Supplementary submission by the Just Transition in the Food System Group:

SA Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) National Inquiry into the Food Systems of South Africa

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Question 1: Why has there been a significant increase in the rate of food insecurity amongst Coloured households in recent times?

1. There has been a significant and deeply concerning increase in the rate of food insecurity amongst Coloured households in recent years, particularly in rural and peri-urban agricultural regions. This trend is not accidental but is structurally linked to the transformation of labour relations in the agricultural sector, worsening socio-economic conditions, and the intensifying impacts of climate change.

2. A central driver of this crisis is the casualisation of labour within the agricultural sector. Coloured communities continue to make up the bulk of the agricultural workforce in the Western Cape and Northern Cape. However, stable, permanent employment has been systematically replaced with seasonal and contract-based work, stripping workers of income security, benefits, and basic labour protections. This restructuring has entrenched a cycle of poverty and vulnerability within these communities.

3. The burden of this precarious labour regime falls disproportionately on women, who constitute a significant portion of seasonal farmworkers. Employment opportunities for women are often limited to short-term contracts lasting approximately three to four months during peak agricultural seasons. With the growing impact of climate change—including irregular rainfall patterns, droughts, and shifting harvesting periods—these already short working windows are becoming even more compressed. As a result, women face prolonged periods without income, placing severe financial strain on households, particularly those headed by single women.

4. The increasing reliance on labour brokers has further intensified precariousness. Labour broking arrangements allow employers to externalise responsibility and bypass direct accountability, often resulting in widespread non-compliance with the National Minimum Wage (NMW) and other labour standards. Workers are frequently underpaid, denied benefits, and left without recourse to challenge unfair labour practices. This erosion of labour rights directly contributes to declining household incomes and heightened economic instability.

5. At the same time, the National Minimum Wage itself remains insufficient and is not aligned with the rapidly rising cost of living, including escalating food prices, transport costs, and basic services. Even where compliance exists, the wage floor does not meet the basic needs of workers and their families. This contradiction forces many households into a position where debt becomes a survival mechanism, with families relying on informal lending, credit, or loan sharks to cover basic necessities.

6. As a consequence of these intersecting factors, an increasing number of households are being pushed into chronic food insecurity, where access to adequate, nutritious food is inconsistent or entirely absent. Many families are compelled to rely heavily on government social grants, which, while essential, are insufficient to meet rising living costs and cannot compensate for the lack of stable employment.

7. In summary, the rise in food insecurity amongst Coloured households is the outcome of a structural crisis in the agricultural labour system, compounded by gender inequality, climate vulnerability, weak enforcement of labour laws, and inadequate wage policy. Without urgent intervention—both in terms of labour regulation, social protection, and climate resilience—this crisis will continue to deepen, further entrenching poverty and inequality within already marginalised communities.

Question 2: Where would funding for the Universal Basic Income Grant (UBIG) come from, given fiscal constraints? Would it be for all adults or more targeted? Is there evidence that recipients use the grant money to purchase food (or that it improves food security)?

8. Regarding funding the UBIG, we refer to the submission by the Universal Basic Income Coalition (UBIC) which argues that the UBIG should be financed through non-regressive measures, such as progressive taxation on the wealthiest individuals and corporations, revenue from economic growth, and borrowing. Funding a universal basic income through progressive taxation would be more effective in targeting benefits to the poorest, reducing administrative costs, and maximizing the economic stimulus effect.[1]

9. Another research report suggests that a BIG program can be funded without increasing income tax or VAT rates.[2] Instead, the proposed funding pathways that were modelled include:

    a. Wealth Tax: A relatively small wealth tax, starting at 0.5% and increasing to 1.0% over time, applied to the taxable portion of household wealth.

    b. Social Security Tax (SST): A flat tax rate (e.g., 3% or 4%) on formal employment wages up to a taxable maximum (e.g., R2.5 million), which adjusts annually based on the national average wage index.

    c. Increased VAT Revenue: Additional VAT revenue generated by the positive impact of the BIG program on Gross Domestic Expenditure (GDE), without raising the VAT rate.

10. The research report shows that these funding mechanisms are feasible and sustainable, with the model projecting that the BIG program can be implemented without significantly increasing the deficit-GDP or debt-GDP ratios.

11. Regarding the UBIG and food security, we note this section from the UBIC's submission: "Ample international evidence demonstrates the profound impact of basic income support

[1] https://iej.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/UBIC-submission-to-SAHRC-food-inquiry.pdf
[2] https://iej.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Macroeconomic-and-Developmental-Impacts-of-Selected-BIG-Pathways-for-South-Africa.pdf

on food security and nutrition. A meta-analysis of the impact of cash transfers on child nutritional outcomes finds statistically significant impacts on height-for-age, stunting, wasting, animal-source foods, dietary diversity and incidence of diarrhoea. Basic income trials in Sub-Saharan Africa have shown extremely promising nutritional outcomes. In 2008 a basic income pilot took place in the Namibian community of Otjivero-Omitara. The pilot provided N$100 (approximately 54% of the then extreme poverty line) to all working-age members of the community. Prior to implementation 30% of households reported facing daily food shortages. Seven months later this had fallen to 12%. The proportion of households reporting they never faced food shortages increased from 20% to 60% over the same period. Dietary diversity improved, as people increased their intake of protein and vegetables. Prior to the pilot 42% of children were undernourished, and 51% stunted. In the seven months following the introduction of the programme the proportion of undernourished children had fallen to 17%. A long term UBI pilot in Kenya has also produced significant positive results in terms of nutrition. Food variety and protein consumption went up significantly across all treatment households, protein consumption increasing by as much as 25%."

12. For further information on the evidence of a UBIG's contribution to food security, please see the IEJ fact sheet cited below.[3]

Question 3: How should local government be given a mandate for food security?

13. We refer to our previous submission, which included several mentions of local government's role in food security (see especially paragraphs 149, 162, 168 and the referenced report, De Visser 2019)

14. In addition, we highlight that there are existing local government spaces/forums (Integrated Development Plans and Spatial Development Plans) where a food and nutrition security mandate can be more explicitly incorporated. Indeed, all local government planning processes should have to incorporate food and nutrition security as a key consideration.

15. Furthermore, local government practices are often disruptive of the food system, as is the case in the regulation of informal trade or the eviction of small-scale farmers from municipal land. These and other forms of disruption might be eliminated by incorporating food security as an objective, more than a new mandate, in planning, regulation and other existing functions of local government.

16. In urban areas local government can use its land-use and planning powers to prioritise access to public land for urban farming, to incentivise use of underutilised private land for urban farming and to ensure that people are not penalised for farming in urban areas (as

[3] https://iej.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/IEJ-UBIG-11-fact-sheet.pdf

was the case with the “Cabbage Bandit in Pretoria”). Further, local government can provide space and infrastructure for local markets and informal traders. At present, municipalities often offer tax incentives to property developers or large corporations to promote ‘development’ of under-served areas, rather than working with community members to promote local entrepreneurship and self-sufficiency.

Question 4: How should government influence food affordability? Re: para 169 of our submission

17. In addition to the suggestions made in our initial submission, we would propose the following:

18. Food affordability is the outcome of two things: incomes (cash in hand) and prices. Government policy should address both. Regarding incomes, more immediate government measures should include increasing the value of relevant social grants, widening their access, and introducing a UBIG. More broadly, the fact that unemployment is a major reason people lack sufficient money to purchase food points to the fact that hunger is a structural issue. In this sense, unemployment is rooted in the structure of the economy, and the government has to do more to transform the economy through active industrial policy, land reform, and greater public investment.

19. Apart from unemployment, food prices in South Africa are high and have been rising. Some food types, like maize meal, also illustrate higher levels of volatility. As such, even many of the employed cannot afford a healthy diet. There is no single, silver bullet intervention for lowering and stabilising food prices. Rather, government should adopt a suite of policies and interventions, which can include subsidies (in production and retail), price caps, buffer stocks, public shops and restaurants, various forms of taxes, and so on. It can also include developing alternative marketing channels for producers beyond the core of corporate processors and retailers (e.g., through government procurement and provision of market infrastructure), thus increasing participation in the food system and competitive pressure on the corporate core.

20. In the city of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, the municipal government sought to make healthy food more affordable through a number of interventions, introduced alongside national-level policies like social grants, school lunches and mandatory public procurement from small-scale, agroecological farmers. Price-specific interventions included:

    a. Popular restaurants- government-run canteens serving subsidised nutritious meals. These are open to anyone in the community, but the subsidy increases for low-income individuals, and the meals are free to homeless residents.

    b. ABC shops- these small grocery shops receive discounted leases of municipal property in exchange for selling a mandated list of 20 healthy items at very low

prices set by the government. The shops may charge whatever they like for other items.

c. Farm stalls and farmers' markets- the municipal government provides space and infrastructure for these channels that enable small-scale farmers to sell directly to consumers, cutting out the middleman and thereby lowering prices while raising producer incomes.

21. Many of the possible policy solutions to high food prices do require further investigation and planning for how they would work in South Africa. Therefore, government should at least commit to developing a food affordability policy framework in South Africa. Its development would include the investigation and planning required on various price management options.

Question 5: Can agroecology supply sufficient food for the country? How would the transition to agroecology affect food prices? What would be the proposed timeframes for the transition?

22. There has been limited research on agroecology in South Africa, compared to other parts of the world. Our initial submission cited a number of studies showing that agroecology can produce as much as other forms of agriculture, with additional benefits in terms of food and nutrition security, farmer livelihoods, environmental and biodiversity conservation, as well as social benefits such as strengthening community ties. Several of those studies are in fact reviews, summarising the findings of dozens if not hundreds of other studies to show that agroecology can increase food availability, and that agro-chemicals are not needed to produce sufficient food.[4]

23. A key aspect of the debate around agroecology's ability to feed the world is the question of yield. Studies on the yields of organic farming find that they are generally equal to, or only slightly below, those of conventional farming. However, when other agroecological practices are incorporated, such as intercropping, minimal tillage, soil cover, etc., the yield gap is closed.[5]

24. A recent study points out, however, that the exclusive focus on yield is misplaced–after all, there is currently more than enough food to feed the world, just as there is more than enough food in South Africa to feed the entire population. The issue is one of inequitable

[4] Faure, G. *et al.* (2024). *What agroecology brings to food security and ecosystem services: a review of scientific evidence*. Knowledge Brief 4. DeSIRA-LIFT. https://capacity4dev.europa.eu/library/whatagroecology-brings-food-security-and-ecosystem-services-review-scientific-evidence_en and Elver, H. (2017). Report of the special rapporteur on the right to food. UN Human Rights Council A/HRC/34/48. http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=A/HRC/34/48&Lang=E

[5] Nichols et al (2016) Agroecological Principles for the Conversion of Farming Systems. *Journal of Ecosystem & Ecography* S5(1) https://www.worldscientific.com/doi/pdf/10.1142/9781786343062_0001

distribution. One study that analysed various reviews (covering over 5000 studies) found clear evidence of how agroecological practices, alongside more socio-environmentally just farming systems, can secure win-win outcomes in terms of diverse ecosystem services and human well-being outcomes.[6]

25. One major study found large yield increases using less water by shifting from conventional high input production to sustainable crop intensification, which focuses on adding soil organic matter and soil aeration, healthy seeds and seedlings, and bigger plant spacing (agroecological practices).[7]

26. A study of agroecological interventions in semi-arid regions in three countries (Pernambuco state in Brazil, Fatick district in Senegal, and Osmanabad district in India) showed that agroecology can help increase farmers' economic viability and income, farm productivity and diversity, food and nutritional security, and promote social change and women's empowerment. Farmers in all three case studies showed significant gains in income, specifically greater income from agricultural sales, value of home consumption, and net income. Median income from agricultural sales for agroecological farmers was 79% higher compared to a "reference group" of farmers in India, 177-284% higher in Brazil, and 36% higher in Senegal. In terms of cash equivalents for consumption based on self-supply, agroecological farmers showed an advantage of 67% in India, 61-74% in Brazil, and 14% in Senegal. Importantly, the agroecological interventions were shown to be particularly pro-poor: while cash income from the sale of agricultural products was higher for all agroecological farmers, it in fact rose most sharply amongst the poorest farmers.[8]

27. Another analysis of 40 'sustainable intensification' projects and programmes in 20 African countries during the 1990s–2000s provides further evidence. These sustainable intensification projects included harnessing agro-ecological processes such as: nutrient cycling, biological nitrogen fixation, allelo-pathy, predation and parasitism; minimizing the use of technologies or practices that have adverse impacts on the environment and human health; mixed cropping agroforestry, horticulture, fodder crops, farmed animals, aquaculture and novel policies and partnerships. The findings documented benefits for 10.39 million farmers and their families and improvements on approximately 12.75 million hectares of land. Crop yields rose on average by 2.13-fold and also resulted in

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[6] Chaplin-Kramer, R, Jahi-Chappell, M, & Bennett, E (2023). Un-yielding: Evidence for the agriculture transformation we need. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1520:89–104. DOI: 10.1111/nyas.14950

[7] Adhikari, P., et al. (2018). System of crop intensification for more productive, resource-conserving, climate-resilient, and sustainable agriculture: experience with diverse crops in varying agroecologies. *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability*, *16*(1), 1–28. https://doi.org/10.1080/14735903.2017.1402504

[8] Chappell, M. J., et al (2018). *Agroecology as a Pathway towards Sustainable Food Systems*. MISEREOR IHR Hilfswerk. https://www.misereor.org/fileadmin//user_upload/misereor_org/Publications/englisch/synthesis-report-agroecology.pdf

diversification with new crops, farmed animals or fish that added to the existing staples or vegetables already being cultivated.[9]

28. Numerous studies from the global south have found that agroecology improves yields as well as food security.[10]

29. In addition to studies on existing agroecological farms, there is also forecasting and modelling to demonstrate the potential of agroecology. Research on the benefits of agroecology comes from Europe as well. One study systematically compared agricultural production, modes of production and land use to quantify scenarios for 530 million Europeans by 2050. It found that by generalising agroecology, restoring landscapes, abandoning imports of plant proteins (reducing global food footprint) and adopting healthier diets Europeans could have enough and healthier food, maintain exports, recover biodiversity and reduce greenhouse gases by 40%.[11]

30. Another study used a global dataset of 293 examples comparing average yield ratios of organic vs. conventional food production of different food categories for the developed and the developing world.[12] Using average yield ratios, researchers modelled the global food supply that could be grown organically on the current agricultural land base. The study found that:

    a. organic methods could produce enough food on a global per capita basis to sustain the current human population, and potentially an even larger population, without increasing the agricultural land base.

    b. the agricultural land base could eventually be reduced if organic production methods were employed.

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[9] Pretty, J., Toulmin, C. and Williams, S. (2011) Sustainable Intensification in African Agriculture. International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability, 9, 5-24. https://doi.org/10.3763/ijas.2010.0583.

[10] Altieri MA. (1999) Applying agroecology to enhance the productivity of peasant farming systems in Latin America. *Environ Dev Sustain*. 1999;1:197-217; Bunch R. (1999) More productivity with fewer external inputs: Central American case studies of agroecological development and their broader implications. *Environ Dev Sustain*. 1999;1:219-233. Pretty J. (1999). Can sustainable agriculture feed Africa? New evidence on progress, processes and impacts. *J Environ Dev Sustain*. 1999;1:253-274. doi:10.1023/A:1010039224868. Hine R, Pretty J, Twarog S. (2008) Organic Agriculture and Food Security in Africa. UNEP-UNCTAD Capacity-Building Task Force on Trade, Environment and Development; 2008. http://bit.ly/KBCgY0. Barzman M, Das L. (2000) Ecologising rice-based systems in Bangladesh. LEISA Mag. 2000;16. http://bit.ly/L2N71R. Zhu Y, Chen H, Fan J, et al. (2000) Genetic diversity and disease control in rice. Nature. 17;406:718-722. http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v406/n6797/full/406718a0.html

[11] Poux, X., Aubert, P.-M. (2018). Agroecology can feed Europe pesticide-free in 2050 /Une Europe agroécologique en 2050: une agriculture multifonctionnelle pour une alimentation saine. Enseignements d'une modélisation du système alimentaire européen, Iddri-AScA, Study N°09/18, Paris, France.

[12] Badgley, C., et al. (2007). Organic agriculture and the global food supply. *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems* 22(2); 86–108

c. nitrogen-fixing legumes used as green manures can provide enough biologically fixed nitrogen to replace the entire amount of synthetic nitrogen fertilizer currently in use.

31. The study noted that actual output for organic farms may have been underestimated as yield ratios were reported for individual crops, whereas many organic farmers use polycultures and multiple cropping systems, from which the total production per unit area is often substantially higher than for single crops–this is certainly the case for agroecological production, which draws on the principles of synergies and biodiversity.

32. The International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food) reports on multiple benefits of agroecology.[13] Polycultures are shown to produce 1.7 times more harvested biomass on average than single species monocultures and to be 79% more productive than the average monoculture. Where diversified systems raise productivity, they do so sustainably, and in the places where additional food is desperately needed. Diversified systems produce diverse and changing outputs, making these difficult to measure.

33. In South Africa, a systematic review of smallholder agroecology strategies in adapting to climate change, found that agroecology practices increase crop resilience, improve soil fertility, and enhance water use efficiency. While these do not directly respond to the question, they indicate that agroecology can contribute to the conditions for a stable food supply.[14]

34. Another meta-analysis found "that agroecological practices are associated with a positive and significant difference in land productivity, compared to that for monocrop systems especially so when monocrops are grown without inputs. However, the size and direction of yield differ by practice, crop, climatic factor, soil property and type of control."[15]

35. A sub-Saharan African study, based on case studies, found that while organic production in Africa has the potential to increase yields, it requires deliberate/active organic management and agroecological practices.[16]

36. Another meta-analysis found that "overall, organic yields are typically lower than conventional yields. But these yield differences are highly contextual, depending on system and site characteristics, and range from 5% lower organic yields (rain-fed legumes and perennials on weak-acidic to weak-alkaline soils), 13% lower yields (when best

[13] Frison, E et al., (2016). *From uniformity to diversity: a paradigm shift from industrial agriculture to diversified agroecological systems*. International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems. See www.ipes-food.org

[14] Zenda, M & Rudolph, M (2024). A Systematic Review of Agroecology Strategies for Adapting to Climate Change Impacts on Smallholder Crop Farmers' Livelihoods in South Africa. *Climate*. *12*(3), 33; https://doi.org/10.3390/cli12030033

[15] Romero Antonio et al (2025) Productivity effects of agroecological practices in Africa: insights from a systematic review and meta-analysis" https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12571-024-01504-6

[16] Schader et al (2021) "How is organic farming performing agronomically and economically in sub-Saharan Africa?" https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959378021001047

organic practices are used), to 34% lower yields (when the conventional and organic systems are most comparable). Under certain conditions—that is, with good management practices, particular crop types and growing conditions—organic systems can thus nearly match conventional yields, whereas under others it at present cannot. To establish organic agriculture as an important tool in sustainable food production, the factors limiting organic yields need to be more fully understood, alongside assessments of the many social, environmental and economic benefits of organic farming systems."[17]

37. All of this suggests that deliberate effort must be made to promote active agroecological management and practices, that results are very context specific and change from season to season, that agroecological systems can perform better in stress conditions (e.g. low rainfall or drought), and that yield must also be considered alongside other indicators, such as soil health, water use efficiency and social benefits of agroecology.

38. It should be noted that we are not calling for the immediate replacement of industrial-conventional farming, but a period of expansion of agroecology in relation to conventional agriculture. There is strong recognition that the environmental damage of conventional agriculture, combined with the predicted negative impacts of climate change on agricultural production and greater global instability of input supply and export markets, will reduce the performance of the conventional system in the next decade.

39. In South Africa and elsewhere, commercial farmers are already moving to adopt some elements of agroecological practice (even if these are fairly restricted) through conservation agriculture that embraces minimal soil disturbance, reduction in conventional inputs (especially synthetic fertiliser), intercropping and crop rotations, permanent ground cover, and species diversification. These practices are shown to increase yields in South Africa.[18]

40. Research in South Africa has included long-term trials at agricultural stations as well as research on conventional farms. One financial assessment of conservation agriculture (CA) and other farming systems in the Western Cape found conventional farming's "practices of monoculture and deep tillage are financially unsustainable. The financial benefits of CA are directly related to improved soil health, lower weed and pest stress and

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[17] Seufert et al (2012) Comparing the yields of organic and conventional agriculture. *Nature* https://www.nature.com/articles/nature11069

[18] Strauss, Swanepoel, Smith and Smit (2021) A history of Conservation Agriculture in South Africa. *South African Journal of Plant and Soil.* https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02571862.2021.1979112. Hardy, M.B., Strauss, J.A. and Laubscher, S.J.A. (2011) *An Economic Evaluation of Crop and Crop/Annual Legume Pastures Rotation Systems in the Swartland, Western Cape*. Western Cape Department of Agriculture, Stellenbosch, South Africa. Strauss, J.A., Hardy, M.B. and Langenhoven, W.R. (2011) *An Economic Evaluation of Crop and Pasture Production Systems Within the Longterm Crop Rotation Trial at the Tygerhoek Agricultural Research Farm, Western Cape*. Western Cape Department of Agriculture, Stellenbosch, South Africa. https://overberglandbou.yolasite.com/resources/Interim%20Gross%20Margin%20Report%20-%20Langgewens%202002%20to%202010%20-%20TEXT.pdf. https://overberglandbou.yolasite.com/resources/Interim%20Gross%20Margin%20Report%20-%20Tygerhoek%202002%20to%202010%20-%20TEXT.pdf.

improved yields. The CA farming systems were less susceptible to variations in external factors, highlighting the resilience of the system that incorporates crop rotation and no-till."[19]

Food prices and agroecological transitions

41. With regard to the question of the impact of a transition to agroecology on food prices, this is a complex question. A cost-benefit analysis shows that agroecological/organic production saves costs on inputs but has higher costs on labour and operational costs– noting that labour costs are not necessarily a problem, because it can mean more cash for food purchases. Environmental benefits (and hence long-term implications for farming) of agroecological production are typically excluded from cost-benefit calculations. Once these are internalised, the benefits of agroecological production become more pronounced. Evidence suggests that, over a number of seasons, any yield gaps decline as the soil fertility, biodiversity and other environmental benefits begin to take material effect.[20]

42. Agroecology is generally associated with more localised production for local consumption. This cuts out costs of transport for local community members to purchase food. Evidence also suggests that informal traders and farmers markets are generally cheaper than supermarkets. Research on the informal traders who procure produce at the Johannesburg Fresh Produce Market states that "By selling at low prices in convenient locations, informal traders reduce the cost of food and the need for transport when shopping. They are key to making fruit and vegetables physically and economically accessible to the urban poor."[21] Other studies have similar findings about the importance of informal traders in selling lower-priced foods.[22] This therefore suggests that a study of the impacts of changes in the system on food prices should not stop at production costs, but also consider distribution channels, costs of transport, energy, mark-up by retailers, etc.

Timeframes for agroecological transitions

43. Transitions occur at different scales, from transition in an individual plot or farm from conventional to agroecological production, all the way to a transition in the overall food

[19] Knott, Stuart & Hoffmann, Willem & Strauss, Johann (2017). The Whole farm financial implications of different tillage systems on different crop rotations in the Swartland area of the Western Cape, South Africa. *International Journal of Agricultural Management*, Institute of Agricultural Management, vol. 6(01). https://ideas.repec.org/a/ags/ijameu/287267.html

[20] https://agriculture.institute/organic-produce-economics-marketing/organic-vs-conventional-farming-analysis/

[21] Wegerif (2025) Johannesburg's produce market has supplied the informal sector for decades: a refresh is due. https://theconversation.com/johannesburgs-produce-market-has-supplied-the-informal-sector-for-decades-a-refresh-is-due-268151

[22] Sithole and Wegerif (2025) The contribution of cart traders to fresh produce accessibility in Soshanguve township, South Africa. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s44187-025-00634-w. Malatji (2023) The Role of Informal Trade Markets in Household Food Security and Nutrition in Cape Town's Food Systems Value Chain. https://open.uct.ac.za/items/56c9f4c9-b33c-42e1-b2d6-e84688527860

system. The former obviously has a shorter timeframe than the latter, especially since food systems transition is dependent on multiple actors working in concert to adjust policies and programmes, adapt supply chains, input supply systems etc. On-farm transitions can vary from 3-7 years, depending on the quality or extent of degradation of the natural resource base at the start, and the availability of financial and other resources to buffer the transition. On average, soil improvements become apparent 3-4 years after the start of transition.[23] Food system transitions are a question of political will and good coordination and process facilitation of multi-actor processes.

44. Given that agroecology is a holistic approach to food system transformation, it makes sense that an agroecological transition will involve not only shifts in agricultural production, but also shifts in how the distribution of food is organised. As mentioned above, localised markets, with government support, should be part of that transition. Countries such as Brazil that have implemented multi-pronged strategies against hunger, and in support of agroecology, have seen dramatic results within a few years' time.[24]

Question 6: With regard to land and spatial justice, what proportion of redistributed land is currently being used for food production? Are there support models (for farmers on redistributed land) that have been proven to work?

45. There is a huge lack of both governmental and civil society statistical data in the land sector, making it unlikely that there are any accurate records of what proportion of redistributed land is currently being used for food production. Civil society groups have been unable to get clear data from government on how much land has been redistributed, to whom, how it is used, or what the outcomes have been. Better data on land redistribution must be collected and shared by government to plug this gap. In the absence of these government datasets, we can only provide evidence based on our experiences.

46. Based on Surplus People Project's (SPP) engagements and case tracking, especially under the Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy (PLAS), consistent patterns show the ineffectiveness of current support models. In multiple cases in the Western Cape and Northern Cape, implementation and decision-making have been uneven. National budgets often do not reflect farms' market value. The model is frequently tied to high-value commodity production, such as wine grapes in the Western Cape and livestock in the Northern Cape. This limits beneficiaries' ability to adapt production systems to their contexts. Delays in procurement and funding approvals, especially where lease agreements exist, have caused farmers to miss critical planting and breeding cycles. Incomplete or inadequate infrastructure on transferred farms worsens this.

[23] Nichols et al (2016), *op cit.* See also: https://sagrainmag.co.za/2025/06/04/how-ca-producers-navigated-the-j-curve/
[24] https://ipes-food.org/brazil-beats-hunger/

47. Mentorship arrangements under PLAS often result in commercial partners retaining significant control over production decisions, which can reproduce existing inequalities rather than transform them. Cooperative models also tend to struggle, especially where governance is weak and there is little or no ongoing institutional support from relevant departments. Across cases tracked by SPP, these challenges point to fragmented and insufficiently coordinated support.

48. The Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE) has found that the land redistribution programme has fallen short of expectations by various measures, such as the extent of land redistributed against the set targets, as well as the measure of whether redistributed farms have economically improved the lives of beneficiaries. There are several interconnected factors cited for declines in productivity on redistributed farms. Group farming on large commercial farms generates unique challenges such as conflicts, leading to complete collapse of production on farms. Large volumes of literature produced on the state of land reform farms point to the direction of inadequate support, or no post-settlement support, to land reform beneficiaries. A recent study found that out of 1,956 farms acquired through the government's Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy (PLAS), only 7% were operating at commercial scale.[25]

49. Government's land reform programme encouraged large-scale cash crop operations on large farm units and never encouraged subdivision of plots to family operated units. That is one of the factors crippling the potential of family units as optimal food production hubs. Previous work that assessed land reform farms show that more than 80% of land reform farms were struggling, with some in complete state of failure. The recapitalization programme of 2010 to revive the redistributed farms did not produce the desired material gains, other than opening an avenue for capital accumulation by elite farmers through the mentorship programme.

50. The government's insistence on promoting large-scale commercial farming on redistributed farmers is misplaced. In general, 60% of food consumed around the world comes from smallholder agriculture in developing countries.[26] There is also evidence from many countries of an inverse relationship between farm size and productivity.[27] Other research has documented the multiple functions and benefits of small farms both in the United States and worldwide, demonstrating that even in industrialised countries small farms can outperform larger ones in terms of productivity and economic viability.[28]

51. In addition to the information provided above, we would like to provide a case study, shared by a farmer who received a redistributed farm through PLAS. The case study

[25] Verschoor et al (2025) How Effective is the Agricultural Advisory Service Rendered to Land Reform Beneficiaries in South Africa? *SA Journal of Agricultural Extension* 53(5): 115-130. 10.17159/2413-3221/2025/v53n5a21387
[26] IPES-Food, 2016*, op cit.*
[27] Cornia, G (1985) Farm size, land yields and the agricultural production function: An analysis for fifteen developing countries. *World Development* 13(4): 513-534. https://ideas.repec.org/a/eee/wdevel/v13y1985i4p513-534.html
[28] Rosset, P (1999) The Multiple Functions and Benefits of Small Farm Agriculture (Policy Brief). Food First, Oakland, CA. https://www.iatp.org/sites/default/files/Multiple_Functions_and_Benefits_of_Small_Farm_.htm

documents the lack of support and other challenges faced by this farmer. See attached overview of Hillview Farm in the Eastern Cape.

Question 7: Are the barriers to women's access to land a matter of law or practice? Provide evidence for the predominance of women in the informal food trade.

52. While precise demographic data on informal food traders is unavailable, several local studies as well as national research suggest that women outnumber men in informal trade generally, with women making up an estimated 63% of South African street traders.[29]

53. In terms of the barriers to women's land access, we will address the question of whether these are more a matter of law or practice in terms of urban and rural (communal and farm) land. The barriers to women's access to land are not only a matter of law or practice but arise in the interaction between the two. This interaction is particularly significant in the context of food insecurity. While South Africa is food secure at a national level, many households, especially those in informal settlements and low-income urban areas, experience chronic hunger and poor nutrition. Food insecurity in South Africa is widespread and persistent, with over one in five households reporting inadequate access to food, and significantly higher rates among poor and female-headed households.[30]

54. In these contexts, access to land is closely tied to the ability to secure food, generate income, and sustain livelihoods. Where women's access to land is limited or insecure, their ability to meet household food needs is directly affected.

55. Across different tenure contexts, legal frameworks often recognise women's rights in principle. However, these rights are not consistently realised in practice due to structural inequality, administrative weaknesses, and entrenched social norms.[31] The result is that women's access to land remains constrained in ways that undermine both tenure security and food security. This gap between formal rights and lived realities highlight how legal protections across the food system often fail to translate into meaningful access to food and livelihoods for low-income communities.[32]

56. In the context of family homes, a key issue is the law's limited recognition of collective and intergenerational forms of tenure. While the formal property system is based on

[29] Mahopo et al (2022) Operational Characteristics of Women Street Food Vendors in Rural South Africa. Frontiers in Public Health. DOI: 10:849059. Ramirez Reynoso & Vanek (2024) Street Vendors and Market Traders in 12 Countries: A Statistical Profile. WIEGO Statistical Brief. Rogan, M (2019). Informal Workers in Urban South Africa: A Statistical Snapshot. WIEGO Statistical Brief. Rogan, M and Skinner, C. The size and structure of the South African informal sector 2008–2014: A labour-force analysis. In *The South African informal sector: Creating jobs, reducing poverty,* HSRC press, pp 77-102.

[30] SERI, *Food for Thought: Reflection on Food (In)Security. Laws, Experiences, Interventions*. (2025).

[31] SERI, Women's Equal Rights to Land and Housing: A Gendered Analysis of Family Homes in South Africa (Research Report 1, SERI, 2024); SERI, Women's Equal Rights to Land and Housing: A Gendered Analysis of Informal Settlements in South Africa (Research Report 2, SERI, 2025); SERI, Women's Spaces. Access to the Formal System of Registered Property in South Africa: Loss of Homes Due to Indebtedness (2026); SERI, Women's Spaces: Rental Disputes in South Africa (2026).

[32] SERI, Food for Thought: Reflection on Food (In)Security. Laws, Experiences, Interventions.

individual ownership, many families understand these homes as shared, multi-generational resources.[33] The registration of property in a single individual's name, often a male relative, combined with gaps in the administration of deceased estates and weak or absent rights inquiries, has resulted in the exclusion of women from ownership and decision-making.[34] This has direct implications for food security. Women who do not have recognised rights to the home may lack the authority to make decisions about household resources, including food production, expenditure, or the use of land for subsistence purposes. In situations of dispute or dispossession, the loss of access to the home also disrupts the primary site through which many households secure and prepare food.

Urban land access

57. In informal settlements, the relationship between land access and food security is more immediate. Although legal and policy frameworks provide for tenure security and upgrading, women's access to land and housing is shaped by poverty, insecure tenure arrangements, and uneven state support.[35] These conditions intersect with gender inequality and gender-based violence, which limit women's ability to claim, use, and retain land. At the same time, high levels of food insecurity mean that access to even small parcels of land can be critical for survival.

58. Experiences in Slovo Park informal settlement, south of Johannesburg illustrate this clearly.[36] In a context where many households struggle to meet basic food needs, women have used urban agriculture and community food gardens as a way to secure household nutrition and generate income.[37] Such practices are part of broader coping strategies adopted by low-income households, including growing food, informal trading, and making difficult trade-offs between food and other basic needs.[38] Through the establishment of cone gardens, horizontal gardens, and small-scale animal production, residents have repurposed backyard spaces and nearby vacant land to produce food.[39] These initiatives enable households to supplement their diets, reduce reliance on purchased food, and create small livelihood opportunities, reinforcing the importance of agency in achieving food security.

59. At the same time, these practices highlight the limits of current legal and policy frameworks. The land used for food gardens is often informal, unsecured, and not recognised within formal planning or upgrading processes. Efforts by the community to incorporate additional land into upgrading plans have been resisted by authorities, despite the clear role that these spaces play in supporting food security and livelihoods.[40] This reflects a broader pattern: that community-led and informal contributions to the food

[33] SERI, *Women's Equal Rights to Land and Housing: A Gendered Analysis of Family Homes in South Africa*.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] SERI, *Women's Spaces. A Case Study from Slovo Park: Urban Food Gardens and Food Security* (n.d).
[37] Ibid.
[38] SERI, *Food for Thought: Reflection on Food (In)Security. Laws, Experiences, Interventions*.
[39] SERI, *Women's Spaces. A Case Study from Slovo Park: Urban Food Gardens and Food Security.*
[40] Ibid.

system, such as urban agriculture and informal trade, remain undervalued and insufficiently supported in law and policy.[41]

60. A similar gap between law and practice is evident in the rental sector. While the legal framework provides protections for tenants, in practice many women face insecure tenure, informal agreements, and exploitative conditions. Women, particularly those heading households, are disproportionately affected by eviction, unaffordable rent increases, and coercive practices such as service disconnections.[42] These forms of insecurity have direct consequences for food access. Households routinely make trade-offs between rent and food, often prioritising housing costs at the expense of adequate nutrition.[43] Displacement further disrupts access to local food networks, informal economies, and social support systems that are critical for survival.

61. Within the registered property system, barriers are increasingly linked to indebtedness.[44] Although ownership appears secure, it is often contingent on the ability to sustain mortgage repayments. When households fall into arrears, the legal framework allows for the escalation of debt and eventual sale in execution. In practice, many homeowners are not fully aware of the terms of their loans or the legal processes that follow default.[45] The loss of a home in this context is not only a loss of shelter, but also a loss of stability, assets, and the means to secure food. Households facing foreclosure often experience acute financial strain, reducing their ability to afford food and increasing vulnerability to hunger.

62. These risks are closely tied to broader economic vulnerability. Food insecurity affects not only the unemployed but also low-income workers, reflecting the inadequacy of wages and the rising cost of food.[46] Women are more likely to be in precarious forms of employment and to carry primary care responsibilities, which limits their ability to absorb financial shocks.[47] Rising living costs, including food prices, further constrain household budgets. In this context, limited or insecure access to land reduces the capacity of households to supplement food through subsistence production or alternative livelihood strategies.

63. Legal enforcement processes, particularly in eviction and foreclosure contexts, further illustrate the gap between law and practice. While safeguards exist, they are not always effective in practice. Inadequate notice, limited access to legal support, and barriers to participation mean that many households are unable to assert their rights.[48] The resulting loss of land or housing often has immediate and severe consequences for food security,

[41] SERI, *Food for Thought: Reflection on Food (In)Security. Laws, Experiences, Interventions*.
[42] SERI, *Women's Spaces: Rental Disputes in South Africa*.
[43] SERI*, Food for Thought: Reflection on Food (In)Security. Laws, Experiences, Interventions.*
[44] SERI, *Women's Spaces. Access to the Formal System of Registered Property in South Africa: Loss of Homes Due to Indebtedness*.
[45] Ibid.
[46] SERI, *Food for Thought: Reflection on Food (In)Security. Laws, Experiences, Interventions*.
[47] SERI, *Women's Spaces. Access to the Formal System of Registered Property in South Africa: Loss of Homes Due to Indebtedness*.
[48] Ibid.

reinforcing that the right to food is deeply interconnected with other socio-economic rights, including housing, work, and social security.[49]

Rural land access

64. The central obstacle to women's land access is a result of practices which exclude women from having a voice, as well as laws that do not actively recognise and address women's challenges in accessing land in a way that enables interpretation and implementation of those laws to make women's rights realisable.

65. There are areas where women experience sexual extortion to access land because the traditional leaders demand sexual favours in exchange for access to land for farming. Patriarchal practices see women being allocated land under their fathers, brothers and any other male relative. Most decisions happen in isolation away from women, with older men making all of the decisions supposedly on behalf of the community.

66. Women who are widows, divorced, unwed and childless are often targeted for dispossession from the land upon which they live or grow food, because they are deemed not to belong to the community, so they are isolated and rejected from society. These women cannot even enter negotiations for their land if there will be compensation paid, and their unpaid labour is viewed as expendable.

67. In communal areas, the key barriers impacting women's access to land are:[50]

    a. Commodification of land: In Moletjie land is available to anyone who is willing to pay the high price. Therefore, those with money are able to access land, even big portions. This often takes place even on land that is already used by women who are practising subsistence farming on it. There have been instances of shopping malls being developed in ploughing fields.

    b. Some land is reallocated for residential plots without consent of the women who are already deriving livelihoods from farming that land. This is due to urbanisation in the area. Some people who avoid payment of rates and taxes in the suburbs of Polokwane, acquire land in Moletjie to build mansions and/or retirement homes.

    c. Patriarchal control is also a factor that hinders women's access to land. While single women can access land and hold it through Permission to Occupy (PTOs), married women struggle to secure land independently. Acquired land is often registered in the husband's name and later transferred to a son upon the passing of the husband. Widows and divorced women have challenges acquiring land for livelihoods.

    d. Unemployed youth organise themselves into vigilante groups or SANCO and reallocate land which women use to grow food. These become parallel structures to traditional councils and headmen, who are known land

[49] SERI, *Food for Thought: Reflection on Food (In)Security. Laws, Experiences, Interventions*.
[50] Data drawn from a study conducted by Nkuzi Development Association with PLAAS in Moletji titled "Privatisation of customary land and implications for women's land tenure security and livelihoods in Southern Africa".

administrators with a role in site demarcation and allocation. Women who resist these kinds of actions are subject to abuse and harassment, even to the point of physical violence.

68. On farms, the issues affecting women's access to land are:[51]

    a) Women's rights are tied to the existence of a male relative. Upon termination of employment or death, women are often pushed off land. Therefore, women on farms do not have independent land rights and cannot even produce food on land beyond the passing or termination of employment of the patriarch of the family. As in the cases of customary marriage, women should inherit their husbands' land.
    b) There was a court judgement in 2011[52] wherein customary law was used to rule against a woman who was illegally evicted from a farm. The court considered a submission by the landowner's legal representative that the son assumed the role of head of the family after his father passed, and since the son was not a long-term occupier, the entire family, including his elderly mother, should move. This ruling was a major concern for women's land rights, as it often ignored the independent tenure rights of elderly women, focusing only on the status of the male "family head". There is a need to recognise independent land rights of women.
    c) There are instances of women being denied a voice in decision making, especially when it comes to negotiations for off-farm settlements. Male relatives block women from being part of negotiations and as such their interests and voice are not considered. Women's interests are better articulated by women themselves. Therefore, women should be included in decision-making processes and be supported to exercise agency.
    d) Women who access land through the government's land reform program, whether through leases under PLAS or section 4 of ESTA acquisition, do not have resources to use the land productively. This includes financial support, water rights and technical skills. As a result, land transfer or lease does not translate into productive land use. Post-settlement support is crucial in this case.

69. Overall, the barriers to women's access to land are best understood as a combination of legal and practical constraints that directly shape food insecurity. Legal frameworks are often incomplete or poorly implemented, while social norms, economic inequality, and institutional weaknesses determine how land is accessed and used in practice. At the same time, community-led initiatives such as those in Slovo Park demonstrate that where women are able to access and use land, even on a small scale, this can play a meaningful role in addressing household food insecurity. However, these forms of access remain insecure and insufficiently recognised, limiting their potential to contribute to the realisation of the right to food.

[51] Examples drawn from experience of working with farm dwellers and farm workers.
[52] Meyer NO v Sifile (A355/11) [2011] ZAWCHC 528 (24 November 2011)

Question 8: How should Treasury be held accountable for policies that have negatively impacted on people's right to food?

70. Although the right to food is a state-wide obligation shaped by planning, prioritisation, and departmental capacity, it is misleading to treat Treasury as a neutral or purely technical actor. Budget allocations are not made in isolation but reflect both the quality of proposals coming from government departments and systemic constraints, including weakened institutional capacity within Treasury and line departments. Through its commitment to fiscal consolidation, its determination of expenditure ceilings, and its use of conditionalities, Treasury exerts substantial influence over the implementation of programmes, such as social protection policy. These interventions have, in practice, constrained the scope and adequacy of income support – one of the primary tools through which the state gives effect to the right to food. While failures in planning and capacity across departments are relevant, Treasury's choices are not merely administrative; they reflect policy preferences that can limit the realisation of socio-economic rights. As such, Treasury should be understood as a pivotal actor whose decisions both shape and, at times, restrict the state's fulfilment of the right to food.

71. The implication of this is that, first, the state needs to be held accountable, including by developing coherent right to food plans, aligned across relevant departments. Secondly, more needs to be done, such as by the Cabinet, to ensure that Treasury's functioning is more aligned with necessary structural changes in the economy, including the achievement of the right to food. The pursuit of fiscal consolidation should be subjected to constitutional obligations in terms of the realisation of basic rights. Objectives pursued by Treasury are often presented as technical and ideologically neutral, when in fact they represent ideologically motivated policy choices.

Question 9: Is hunger in South Africa a policy failure, a market failure or a constitutional failure?

72. In general, hunger in South Africa is not a constitutional failure, given that the right to food is included in the constitution (though the way the property clause has limited land reform might be considered a constitutional failure). Even with the mediating aspect of "progressive realisation" of the right to food, after more than 30 years, this should no longer have been an issue.

73. There is certainly a policy failure. The right to food is not carried into policy documents, despite its presence in the Constitution. It is not considered an objective in government planning processes. Food security has been outsourced to the market, with the public sector playing a small role on the edges in food relief, welfare support and small income support programmes. For the most part, food insecurity is considered a problem for the individual to deal with, with market forces determining who gets food and who doesn't. There is also a market failure because authority is ceded to "the market" to meet the food needs of the populace but is very clearly failing when one looks at the levels of hunger and malnutrition in the country. The market will only meet "effective demand" (i.e. where

people are able to purchase food as a commodity at prevailing prices). Even market failure, however, can be considered policy failure as it is the state's failure to regulate the market, and to mitigate its negative impacts (e.g., to require that corporate actors internalise the social and environmental "externalities" associated with the food system) that allows the market to produce inequitable the results that it does.

Concluding note

74. A recent piece of information came to the attention of the Just Transition group that was not included in our initial submission, but which highlights the importance of the Commission's theme 6 (legislative and policy coherence) and theme 7 (civic participation). Our group learned, through a comment by a government official recorded in a report on a session of the parliamentary committee on agriculture,[53] that government is conducting a review of the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act (47 of 1996, amended 2001). This Act has been identified as a significant obstacle to the kinds of government interventions in support of small-scale producers that would enable government to better meet its obligations with regard to the right to food.[54]

75. We welcome this review, but were surprised to learn it has started in 2020 and that it has a 9-year expected timeframe. To ensure coherence, the review of the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act should be linked to the development of the National Food and Nutrition Security Plan (NFNSP), yet this has not been the case. It should also be linked to the Food Systems Transformation Pathways process that government is running, but it has not been mentioned there either. Given that many members of our group participate in those spaces, where we welcome the possibility of engaging with government in the development of policies and programmes, we are surprised that no similar participatory process seems to be under way with regard to the review of this important Act. We urge the Commission to recommend to government that this review be a) participatory and b) expedited, in order to ensure that the revision better aligns the law with government's obligations in terms of the right to food.

[53] See paragraph 3 of this meeting report: https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/42738/.
[54] See Ledger, T (2016), *An Empty Plate*. Jacana Media.