

Shoprite calls for action to counter food insecurity

By 2025, nearly half of South Africa's population will be food insecure, with 48.96% of the population potentially not having enough to eat.



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Provincially, Limpopo will suffer the worst food insecurity with 54% of the population not sure about where their next meal will come from. Although in the Western Cape and Gauteng the numbers will be better, they are still high at 41% and 47% respectively.

How hunger affects urban and rural populations varies from province to province. For example, in the Western Cape 13% of food insecure people will be in rural areas and 87% in urban centres. By contrast 59% of potentially hungry people in the Eastern Cape will reside in rural areas.

This is according to research that the Shoprite Group commissioned to focus national attention on food insecurity and mobilise South Africans to explore every feasible option to end hunger by 2030 in line with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

[The Food Index](#) leverages data on food insecurity from World Data Lab. The Index was released on World Food Day, 16 October 2023.

Despite the grim numbers, the incidence of people escaping food insecurity is improving. In 2020 52% of South Africa was food insecure. The projections for 2025 show this declining to just under 49%.

Understanding the problem

Sanjeev Raghubir, head of Sustainability and CSI at the Shoprite Group says: "To deal with the problem we need to better understand it and the Food Index provides us with some insight. Although the modelling shows an improvement by 2025 the reality is that in two years' time just under half the population will still be struggling with hunger. That's why we must urgently escalate the rate of people escaping food insecurity. Doing so will improve not only their prospects but that of the country."



According to the UN's Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) it's easier to solve hunger than deal with the problems it creates. As well as contributing to societal instability, hunger also constrains development. Where it is not addressed, children's cognitive and physical development can be affected, ultimately contributing to an ongoing cycle of poverty.

In commissioning the research, the Group aims to increase awareness of food insecurity and its attendant issues and encourage South Africans to support initiatives that are successfully rolling back hunger and poverty.

Increasing awareness of food insecurity

"There are many ways ordinary people can contribute to existing, successful programmes. For example, consumers can donate as little as R5 to the Act For Change Fund at any Shoprite, Checkers or Usave supermarket. These donations are distributed to communities through vetted beneficiary organisations including Rise Against Hunger, Meals on Wheels, Operation Hunger and more.

"And it's not only about donating money. Other ways to help could include starting or contributing to a food garden or volunteering at a soup kitchen. Cumulatively even seemingly small interventions can make a significant difference," says Raghbir.

He cites the example of the community food gardens the group supports. Since inception it has invested R50m in 215 food gardens here and seven in other African countries. These food gardens have indirectly impacted 61,064 hungry people.

In addition to these collaborative community initiatives, Shoprite's own efforts to ensure food security include donating R226m worth of surplus food to community partners in South Africa and on the continent equating to 67 million meals.

It supports 114 early childhood development centres where 7,287 children were served 1.1 million nutritious meals, providing not only health benefits but better educational outcomes.

To ensure cash-strapped consumers can buy food, Shoprite introduced a range of R5 deli meals in 2017. In addition, its 600g in-house bakery bread has been selling for just R5 since April 2016. A million loaves of the R5 bread are subsidised each week.



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Raghubir says: “The numbers in the Food Index are unacceptably high and the trickle of people escaping food insecurity too low. That’s why we are intensifying our efforts to reduce hunger, a crisis that demands a collaborative effort from agriculture, manufacturers, retailers, government, NGOs and anyone who has the capacity to #ActForChange. Tackling hunger isn’t just a decent thing to do, it helps secure our future.”

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