

FIGHTING FOOD INSECURITY, HUNGER, AND POVERTY: THE CONTENT AND CONTEXT OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC RIGHT OF ACCESS TO SUFFICIENT FOOD IN SOUTH AFRICA

Duduzile G Mbajjorgu

LLB LLM LLD

*Senior Lecturer, School of Law, Faculty of
Management and Law, University of Limpopo*

Kola O Odeku

LLB LLM MBA LLD

*Professor, School of Law, Faculty of
Management and Law, University of Limpopo*

SUMMARY

Poverty, lack of access to food, low income, hunger, unemployment and malnutrition are all interrelated because they undermine fundamental human rights and are a blatant affront to human dignity and section 27 of the South African Constitution. These factors have a direct impact on the realisation of the right to have access to sufficient food and poverty alleviation. Against this backdrop, this article examines major causes of food insecurity in South African rural households. Using an in-depth analysis of literature, previous studies, government reports, and policies aimed at poverty alleviation, this article examines some of the various poverty-alleviation strategies that the government has adopted in promoting rural food security. In this instance, the importance of social grants and land-based livelihood strategies – specifically subsistence farming – are analysed to determine the extent to which these strategies promote household food security and combat poverty and hunger in rural households.

1 INTRODUCTION

South Africa, a developing country, has a high poverty rate. The Poverty Trends Report, 2017, revealed that an estimated 30.3 million people in South Africa live below the Upper Bound Poverty Line (UBPL), with almost two-thirds (64.2 per cent) of the black African population living below the

UBPL.¹ Of note, poverty is linked with being food insecure and hungry, and with rural households and female-headed households.² The General Household Survey of 2019 (GHS 2019)³ indicates that rural households were largely dependent on social grants as their main source of income.⁴ The 2020 report, “Child Poverty in South Africa: A Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis”, showed that children in rural provinces were multidimensionally poor, and thus more susceptible to experiencing food insecurity.⁵ Evidently, there is a positive association between poverty and food insecurity.

To address food insecurity, the government needs to take progressive steps by introducing and implementing both short-term and long-term interventions aimed at poverty alleviation within the broader framework of food security strategies as required by section 27(1)(b) and (2) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. Section 27(1)(b) of the Constitution provides that everyone has the right of access to sufficient food. Section 27(2) provides that the State must take reasonable legislative steps and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of these rights. Based on this premise, poverty-alleviation strategies are essential in the realisation of the right of access to food. To fulfil this constitutional obligation, the government is enjoined to adopt reasonable and efficient strategies aimed at promoting and protecting the right of access to food.

Furthermore, government policies must be all-encompassing and holistic in their approach, promoting not only the right of access to food but also countering threats that affect the realisation of this right. For instance, poverty-alleviation strategies aimed at realising the right of access to food should deal with factors such as income and gender inequality, low income, and unemployment. This is important, as food insecurity is an outcome of social and economic processes that lead to deprivation and lack of access to food. Therefore, it is pertinent to point out that hunger and lack of access to sufficient food stems from disempowerment, marginalisation, poverty, and lack of economic access.⁶ This means that human rights, including the right to food, place an obligation on states to enact policies that advance both civil and socio-economic rights. Such policies should sufficiently address the social well-being of individuals. To this end, such a measure will give effect to the recognition of the right to have access to sufficient food as a socio-economic right and promote sustainable and long-term food security.

In South Africa, in terms of section 27(1)(b) of the Constitution, the right of access to sufficient food is one of the constitutionally entrenched socio-

¹ Statistics South Africa “Poverty Trends in South Africa: An Examination of Absolute Poverty Between 2006 and 2015” (2017) <http://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=10341> (accessed 2020-09-16) 69.

² Stats SA <http://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=10341> 78–91.

³ Statistics South Africa “General Household Survey” (2019) <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0318/P03182019.pdf> (accessed 2021-01-21).

⁴ Stats SA GHS (2019) 57–58.

⁵ Statistics South Africa “Child Poverty in South Africa: A Multiple Overlapping Deprivation Analysis” (2020) <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/03-10-22/03-10-22June2020.pdf> (accessed 2021-03-27).

⁶ Shepherd “Thinking Critically About Food Security” 2012 *Security Dialogue* 195–212.

economic rights.⁷ The aim of the right is not only to promote human survival but also to ensure that the government enacts policies aimed at promoting access to sufficient nutritious food.⁸ Consequently, the right of access to sufficient food provides a benchmark by which the success of short-term and long-term poverty-alleviation strategies can be measured. The right of access to sufficient food, like all socio-economic rights, is more than a “paper” right. It requires the government to be proactive in providing, securing, fulfilling, and maintaining the well-being of its citizens.⁹ States should take adequate and effective measures for the progressive realisation of the socio-economic rights of their citizens, especially the resource-poor.¹⁰ In South Africa, this duty emanates from section 7(1) of the Constitution, which provides that the Bill of Rights is a cornerstone of democracy in South Africa. The duty imposed by section 7 entails that the State must take reasonable legislative measures to promote the realisation of the right to have access to sufficient food.¹¹ Most importantly, these measures should conform to a certain acceptable standard. According to Liebenberg and Goldblatt,

“[a]n approach to the interpretation of equality and socio-economic rights that acknowledges the interrelationship between these rights is also more likely to be responsive to the reality that the most severe forms of disadvantage are usually experienced as a result of an intersection between group-based forms of discrimination and socio-economic marginalisation.”¹²

The argument advanced by Liebenberg and Goldblatt is critical to realising the right to have access to sufficient food, as the claimants to socio-economic rights have an interest that deserves protection.¹³ Such interest requires that the government adopt legislative standards and other measures to fulfil the required protection, Liebenberg and Quinot¹⁴ argue that the urgency and intensity of the interest determine whether the policy and its implementation are appropriate and reasonable under the circumstances. This reasonableness lies in the appropriateness of the response by the government, considering the socio-economic interest concerned. Using the reasonableness test as set out in *Government of the*

⁷ Brand “Food Security, Social Security and Grootboom” 2002 *ESR Review: Economic and Social Rights in South Africa* 16–17.

⁸ Brand 2002 *ESR Review* 16–17.

⁹ Wiles “Aspirational Principles or Enforceable Rights: The Future for Socio-Economic Rights in National Law” 2006 *American University International Law Review* 22–35.

¹⁰ Al Faruque “From Basic Need to Basic Right: Right to Food in Context” A study prepared for National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh (June 2014) http://nhrc.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/nhrc.portal.gov.bd/page/348ec5eb_22f8_4754_bb62_6a0d15ba1513/From%20Basic%20Need%20to%20Basic%20Right_%20Right%20to%20Food%20in%20Context.pdf (accessed 2020-03-27) 1–37.

¹¹ Khoza (ed) *Socio-Economic Rights in South Africa: A Resource Book* (2007) 30–42.

¹² Liebenberg and Goldblatt “The Interrelationship Between Equality and Socio-Economic Rights Under South Africa’s Transformative Constitution” 2007 *SAJHR* 339.

¹³ Liebenberg and Quinot *Law and Poverty: Perspectives From South Africa and Beyond* (2012) 231.

¹⁴ Liebenberg and Quinot *Law and Poverty* 231–232.

Republic of South Africa v Grootboom,¹⁵ a court would determine whether the government policy is appropriate; if it is appropriate, then it is reasonable and if not, it infringes on the socio-economic right in question. Such an approach to the interpretation of socio-economic rights acknowledges both the negative and positive duties that such rights impose on the State to create a conducive environment for their progressive realisation.

Liebenberg¹⁶ observes that the holistic framework as entrenched in section 7(2) of the Constitution brings about a substantive and contextual approach in realising socio-economic rights, and requires a combination of both negative and positive duties in protecting, promoting, and fulfilling such rights. Brand¹⁷ argues that the duties imposed by socio-economic rights emanate from their formulation, especially where such rights are qualified, hence the need for the reasonableness test to determine whether the State's response in realising such rights is constitutionally valid.¹⁸ Furthermore, the issue of availability of resources requires that the State indicate that its efforts to realise socio-economic rights are constrained by budgetary issues. Therefore, it suffices to argue that the standard set out also applies to the realisation of the right to have access to sufficient food.

The United Nations Principles and Guidelines on Poverty Interventions provide that poverty is the denial of a person's rights to a range of basic capabilities, such as the capability to be adequately nourished and to live in good health.¹⁹ In this context, the right of access to sufficient food plays an important role in poverty alleviation and food-security interventions with a direct impact on food-specific policies. Such interventions will also take account of the fact that people living in poverty not only have needs but also have rights, one of which is the right to food.

At the international level, the duty of states to ensure the progressive realisation of socio-economic rights is derived from the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).²⁰ The ICESCR provides in its Preamble that human beings should enjoy freedom from fear and want. However, this right can only be achieved if conducive conditions are created to enjoy this right. Consequently, states are obligated to develop targeted, legally consistent, and sufficiently progressive policies toward securing these rights.²¹ The basis for enacting targeted policies aimed at realising socio-economic rights is that these rights require states to

¹⁵ See *Government of the Republic of South Africa v Grootboom* [2000] ZACC 19; 2001 (1) SA 46; 2000 (11) BCLR 1169.

¹⁶ Liebenberg *Socio-Economic Rights: Adjudication Under a Transformative Constitution* (2010) 82–87.

¹⁷ Brand "Introduction to the Socio-Economic Rights in the South African Constitution" in Brand and Heyns (eds) *Socio-Economic Rights in South Africa* (2005) 3–4.

¹⁸ Brand in Brand and Heyns *Socio-Economic Rights in South Africa* 26–30.

¹⁹ UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) "Principles and Guidelines for a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies" (2006) HR/PUB/06/12 <https://www.refworld.org/docid/46ceaf92.html> (accessed 2022-08-06) par 7.

²⁰ UN General Assembly *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* 993 UNTS 3 (1966). Adopted: 16 December 1966; EIF: 3/1/1976. See art 2(1) of the ICESCR.

²¹ Art 11(2) of the ICESCR.

ensure that individuals and communities enjoy a dignified existence.²² Socio-economic rights are essential for the overall improvement of societal well-being. Thus, socio-economic rights have as their aim the (re)distribution of wealth in an equitable way, and as their fundamental premise, the understanding that all human beings are equal with equal entitlements.

To achieve this equality, governments must take targeted measures to enable individuals to lay claim and demand on states to fulfil their obligations in respect of socio-economic rights. Social rights are justiciable, at least to the extent that they impose a duty of non-interference, in that the State may not effectively hinder their realisation.²³ This article analyses the importance of the right to adequate food and poverty alleviation against a backdrop concerned with the realisation of socio-economic rights with specific reference to the right of access to sufficient food as entrenched in section 27(1)(b) of the Constitution and its role in promoting poverty alleviation. Poverty is often a precondition to lack of access to food. It hampers an individual's or a household's access to basic needs, including material well-being such as basic resources (land and income).

Undoubtedly, the relationship between poverty and lack of access to food is well established. Although the right to food is an independent right, a holistic approach should consider the right to food within the wider framework of other socio-economic rights. The realisation of the right to food is affected by factors such as the economic, political, and cultural contexts, access to land, employment opportunities, technological advancement, poverty, and educational opportunities.²⁴ Consequently, the realisation of the right to food requires an enforcement of an interdependence of rights to ensure the effective implementation of poverty-alleviation strategies.

Poverty is a condition that causes an individual or a household to be unable to meet the normal standard of living. In addition, poverty leads to food insecurity because poverty entails being deprived of a decent quality of life. In Mubangizi's words, "poverty is a state of being poor or the state of one who lacks the usual or acceptable amount of money or material possessions".²⁵ Poverty is also defined as a human condition characterised by sustained or chronic deprivation of resources, capabilities, choices, security, and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights.²⁶

For effective implementation, government policies aimed at poverty alleviation should address social justice that promotes sustainability. Sustainability requires an integration of economic, environmental, and social

²² McCrudden "Human Dignity and Judicial Interpretation of Human Rights" 2008 *European Journal of International Law* 655–724.

²³ S 7(2) of the Constitution.

²⁴ Chirwa *Child Poverty and Children's Rights of Access to Food and Basic Nutrition in South Africa: A Contextual, Jurisprudential and Policy Analysis* Socio-Economic Rights Project, Community Law Centre, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town (2009) 6.

²⁵ Mubangizi "Poverty Production and Human Rights in the African Context" 2007 *Law, Democracy & Development* 1–14.

²⁶ Phogole "Issues of Increasing Levels of Poverty and Hunger in Africa, With Specific Reference to South Africa" 2010 *AISA Policy Brief* 1–8.

viability in poverty-alleviation strategies. According to article 13 of the 1996 World Food Summit Plan of Action,²⁷ a sustainable approach will ensure that states develop a peaceful, stable, and enabling political, social, and economic environment that is an essential foundation to give adequate priority to food security, poverty eradication, sustainable agriculture, and rural development. Furthermore, such an approach will propel states to promoting good governance as an essential factor for sustained economic growth, sustainable development, poverty and hunger eradication, and the realisation of all human rights, including the progressive realisation of the right to adequate food.

General Comment 12 of the United Nations Committee on Economic Social Cultural Rights²⁸ (General Comment 12) provides that the right to adequate food is realised when every man, woman, and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement. General Comment 12 on the right to food refers to three essential elements – namely, availability, accessibility, and adequacy. Furthermore, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the right to food is described as the right:²⁹

- to have regular, permanent, and free access to food, either directly or using financial purchases;
- to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate food corresponding to the cultural traditions of the people to which the consumer belongs; and
- that ensures a physical and mental, individual and collective, fulfilling and dignified life free of fear.

Thus, the right to food is realised when food is sufficiently available and accessible to meet the day-to-day needs and dietary requirements of individuals and households. The right to food is sufficiently realised when these elements exist, which consequently leads to food security. According to the definition coined at the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome, food security “exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”.³⁰ At the household level, food security is generally perceived as “access by all household members to sufficient and nutritious food that is safe to eat as a prerequisite for sufficient dietary intake and meeting of food preferences for an active and healthy life”.³¹ An important link between the right to food and the concept of food security is evident because when individuals, households, and communities are food-secure, the right to food is protected and respected. Furthermore, the relationship between the right to food and food security is clearly set out in the elements that form the concept of food security. Food security is characterised in this context by the following:

²⁷ UN Food and Agriculture Organisation *Rome Declaration on World Food Security* (1996).

²⁸ UN CESCR Comment No 12: The Right to Adequate Food (Art 11 of the Covenant) (1999).

²⁹ UN OHCHR Factsheet No 34 (2010) 2.

³⁰ Par 1 of 1996 *Rome Declaration on World Food Security*.

³¹ Oldewage-Theron, Duvenage and Egal “Situation Analysis as Indicator of Food Security in Low-Income Rural Communities” 2012 *Journal of Consumer Sciences* 38–58.

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- food availability (referring to the availability of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality, supplied through domestic production or imports (including food aid)); and
 - food access (referring to access by individuals to adequate resources (entitlements) for acquiring appropriate foods for a nutritious diet). Entitlements are defined as the set of all commodity bundles over which a person can establish command given the legal, political, economic, and social arrangements of the community in which they live (including traditional rights such as access to common resources).

In South Africa, poverty and food insecurity are among the greatest challenges. According to the Living Conditions Survey 2014/15 published in 2017, approximately half (49,2 per cent) of the adult population lived below the UBPL and 16.6 million people were dependent on social grants as a major source of income.³² Furthermore, it was revealed that in 2019, 11,1 per cent of individuals were vulnerable to hunger and 19,5 per cent had difficulty in accessing food.³³ These high levels of poverty make it difficult to tackle food insecurity; hence the need for government to adopt holistic food security strategies not only to address food insecurity but also the prevalence of poverty. The GHS 2019 states that livelihood diversification is a vital strategy in reducing poverty and improving the livelihoods of households.

Against this background, this article has two aims:³⁴

- to show that poverty is the main contributor to food insecurity, especially in rural households; and
- to indicate the significance of both short-term and long-term food security strategies in improving food security at the household level, especially in rural areas.

First, the article examines the factors that negate the realisation of the right of access to food in rural areas. Secondly, the article analyses the relationship between the right of access to food and food-security strategies. Thirdly, the role of social grants and subsistence farming as viable food-security strategies in rural South Africa is examined. Lastly, a conclusion is drawn, highlighting the importance of both short-term and long-term food-security strategies in promoting access to food in rural households.

2 FACTORS THAT NEGATE THE REALISATION OF THE RIGHT OF ACCESS TO FOOD IN RURAL SOUTH AFRICA

Poverty is a major contributory factor in household food insecurity and has a direct impact on the realisation of the right to food. General factors such as economic and trading conditions, poor governance, conflicts, illiteracy, and diseases that lead to poverty are multidimensional and prevalent in different

³² Stats SA <http://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=10341>.

³³ Stats SA GHS (2019).

³⁴ Stats SA GHS (2019) 57–58.

African countries³⁵ These general causes of poverty require that government policies reflect a vivid human-rights protection stance that will enable citizens to lay claim to their entitlements. Such an approach takes into account structural and underlying causes of poverty and further recognises that development is not about charity and welfare but an issue of rights and entitlements.³⁶ To realise the right to food and to ensure food security, it is important to consider a holistic approach that views human rights as interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

This is the rights-based approach reflected in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that required states to fulfil their duty in realising the right to food and at the same time empower individuals to assert their claims against governments for the non-realisation of this right.³⁷ The MDGs created an expectation that rights, specifically the right to have access to food, should be protected, respected, promoted, and fulfilled by state parties. Similarly, paragraphs 17 and 24 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development³⁸ (2030 Agenda) provide that ending hunger and achieving food security is of paramount importance, and that state parties are required to commit resources to develop subsistence agriculture and provide support to smallholder farmers. These provisions reflect the vital role of a rights-based approach in addressing food insecurity as it allows individuals to take legal steps to compel governments to take reasonable measures to realise socio-economic rights progressively.³⁹ In other words, government policies should be geared towards the advancement of human rights rather than be restrictive. For instance, countries that have human-rights-centred legislative frameworks in place are more likely to establish a favourable environment for the realisation of socio-economic rights.

In South Africa, the major causes of poverty relate to discriminatory policies pre-independence, the geographical location of households, unemployment, and inequality. According to Lalthapersad-Pillay,⁴⁰ factors that contribute to poverty include isolation from the community, food insecurity, overcrowding in homes, reliance on dangerous energy sources, poorly paid jobs, splintered families, a lack of power to influence change, and the discriminatory legacy of apartheid that has led to high levels of adult illiteracy, homelessness, and joblessness; apartheid stripped people of their assets (especially land), distorted the economic markets and social institutions through racial discrimination, and resulted in violence and destabilisation.⁴¹ Moreover, factors such as government policies that are

³⁵ Nwonwu *The Millennium Development Goals, Achievements, and Prospects of Meeting the Targets in Africa* (2008) 12–19.

³⁶ Shetty “Can a Rights-Based Approach Help in Achieving the Millennium Development Goals?” 2005 36(1) *IDS Bulletin* 74.

³⁷ Cohen and Brown “Access to Justice and the Right to Adequate Food: Implementing Millennium Development Goal One” 2005 *Sustainable Development: Law and Policy* 54.

³⁸ UN General Assembly “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” Resolution adopted by UNGA at its 70th Session (25 September 2015) A/RES/70/1.

³⁹ Cohen and Brown 2005 *Sustainable Development: Law and Policy* 56.

⁴⁰ Lalthapersad-Pillay “The Poverty Alleviation Impetus of the Social Security System in South Africa” 2008 *Africa Insight* 18.

⁴¹ Par 2.4.1 of the White Paper on Reconstruction and Development Gazette 16085, Notice 1954 of 1994-11-23 states that apartheid policies pushed millions of black South Africans

biased towards urban development, the geographical location of rural settlements, and dependence by rural households on agricultural production, exacerbate high incidences of poverty in rural areas.⁴² These factors have led to socio-economic disparities that have plunged people, especially rural households, into abject poverty and food insecurity. In this section, some aspects of the unique causes of poverty in South Africa such as the geographical location of rural areas, gender inequality, unemployment, and the large number of people in households are thoroughly examined and discussed.

2.1 Geographical location as an incidence of the high poverty level

In South Africa, poverty and geographical location are closely associated. According to Mears and Blaauw, the rural provinces of South Africa, notably Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Eastern Cape,⁴³ have the highest prevalence of poverty-stricken communities. This has resulted in social and economic disparities where people in rural areas (when compared to their counterparts in urban and peri-urban areas) lack the most basic necessities of life, one of which is food.⁴⁴ As most rural households depend on land-based livelihoods, any constraints on these livelihoods have dire consequences in the fight against food insecurity. In rural households, the size of farms, access to irrigation water, and the literacy level of the household head determine a household's welfare and improvements in these areas as possible pathway to reducing food insecurity.⁴⁵ In the absence of non-farm activities, most households became vulnerable to food insecurity and hunger. This results in the unequal distribution of resources, with rural households being more prone to food insecurity than households in other settlements.⁴⁶

The high prevalence of poverty in rural areas may be due to factors such as geographical location, which makes it difficult for rural people to find employment. Lilenstein, Woolard, and Leibbrandt⁴⁷ assert that rural areas suffer from poor economic opportunities as a result of their isolation.⁴⁸ At the

into overcrowded and impoverished reserves, homelands, and townships. In addition, capital-intensive agricultural policies led to the large-scale eviction of farm dwellers from their land and homes.

⁴² Anyanwu "Accounting for Poverty in Africa: Illustration with Survey Data from Nigeria" 2012 *ADB Working Paper Series* 14–18.

⁴³ Mears and Blaauw "Socio-Economic and Demographic Characteristics of Selected Rural Villages in the Nwanedi River Basin" 2011 *Africanus* 78–95.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Valipour "Land Use Policy and Agricultural Water Management of the Previous Half Century in Africa" 2015 *Applied Water Science* 368.

⁴⁶ Statistics SA "Poverty Trends in South Africa: An Examination of Absolute Poverty Between 2006 and 2011" (2014) https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/povertytrends03april2014.pdf (accessed 2021-11-05) 27–28.

⁴⁷ Lilenstein, Woolard and Leibbrandt "In-Work Poverty in South Africa: The Impact of Income Sharing in the Presence of High Unemployment" 2016 (193) *Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit Working Papers* 7.

⁴⁸ Lilenstein *et al* 2016 *SALDRU Working Papers* 1–26.

same time, rural households that engage in land-based livelihood strategies are less prone to food insecurity and have adequate access to food. The 2017 statistics on food security indicate that 63,4 per cent of urban households experienced hunger and inadequate access to food compared to rural households that participate in subsistence farming, as they are more likely to have the necessary skills, tools, and access to land for such activities.⁴⁹

As rural households depend on land-based livelihoods, any constraints that affect these livelihoods would have dire consequences in the fight against poverty and limit access to food.

2.2 Gender inequality

Rural household poverty is made worse by the fact that many households in rural areas are headed by women, who are more prone to poverty because females are generally unemployed, have few economic opportunities, and encounter gender discrimination in wage levels in rural provinces.⁵⁰ Flatø, Muttarak and Pelsler posit three reasons that make female-headed households more vulnerable to poverty: (a) women have lower average earnings, fewer assets, and less access to productive resources such as land, financial capital, and technology than men; (b) in the absence of a male provider, female household heads are often single earners and carry a higher dependency burden; and (c) women who are heads of households with no other adult help have to carry a “double-day burden” where they fulfil both domestic duties and the breadwinner role.⁵¹ Furthermore, women in rural areas also lack access to productive resources. These factors negatively impact the right of access to food, which rests on three main elements, namely availability, accessibility, and adequacy.⁵² According to Quisumbing, Brown, Feldstein, Haddad and Peña,⁵³ sustainable food production is the first pillar of food security. However, in rural households, women often lack access to natural resources such as land that are central to sustainable food production. Land plays an important role in rural livelihoods for agricultural production, homestead cultivation, and practices of natural resource harvesting; as a result, its availability is crucial for households.⁵⁴ Female-headed households also often lack access to capital

⁴⁹ Statistics South Africa “Towards Measuring the Extent of Food Security in South Africa: An Examination of Hunger and Food Adequacy” (2019) <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/03-00-14/03-00-142017.pdf> (accessed 2021-11-05) 14–19.

⁵⁰ Aliber “Overview of the Incidence of Poverty in South Africa for the 10-Year Review” (2002) <https://sarprn.org/documents/d0000875/docs/OverviewOfTheIncidenceOfPovertyInSAforThe10YearReview.pdf> (accessed 2022-06-21) 1–21.

⁵¹ Flatø, Muttarak and Pelsler “Women, Weather, and Woes: The Triangular Dynamics of Female-Headed Households, Economic Vulnerability, and Climate Variability in South Africa” 2017 *World Development* 41–62.

⁵² See par 6–13 of General Comment 12.

⁵³ Quisumbing, Brown, Feldstein, Haddad and Peña “Women: The Key to Food Security” 1996 17(1) *Food and Nutrition Bulletin* 1.

⁵⁴ Neves and Du Toit “Rural Livelihoods in South Africa: Complexity, Vulnerability and Differentiation” 2013 *Journal of Agrarian Change* 102–103; see also Kepe and Tessaro “Trading Off: Rural Food Security and Land Rights in South Africa” 2014 *Land Use Policy* 268–273.

and credit to cater to their food needs. To this end, these households are often constrained from buying and producing food owing to lack of income.⁵⁵ Access to food also goes beyond the availability and accessibility of food; constraints such as lack of access to land and income affect women's food choices and provision of an acceptable diet.⁵⁶ Finally, migration of young and middle-aged male household members to urban areas for employment opportunities cause rural households to face challenges of food insecurity. Dungumaro⁵⁷ observes that the tradition of leaving responsibilities to the mother leads to an increased number of female-headed households. The female members that are charged with family upkeep often struggle to cater to the households' food needs. These factors make female-headed households experience high incidences of poverty and vulnerability.⁵⁸

2 3 Unemployment

A comparison of the Poverty Trends Reports of 2014 and 2017 reveal a disturbing poverty pattern.⁵⁹ Despite a drop in the number of people living below the poverty line, black South Africans continue to be the most impoverished. The high poverty rate among Black people may be attributed to high unemployment rates in rural provinces. According to Baulch, labour is one of the assets that assist the chronically poor to escape poverty, and the availability of employment opportunities is vital in poverty alleviation.⁶⁰ To this end, Phogole provides that poverty-reduction strategies go beyond the provision of food and include the context of employment, rural development, and infrastructure development, among others.⁶¹ This entails that poverty reduction strategies should be all-encompassing and include both off-farm and on-farm activities to ensure a holistic approach in the realisation of the right of access to food. However, in South Africa, unemployment has reached soaring levels over the years, making it nearly impossible to escape the poverty trap for some households without direct government interventions.

In 2015,⁶² about 13.7 million people (25 per cent) were unemployed. The 2018 Quarterly Labour Force Survey indicates that by the third quarter (Q3) of 2018 the unemployment rate was at 27,5 per cent nationally.⁶³ At least 31,6 per cent of the youth were not in employment, education, or training

⁵⁵ Stats SA <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/03-00-14/03-00-142017.pdf> 4–6.

⁵⁶ Quisumbing *et al* 1996 *Food and Nutrition Bulletin* 2.

⁵⁷ Dungumaro "Gender Differentials in Household Structure and Socioeconomic Characteristics in South Africa" 2008 39(4) *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 436.

⁵⁸ Schotte, Zizzamia and Leibbrandt "A Poverty Dynamics Approach to Social Stratification: The South African Case" 2018 *World Development* 88–103.

⁵⁹ Stats SA https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/povertytrends03april2014.pdf 16 and Statistics South Africa "Poverty Trends in South Africa: An Examination of Absolute Poverty Between 2006 and 2015" (2017) <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-03-10-06/Report-03-10-062015.pdf> 44.

⁶⁰ Baulch *Why Poverty Persists, Poverty Dynamics in Asia and Africa* (2011) 256–260.

⁶¹ Phogole 2010 *AISA Policy Brief* 1–8.

⁶² Statistics South Africa "Mid-year Population Estimates" (2015) <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0302/P03022015.pdf> (accessed 2020-04-24).

⁶³ Statistics South Africa *Quarterly Labour Force Survey (Q3:2018)* (2018) 1.

(NEET).⁶⁴ The 2021 Quarterly Labour Force Survey⁶⁵ indicates that in the first quarter of 2021 the unemployment rate stood at 32,6 per cent. This high prevalence of unemployment has made social grants an important livelihood strategy in rural households. These statistics indicate the negative impact of unemployment at the household level and its impact on perpetuating poverty and food insecurity.⁶⁶

At the same time, the high rate of unemployment might be a reflection of past institutionalised racial discrimination in South Africa. The White Paper on the Reconstruction and Development Programme of 1994 (RDP) provides that segregation in education, health, welfare, transport, and employment left deep scars of inequality and economic inefficiency for Black South Africans, and cheap labour policies concentrated skills in White hands.⁶⁷ This meant that the majority of the Black populace lacked the requisite skills to enter formal labour markets.⁶⁸ Furthermore, apartheid policies restricted the movement of Black labourers and families and their chance to reside closer to areas with better employment opportunities.⁶⁹ These factors exacerbated unemployment among Black South Africans and the youth, plunging households deep into poverty and food insecurity.

2.4 Large families

Large households are more likely to be poor and increase pressure on household income in terms of the number of people it is required to feed.⁷⁰ According to Baulch, households that have many members are more likely to remain poverty-stricken, especially where members are dependent on social grants.⁷¹ Aliber and Hart point out in their study that although social grants provide a major and regular income to rural households and aid in alleviating poverty, the amounts are relatively small, especially as an average household in South Africa has five members.⁷² Against the backdrop of the discussion above, it is clear that the drivers of poverty are numerous. Drivers such as unemployment, gender inequality, and poor policy formulation emanated from the discriminatory past of the apartheid

⁶⁴ Stats SA *Quarterly Labour Force Survey (Q3:2018)* 6–8.

⁶⁵ Stats SA *Quarterly Labour Force Survey (Q1:2021)* (2021) 12–14

⁶⁶ Granlund and Hochfeld “That Child Support Grant Gives Me Powers: Exploring Social and Relational Aspects of Cash Transfers in South Africa in Times of Livelihood Change” 2020 *The Journal of Development Studies* 1230–1244.

⁶⁷ Par 1.2.3 of the White Paper on Reconstruction and Development Gazette 16085, Notice 1954 of 1994-11-23.

⁶⁸ Dias and Posel “Unemployment, Education, and Skills Constraints” 2007 *Post-Apartheid South Africa Development Policy Research Unit Working Paper* 3–5.

⁶⁹ Storme, De Lannoy, Leibbrandt, De Boeck, and Mudiriza “Developing a Multidimensional Youth Employability Index to Unpack Vulnerabilities in the Lived Realities of Youth in Post-Apartheid South Africa” 2019 *SALDRU Working Paper Number 255 University of Cape Town* 3–4.

⁷⁰ Ngema, Sibanda and Musemwa “Household Food Security Status and Its Determinants in Maphumulo Local Municipality in South Africa” 2018 *Sustainability* 3307.

⁷¹ Baulch *Why Poverty Persists: Poverty Dynamics in Asia and Africa* 199.

⁷² Aliber and Hart “Should Subsistence Agriculture Be Supported as a Strategy to Address Rural Food Insecurity?” 2009 *Agrekon* 434–458.

system that alienated natural and capital resources from the Black majority. However, after 27 years of democracy, the government should have devised short-term and long-term poverty-alleviation strategies to address household poverty and food insecurity effectively, especially among the Black population and female-headed households. The government should comply with its national and international commitments as envisaged in section 27(1)(b) of the Constitution and principle 3 of the 2009 Declaration of the World Summit on Food Security⁷³ (Rome Declaration, 2009) by adopting short-term and long-term poverty-alleviation strategies that enable households to enjoy the right to food sovereignty. Finally, the government should devise a strategy that will ensure that rural households, especially those headed by women, are integrated into the existing agrarian reform programmes to enable them to become active participants in food security strategies.

3 NEXUS BETWEEN THE RIGHT OF ACCESS TO SUFFICIENT FOOD AND POVERTY-ALLEVIATION STRATEGIES

Section 27(2) of the Constitution sets the foundation upon which legislative and other measures should be adopted to give effect to the right of access to sufficient food. As a result, in South Africa, the government's approach to the realisation of the right to food can be termed dualistic as it consists of short-term interventions such as social assistance and long-term interventions such as agrarian reform. This is consistent with principle 3 of the Rome Declaration of 2009, which provides for a comprehensive twin-track approach to food security. This approach consists of direct action to tackle hunger immediately for the most vulnerable, using medium- and long-term sustainable agricultural, food security, and nutrition and rural development programmes to eliminate the root causes of hunger and poverty. According to the Integrated Food Security Strategy for South Africa (IFSS 2002), its prominent goal is to eradicate hunger, malnutrition, and food insecurity. The vision 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". Therefore, the objectives of the IFSS are to increase household food production and trading, to improve income generation and job-creation opportunities, to improve nutrition and food safety, and to increase safety nets and food emergency management systems.

To achieve these objectives, the IFSS has adopted a developmental approach to poverty alleviation. This entails that the realisation of the right of access to sufficient food will be based on both interceptive and empowerment interventions, where households are capable of accessing production resources on their own as the intervention will be made available to support access to such production resources (empowerment). This

⁷³ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations "Declaration of the World Summit on Food Security" *World Summit on Food Security* (Rome, 16–18 November 2009) WSFS 2009/2.

developmental approach proposed by the IFSS adopts a holistic approach to poverty alleviation by classifying poverty as a social problem that all social development programmes should address. Such an approach not only assesses the needs of people living in poverty but also recognises that such people have entitlements such as the right of access to food. On the other hand, in severe cases where households are unable to access sufficient food, intervention is appropriate and short- to medium-term relief measures will be made available. A good example of an intervention strategy is the Zero Hunger Programme.⁷⁴ The Zero Hunger Programme's vision combines short-term responses to emergencies with medium- and long-term responses that help create the necessary conditions for people to improve their food security.⁷⁵ The Zero Hunger Programme gives effect to strategic goal one of the IFSS, which aims to eradicate hunger, malnutrition, and food insecurity by increasing household food production and trading.

To ensure compliance with its international and regional mandate, the government enacted the National Policy on Food and Nutrition Security for the Republic of South Africa in 2013⁷⁶ (Food Security Policy). The overall purpose of this policy is to ensure the availability, accessibility, and affordability of safe and nutritious food at national and household levels. Paragraph 4 of the Food Security Policy adopts a holistic approach to food security and provides that food and nutrition security requires well-managed inter-sectoral coordination and the genuine integration of existing policies and programmes in health, education, and environmental protection, as well as in agrarian reform and agricultural development. To this end, the Food Security Policy provides that South Africa has as one of its food challenges, the under-utilisation of productive land for food production owing to lack of finance, equipment, and water, among other factors.

Interventions should thus be taken to ensure that the agricultural sector, including household and subsistence producers, have access to natural resources, which should be used optimally to be profitable. This is consistent with the Food Security Policy's goal, which is to ensure the availability, accessibility, and affordability of safe and nutritious food at national and household levels. As a result, this policy gives effect to section 27(1)(b) of the Constitution and enables the State to fulfil its obligation in terms of section 27(2) of the Constitution. In discharging its duties in respect of ensuring the right of access to food, the South African government has adopted both short-term and long-term poverty-alleviation interventions.

4 POVERTY-ALLEVIATION STRATEGIES IN RURAL SOUTH AFRICA

The most prominent poverty-alleviation strategies that have proved successful in poverty reduction and in promoting access to food in rural

⁷⁴ The Framework for the Zero Hunger Programme: Actuating the Integrated Food Security Strategy for South Africa, Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (2012).

⁷⁵ The Framework for the Zero Hunger Programme: Actuating the Integrated Food Security Strategy for South Africa, Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (2012) par 5.

⁷⁶ National Policy on Food and Nutrition Security for the Republic of South Africa, Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (2013) No 637, 22 August 2014.

households are social grants and land-based livelihood strategies, such as subsistence farming.

4 1 Social grants as a means of poverty alleviation

Section 27(1)(c) of the Constitution provides that everyone has the right to have access to social security, including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependants, appropriate social assistance. The right to social security encompasses the right to social insurance and social assistance. Social assistance refers to a form of social welfare that is made available to destitute persons and households based on a means test in South Africa. Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler describe social protection as:

“[a]ll public and private initiatives that provide income or consumption transfers to the poor, protect the vulnerable against livelihood risks, and enhance the social status and rights of the marginalised; with the overall objective of reducing the economic and social vulnerability of poor, vulnerable and marginalised groups.”⁷⁷

Social protection in the form of social grants is a pathway that ensures not only that the most vulnerable households enjoy a minimum level of food access but that poor households live a dignified life. The provision in the Constitution entails that the right to social security is an entrenched right and should be afforded full recognition and measures should be adopted to ensure its effective realisation. For instance, Pienaar and Von Fintel observe that within farming communities in former homelands, grants have become a vital strategy to combat socio-economic disparities.⁷⁸ Furthermore, these grants also perpetuate a reliance on resources outside of the labour market.⁷⁹ The Constitutional Court, in granting direct access in the case of *Black Sash Trust v Minister of Social Development*,⁸⁰ held as follows:

“The constitutional right to social assistance that for many, especially children, the elderly and the indigent, provide the bare bones of a life of dignity, equality, and freedom is directly involved, across the land.”⁸¹

Battersby notes that social protection is seen as a means to reduce food insecurity. Social grants provide an important source of income for poor households.⁸²

⁷⁷ Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler “Transformative Social Protection” 2004 *IDS Working Paper* 9.

⁷⁸ Pienaar and Von Fintel “Hunger in the Former Apartheid Homelands: Determinants of Converging Food Security 100 Years After the 1913 Land Act” 2013 *Stellenbosch Economic Working Papers* 20.

⁷⁹ Pienaar and Von Fintel 2013 *Stellenbosch Economic Working Papers* 21.

⁸⁰ [2017] ZACC 8.

⁸¹ [2017] ZACC 36.

⁸² Battersby “The State of Urban Food Insecurity in Cape Town” 2011 *Urban Food Security Series* 1–31.

4 2 Role of social grants in household poverty alleviation in South Africa

Social grants play a crucial role in providing a source of income to poor households and in lifting such households out of the poorest poverty bracket. Van der Berg, Siebrits and Lekezwa state that 76 per cent of government spending on social grants accrues to roughly 50 per cent of individuals who constitute the poorest two quintiles of households, with rural households being the significant beneficiaries.⁸³ Similarly, Woolard, Harttgen and Klasen observe that although social grants do not affect headcount poverty significantly, they affect the severity of poverty that households could suffer in the absence of social assistance.⁸⁴ There is no doubt that social grants are a formidable short-term poverty-alleviation strategy.

Social grants play an integral role in increasing overall welfare in African rural households, especially in the former homeland areas of South Africa.⁸⁵ In this instance, well-targeted social grants can be extremely pro-poor and play a critical role in reducing income poverty and inequality. Before the breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa, over 60 per cent of the population nationally received social grants, and 80 per cent of those residing in rural areas lived in a grant-receiving household.⁸⁶ According to Brand, social grants are important for the following reasons:

- (a) Social security grants are logistically more manageable than the direct provision of food to the disadvantaged.
- (b) Social security grants are more sensitive to individual choice and consequently better meet the requirements of human dignity and freedom than other forms of direct transfers of food.
- (c) Social security grants can contribute not only to improving food security but also other aspects that impact a person's quality of life, such as clothing and transport costs.
- (d) Social grants can facilitate development by providing a basic income to enable job seeking and participation in developmental programmes.⁸⁷

Social-grant interventions address immediate poverty needs that affect the most vulnerable population in the community, such as children, women, and the elderly. Social grants are meant for those living in dire poverty and who require immediate relief. Such interventions are protective in character and are meant to prevent poverty-stricken individuals and households from falling into deeper poverty (by reducing household poverty and ensuring

⁸³ Van der Berg, Siebrits and Lekezwa "Efficiency and Equity Effects of Social Grants in South Africa" 2010 *Stellenbosch Economic Working Papers* 1–58.

⁸⁴ Woolard, Harttgen and Klasen "The Evolution and Impact of Social Security in South Africa" (2010) <http://erd.eui.eu/media/BackgroundPapers/Woolard-Harttgen-Klasen.pdf> (accessed 2020-04-21).

⁸⁵ Armstrong and Burger "Poverty, Inequality and the Role of Social Grants: An Analysis Using Decomposition Techniques" 2010 *Stellenbosch Economic Working Papers* 1–20.

⁸⁶ Wills, Van der Berg, Patel and Mpeti "Household Resource Flows and Food Poverty During South Africa's Lockdown: Short-Term Policy Implications for Three Channels of Social Protection" 2020 *Stellenbosch Economic Working Papers* 1–43.

⁸⁷ Brand 2002 *ESR Review* 16–17.

minimal food security).⁸⁸ To illustrate the importance of social grants, the 2014/15 First Quarter Statistical Report on Social Grants⁸⁹ states that grants in aid increased from 83 059 to 88 666 from the beginning of April 2014 to the end of June 2014, indicating that the target group of those in need received the requisite assistance. To indicate that social grants are the most utilised pro-poor form of social assistance to meet immediate food needs and to relieve poor individuals and households from deep poverty, the total number of grant beneficiaries increased from 11.31 million at the end of April 2020 to 11.45 million at the end of March 2021.⁹⁰ The different social grants available for children, women, and the elderly and their benefits are discussed below.

4.2.1 Children grants

In South Africa, the effectiveness of social protection measures is apparent, especially concerning destitute children. For instance, there are three kinds of social grant targeting the alleviation of poverty among children, namely the child support grant (CSG), care dependency grant, and foster care grant.⁹¹ This wide range of grants for children ensures that children do not fall beneath the acceptable quintile of the living standard; it ensures that children have access to education and also enables parents to buy food, school uniforms, and other necessities.⁹² Moreover, women benefit most from CSGs as they are often children's primary caregivers. This means that female-headed households are likely to enjoy a minimal level of food security.⁹³ In addition to the CSG, the care dependency grant aims to ensure that children suffering from severe mental or physical disability and in permanent home care do not suffer financial hardships. The grant is payable to the caregivers of these minors.⁹⁴ This enables the legal guardian to supplement his or her household income for the benefit of the child, thus reducing incidences of poverty and food insecurity within the household.⁹⁵

⁸⁸ Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004 *IDS Working Paper* No 232 10.

⁸⁹ Statistics South Africa "2014/15 First Quarter Statistical Report on Social Grants" http://www.statssa.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Annual_Report_2015_Book_1.pdf (accessed 2020-04-24).

⁹⁰ Parliamentary Budget Office "Social Grant Performance as at end March 20/21" (March 2021) https://www.parliament.gov.za/storage/app/media/PBO/National_Development_Plan_Analysis/2021/june/03-06-2021/May_2021_Social_Grant_fact_sheet.pdf (accessed 2022-01-15).

⁹¹ Satumba, Bayat and Mohamed "The Impact of Social Grants on Poverty Reduction in South Africa" 2017 *Journal of Economics* 33–49.

⁹² Samson "Social Cash Transfers and Employment: A Note on Empirical Linkages in Developing Countries in OECD Promoting Pro-Poor Growth Employment" (2009) <https://www.oecd.org/greengrowth/green-development/43514554.pdf> (accessed 2020-01-16) 179–191.

⁹³ Martin "Children's Rights to Social Assistance: A Review of South Africa's Child Support Grant" in Proudlock (ed) *South Africa's Progress in Realising Children's Rights: A Law Review* (2014) 58–83.

⁹⁴ Satumba, Bayat and Mohamed 2017 *Journal of Economics* 33–49.

⁹⁵ Granlund and Hochfeld 2020 *The Journal of Development Studies* 230–1244.

4.2.2 Old age grants

Apart from children's grants, old age grants (OAGs) also play a role in ensuring that households are food secure by contributing to household income. High unemployment levels lead to OAG recipients often being the only contributors to household income and supporting entire families. Aliber observes that the so-called "granny households" bear the largest brunt of having to rely on OAGs because grandmothers use their state pensions to support their grandchildren.⁹⁶ According to Granlund and Hochfeld, the CSG and OAG create a form of "reversed dependency" with male family members also benefiting from these grants owing to scarcity of employment.⁹⁷ The OAG is also critical because it is used as a buffer against household food insecurity. Waidler and Devereux observe that in poor households, the OAG is associated with food security.⁹⁸ Furthermore, pension income is shown to improve household food security.⁹⁹

5 PROMOTING AGRICULTURE PRODUCTION: SUBSISTENCE FARMING AS A LAND-BASED LIVELIHOOD TO ALLEVIATE POVERTY

The existence of poverty, low-income levels, lack of access to land, unequal distribution of land ownership, disparity, lack of the necessary assets, lack of access to credit and rising food prices, among other factors, leave many people in South Africa deprived of basic needs.¹⁰⁰ The agricultural sector in South Africa is crucial to reducing food prices, creating employment, increasing real wages, and improving farm income, especially in rural areas.¹⁰¹ Consequently, long-term poverty-alleviation strategies, particularly agricultural-related ones, are important in advancing the standard of living of the rural poor.¹⁰² As such, the government should adopt strategies that are aimed at promoting access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food in rural households.

In this current article, we examine the significance of subsistence farming in poverty alleviation. "Subsistence farming" refers to farming and associated activities where the main output is for household consumption and the

⁹⁶ Aliber "Overview of the Incidence of Poverty in South Africa for the 10-Year Review" (2002) <https://sarpn.org/documents/d0000875/docs/OverviewOfTheIncidenceOfPovertyInSAforThe10yearReview.pdf> 1–21.

⁹⁷ Granlund and Hochfeld 2020 *The Journal of Development Studies* 230–1244.

⁹⁸ Waidler and Devereux "Social Grants, Remittances, and Food Security: Does the Source of Income Matter?" 2019 11(3) *Food Security* 687.

⁹⁹ Waidler and Devereux 2019 *Food Security* 689.

¹⁰⁰ Beretta and Balestri "Poverty Eradication, Access to Land, Access to Food" (2015) <https://publicatt.unicatt.it/retrieve/handle/10807/69572/112830/%5beBook-pdf%5dPoverty-Eradication.pdf> (accessed 2020-07-26).

¹⁰¹ Machethe *Agriculture and Poverty in South Africa: Can Agriculture Reduce Poverty?* Paper presented at the Overcoming Underdevelopment Conference, Pretoria, (28–29 October 2004) https://sarpn.org/documents/d0001005/P1125-Agriculture-Poverty_Machethe_2004.pdf 3.

¹⁰² Machethe paper presented at the Overcoming Underdevelopment Conference 10.

remaining output, if any, is marketed for extra income.¹⁰³ According to Aliber and Hart, households engage in subsistence farming for two main reasons: first, to supplement a household's food supply; and secondly, as an extra source of income.¹⁰⁴ It is clear that subsistence farming is a useful poverty-alleviation intervention. Unlike social grants, subsistence farming presents a more sustainable strategy for ensuring that households stay above the higher poverty margin.

This is because subsistence farming presents a food-supply strategy that enables households not only to have access to food at all times but also to have access to food that meets their dietary requirements in a culturally acceptable manner. The IFSS in South Africa borrows the definition of the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) in outlining its vision for attaining 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. In discharging this objective, the government seeks to increase food production both at national and household levels, including by increasing its national food safety nets and household food production through productive agriculture including small-scale farming.

To achieve adequate household food production and alleviate poverty at household level, the government has enacted various policies such as the Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Strategy (ISRDS), and the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme Framework (CRDP) that have as their aim the promotion of agricultural production as a poverty-alleviation intervention. The ISRDS provides that agriculture and related activities provide a formidable basis for rural livelihoods to increase their food supply.¹⁰⁵ As a result of the beneficial impact of agriculture on rural households, agrarian reform aims to promote rural livelihoods by making available valuable agricultural land.¹⁰⁶ It also entails that land reform programmes will in the future make provision for landless households, including those seeking land for subsistence farm production and other subsistence purposes. In South Africa, the importance and scarcity of agricultural land are reflected in the White Paper on Agriculture of 1995, which provides that economic development and national food security depend on the availability of land and that the use of such land for other purposes should be minimised.¹⁰⁷

Literature indicates that access to land serves as a valuable resource in poverty alleviation. Holden and Otsuka argue that access to land is integral to promoting rural livelihoods, especially farming because of limited

¹⁰³ Morton "The Impact of Climate Change on Smallholder and Subsistence Agriculture" 2007 *PNAS (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America)* 19680–19685.

¹⁰⁴ Aliber and Hart 2009 *Agrekon* 434–458.

¹⁰⁵ Altman, Hart and Jacobs "Household Food Security Status in South Africa" 2009 *Agrekon* 352–353.

¹⁰⁶ Altman *et al* 2009 *Agrekon* 345–361.

¹⁰⁷ Department of Agriculture *White Paper on Agriculture* (1995) par 4.3.

livelihood opportunities.¹⁰⁸ In rural households, large farm sizes, access to irrigation water, and literacy levels of the household head usually determine a household's welfare and are a possible pathway for poverty reduction.¹⁰⁹ To this end, access to assets such as finance, land, and natural resources has the potential to promote rural livelihoods.¹¹⁰ Fan, Hazell and Haque also observed that rural infrastructure can lead to improved opportunities for both on-farm and off-farm employment.¹¹¹ According to the Africa Agriculture Status Report of 2013, lack of sufficient infrastructure in Africa, such as access to roads, irrigation, and land management capabilities, has resulted in under-utilisation of the small amount of land available. This entails that agrarian transformation should be viewed holistically within the ambit of rural development. Such an approach is vital because poor rural development has a negative effect on agrarian transformation. Furthermore, land is essential to ensuring food availability and access to food, as food can only be achieved through the efficient use and management of natural resources, including land.

This therefore calls for policies that promote land distribution, especially in economies where there exist limited off-farm employment opportunities.¹¹² Hence, the Declaration of the Forum for Food Sovereignty of 2007, which states that food sovereignty entails that the right to use and manage lands should be in the control of those who produce food. Agrarian reforms should also guarantee subsistence farmers full land rights.¹¹³ The concern presented in the Nyéléni Declaration is shared by Moyo who argues that agrarian transformation in Africa tends to move towards modernisation of farming and favours medium and large-scale farming by allocating more land to such farms.¹¹⁴ This results in rural households having smaller landholdings.¹¹⁵ Of note, institutional investors acquired about 40 million hectares of land for large-scale agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa in the period 2008–2009.¹¹⁶ This may seem like a great gain for national economic growth, but it defeats one of the main objectives of agrarian transformation, which is to strengthen rural livelihoods for vibrant local economic development.

Kepe and Tessaro observe that the development of large-scale farming through displacement based on land acquisitions and leasing from

¹⁰⁸ Holden and Otsuka "The Roles of Land Tenure Reforms and Land Markets in the Context of Population Growth and Land Use Intensification in Africa" 2014 *Food Policy* 88–97.

¹⁰⁹ Valipour 2015 *Applied Water Science* 367–395.

¹¹⁰ Adams, Sibanda and Turner "Land Reform and Rural Livelihoods in Southern Africa, Overseas Development" (1999) <https://www.odi.org/publications/2113> (accessed 2020-01-10).

¹¹¹ Fan, Hazell and Haque "Targeting Public Investments by Agro-Ecological Zone to Achieve Growth and Poverty Alleviation Goals in Rural India" 2000 *Food Policy* 411–428.

¹¹² Holden and Ghebr "Land Tenure Reforms, Tenure Security and Food Security in Poor Agrarian Economies: Causal Linkages and Research Gaps" 2016 *Global Food Security* 21–28.

¹¹³ Forum for Food Sovereignty *Declaration of Nyéléni* (2007) par 2.

¹¹⁴ Moyo "Land Reform, Small Scale Farming and Poverty Eradication Lessons from Africa" 2010 *AISA Policy Brief* 1–9.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Li "What is Land? Assembling a Resource for Global Investment" 2014 *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 592.

governments makes subsistence farmers vulnerable to food insecurity.¹¹⁷ This negates the role of agriculture as a poverty-alleviation intervention in rural households.¹¹⁸ Pienaar and Von Fintel indicate that South African households that had access to land and engage in farming were less likely to face severe hunger than non-farming households.¹¹⁹ The importance of access to land in poverty alleviation is also recognised in the NDP 2030, which provides that strategies that promote the efficient use of agricultural land should also promote access to land and social equity and recognise the important economic role of subsistence agriculture in some rural communities. The above discussion indicates that land is a vital asset in poverty alleviation for rural households; land-based livelihoods should thus be sustainably promoted, especially in subsistence agriculture to counter land constraints.¹²⁰

6 THE BENEFITS OF SUBSISTENCE FARMING IN SOUTH AFRICA

According to Mathebula, Molokomme, Jonas and Nhemachena, activity and income diversification form the basis of livelihood strategies of many rural communities in sub-Saharan Africa. Hence, subsistence farming as a poverty-alleviation strategy can increase a household's food supply and income if properly implemented.¹²¹ In South Africa, the importance of this intervention is stressed by the fact that the government has adopted the Rome Declaration, 2009. The Declaration provides for state parties to implement medium and long-term sustainable agriculture, food security and nutrition, and rural development programmes aimed at alleviating poverty, enhancing food security, and ensuring the progressive realisation of the right to adequate food.¹²²

To this end, the objective of the Rome Declaration, 2009 is to ensure that governments enact policies and legislative frameworks that promote agriculture, including small-scale farming as a poverty-alleviation strategy aimed at increasing the household food supply for vulnerable populations such as the rural poor and women. To enhance food security, the government should thus ensure an increase in agricultural output by supporting emerging farmers and households, fencing off agricultural areas, making agricultural loans accessible, and ensuring agricultural extension services of high quality.

¹¹⁷ Kepe and Tessaro "Integrating Food Security with Land Reform, A More Effective Policy for South Africa" 2012 *Land Use Policy* 267–274.

¹¹⁸ Pienaar and Von Fintel 2013 *Stellenbosch Economic Working Papers* 2–3.

¹¹⁹ Pienaar and Von Fintel 2013 *Stellenbosch Economic Working Papers* 19.

¹²⁰ Heady and Jayne "Adaptation to Land Constraints: Is Africa Different?" 2014 *Food Policy* 18–33.

¹²¹ Mathebula, Molokomme, Jonas and Nhemachena "Estimation of Household Income Diversification in South Africa: A Case Study of Three Provinces" 2017 *South African Journal of Science* 1–9.

¹²² Principle 3 of the Rome Declaration, 2009.

In achieving these objectives, South Africa would be a step closer to discharging its regional and international commitments to halving poverty and enhancing food security. This, in turn, will entail that households enjoy food sovereignty. According to the Nyéléni Declaration, food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their food and agriculture systems.¹²³

Rural provinces have over the years increased the intensity of their subsistence farming, indicating the importance of subsistence agriculture in alleviating poverty and enhancing food security.¹²⁴ The benefits of subsistence farming are centred on ensuring food stability, reducing poverty and unemployment.¹²⁵ However, despite these benefits, subsistence farming is not an easy poverty-alleviation strategy to implement owing to external factors that hamper the efficiency of subsistence farming – such as availability of natural resources (mainly land and water), extension services and market access for subsistence farmers.¹²⁶

7 CONCLUSION

This article highlights the importance of adopting targeted and efficient strategies that promote the right of access to sufficient food in rural households. Strategies that give effect to the right of access to sufficient food play a vital role in reducing overall household poverty. Therefore, in addressing the lack of access to food, there is a need to take progressive steps to introduce and implement both short-term and long-term interventions aimed at poverty alleviation within the broader framework of food-security strategies as required by the Constitution. The Constitution emphatically provides that everyone has the right to have access to sufficient food. The State has a duty to ensure the progressive realisation of the socio-economic right to food because human beings should enjoy freedom from fear and want. Fighting poverty and hunger entails providing robust interventions and leadership that will ensure that the poor have access to means of production, particularly land. Land should be put to productive use by farming, producing food, and other beneficial socio-economic activities that would produce abundant food, both for domestic and commercial purposes. This would enhance food availability and access to sufficient food, generate income for the people, reduce poverty and improve the standard of living of the people.

¹²³ Nyéléni Declaration (2007) 1.

¹²⁴ Maziya, Mudhara and Chitja “What Factors Determine Household Food Security Among Smallholder Farmers? Insights From Msinga, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa” 2017 *Agrekon* 40–52.

¹²⁵ Irz, Lin, Thirtle and Wiggins “Agricultural Productivity Growth and Poverty Alleviation” 2001 *Development Policy Review* 449–466.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*