

Wise men once said...

1952 : “A HUNGRY MAN IS NOT A FREE MAN.”

— Adlai Ewing Stevenson II

1985 : “ONLY A FREE MAN CAN NEGOTIATE.”

— Nelson Mandela

2015 : FOOD INSECURITY MAY THREATEN SOUTH AFRICA'S YOUNG DEMOCRACY.

A strong commercial agriculture sector is necessary for strengthening democracy in South Africa.

A decline in the well-being and effective functioning of this crucially important economic sector may lead to severe food insecurity which may threaten South Africa's young democracy. The inability of people to buy food or feed their children affects one of their most basic needs and degrades their dignity.

Research shows that there is a strong link between social unrest and surges in food prices. These increases directly affect food security negatively. The Global Food Security Index for 2014 (an annual measure of the state of global food security) shows that the majority of people who do not have enough food reside in sub-Saharan Africa.

South Africa's current strong commercial agricultural sector makes it the best placed country, compared to its neighbours, to maintain and enhance its food security status. This is despite the fact that the South African agriculture sector has one of the lowest government support levels and subsidies when looking at countries with vibrant commercial agricultural sectors. According to an article published in the Economist in 2014, South Africa's position weakened slightly, but it still holds the 46th position out of 109 countries listed in the the Global Food Security Index.

The number of commercial food producers in South Africa has decreased significantly over the last 20 years, from about 60 000 to approximately 40 000. However, they still produce enough food to feed an urbanising and growing population of 54 million people. This is a position that should be maintained, as relying on imported food could push up food prices, thereby contributing to decreasing food security. This is especially true given fluctuations in the exchange rate and downgrading of the country's credit rating. This negates a strategy of food imports based on a stable exchange rate and easy and affordable access to foreign capital.

The relationship between food insecurity caused by price spikes and social unrest has been confirmed by



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events such as the so-called “Arab Spring”, where the governments in Tunisia and Egypt were overthrown due to social uprisings. Closer to home, a few years ago, riots broke out in Mozambique due to a surge in bread prices. Both these examples correlate with the price peaks of 2008 and 2011/12 as measured by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). The 2011/12 price peak correlates with social unrest in Mozambique, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Uganda to name but a few. It might also be argued that food insecurity among the poor may contribute to protests in South Africa, where it is estimated that one in three people do not have enough food daily.

There are indications that higher white maize prices may have contributed to the events relating to the Marikana incident in 2012, which coincided with the highest prices for this commodity in South Africa's history. A high white maize price has a direct impact on the affordability of food for the poor. Research indicates that about a third of South Africa's population spend between 40-50% of their income on basic food.

The above clearly shows that it is of vital importance that a national strategy for better food security should support and further develop a vibrant and viable commercial agricultural sector. Overcoming the challenges of food insecurity threatening parts of the population will help stabilise and deepen the democratic values in South Africa.

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