirical, theoretical and policy implications for food insecurity in its gendered context. Despite this, preliminary conclusions suggest that there is a developing literature of food insecurity, but more grounded studies are required that fully extrapolate food insecurity in its gendered and policy context. Preliminary evidence suggests that women and girls are to be considered most-at-risk-populations (and therefore vulnerable to food insecurity) because they have limited access and control of resources (be it land, water, and failing support systems) when compared to men. HIV/AIDS is another fuelling factor, and poverty in its multi-dimensional aspects is a corroborating feature. Additionally, the mismatch between policy and programmatic work to curb the gendered dimensions of food insecurity is a real, material and policy variable that requires attention in future work.

The study establishes that interventions addressing food insecurity in its gendered context imply that women are playing key roles in households and that to meet the food gaps, a combination of factors need to be employed by women and girls that must be supported by the policy framework. Consequently, gender needs to be more strongly foregrounded as a feature of the policy framework; more targeted programmes focused on female-headed households require attention. There is a marked absence of empirical studies addressing women and gender in the food insecurity arena, and that a more holistic understanding of problems is required. To this end, issues such as natural disasters, education, poverty, ageing, technology, ageing, genetically modified foods etc.), should be prioritised in future policy that addresses the multidimensionality of food security to ensure a grounded understanding that could alleviate potential problems related to the position of women and gender more broadly in relation to food security.

1. Introduction

Poverty means hunger, thirst, and living without decent shelter. It means not being able to read. It means chronic sickness. Poverty means not finding any opportunities for you or your children. It is about being pushed around by those who are more powerful. It is about having little control over your own life. And it can mean living with the constant threat of personal violence. (Commission for Africa, 2005: 1010)

One of the key indicators of the lack of wellbeing in societies is the incidence of child hunger in households, which in turn fuels the vulnerability of populations already rendered weak by disease, unemployment and poor development. Such a reality is usually precipitated in the context of poverty. Presently approximately 815 million people in less developed countries (LDCs) are undernourished, with approximately 20% being children under the age of five (FAO 2002, 2006). As one of the key development issues impacting upon communities, child hunger by association cannot be separated from poverty and under-nutrition among women, particularly those in rural and other marginalised communities (Smith et al., 2003). Contributing to this international problem is food insecurity, the lack of “sustainable physical or economic access to enough safe, nutritious, and socially acceptable food for a healthy and productive life”.¹

This paper reviews literature related to the gendered aspects of food insecurity in South Africa, specifically on its gender impacts on individuals, families and communities. The paper also analyses the South African (and international) policy framework aimed at addressing food insecurity, particularly the extent to which, and ways in which, it addresses gender inequality in food security in the country. From this analysis, some gaps, limitations and areas requiring further research are identified.

The concept “food security” can be traced to references made in the critical literature on development in the 1970s to foodstuff availability in sufficient quantity at a national and global level. However, the concept of household food security has emerged more recently; it is traceable to the literature dating from the 1980s (Smith et al., 1993) in which the emphasis in policy debate was shifted from food supply to food demand, with its attendant relation to vulnerability, risk and access (Maxwell & Slater, 2003). The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) defines food insecurity as “when people must live with hunger but fear starvation” in their daily lives (FAO, 2002: 1; see also Kent, 2005). The central meaning, then, is that food insecurity is a threat to physical wellbeing and normal social activity (Jenkins et al., 2007: 826).

Extending the FAO (2002) definition, in the South African context we can state that food security refers to physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food by all people at all times to meet their dietary and food preferences for an active and healthy life (Integrated Food Security Strategy for South Africa (IFSS), cf. DoA, 2002). Food security comprises three key elements: food resource availability, access to those resources to ensure sufficient consumption of

¹ www.faqs.org/nutrition/Erg-Foo/Food-Insecurity.html, accessed 27 February 2009.

food, and appropriate utilisation in a sanitary and nutritious manner (Hussein 2002, cited in Baro & Deubel, 2006). South Africa still experiences limited food availability, due mainly to the (under-) performance of the agricultural sector (see The Presidency, 2008a). As this paper argues in the sections that follow, a key factor contributing to the food insecurity in the country is gender inequality in families, communities and society as a whole. Due to power imbalances, women are often denied access to available food, to food production activities (the labour market), and to production spaces/tools such as land.

Within the household and intra-household context, the 2000 measurement of poverty by Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) indicated that “35% of the total population or 14.3 million South Africans are vulnerable to food insecurity. Among these, women, children and the elderly are particularly more vulnerable” (DoA, 2002: 22). The gendered aspect of food security is more apparent if the household structure is taken into account. To illustrate, the DoA (2002: 23) notes that:

Nearly one third of all South African households are female-headed which are [sic] considerably poorer than male-headed households. Nearly 52% of female-headed households spent less than R1 000 per month in 1996, in contrast to 35% of male-headed households that spent less than R1 000 in the same period. Nearly 25% of male-headed households spent more than R3 500 per month compared to only about 8% of female-headed households in the same quintile. The relative poverty of female-headed households who spent less than R1 000 per month was nearly 80% in the Eastern Cape, compared to 26% of relatively poor Gauteng female-headed households that spent less than R1 000 per month. About 73% of all households receive monthly incomes of less than R2 500 and only 27% receive incomes of more than R2 500 per month. Almost half of South African households earn a monthly income of R1 000 or less.

Another direct measure of food insecurity is an estimate of the adequacy of daily energy intake. Based on data for the Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development (PSLSD), the IFSS makes another important assessment that confirms further vulnerability in respect of children under the age of six:

PSLSD estimated that 30% of the population (14.8 million people) did not meet their daily energy requirements (2 000 kcal/day). Compared to international ranges protein energy malnutrition, as measured by stunting levels, is a moderate public health problem in South Africa. The national stunting rate for young children ranges between 23% and 27%. This means that approximately 1.5 million children under the age of 6 years are malnourished. Among the ultra-poor (the poorest twenty percent of households) the rate is 38%, while it is only 6 % among the rich. The highest stunting rates occur in the Northern Province (34.2%), Eastern Cape (28.8%) and Free State (28.7%). In contrast, Western Cape (11.6%) and Gauteng (11.5%) exhibit low stunting rates by international standards. Whereas the three provinces of the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Northern Province house 52% of the country's children, an estimated 60% of all stunted children and two-thirds of poor people live in these provinces. Anaemia and marginal vitamin A status are widespread micronutrient deficiencies, affecting between 20 and 30% of young children. Children in rural areas and those of mothers with limited education are badly affected (DoA, 2002: 23)

Vulnerability to food insecurity is clearly gendered. To illustrate, in their report, the Department of Agriculture and Land Affairs (1997) stated that about 48% of women, as compared to about 43% of men, live in poverty in both urban and rural areas. In addition, about 61% of female-headed

households in rural areas are poor. Vulnerable groups often lack the power to make decisions about how their household's resources are to be used and may lack sound information about food and nutrition. Clover (2003) sees vulnerability to food security as one of the main factors that feed into the very risky behaviours that drive the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Women, children and the elderly, as vulnerable groups in South Africa, are the most affected. South African food insecurity rates are higher among households headed by females and the elderly (Rose & Charlton, 2002). A study conducted by Kapungwe (2005) in Zambia found that female-headed households had a much higher chance of being food-insecure, as did large households and those headed by the elderly. This may be because of lack of, or poor access to, training as well as unequal pay for men and women performing the same tasks. Such women also have limited access to productive assets, organisations and social networks, credit, legal rights and a voice in the political system (Kapungwe, 2005).

To engage meaningfully with the issue of food is to recognise that nourishment, life and survival are inextricably connected to human development and public policy. As such, it is difficult to separate issues of food from the broader socio-political issues impacting on individuals and groups in communities. For example, access to water, land and other natural resources, as well as effective waste management, have significant bearing on food security in families and communities, and with women shouldering the burden of care in these contexts, failure to address these issues brings negative consequences for them. In a recent formulation, Loots (2007: 85) cogently captured the core issues from a South African perspective:

The politics of food are highly gendered. Women are often understood as the primary food managers in charge of purchasing, growing, cooking and consumption within the home or homestead. While gendered debates around challenging the "rightfulness" of this social role that women play is important, the politics in Southern Africa are a reality. This means that any discussion around food and food security has to involve women in their various capacities. The bio-politics of food and the genetic engineering of food crops thus effects and affects women directly and, indirectly, the community around them.

These views articulate what a gendered dimension of food security could imply: gender roles in production activities, access to land and other food-producing spaces, and an understanding of the multifaceted dimension of gender in terms of the social, political and economic context.

The following research questions frame the present inquiry:

- What is the socio-political context of gender and food security in South Africa?
- What is the policy framework vis-à-vis food security and gender equality (national, regional and international policies, treaties, etc.)? To what extent and in what ways does the existing policy framework address food insecurity and its related gender inequality problems? What are the gaps?
- What are some theoretical approaches to understanding gender and food security?
- How does gender inequality impact on food security and what implications does this have for: policy refinement/development, practice/intervention and further research?

2. The socio-political context of gender and food insecurity in South Africa

If we take the IFSS (DoA, 2002: 15–16) definition of food security as the “physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food by all South African at all times to meet their dietary and food preferences for an active and healthy life”, then the African continent is the only region in the world that has not been able to achieve this (Rupiya, 2004). According to Rupiya, since the mid-1970s, the continent has not been able to sufficiently feed itself and is unlikely to do so in the future unless radical policy changes are made to current practice. Rena (2005) outlines the case of Eritrea, where malnutrition and transitory food insecurity are pervasive. In some cases, a shift to neoliberal agricultural policies has also affected the non-market distribution of products such as maize in rural Zambia, including bartering for goods and labour, resulting in increased risks of food insecurity (Sitko, 2006). Vogel and Smith (2002: 315) have cautioned against an emerging food crisis looming in Southern Africa (with Angola, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe possibly facing massive food crises), largely due to structural vulnerabilities (lack of resources and political instability), as well as through conjunctural factors (triggers such as droughts, flooding, pestilence). In the case of Botswana, environmental and socio-economic factors also impact on food security (Lado, 2001).

South Africa faces the same plight as other sub-Saharan African countries, not producing and not having enough food available to feed its own population (see The Presidency, 2008b). Food-insecure households (i.e. those with low food spending and low available energy) accounted for 39% of the South African population in 1995 (Rose & Charlton, 2002). Importantly, a direct consequence of food insecurity is the reality of malnourished children as a result of nutritional deficiencies (see Rukuni, 2002). For example, approximately 14 million people in South Africa are estimated to be vulnerable to food insecurity, while 1.5 million children under the age of 6 years are stunted by chronic malnutrition (The Presidency, 2008a). In South Africa food insecurity is highest among the African population, but also affects a significant number of coloured and Indian households (DoA, 2002).

Lean-Heng (2008) estimates that women presently constitute 75% of the world’s poor. In South Africa, as elsewhere in the world, patriarchies (social systems of male dominance) prevail and women are subordinated despite their contributions to both economic and social life. Despite the South African Constitution’s attention to gender equality and a non-sexist society, inequality and the sexual exploitation of women continue, and often are not easily addressed by constitutional protections. For example, most recently, South Africa was ranked 20th in the World Economic Forum’s Gender Gap Index (Hausman et al., 2008). The index measures the size of the gender gap in 128 countries in four critical areas of inequality: political empowerment, economic participation, educational attainment, and health and survival. South Africa is the only African country to feature in the top 20. The Global Gender Gap Report praises South Africa, attributing the country’s firm position to its performance on such criteria as political empowerment, and to slight improvements in the participation of women in the labour market and a move to close the wage gap. However, the report also acknowledges that no country in the world has reached total equality between men and women in all spheres of life. Even in countries which have made the most progress, women remain generally dominant in the informal sectors and are, therefore, more subject to poverty. Thus, in

spite of the representation of women improving in the various institutions that constitute South African society, true gender equality continues to be elusive. This is due to such factors as the rural-urban divide, women's relatively poor access to and low levels of success in education and skills development, HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence, and low levels of access to the labour market presenting challenges particularly for women.

2.1. The negative impacts of natural disasters

One explanation for the vulnerability of African societies to poverty and hunger is the negative impacts of disasters (natural and political). De Haen and Hemrich (2007) argue that in order to mitigate disaster impact on poor population groups, development policy and disaster management need to become mutually supportive. Focusing on challenges that disasters pose to food security, their study proposes that in disaster-prone locations measures to improve disaster resilience should be an integral part of food security policies and strategies. Furthermore, the study expands the twin-track approach to hunger reduction to a "triple-track approach", giving due attention to cross-cutting disaster risk-management measures. Practical areas requiring more attention include risk information and analysis, land use planning, upgrading physical infrastructure, diversification and risk transfer mechanisms. Investments in reducing disaster risk will be most needed where both hazard risk and vulnerability are high. As agriculture is particularly vulnerable to disaster risk, measures to reduce this vulnerability (i.e. conserving agricultural lands and water and other assets) should be given greater weight in development strategies and food security policies (De Haen & Hemrich, 2007).

Perhaps also relevant are approaches that prioritise climate change, focused on environmental degradation which results in the further undermining of the food systems upon which food security is based. A major emphasis of research on climate change in relation to food security in recent years has been the agronomic aspects of climate change, particularly crop yield (cf. Ingram et al., 2008). In recent years, and given the enormity of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Southern Africa, the critical literature has investigated famines as factors compounding food insecurity, through what has come to be termed the New Variant Famine (NVF). The study by Van Riet (2007) suggests that analyses focus on the underlying processes driving vulnerability and not on specific instances of "famine" or crisis.

But how do the above factors (climate change, HIV/AIDS, famines, for example) explain the relatively high rates and levels of poverty and food insecurity, as well as the negative impacts thereof, among women and children?

2.2. The impact of social forces

In his study of forest management, gender and food security among the rural poor in Cameroon, Gbnetkom (2007) concludes that food security negatively correlates to forest resource depletion. His argument is that deforestation places major demands on women and children's time, and therefore limits children's opportunities to obtain an education and women's chances to undertake income-generation activities.

Quantitatively, there are significant differences, both in patterns of usage of the natural environment and in levels of food security, between households that have lost an adult and those that have not. The association between mortality and household use of local environmental

resources is further shaped by the gender of the deceased and the time elapsed since the death. A key conclusion is that the death of a male wage-earner affects household food security. Time allocation is affected, as resource collection responsibilities shift, and wild foods may substitute for previously purchased goods.

International organisations such as the FAO have recently initiated critical responses to the gap in policy regarding gender and food. Since the Rome Declaration (RD) in 1996, there has been a lack of clarity with regard to understanding women's rights, and especially women's rights to food, in relation to international conventions and declarations to which states have pledged themselves (see Rae, 2008). More specifically, with regard to the RD, the FAO (2001) identified gender mainstreaming as a gap in the RD in relation to food security, and initiated a process to: (1) improve FAO capacity to assist member states of the UN to achieve equitable and sustainable agricultural and rural development, by mainstreaming gender issues into operational activities of the RD; (2) establish objectives for achievement of measurable and realistic medium-term goals for gender mainstreaming. Some of the issues that have been prioritised in respect of gender for food security purposes are:

- gender roles and their relation to agriculture and food security;
- the context of globalisation;
- population dynamics (HIV/AIDS, rural-urban migration, rural ageing);
- increasing pressure on natural resources and their use;
- urban and peri-urban agriculture;
- disaster-related complex emergencies;
- information and communication technology.

2.3. Gender, race, class, rurality and food security

As is the case with other social challenges, gender interacts in insidious ways with other forms of identity, including race and geographical location, to negatively impact on individuals' and groups' levels of poverty and food insecurity. For example in South Africa, available literature indicates that poverty is negatively skewed against poor, African women, particularly those who reside in rural contexts. To illustrate the argument that poverty cannot be divorced from politics, a number of scholars have linked poverty in South Africa with apartheid policies which, they conclude, were responsible for disempowering individuals, households and selected race groups, especially those living in rural areas (see for example Van der Walt and Morolo, 1996: 137, 138). In this regard, May et al. (2000: 47, 48) reveal how the strategy of the introduction of homelands and the migrant labour system contributed to the unequal distribution of resources and to the negative skewing of poverty against African women in rural areas. Similarly, Wilson & Ramphele (1989: 193) detail the devastating impacts of the migrant labour system on family life, with male migrants living in closed compounds and women left to fend for the family in the rural reserves. Mubangizi and Mubangizi (2005, cited in Manik, 2008: 625) note that, years after the demise of apartheid, 'there is a close correlation between living standards and race in South Africa with poverty being concentrated

amongst the African population. Woolard (2002) for her part suggests that Africans account for 94–95% of the poor in South Africa. A 1998 newspaper report estimated that poverty reigned amongst female-headed households, at 60% in comparison with 31% for male-headed households.² Recent statistics discussed by Mubangizi and Mubangizi (2005) indicate that this figure has dropped to 48% of female-headed households. As such, while post-apartheid policies have targeted these past injustices, it is becoming abundantly clear that their negative impacts persist, and strategies aimed at addressing them will have to take cognisance of the very complex and insidious ways in which communities have been affected.

As stated above, the intersection of gender, race and class (and other forms of identity) impacts negatively on poverty amongst particular groups in South Africa. With regard to social class, for example, seven years ago Watkinson and Makgetla (2002) suggested that South Africa was facing a crisis in terms of food prices and security, citing the food price index as having risen to 176.7% in 2002. Using the example of maize meal prices, which had doubled in 2002, they asserted that maize meal prices have a severe impact on the working class, which spends more than a third of its earnings on food. The case of the ultra-poor is more poignant – they spend more than 50% of their earnings on food. This growing crisis appears to be reaching epic levels at present, with South Africans “battling to come to terms with the grim reality of food price inflation that has made the most staple items such as milk, bread, fresh vegetables and a small portion of meat a luxury for many”.³ The *Sunday Tribune News* article explains that a rural domestic worker, on her minimum salary of R1 097.40 per month, would spend 34.61% of the salary on food, as opposed to an assistant store manager who earns R3 542.93 and would spend 10.72% of her salary on food purchases. The article quotes Efficient Group economist Dawie Roodt as concluding that poor people spend more money on food than those more well-off. Furthermore, the “prices paid by consumers in low-income areas (informal settlements, townships and rural areas) are higher than in formal suburbs where large retail chain stores are available” (Watkinson & Makgetla, 2002).

Watkinson and Horton (2001) argue that the ultra-poor are rural households with more than half the members being pensioners, and where the household is supported by women. Hence the burden on women providing for their families in rural areas is greater. An increase in the spending of the ultra-poor on food translates into a higher consumer price index (CPI) for the poor as opposed to that for higher income groups. For example, the CPI in the year to June 2002 rose by between 11% and 14% for households earning below R2 030 per month, compared to 8% for the very high income group, and 9% for the overall CPI in metropolitan and other urban areas (Stats SA, 2002 cited in Watkinson & Makgetla, 2002).

The majority of households in South Africa are dependent on food retailers and industries for their daily food requirements, as opposed to approximately 600 000 households who farm to produce food for their own needs. Specifically, according to the September 2000 Labour Force Survey (Stats SA, 2000), “the percentage of households involved in farming for cash or food is highest in the lowest income category and then decreases steeply, from 39% of ultra-poor households, to 22% of

² “Experts find: Fight poverty, create jobs”, *The Citizen*, 13 June 1998: 5

³ “Sky high food prices”, *Sunday Tribune News*, 8 March 2009: 9

the poor, to 12%, 6% and 3% of the wealthiest income group”. Farming for the household’s own consumption in South Africa is a strategy adopted by poor rural households to save income. The Labour Force Survey reveals that the burden of subsistence production falls on women, young people and very old people.

Women are known to be responsible for food selection and food preparation, as well as for the care and feeding of children. In rural areas the availability of women’s time is also a key factor in the availability of water for hygiene, firewood collection and frequent feeding of small children. Since in many cases it is women who are mainly responsible for household agricultural production, any intervention that enables them to increase the productivity of their time spent on farming activities, and to spend less time on routine household tasks such as fetching water, firewood and groceries, is likely to be most effective in increasing agricultural output (HSRC, 2004).

Similarly, in some cases, peri-urban areas affected by problems of food security are in low-income and informal settlements. A study done by Van Averbeke (2007) found that in urban areas farming is often done mainly by middle-aged and elderly women. Furthermore, urban agriculture is limited to the production of crops in home gardens, open urban spaces and group gardens. Thus, interventions that promote urban agriculture should be geared especially to addressing the needs of women. Interventions may serve different functions to assist in socialisation and the building of social networks; this is extremely valuable for the women involved in these projects. The HSRC (2004) study points out that participation in small-plot agriculture is important to food security, with women taking major responsibility for it as one aspect of a multiple livelihood strategy.

2.4. The negative impacts of HIV/AIDS

In the era of HIV and AIDS it is also difficult to achieve food security because HIV/AIDS affects people’s ability to produce food, resulting in the reallocation and increase of household tasks, thereby increasing women’s workloads. Household members suffering from food insecurity and diseases typically care for and feed their children less, because of increased time spent on gathering food, fuel and water or feeling too weak and sick to do the necessary work (HSRC, 2004).

Hlanze et al. (2005), in a Swaziland study, point out that HIV/AIDS increases the nutritional demands in households, as HIV-positive household members require highly nutritious food to support an already weakened immune system. Clover (2003) also maintains that sub-Saharan Africa is the hardest hit region, with HIV/AIDS widespread. In regions where women participate in agricultural production, food security at both household and community level is being seriously threatened. A study in Malawi found that the impact of HIV/AIDS on food production depends on the patient’s gender. For example, if a male head of household is sick and later dies, available field labour is reduced, as family members are expected to take care of him and consequently less food and cash crops are produced. However, when a woman is sick and later dies the effect on male labour is not as great, as males are not caregivers (Thangata et al., 2007).

In South Africa, HIV/AIDS has also been noted to be one of the greatest hurdles facing communities, with more than 5.6 million people within the age group 20–45 affected (Oxfam, 2008). A consequence of gender inequality is that women are vulnerable in sexual relations and hence more prone to HIV infection than their male counterparts. Budlender (2002) contends that poverty, natural disasters, violence, social disruption and the disempowered status of most rural and peri-urban women in Southern Africa form a fertile environment for the transmission of HIV

infections. Budlender (2002) further explains that people infected with HIV are often unable to fulfil their work obligations and eventually lose their source of income. In addition, medical costs are burdensome for the individual and the household. There is also a clear link between the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and achieving adequate nutrition levels, with people needing to sell off their assets in order to pay for food and medication. Adequate and affordable nutrition is essential for HIV-infected individuals, including those who receive antiretroviral treatment. In this context, some epidemiologists have raised serious concerns about the level of harmful toxins found in common food products (Dutton, 2001). With women shouldering the burden of care in the context of AIDS (Oxfam, 2008), poverty and food insecurity tend to impact negatively on them more than on other groups in families and communities.

There is a significant link between poverty, violence and HIV/AIDS. For example, violence is a reality in the lives of women and girls in many households and communities. Lemke (2003) maintains that such a situation has dire consequences in terms of poverty, as children may lose their parents and become orphans in need of care and financial support. In other cases, extended kin take in orphans, which reduces the average available food resources in these households. This has led Watkinson and Makgetla (2002) to suggest special nutrition schemes for people with HIV and their families, and more effective welfare grants.

Writing in the context of communities affected by war in north and north-eastern regions of Uganda, Bukuluki et al. (2007–2008) maintain that there is a close relationship between food and nutritional security and high HIV/AIDS prevalence. They state that women and female children are particularly susceptible, as gender relations dictate the interaction between food insecurity and HIV/AIDS. The authors note the limited research done on the influence of conflict and displacement on gender relations and food insecurity and how this can run the risk of HIV infection. They further comment on the inability of Uganda's policies and programmes to address this, and embark on a study of 403 households in 8 camps to motivate for policy changes.

So, what have been the policy interventions targeting gender and food insecurity? The next section of the paper addresses this question.

3. The policy context

Local policies that inform interventions targeting poverty generally, and food security specifically, in South Africa are influenced by policies at the regional and global level. These are discussed in the subsections below.

3.1. The international policy context

At the global level, the World Food Summit held in Rome, Italy, on 13–17 November 1996, resulted in the formulation of the Rome Declaration on World Food Security⁴ to which South Africa pledged support. Organised under the auspices of the FAO, the gathering brought together approximately 185 heads of state and government and their representatives, to take stock of the challenges of food insecurity and the commitments of national governments to “achieving food security for all and to an ongoing effort to eradicate hunger in all countries, with an immediate view to reducing the number of undernourished people to half their present level no later than 2015”. The central problem identified was that problems of hunger and food insecurity have global dimensions and are likely to persist, and even increase, unless *dramatic* action is taken. The RD redefined food security as “food that is available at all times, that all persons have means of access to..., that ... is nutritionally adequate in terms of quantity, quality and variety and ... is acceptable within the given culture”.

Indicators of the challenge to food security, motivated by the declaration, refer to:

- inadequate access of food supplies despite the substantial increase in food supplies;
- inadequacy of household and national incomes to purchase food;
- instability of supply and demand;
- natural and man-made disasters;
- conflict and terrorism;
- corruption;
- environmental degradation;
- poverty.

Accordingly, the declaration suggests that a peaceful, stable and enabling socio-political environment is the bedrock for enabling nation states to give priority to food security and poverty eradication. Such stability, an essential ingredient for sustainable development and food security, is

⁴ All references are to the 1996 Rome Declaration on World Food Security and World Summit Plan of Action (abbreviated as RD), accessed 18 December 2008, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/w3613e/w3613e00.htm>.

dependent on solid democracy, as well as on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to equality and participation for both men and women, boys and girls.

To facilitate achievement of its targets, the RD is underpinned by a call to action and for states to adopt policies that facilitate employment and income generation, the promotion of equitable access to productive and financial resources, and overall sustainable development.

The RD recognises the multifaceted character of food security, and that effective international efforts are required to supplement and reinforce national action. To this end, a number of commitments were identified, to be undertaken nationally and internationally, including:

- ensuring political, social and economic stability to create the best conditions for the eradication of poverty and for durable peace, based on the full participation of men and women to achieve sustainable food security;
- the implementation of policies targeting the eradication of poverty and inequality to improve physical and economic access by all;
- pursuing participatory and sustainable food, agriculture, fisheries, forestry and rural development policies and practices in high- and low-potential areas, which are essential to adequate and reliable food supplies at the household, national, regional and global levels that combat pests, drought and desertification;
- ensuring that food, agricultural trade and overall trade policies are conducive to fostering food security through an equitable and market-oriented world trade system;
- ensuring prevention of and preparedness for natural disasters and socially induced emergencies and to meet transitory and emergency food requirements in ways that foster recovery, rehabilitation, and development;
- promoting optimal allocation and use of private and public investments to foster human resources, sustainable food, agriculture, fisheries and forestry systems, and rural development in high- and low-potential areas;
- implementing and monitoring a Plan of Action at all levels, in cooperation with the international community.

These commitments were translated into objectives and action plans in the form of the Special Programme for Food Security (SPFS). The SPFS Plan of Action was reviewed in Rome in 2003 (5–9 May) and this process highlighted several gaps that had become evident since the implementation of the RD.⁵ These included:

- widespread misconceptions about the SPFS;
- lack of systematic impact assessment;

⁵ See “Summary of Actions Taken to Respond to Recommendations of the Independent External Evaluation”, <http://www.fao.org/Docrep/meeting/0006/y8966e.htm>, accessed 18 December 2008.

- insufficient systematic oversight of national SPFS projects;
- weaknesses in constraints analysis;
- insufficient application of participative approaches in SPFS design implementation;
- limited impact on national policies for food security;
- lack of clarity on scaling-up processes;
- insufficient targeting.

One explanation for these gaps may lie in the conspicuous absence of any particular reference to interventions targeting gender inequality or improving the status of women as a strategy for addressing food insecurity. Without such a focus, the root causes of food insecurity may not be understood and interventions may miss the mark in terms of their orientation and goals.

As a response to the RD, the South African government appointed a Food Security Working Group to investigate options for achieving food security in South Africa. The Integrated Food Security Strategy (IFSS) builds on the proposals made in a 1997 *Discussion Document on Food Security* (Department of Agriculture and Land Affairs, 1997); we return to this later in this section. Furthermore, the RD was reinforced a few years later by the Millennium Declaration on Millennium Development Goal One (MDG-1) which aims to halve the proportion of people suffering from both poverty and hunger by 2015. The MDGs have measurable targets that collectively aim to make definite improvements in the lives of the world's poor, and require coordinated action. An emphasis on the elimination of hunger, poverty, and maternal and child mortality requires an emphasis on promoting healthy, productive individuals.

Through MDG-1 the MDGs have committed signatory nation states, South Africa included, to ensuring among other things the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, and specifically, by 2015, to achieving three targets. Target 1 aims to “halve the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day”. Target 2 is to “achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people”. Target 3 is to “halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger”. Complementing MDG-1 are seven other MDGs that also seek to improve the lives of communities across the globe. Among these are MDG-3, aimed at improving gender equality, and MDG-5, aimed at improving maternal health. As is evident from the preceding discussion, food insecurity is one of the greatest obstacles facing the Southern African Development Community (SADC), as all member countries, including South Africa, have populations experiencing malnutrition and famine. Key among interventions aimed at addressing this challenge are policies and programmes targeting food production and costs. While such policies are necessary, reports suggest that they tend to inhibit the very activities they target. This is illustrated by a report on the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) council meeting in Rome in February 2009, which identified food insecurity and rocketing food prices as a function of two factors: food production, and the cost of fuel and other sources of energy.⁶ Furthermore, the report referred to comments by agricultural experts that high oil prices, lack of investment in agriculture, unfair trade policies and inequitable distribution of produce were responsible

⁶ K Palitza, “Food for thought”, *Mail & Guardian*, 27 February–5 March 2009

for the present downward trend in food security. The head of the FAO, Dr J. Schmidhuber, was reported to have said that the energy market dictates the price of agricultural produce, and that the cost of energy to produce and transport food adds to the price of the produce; hence food prices are directly correlated with the global price of oil.

According to the report, the IFAD council meeting concluded that while increases in agricultural production had taken place in developed countries, levels of agricultural production in developing countries had risen by less than 1%. However, the value of agriculture to countries in Southern Africa is significant, given that it accounts for one-third of the region's gross national product and 20% of total foreign exchange earnings. In this regard, Laurent Thomas, director of the emergency operations and rehabilitation division of the FAO, suggests that small-scale farmers and livestock owners require support in order to address the food crisis (FAO, 2008). Ides de Willebois, director of the International Fund for Agricultural Development - East and Southern Africa (IFAD) believes that African governments have hindered development in agriculture by imposing export taxes and restrictions, and introducing import subsidies. He suggests that Southern African countries are at fault, because by not reinvesting sufficiently in agriculture, they only utilise 4% of their agricultural GDP while other countries invest as much as 10% (IFAD, 2007). Specifically, such policies do not seem to target gender inequality, and as such are ineffective in addressing the challenges faced by the most vulnerable groups in society: women and children.

Within this context, regional policies and treaties have been developed that address the specific local contexts and aim to ensure closer monitoring and evaluation of member states' progress towards achieving these targets. For example SADC, of which South Africa is a member, has put in place a policy framework that takes gender and gender equality as key to effective development interventions in the region. Adopted by member states in 1997, the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development notes gender equality as a fundamental human right, and the "integration and mainstreaming of gender issues into the SADC Programme of Action and Community Building Initiative [as] key to the sustainable development of the SADC region" ([SADC, 1997]: 1). The latter is further confirmed in the Draft SADC Protocol on Gender and Development ([author], 2008). While neither of these policy documents directly addresses food security/insecurity, the latter commits member states to developing "social safety nets", or measures to mitigate the effects of poverty, gender-based violence and other social ills. Arguably, food insecurity falls among these, and its gendered aspects need to be considered if individuals and groups are to benefit from interventions targeting sustainable development.

Drawing on this fertile policy framework in the region, individual member states have developed and implemented contextually specific policies and other interventions to mitigate the negative impacts of poverty more generally, and of food insecurity specifically. According to Bukuluki et al. (2007–2008), Uganda's national planning framework, the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), recognises AIDS and gender as cross-cutting issues in the eradication of poverty. The authors comment that while the "PEAP proposes actions to reduce gender inequality" by "improving access" for women to "agriculture extension services" it "does not propose concrete proposals to boost food security in IDP camps" (Bukuluki et al., 2007–2008: 1).

In a similar vein, the Uganda AIDS Commission contains guidelines on responses to AIDS, but there is an absence of discussion on food security. Bukuluki et al. (2007–2008) express surprise that the relationship between food security, gender and HIV/AIDS is overlooked. Furthermore, Uganda's National Antiretroviral Therapy Policy displays recognition of the importance of nutrition

for people living with HIV, but again there are no distinct guidelines on integrating nutrition and food security into antiretroviral therapy programmes. This is despite evidence that “women and girls were adopting behaviours and livelihood strategies such as transactional sex for money, food, and other basic necessities” (Bukuluki et al., 2007–2008: 2). The authors conclude that there is a lack of national policies in respect of internally displaced people as a vulnerable group, and suggest a host of policy interventions to link gender, food security and HIV/AIDS. These include, among other things, strengthening existing policies through:

- *Developing comprehensive guidelines with clear indicators for addressing linkage between gender issues, food insecurity, and AIDS;*
- *Improving coordination and integration of services addressing AIDS and food security and gender-based sexual violence in conflict-affected settings;*
- *Special targeting of the most vulnerable households, especially those with the elderly, chronically sick (living with HIV), orphans, and the disabled;*
- *Using gender as a conceptual lens to integrate HIV prevention programs with poverty/livelihood security interventions rather than have them as stand alone;*
- *Conceptualizing food security as an HIV prevention intervention rather than only a social support intervention;*
- *Developing HIV policies and programs that adequately address critical issues linked to access of HIV-infected mothers to alternative feeding of their babies; and*
- *Integrating gender analysis into policy/program development and implementation in IDP settings. (Bukuluki et al., 2007–2008: 2)*

What is the nature of the policy framework aimed at addressing poverty and food security in South Africa? This is examined in the next section.

3.2. The South African policy context

In South Africa there has been a consistent concern within government policy formulation about the connection between gender (as a social force which shapes the roles of men and women differently), gender inequalities (in terms of an analysis of power relations between women and men in specific contexts), and poverty. Based on this, current debates and discussions on inequalities and policy strategies disclose a complex set of questions about how gender dynamics are integrated into the design of programmes targeting women, and how they are understood as central to the economic and social deprivation experienced by millions of South Africans. Evidence shows that access to electricity, sanitation, water and housing has improved for the general population, but life expectancy has reduced (Dorrington & Tootla, 2007; Seekings & Nattrass, 2005). To this can be added evidence from the Report of the Committee of Inquiry into a Comprehensive System of Social Security for South Africa (CICSSSA, 2002: 19), which indicates that unemployment is at 29% for the total population but at 36.4% for African women. While more money is going into social spending than before, the degree of inequality between the well resourced and those living under

conditions of poverty is growing: measurements of inequality were higher in 2007 than they had been in 1994 (The Presidency, 2008a).

Informed by the international policy framework, the South Africa policy interventions that target poverty more generally, and food security specifically, are guided principally by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996). In his inaugural speech as President, Nelson Mandela made clear the national commitment to gender equality:

It is vitally important that all structures of government, including the President himself, should understand this fully: that freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression. (Mandela, 1994)

With regard to gender equality the South African policy context is informed by the document formally titled *South Africa's National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality*, and more commonly known as the Gender Policy Framework (Office of the Status of Women, 2009). Guided by “a vision of human rights which incorporates acceptance of equal and inalienable rights of all women and men” (Office of the Status of Women, 2009) the country has defined goals and identified steps to be taken towards the achievement of gender equality, an ideal that is a fundamental tenet under the Bill of Rights that forms part of the Constitution.

In terms of its vision, the Gender Policy Framework seeks “a society in which women and men are able to realise their full potential and to participate as equal partners in creating a just and prosperous society for all. The vision is that of gender equality” (Office of the Status of Women, 2009:40). As such, the framework offers guidelines for interaction among individuals and groups as well as for developing gender equality interventions in organisations and institutions. It proposes and recommends an institutional framework that facilitates equal access to goods and services for both women and men. It seeks to address such challenges as unequal gender relations, poverty, access to basic resources, access to employment, violence against women and access to land. The framework advances several guidelines and principles for integrating gender concerns into interventions aimed at transforming communities. Among others, these include ensuring that:

- *there is equality of all persons and that non-sexism and non-racism be enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa;*
- *there is an understanding that women are not a homogenous group. This principle must inform all policies and programmes that will lead to the implementation of Gender equality. Distinctions according to race, class, sexuality, disability, age and other variables should not be overlooked or taken for granted. However, similarities should also be used to strengthen initiatives designed to reverse past gender discrimination;*
- *women's rights be seen as human rights;*
- *customary, cultural and religious practices be subject to the right to equality;*
- *economic empowerment of women be promoted; and*

- *serious attention be placed on [sic] changing policies and practices which have hitherto hindered women's access to basic needs, the economy and decision making (Office of the Status of Women, 2009: vi–vii)*

Obviously, the Gender Policy Framework is intended to inform and permeate all other policies developed in South Africa, including those targeting poverty and food security. This is premised on the notion that the right of access to sufficient food is enshrined in section 27 of the South African Constitution, indicating that every citizen has a right to sufficient food and that “the state must by legislation and other measures, within its available resources, avail to progressive realisation of the right to sufficient food”. The RDP programme of 1994 also identified food security as a priority policy objective, DoA (2002). An immediate spinoff of such policy was increased social spending by the state in various spheres of government (school feeding schemes, child support grants, free health services for children between 0 and 6 years and for pregnant and lactating women, pension funds for the elderly, access to water, and community public works programmes). Additionally, community food garden initiatives such as Kgora and Xosihindlala, land reform and farmer settlement, loan schemes for small farmers, infrastructural support and a presidential tractor mechanisation scheme were initiated.

Encompassing these, as mentioned previously, is the IFSS initiated in 2002. The national food security strategy resulted from a policy review by the state in 2002 in order to better coordinate existing state programmes; the review led to a Cabinet decision to formulate a strategy to streamline, harmonise and integrate various programmes into what is now known as the IFSS, coordinated by the Department of Agriculture (DoA, 2002).

The grand vision of the IFSS (DoA, 2002: 13) is to achieve universal physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food by all South Africans; it is underpinned by a set of key objectives that address identified gaps and problems, in order to:

- increase household food production and trading;
- improve income generation and job creation opportunities;
- improve nutrition and food safety;
- increase safety nets and food emergency management systems;
- improve analysis and information management systems;
- provide capacity-building mechanisms;
- hold stakeholder dialogues.

The IFSS identifies key trends in food security challenges in South Africa, shaped by two inter-related dimensions (DoA, 2002: 19). First is the urgency of maintaining and increasing the ability of the country to meet its national food requirements, through use of domestic agricultural resources and importation of food items that cannot be produced efficiently. Second is the need to eradicate inequalities and grinding poverty among the majority of households (fuelled by inadequate and unstable food supplies, lack of purchasing power, weak institutional support networks, poor nutrition, inadequate safety nets, weak emergency management systems and unemployment).

As stated above, the vision of the IFSS is to “attain universal physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food by all South Africans at all times to meet their dietary and

food preferences for an active and healthy life” (DoA, 2002: 13). The IFSS is premised on the fact that “food security is part of the section 27 Constitutional rights in South Africa” and that “[in relation to] these rights, the Constitution states that every citizen has the right to have access to sufficient food and water”, and that “the state must by legislation and other measures, within its available resources, avail to progressive realisation of the right to sufficient food”.

Given the enormity of the tasks, the IFSS (DoA, 2002: 27–32) has identified a number of priority areas that include policy interventions as summarised below:

- **Improve household food production, trade and distribution** (policy intervention targets access to resources such as land, technology, credit and training; promotion of irrigation and rainwater harnessing technologies; improving access to credit by the poor, *including women*; improving access to food production and food processing technologies, *particularly technologies for women*; enhancing the ownership and exchange entitlement of the poor in the trade of agriculture and food sectors; improving household food security by commercialising agriculture to increase income and employment generation among food-insecure households).
- **Increase income and job opportunities** (policy interventions support job creation through local economic development; strengthening off-farm income generation; supporting skills training).
- **Improve nutrition and food safety** (policy interventions include public education; *support for targeted interventions (e.g. micronutrients, vitamin supplements) for the chronically vulnerable groups*).
- **Enhance safety nets and food emergency management systems** (policy interventions include the creation of cost-recovery programmes when services are provided by the private sector; strengthening the coordination and management of emergency relief operations at national and provincial levels; compiling baseline information to assess the food insecurity and vulnerability situation of the country).

To achieve some of these goals the IFSS has identified a number of structures or units to support national and local initiatives that will work with a Ministers’ Social Cluster made up of the following units: National Coordination, Provincial Coordination, District Food Security Officers, Local Food Security Action Groups (DoA, 2002: 33–36). The implementation plan is designed around a broad-based integrated approach to address food security problems at household and national levels, monitor and evaluate, and provide support to institutional and organisational development.

Despite the ambitious vision outlined in the IFSS, policy response in South Africa still has some limitations. Evaluation of the community-based public works programme indicates that it has been well targeted, employing predominantly Africans and a high proportion of women, and reaches the poor in rural areas (Department of Agriculture and Land Affairs, 1997). However, the off-farm income-earning opportunities should be strengthened; for example, specific public works programme service options for women should be made available, such as day-mothering or running soup kitchens, and should be used to complement public works with employment opportunities which also have positive externalities and which are more likely to be ongoing (HSRC, 2004).

As elaborated in the IFSS (DoA, 2002) the South African government aims at increasing social spending on such programmes as school feeding schemes, child support grants and others. Although some of them are doing well, there is still a need for monitoring and evaluation of these programmes because some of them do not cover food concerns or ensure food security for

individuals. A further influence on the success of programmes is escalating food prices, which also hamper vulnerable households. As Hendriks (2005) points, out food insecurity is likely to increase with rising food prices, increased reliance on cash food purchases, and the erosion of household coping strategies due to the impact of HIV/AIDS.

In terms of gender inequality, while the vision of the IFSS reflects noble intentions, it also reflects a gap in relation to the role played by gender in ensuring such access. On the one hand, the IFSS (2008: 16) acknowledges that “within the household, food insecurity often affects the more vulnerable members of the family, namely children and women” and that the “costs associated with food-insecurity at the intra-household level relate to slow educational development (often of female children), stunting, etcetera”. On the other hand, the programmatic and policy interventions it recommends do not particularly use gender as a tool for analysis and development. For example, while the IFSS recommends improving household food production, trade and distribution, the policy interventions it suggests are generic in nature, and do not take into consideration the complex ways in which gender, together with race and class and other social identities, interact to impact on women’s (and girl-children’s) access to safe and nutritional food in households and communities; as such, they do not outline ways in which programmes might address the challenges created by gender inequality in food production, distribution and access. In addition, while it refers to universal access to resources and to the need to eradicate inequalities, unless the gender dimension is explicitly spelled out and a clear link is made to the Gender Policy Framework, these concerns cannot be assumed to include addressing gender inequality.

To illustrate, in the Strategic Plan for South African Agriculture (DoA, 2001), the list of aims includes food security and employment creation, but no link to gender is made despite the fact that women constitute 51% of the population. In addition, Watkinson and Makgetla (2002) conclude that the process of deregulation and liberalisation in the past decade has been too rapid. According to them, many farmers have limited capacity to adjust to such rapid policy and market changes. Furthermore, greater exposure to international competition has negatively affected their competitiveness, causing many farmers to leave the industry. In this much more competitive and open economy, small farming systems are also failing or finding it hard to become part of mainstream agriculture. Strangely, the document fails to provide strategies to address issues such as encouraging women to adopt small-scale farming methods, which will be at the heart of community development. After all, poverty and underdevelopment dominate rural areas, and as women as the main agricultural producers are often ignored (Watkinson & Makgetla, 2002. Poverty eradication that provides them with basic training in agricultural production, for example, should be central in interventions targeting food insecurity.

As suggested in the sections above, ultimately the decline in agricultural food production will affect achievement of the MDGs. The South African Human Rights Commission intended holding hearings to ascertain why so many South Africans are trapped in poverty, after research suggested that there had been an increase in the levels of poverty and inequality in the last ten years. These hearings would have indicated whether or not South Africa was making any progress towards

meeting the MDGs. Unfortunately, the hearings were cancelled due to a “lack of response from state organs”.⁷

The critical challenge for policy review is to foreground the daily struggles of ordinary people for basic resources and to ask questions about *how* the social relationships and realities of everyday experience match the policy promise around broad development, in this case food security (this is an overarching argument that is not fully elaborated in this literature review).

⁷ “Government silent on Millennium Development Goals”, *Mail & Guardian*, 6–12 March 2009: 39

4. Some theoretical approaches

As discussed in the sections above, it is now common knowledge that poverty and its impacts tend to be negatively skewed against women. One explanation for this lies in the dominant socio-cultural norms in society. For example, in any society, social norms tend to influence men's and women's work and, in particular, the gender division of labour in families, communities, and consequently in the allocation of rights and responsibilities among the two sexes. Starting from the family and extending into the workplace and society more broadly, certain tasks are considered more appropriate for men or women. This often means that women's responsibilities revolve around the home, while men are expected to go out to work. Women, therefore, tend to be excluded from a range of jobs and positions, particularly those considered to be appropriate for men. Furthermore, as a consequence of these socially ascribed roles and responsibilities for men and women, motherhood in particular tends to limit women's access to the labour market and to progression within industry. It results in women leaving the labour market more frequently, as well as in lack of progression and skills development, leaving them prone to poverty and the consequences thereof.

In South Africa, post-apartheid policies have consistently targeted gender inequality and have sought to increase women's access to positions in various spheres of society, including the labour market. However, inequalities persist and their impacts continue to be gendered in that they are negatively skewed against women and children, particularly girl-children. Available literature suggests that explanations for these trends derive from theoretical perspectives (mostly gender and feminist theories) as well as from evidence gathered through empirical research.

In relation to food security and poverty, it is necessary to examine what so effectively maintains male domination and privilege. Policy and social science arguments have generally tended to focus on food supply, with the assumption being that hunger is simply an effect of scarcity of supply. Increasing food supply, stimulating economic growth and expanding food markets are assumed to result in a trickle-down effect to reach more vulnerable populations such as women and children (Leathers & Foster, 2004: 67; Quinn & Kennedy, 1994). This view often neglects the impacts of the dominant socio-cultural norms which exclude women from decision-making within the home and society, including involvement in decisions about how available resources are utilised. Taking this into account are approaches which point to questions of entitlement, for example, during periods of famine, explaining that the problem is the differential access to scarce resources and power (Drèze & Sen, 1989; Drèze et al., 1995; Kent, 2005; Sen, 1981, 1999). Earlier formulations of entitlement theory (Drèze & Sen, 1989; Sen, 1981) focused attention on access to marketable skills and economic assets (e.g. tools, human capital and land). Poverty underpinned the gap. In recent work Sen (1999) has focused attention on political rights, access to health care, and gender equity. The assumption is that if the hungry have access to power and resources, hunger will be alleviated. This, however, neglects the unequal power dynamics involved in decision-making regarding how food is used, and for whose benefit, once it is accessed.

Another strand in food policy arguments focuses on the "military famine" thesis, which traces food insecurity and famine to the power of the military (see Cheatham, 1994; De Soysa & Gleditsch, 1999). Studies verify that military spending, arms imports and armed conflict contribute to hunger (Scanlon, 2003) and reduced access to safe water (Carlton-Ford, 2005). The critical literature suggests that hunger and famine, and by extension, food security, are not necessarily an isolated

problem but also an international security issue, as effects of inter-state and internal war. Also evident are postmodern conceptualisations and modernist interpretations to food security that maintain that, while studies give attention to issues of perception and local knowledge in food outcomes, such studies have yet to engage in a systematic discussion of the role played by society in food outcomes (see Carr, 2006 for a discussion of why a theory of the social is preferred to lend broad, cross-contextual coherence to a study of food security).

5. Implications for programmatic and policy interventions

As illustrated by the preceding discussion, the stark absence of gender as a specific focus in the South African policy documents, in spite of the existence of a strong Gender Policy Framework (fleeting references are made to vulnerable populations such as children and women but these concerns are never fully integrated into explicit policy interventions), highlights a gap in the policy framework on food security.

Available research literature, although scant, engages more rigorously with gender in relation to food (see for example Budlender, 2002; Bukuluki et al., 2007–2008; Lemke, 2003). In these studies, gender is identified as an important factor in food insecurity because the latter's impacts on women and men differ markedly.

Programmes targeting female-headed households can help improve their access to food in times of illness and after the death of their spouse. In his Zambian study Kapungwe (2005) recommends that gender concerns should be among the key issues to be considered in planning, implementing and monitoring and evaluating intervention policies and programmes intended for improving household food security. Furthermore, policies that will ensure the mainstreaming of gender concerns in all interventions against food insecurity and poverty are much needed. Oniang'o (2005) argues that there is a need for legislation that will increase access to and ownership of resources, including credit for women, as well as services designed to target specific issues that face women and to address inequities. This section of the paper identifies some implications of the preceding discussion on policy and practice that target food insecurity in South Africa.

Based on a preliminary review of some factors (theoretical approaches, policy context) and gendered insights, it is reasonable to conclude that the full impact of the gender dimension of food insecurity has not been fully interrogated, both in terms of the policy framework and in the scientific literature.

Food is maintained to be key to wellbeing (FAO, 2002), as a core human right (Kent, 2005) and as a core factor of human development (World Bank, 2006) and crucial to stable international relations (Bryant & Kappaz, 2005). In this literature review, gender has been indexed as a factor central to meaningful food security policy and research. The value of gender equality in securing and maintaining sustainable development is not in dispute. Its significance in interventions that aim to reduce hunger, and by extension poverty, has been emphasised in several studies that highlight gender in different regions, for example, Africa (Das & Laub, 2005; Kerr, 2005) and West Asia (Abdelali-Martini et al., 2008).

A Status Report of the Integrated Food Security and Nutrition Task Team (IFSNTT) in 2006 (see DoA, 2006) provided a review of the IFSS, and the gaps identified are cause for concern. Identified challenges refer to institutional arrangements (such as slow programme integration; contested meanings of food security amongst stakeholders; and lack of institutional arrangements for the implementation of IFSS at provincial, district and local level). Over and above the institutional problems, the DoA (2006) review identified a number of challenges, some of which are identified in the DoA (2002) IFSS:

- an increasing number of food emergencies, resulting in an increase of dependency on direct food distribution;
- limited access to safe drinking water and poor sanitation increasing the occurrence of chronic diseases;
- increasing occurrence of HIV/AIDS aggravating vulnerability and food insecurity;
- illiteracy and low levels of education leading to a low level of awareness and access to information, as well as slow adoption of technology;
- poor transport infrastructure limiting access to support services and markets;
- sometimes limited access to sources of energy (especially electricity);
- general poverty leading to insecurity, discouraging small-scale farmers from investing.

In the DOA (2006) review no mention is made of the gendered dimension of food security, but rather a generic review is provided. Similarly, a gender-blind report commissioned by the Office of the Presidency (The Presidency, 2008b) paints an even more alarming picture of possible failures of the IFSS, explaining that “despite interventions, there are signs that there is increasing food insecurity in specific places, largely poverty nodes in both rural and urban contexts, related to increasing unemployment, food price increases, HIV/AIDS, poor quality diets, adverse environmental conditions, and poverty in general”. The tenor of the report suggests that the intention of the IFSS to be integrative has not been realised, indicating that “a more integrated poverty reduction strategy” should create “positive synergies between social welfare measures on the one hand, and economic growth policies on the other”. Gaps and problems identified in the food security framework espoused by the IFSS result in findings against policy-specific goals, and further recommendations to 2019. Some of the findings are:

- *Prospects for future employment opportunities are encouraging (employment growth of 3% vs population growth of < 1%) but jobs are not being created in sectors where the majority of the poor will find employment.*
- *Successes of AsgiSA are central to the higher rates of food security.*
- *A lack of pro-poor focus economic growth will increase prevailing inequalities.*
- *Food price volatility and HIV/AIDS is [sic] negatively impacting on the poor.*
- *Chronic, structural food insecurity is prevalent.*
- *Despite its role in regional and national food availability (including food pricing), agriculture plays a small role in South Africa's economy. Agriculture however plays an important supplementary role in household food availability in the former homelands.*
- *Engagement in agriculture fluctuates due to constraints (such as inappropriate technologies, expensive inputs, HIV/AIDS, pressure on water supplies and climate change). Smallholders are also excluded from value chains and supply lines.*
- *Insufficient micronutrient consumption compromises diet and growth.*

- *Subsistence agriculture and small enterprises require more support.*
- *Food security should be integrated into government's integrated anti-poverty strategy that includes social grants, employment, agricultural policy, etc.*
- *The existing IFSS is promising but currently failing, in part due to a weak line of authority by the Department of Agriculture to implement the IFSS (the latter requires centralisation).*
- *The IFSS requires greater funding and greater participation by civil society with the recognition that food security is a human right.*
- *Greater monitoring and evaluation of food insecurity is required.*
- *Food prices and other inflationary issues are drivers of food insecurity. (The Presidency, 2008b)*

Flowing from the findings, the report identifies four recommendations to honour constitutional commitments within the context of the current institutional framework:

- *Pursue to develop an integrated policy framework for poverty reduction in South Africa that promotes greater cohesion to address: (1) pro-poor economic growth to achieve food security by strengthening employment and effective service delivery by the State; (2) affordable and sustainable social protection measures (particularly social grants) as safety nets against hunger.*
- *Actively encourage agricultural development and allied non-farm enterprises to promote livelihoods of those on the periphery of the formal economy.*
- *Strengthen and alter the institutional arrangements of the IFSS to transform it into a more enabling structure for state and non-state actors to address the overarching poverty reduction strategy.*
- *Establish a well coordinated and well managed monitoring and evaluation and information system for food security. (The Presidency, 2008b: 65)*

Despite overwhelming generic literature on food security there is little empirical and qualitative research addressing the political, social and gendered factors that affect food insecurity in South Africa. The gap in knowledge implies that women's status is central to achieving sustainable food security. Although freedom from hunger receives much attention as a fundamental human right (Kent, 2005), the effects of gender equity, through political and social rights, on food security receive scant attention. Additional research on food security and its links to gendered development should be pursued in order to explicate the policy gap in dealing with how "food insecurity" relates to the complexities of the gendered divide, beyond a policy identification of women and children as a vulnerable group. As mentioned in the opening paragraph of this review, patriarchies prevail, because male dominance is sexual. Firstly, because men sexualise hierarchy; patriarchy is one important system through which social realities such as rape, sexual harassment, and sexual abuse of children operate. These practices express and actualise the distinctive power of men over women. This approach identifies not just sexuality itself as the dynamic of the inequality of the sexes. It is also argued that sexual difference is a function of sexual domination (cf Butler, 1990).

Secondly, male dominance appears to exist cross-culturally, if in locally particular forms. To explain gender inequality in terms of “sexual politics” is to promote not only a political theory of the sexual that defines gender but also a sexual theory of the political to which gender is fundamental. In this context, the question of food security in its appropriate gendered dimension must be subject to the full spectrum of roles, responsibilities and social forces that shape the unequal distribution of resources, access and availability of food for women and children.

It is also noticeable that within the policy arguments in South Africa, and in the scientific literature, critical domains affecting food security (such as natural disasters, education, poverty, unemployment, ageing, technology, etc.) have also overlooked other domains within agricultural production. An example is the biopolitics within the food debate; the politics around contemporary biology’s genetic manipulation/modification of life forms (plant, animal, human) is also fast becoming an issue of global concern. Indeed, as emerging research is demonstrating, such issues are profoundly gendered as they impact on the lives of men and women living in the South (cf. Shiva, 1988, 2001). Of related concern, in the era of genetically modified foods, are questions of public health risks and responsibilities and of information provided to the public in the form of food labelling (i.e. keeping people informed about potential health risks).

In summation, a gendered assessment of food security cannot take place without recourse to its multidimensional nature. In the South African context, indications are that food security is increasingly becoming aligned to the core problem of poverty (itself a social problem of a multifaceted nature).

6. Conclusion

Based on the preceding review of theoretical and critical approaches to the issue of food security, it is reasonable to conclude that the impact of the gender dimension on food insecurity has not been fully interrogated, both in terms of the policy framework and in the critical literature. An understanding of gender as a factor in food security demonstrates that food insecurity is a multidimensional issue, i.e. it is shaped by poverty, resources, environment, disease, natural disasters and political context. This literature review has identified the value and efficacy of a gender lens in understanding why food security is a gendered issue. It is gendered because food is both a human and a social issue that concerns the wellbeing of a population, and men and women are socially and culturally defined by their social roles in relation to producing, accessing and consuming food.

The international and South African policy context demonstrates a genuine bias toward prioritising gender in combating food insecurity. In the local context a broad suite of instruments exists (in the Constitution and the IFSS) but there appears to be a gap between the policy's promise and its implementation.

The scientific literature on food security is equally fairly generic, and scant attention is given to creating a fuller picture of the gendered dimension of food insecurity. The literature reviewed suggests that there are indeed gaps in the availability of disaggregated data on women and men in respect of food insecurity. Additionally, there is a knowledge gap as to how food security fully impacts on the social roles of men and women. Meaningful future studies should assess how the "voices" of women and men affected by food insecurity could be incorporated into quantitative and qualitative studies to demonstrate what can be learned from "experience" to target interventions.

A key conclusion is that a gendered lens through which to examine questions of food security is able to provide a more integrated understanding of the gendered nature of food insecurity. Such a lens is therefore crucial to understanding how policy works, whether programmes are focused, and whether the scientific literature should pay more attention to this underdeveloped area of inquiry.

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