



UNIVERSITY of the  
WESTERN CAPE



**DULLAH OMAR INSTITUTE**  
FOR CONSTITUTIONAL LAW, GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

## **NATIONAL COLLOQUIUM ON ACCESS TO FOOD FOR STUDENTS IN SOUTH AFRICAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS**

**DATE: 14-15 AUGUST 2018**

**PROTEA HOTEL, SEA POINT, ARTHURS RD, SEA POINT, CAPE TOWN**

**PROGRAMME REPORT**



DST-NRF  
**Centre of Excellence**  
in Food Security



**FORDFOUNDATION**

## Background

All around the world especially in lower and middle income countries, access to adequate food remains a serious challenge resulting in hunger and malnutrition. Given the high burden of poverty in South Africa, food insecurity is a major challenge with over 13 million South Africans estimated to be suffering from hunger daily.<sup>1</sup> Despite initiatives by the government and the private sector, food insecurity is a reality for many, more so for vulnerable groups in South Africa. The right to food provided in the South African Constitution<sup>2</sup> guarantees food security for all and creates a regime for accountability through elements of state obligation, encourages citizens' participation as right bearers and not merely recipients, and places emphasis on addressing the needs of vulnerable groups<sup>3</sup> such as infants and children, orphans, widows, the elderly, pregnant and lactating mothers, persons living with HIV, the disabled, unemployed amongst others.

Students in tertiary institutions have been identified as a particularly vulnerable group in discussions on food insecurity. They are mostly unemployed, they do not fall within the age bracket of persons entitled to social grants from the government and are wholly reliant on income from parents or other caregivers which is split amongst several contesting needs. Many disadvantaged students are assisted through the National Students Financial Aid Schemes (NSFAS) which caters for their tertiary education needs. Unfortunately, the current structuring of the fund largely prioritises other financial needs such as tuition, accommodation, study materials, leaving subsistence to be catered by whatever is left over which is usually insufficient. Other issues affecting access to food for such students include delayed payments of NSFAS bursaries, distance to grocery stores, and overpriced food outlets within campuses making food both physically and economically inaccessible to students. Some students develop coping strategies such as skipping meals, cutting down on the amount of food eaten, choosing less nutritious but cheap options etc. It could also predispose them to coping mechanisms that are inimical to their well-being such as shoplifting or engaging in transactional sex for survival. Food insecurity has a negative impact on academic performance, student well-being and university completion rates across South Africa.

The recent agitations for zero fees by students in tertiary institutions around the country have brought to the fore several other issues which students grapple with besides high costs of tuition fees, including a lack of housing and an alarming rate of food insecurity amongst students. The issue of food insecurity on campuses has motivated several initiatives both within and outside campuses aimed at alleviating the plight of food insecure students. Among such initiatives are feeding programs, food gardens, food

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<sup>1</sup>Oxfam 'Hidden hunger in South Africa' Available at [https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file\\_attachments/hidden\\_hunger\\_in\\_south\\_africa\\_0.pdf](https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/hidden_hunger_in_south_africa_0.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>Section 27, South African Constitution, Act 108 of 1996. Children in particular have the right to basic nutrition (section 28(1)(c) and persons in detention are guaranteed adequate nutrition at State expense (section 35(2)(e).

<sup>3</sup> Anderson M 'Rights-based food systems and the goal of food systems reform' (2008) 25 *Agriculture and Human Values* 593-608

vouchers etc. These initiatives have been successful in addressing student hunger but only to a limited extent. The food insecurity challenge persists as the initiative can only do so much to address the needs of hungry students on possibly a once off basis. These attempts are laudable but what remains missing is an accountability mechanism within institutions, which fosters a sense of coordination, extending the schemes to every student that is food insecure on all campuses countrywide.

Against this backdrop, the Socio-Economic Rights Project (SERP) at Dullah Omar Institute in 2017 embarked on a project known as 'Access to Food for Students in South African Tertiary Institutions'(Access to Food for Students Project). The project seeks to determine where the obligations to realise the right to food of students in tertiary institutions lies; the role of different stakeholders including non-state actors; and given several initiatives resorted to, the best approach to addressing food insecurity among students. The project is subdivided into exploratory and implementation phases. The exploratory phase commenced with reviewing the current structures in place for and exploring the dynamics of addressing food insecurity of students in tertiary institutions in South Africa through a one day stakeholders' roundtable on food insecurity for students of higher institutions on 5 October 2017. The implementation phase of the project commences with this two-day colloquium, drawing together a broader range of stakeholders including government officials, policy makers, student leaders, academics, representatives from civil society organizations and human rights activists involved in enabling access to food for students in South African tertiary institutions.

The colloquium puts in perspective lessons learnt from the roundtable and kick starts the advocacy process of the Access to Food for Students Project. In doing this, it becomes necessary to contextualise the issues of student food insecurity on a national scale. The colloquium creates a platform for experiential knowledge exchange among researchers and academics on the problem of student food insecurity as well as relevant stakeholders who have a role to play in addressing the food insecurity problem among students of tertiary institutions. It also galvanizes the advocacy process with a view to addressing systemic issues, as well as commencing the call for policy review on food security of students in South African higher institutions. The colloquium also explores the dynamics and utility of a rights-based approach to addressing food insecurity of students in tertiary institutions in South Africa.

## DAY ONE

### OPENING ADDRESS

#### **Prof Pamela Dube, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Student Development and Support, University of the Western Cape**

Prof Dube expressed a message of goodwill from the UWC administration as well as its support of the national issue of food insecurity, which is the focus of the colloquium. She noted that food insecurity is common place in a country like South Africa with glaring inequalities and limited progress in bridging the gap between the rich and the poor. Students of tertiary institutions are products of this unequal society and face the challenges inherent in such society one of which is food insecurity among a large part of the population. According to Prof Dube, the food insecurity situation on campus mirrors the challenge with hunger in the wider society affecting young people. Many students are from homes relying mostly on social grants with limited or non-existent support due to contesting needs for the grant money at home. Hunger amongst young people because of the social inequality is a fertile ground for several social ills. The situation puts them in vulnerable positions, prompting them to engage in relationships of dependence. She also noted the challenges with accessing NSFAS bursaries especially in UWC having about 7000 students relying solely on the funding for not only tuition, accommodation or books but also daily survival.

Considering hunger has a negative impact on student progress and learning outcomes, and given several calls from students seeking assistance to address hunger, Prof Dube stated that the UWC administration has made efforts to support affected students. As early as 2005, the school engaged in providing support to students through the Student Resource Exchange programme which afforded support to some students in return for tutoring first year students. There is also the work-study programme, which empowers students by using their skills. The school has also been involved in disbursement of food hampers through partnership with private companies such as Tiger Brands. Many students continue to rely on support from the administration prompting the university to encourage faculties to be a part of the food security programme on campus. Some department have engaged in food intervention programmes during critical times like the School of Public Health, the Faculty of Arts, and the Centre for Gender Studies. Students have also played a role in the intervention efforts. The student representative council of the UWC have also provided support to students through the Ikamva Lethu Fund. Without all these support, students would be in a very vulnerable situation. Unfortunately, not all hungry students are currently supported.

Prof Dube on a final note stated that food insecurity among students is not a problem to be addressed by the university administration alone, but one that requires a holistic approach in dealing with the issues with the cooperation of all relevant stakeholders. The UWC administration looks to the multi stakeholder cooperation to provide a sustainable and coordinated, comprehensive institutional wide intervention in addressing the

problem. They look forward to the outcome of the colloquium exploring a rights based approach and policies to address the food security challenges.

### **KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

#### **Stephen Devereux, SA-UK Bilateral Research Chair in Social Protection in Food Security (SARChI), Centre for Excellence in Food Security, University of the Western Cape**

Dr Stephen's address focused on food insecurity and hunger among students of tertiary institutions particularly looking at the prevalence, causes, consequences, coping strategies and institutional responses as well as what needs to be done to address the crisis. He noted that there is a common misconception that students represent the elite and as such should be food secure. The reality however is that students are more likely to be food insecure than other population groups. He provided evidence from other countries – the United States and Australia revealing alarming levels of food insecurity among tertiary institution students sometimes even higher than national average. In South Africa, university surveys that have been carried out, showed the prevalence of hunger. North West University, University of the Free State, University of KwaZulu Natal and University of Witwatersrand showed levels of hunger higher than national average.

On why students are hungry, Stephen gave the first reason to be the structural inequality in the society, an apartheid legacy that is yet to be addressed. This is evident in the disproportionate impact of food insecurity affecting mostly black students. He also highlighted proximate causes such as high cost of living, due to inflation and VAT increase and transport as well as underlying causes such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality as drivers of student hunger. He cited the problem with NSFAS funding which ordinarily should provide relief, only makes available insufficient funds to cater for students needs after the priority expenses – tuition, accommodation and study materials are paid. This is in addition to delays in accessing the bursaries. Among the consequences noted include working long hours, mental health challenges, academic performance problems and school dropout. Student hunger also has an impact on their human dignity and the shame associated with it could make the problem largely under reported. On how food insecure students survive, he noted that the study on UWC showed that some find help (friends and relatives), rationing (choosing cheaper foods, fasting, and living on fluids), and raising money (borrowing, pawning, hawking). These coping strategies do not improve the situation; rather it makes it more complex.

On interventions, he noted positive responses by universities, NGOs, private organisation and students themselves to the food insecurity crisis across South African universities. In the University of Witwatersrand, there are interventions such as food banks, daily meal project, soup kitchens as well as the Wits Inala programme, which operates an organic food garden on the campus for the benefit of hungry students. Several initiatives already highlighted by Prof Dube have also been employed in the University of the Western Cape.

The University of Johannesburg has an NGO (Stop Hunger Now) providing 7000 packs of meals to the campuses weekly. In the University of the Free State, the Vice Chancellor set up a No Student Hungry campaign, which provides daily allowances to needy students loaded onto their cards to purchase food on campus. In Durban University of Technology, the university administration has a fund to support hungry students who qualify for assistance. It is a short-term solution to students while they make other arrangements. University of KwaZulu Natal has initiatives including provision of food hampers and vouchers to students as well as NGO assistance. At the University of Cape Town, needy students are provided with vouchers to purchase food on campus. Academics and other staff of universities are also contributing to the initiatives addressing student hunger. Many students have to resort to these initiatives due to failure of NASFAS to provide their bursaries timeously. These according to Stephen are interventions and not solutions.

There are numerous ad-hoc responses by universities, NGOS and students to address the problems are vital but they are underfunded and not coordinated – they cannot solve the problem. He noted that the fees must fall issue was focused on the visible costs of education and not enough attention paid to the hidden costs of education such as food and living cost. It becomes important to determine the role of the government, universities and other relevant stakeholders in addressing student hunger. Dr Stephen concluded noting that sustainable poverty reduction and radical transformation of South Africa's economy and inequalities in the society are impossible without a substantial increase in the number of graduates especially black graduates who often come from poor backgrounds. It follows that the crisis of student hunger must be addressed urgently for the good of the students and for the good of South Africa.

## **PANEL SESSIONS AND OPEN DISCUSSIONS**

### **PANEL SESSION ONE: SHARING EXPERIENCES**

Maricia Smith from Wits Inala, University of Witwatersrand moderated this session,<sup>4</sup> The panel features student representatives from four universities in the Western Cape who gave insights on student's experiences with food insecurity on campus as well as on-going efforts and challenges in addressing the problem.

Maricia gave insights on the responses provided in the University of Witwatersrand to address food insecurity issues particularly the work of Wits Inala. The initiative is a student response to food insecurity and a reaction to the university administration's reluctance to address the issue. It was also in reaction to the silence and shame associated with student hunger on campus. The program initially provided food parcels and

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<sup>4</sup> Maricia is an LLB student at the University of Witwatersrand. She graduated in 2018 with a Bachelor of Arts Degree with her majors as Law and International Relations. She also serves as President of the Wits Inala Forum, a student society which forms an integral part of the Wits Food Program.

progressed into operating an organic garden on the campus and students who worked on the farm were able to take a food bags with fresh produce. The setting provides an opportunity for dynamic conversations with students on addressing the issues of food insecurity. Challenges encountered at the onset of the programme include lack of support from the university administration, shortage of resources as students had to donate things necessary to get the garden running such as tools, seeds and soil. There was also limited participation by students not in need and inability of students in need to participate due to personal and academic issues. In addressing these problems and ensuring a continuation of the initiative, the Wits Inala partners with NGOs and other student organisations to maintain the garden and also raise awareness about the initiative as well as expand its reach. It has helped in facilitating direct access to nutritious food for a good number of students who are food insecure.

### **Experiences from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT)- Athi Nditha, Secretary General, SRC**

In emphasising the magnitude of the food insecurity on campuses, Athi shared with participants a particular instance where during the fees must fall protests, about six students leaders in CPUT were arrested because they entered a management meeting and ate the food provided for the members. This mirrors the problem of food insecurity and how it takes away from the dignity of students, who have to sometimes resort to questionable coping mechanisms to satisfy their hunger. The limited access of students at CPUT to nutritious and affordable food on campus and the use of food vouchers only in specified grocery shops heightens the food insecurity problem. Athi noted that the SRC has made efforts to dialogue with NSFAS to address the management of bursaries especially the delays in payments. He also highlighted the ripple effect the food insecurity problem has on students who are not necessarily food insecure as they are sometimes burdened with assisting other needy students. Athi pointed out that CPUT has some food security initiatives but unfortunately, they had not been effectively publicised to students. Generally, little had been done by the school's administration to address the problem. The food insecurity issue has led students into adopting several coping strategies including skipping meals, relying on friends, buying meals in groups. It has also made negative coping mechanisms fashionable such as engaging in sexual relationships of dependence in a bid to meet their survival needs.

### **Experiences from the University of the Western Cape- Lukhanyo Daweti (Secretary General of the SRC, UWC)**

Similar to the experiences at CPUT, Daweti shared the challenges students on NSFAS encounter due to delays with dispensing bursaries. The SRC initiative to combat food insecurity and lack of funds for registration and study materials is the Ikamva Lethu Fund.

Tiger Brands got involved upon a discovery that the Ikamva Lethu programme was having a positive impact on benefiting students' academic performance. The programme however can only do so much due to budgetary constraints. The government is doing nothing to address food insecurity at tertiary education level, making it important to define the role of the government in addressing the problem in historically disadvantaged universities like UWC and efforts to address the problems must tackle the root causes.

### **Experiences from the University of Stellenbosch- Lwando Nkamisa (Chairperson, SRC, University of Stellenbosch)**

Lwando in his presentation explored a link between student hunger and their dignity and self-esteem as well as resultant effects such as depression and suicide. Hunger in the University of Stellenbosch is not only a problem of students of colour; white students who are perceived to be rich could also be hungry. For them the challenges with dignity could be even more dire because of the perceptions which precedes them. Student initiatives to provide meals to hungry students are not very sustainable. Lwando noted that some students are forced into negative coping strategies including shoplifting or transactional sexual relationships. Drop-out rates of students is also an increasing challenge in the University of Stellenbosch especially among students of colour. Lwando noted that the trend is not surprising considering that it is unreasonable to expect students who are hungry in addition to other challenges, to compete effectively with students who have all the provisions necessary to ensure a good learning experience.

### **Experiences from the University of Cape Town (UCT)- Maxisole Mlandu (SRC Member, UCT)**

Maxisole gave a slightly different perspective on the issue particularly relating the food insecurity problem to historical inequalities entrenched by apartheid. The student representative noted that food insecurity is a largely ignored problem in South Africa, only sometimes recognised by a group under what he termed false generosity. Maxisole highlighted instances of differential treatment of students in historically disadvantaged universities compared to those in privileged universities like UCT. He noted that in UCT unlike other universities, students on NSFAS are given somewhat better treatment than in other universities. This is probably because that there are fewer students funded by NSFAS in UCT than in other historically disadvantaged universities. In UCT, a first year student on NSFAS is given an option to choose to eat at the residence or given a voucher if they wished to eat outside of the residence. This does not happen in other universities. Unlike other universities where NSFAS does not give students money directly, it is in not the same in UCT. From the comparisons, Maxisole concluded that the experience of students in historically disadvantaged universities as opposed to those of more privileged universities forms part of factors that fuel student hunger. As such, addressing hunger



among students cannot be done without reflecting on the historical contexts which engenders inequality and poverty that affects student coming from such disadvantaged positions.

### **Open discussion**

On the queries about the initiatives to deal with student hunger by the SRC and support received in achieving that, the responses showed that accessing funds for implementing programmes could be very difficult, however they are lucky with a few. Daweti noted that the SRC budget remains same in the face of inflation and increase in VAT leading to inability to implement proposed programmes. Maricia also noted that the Wits Inala programme had received support from donor organisation for their operations. In Stellenbosch, Lwando noted that they get the most support for the alumni association. Though these funds come in handy, they are usually insufficient and sometimes the support is not sustained. The fund constraint is largely the reason many interventions are unsustainable.

Concerns were raised regarding the discussion of female student's engagement in transactional sex for survival despite the absence of research on the subject. It was similarly of concern that no female SRC representative was on the panel to give views on the gendered aspects of the issue. Daweti in response noted that this negative coping strategy is not related to female students only. Rather, engaging in sexual relationships of dependence cuts across both male and female students who are exploited simply because of their vulnerable situations. Fumilola, one of the organisers stated that attempts were made to get female representatives on board, but the efforts were unsuccessful.

The need for more research into the prevalence of food insecurity and the surrounding issues were discussed. The problem is known to exist but actual figures are lacking which could lead to some issues such as the gendered implications and coping strategies being seen as mere speculations. Concrete figures are needed in order to hold the government and relevant stakeholders accountable.

The discussions also brought forth issues of access to food on campus particularly monopoly, high cost of purchasing food, limited nutritious food at affordable prices as well as the reservation of use of food vouchers in specific grocery stores. These are challenges that exist in all campuses represented at the colloquium but unfortunately, the university administrations are making little or no efforts to address this cause of hunger on campus.

Given that student representatives from different universities have a forum for dialogue where they gain insights on happenings in their universities, a question was posed as to how they hold the university administration accountable to ensure that they bring the

experiences of students of disadvantaged institutions up to par with those of other students in other privileged universities. It was noted that normal course of dialogue and communication between students and administration usually yield limited or even no results. This is the reason students resort to violence and occupation to get the attention of the administration. These steps however make protesters subjects of victimization.

The discussions in summary emphasised that the food insecurity on campus is a product of an unequal society, manifested even in a differential experience between students of privileged universities and those of historically disadvantaged universities. Although there have been intervention by universities as well as other organisations, students themselves have not folded arms on the issues. They have made laudable initiatives within their capacities but these are largely unsustainable due to the limited availability of funds and support. In addition, the university administrations appear not to be doing a lot in response to the plight of students particularly as it touches on access to nutritious food, at affordable prices on campus and the administration of NSFAS bursaries. As more presentations are made in the colloquium, further insights are gained on the role of different state holders including the universities in handling the food insecurity crisis among students.

## **PANEL SESSION TWO: STUDENT FOOD INSECURITY IN SOUTH AFRICA: THE RESEARCH**

This session was moderated by Prof Julian May, Director, Centre of Excellence in Food Security, University of the Western Cape. The panel featured Lucia Meko, Prof Rina Swart and Remonliwe Mogatosi who provided insights into the prevalence of food insecurity among South African tertiary institutions from research conducted in the University of the Western Cape and the University of the Free State.

### **Food insecurity and measures to alleviate hunger amongst university students – Dr Lucia Meko,<sup>5</sup> University of the Free State**

Lucia pointed out that food insecurity in South Africa is a primary result of rapid urbanisation, high levels of unemployment, low-income levels, influx of migrant workers and HIV and AIDS amongst others. Citing Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Lucia noted that food is a basic need, which if not met, becomes the dominant problem of the individual. There is however limited research on the extent of food insecurity in tertiary institutions in South Africa. This makes it a problem that exists but not much spoken about it.

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<sup>5</sup> Dr Meko is a registered dietician and currently works as a Lecturer in the Faculty of Health Sciences in Department of Nutrition and Dietetics at the University of the Free State.

As at 2013, there was no published work on the extent of food insecurity among students of tertiary institutions in South Africa. Lucia shared results of a research conducted in 2013 and 2015 in the University of the Free State through a web-based questionnaire. The research explored the prevalence, contributing factors, food procurement measures as well as coping measures. It was shown that 64.5 per cent of students were food insecure and this included mostly males, students of African and coloured races who largely rely on NSFAS or other bursaries. Students living with their parents were less likely to be food insecure than those not living with their parents. About 21 per cent of students who were at a high risk of food insecurity reported that they had to support their families as well. The study showed that most students who were food insecure never had enough money to purchase food. Food insecurity was shown to affect student's retention and school completion rates. They also found an unhealthy trend in the food that is available on campus.

Lucia noted that there are interventions to address the food insecurity problems in the University of the Free State. A notable one earlier mentioned by Stephen Devereux is the No Student Hungry campaign, which provides students in need with food allowances and daily access to one balanced meal. Beneficiaries are selected in terms of financial need, academic performance, participation in student life and a commitment to giving back to the community. With the intervention, students are able to focus on their studies without having to worry about the next meal. Lucia noted that intervention efforts across campuses are largely ad hoc responses with no formal food policies in universities. While the efforts are noble, the absence of policies means that issues such as suitability, quality, accessibility and affordability of foods in and around campuses may hamper the effectiveness of these efforts.

In conclusion, Lucia recommended that initiatives to address food insecurity must take into consideration students concern regarding food, their acquisition and consumption experiences, and food availability and affordability. Efforts must include educating students on healthier food options; ensure a supportive food environment through making nutritious food available on campus. In addition, efforts to alleviate food insecurity amongst students should be at par with the magnitude of the problem in the university. The initiatives considered should be developed in partnership with the university administration, the student body and NGOs. She also suggested a revision of the NSFAS scheme and reinstating catered food halls.

## **Researching food insecurity of students: current trends- Prof Rina Swart, University of the Western Cape<sup>6</sup>**

Prof Swart noted that food insecurity and the assessment of it is very complex. Definitions provided overtime have taken into considerations several issues such as production and later on the inclusion of nutritional value, accessibility, as well as the lived experiences of people in accessing food. Food security can be a cause and consequence depending on the context. It is a multi-dimensional issue touching on availability, accessibility, utilisation and stability of resources to acquire it. Food insecurity can also be chronic, temporary or cyclical and be influenced by multiple manifestations or causes such as social norms, individual behaviour, life cycle, food quality and availability. As such, an assessment of the food insecurity problem requires a comprehensive approach.

In UWC, an assessment was conducted in 2011 and 2017 exploring the prevalence of food insecurity as well as coping strategies. The research also clarified some misconceptions about food insecurity among students in UWC. For example there was a misconception that hungry students were mostly those living in the school residences but research has shown that some living at home were also food insecure. There is also the belief that students on NSFAS are not hungry. On the contrary, they are especially vulnerable when payments are late and some others living at home report that transport cost to campus is the reason they are hungry. The 2011 study showed that similar proportions of students who are on bursaries or supported by their parents reported going hungry. Prof Swart finally highlighted the care component as part of the food security issue and particularly looking at for example students who have children while studying and how they can be factored into the discussions and intervention efforts.

## **Current research trends on food insecurity among students in tertiary institutions - Mr Remoneilwe Mogatosi, University of the Western Cape<sup>7</sup>**

Remoneilwe conducted two studies in 2015 and 2016 investigating several issues including prevalence, perceptions, coping strategies as well as shame associated with food insecurity in the University of the Western Cape. The research showed that students have subjective interpretations of hunger. The research showed that a large number of students are food insecure particularly those who rely on NSFAS funding which usually

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<sup>6</sup>Prof Rina Swart is a registered dietitian / nutritionist with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) and part of the Department of Dietetics and Nutrition at the University of the Western Cape. Her post-graduate qualifications and area of specialization is in Public Health Nutrition with a focus on the prevention of all forms of malnutrition through nutrition policies and programmes as well as the evaluation of such policies and programmes. She serves as the Nutrition programme leader within the DST/NRF Centre of Excellence in Food Security.

<sup>7</sup> Remoneilwe graduated from the University of the Western Cape (UWC) with a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Sociology, Psychology and Ethics (*Summa Cum Laude*). A BA Hon in Sociology with a research paper titled *Food Insecurity, Hunger and Social Capital among university students at the University of the Western Cape (UWC)*. Remoneilwe is currently a Master's candidate in Development Studies with a focus on Weight Management Practices and Obesity in Khayelitsha.

comes late in the year. Coping strategies as identified earlier such as fasting, skipping meals, choosing cheaper and less nutritious food were found to be employed by hungry students. The research also explored the problems with dignity and shame regarding hunger, showing significant reluctance among students to ask for food assistance. The research also highlighted the problem of hidden hunger which is a situation where students have food to eat, but are actually consuming food with little or no nutritional benefit. This is a common issue considering that most food outlets on campus provide food with containing mostly starch. Remonlewe finally pointed out that more research on student food insecurity is required as it provides greater clarity and unpacks the hidden and sometimes ignored issue. It is particularly important for the development of policy and other responses to deal with the problem.

### **Open discussion**

Following the information provided by the speakers, questions were posed especially regarding the extent to which research conducted on campuses have influenced the university administrations response to the food insecurity problem. Lucia noted that their research influenced the No Student Hungry campaign in the University of the Free State. They were able to get more food outlets into campus to create varieties for students on food aid from the NO Student Hungry campaign to purchase food from. Considering that food has various aspects to it, Lucia noted that the intervention in food security should factor into the programmes other aspects of foods other than access such as acceptability, nutritional values that influence how people relate with food. Remonlewe suggested that work-study opportunities on campuses be structured to ensure that it is available to students who are really in need. There was also a suggestion that facilities on campus such as dining halls in residences be used to address the food insecurity problem. Lucia also noted that in the University of the Free State, there have been interventions, which provide education to students on how they can source nutritious and cheap ingredients and how to prepare their own food. This is a worthy effort but only practicable where the students have access to facilities for cooking such as kitchen, stoves and storage facilities.

A participant also highlighted an intervention in CPUT in which students of various departments in the school were involved in food production, preparation and marketing came together and produced their own food which they sold at affordable prices in the student residences. He suggested that such an approach can to be extended to more of the campus residences and possibly other campuses.

### **PANEL SESSION THREE: STUDENT FOOD INSECURITY AROUND THE WORLD: RESEARCH AND INNOVATIVE RESPONSES**

This panel discussion was moderated by Prof Jaap De Visser, Director, Dullah Omar Institute, University of the Western Cape. The panel featured Kate Thornton (digitally) and Prof. Katherine Broton, who provided perspectives on the food insecurity problem among students in the United States, the understanding of students experience as well as responses to the problem.

#### **Innovative responses to food insecurity among students in tertiary institutions – Dr Kate Thornton,<sup>8</sup> Hunger Solutions Institute, Auburn University**

In the United States, many students are food insecure reaching up to about 27 per cent. They adopt several coping mechanisms demonstrating several levels of insecurity such as decreasing the quality of food through opting for cheaper and less nutritious food. More intense levels of food insecurity involves cutting down on the quantity of food taken, skipping meals amongst other intense coping mechanisms. Research conducted to find out what students who are food insecure do to cope, revealed food choices simply aimed at being full, such as mixing flour with water or stealing sugar packets from the cafeteria so as to have energy during class. There are attempts to develop models to help students not only to succeed in the school but also to get adequate nutrition. Several models are being tried in campuses towards finding a workable and lasting solution. Some models have been tried and have worked such as exploring new cafeteria styles to suit student options and hopefully eliminate some of the problems. Another initiative is repackaging of leftover food from cafeterias which would have been thrown away, as hot meals served to students who are hungry and also reduce food waste on campus. The meals go through necessary safety checks to ensure the consumers are not placed at risk. The initiative has also recorded immense success in addressing food insecurity though adequate publicity. They make the food available to all, without the need for identification as students in need- and this addresses the issue of stigma as those who are food insecure are not singled out.

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<sup>8</sup> Dr. Kate Thornton currently serves as the Director of Hunger and Sustainability Initiatives at the Hunger Solutions Institute at Auburn University.

## **Food insecurity among students in tertiary institutions - Prof Katherine Broton, University of Iowa<sup>9</sup>**

According to Katherine, a large number of undergraduate students in the United States are either food insecure or at verge of food insecurity. In many cases, such students equally struggle with other basic needs such as housing, clothing, and toiletries. There are cases of students skipping meals, dumpster diving, taking left overs of other people just to have something to eat. Though her research has largely looked into the prevalence of the problem, students' individual experience and consequences for their academics and wellbeing, she took a different approach to look away from students and focused on university staff. The aim was finding out the understanding of the problem of food insecurity and student experience by those working with them. Over 60 college presidents, deans, directors and other staff of universities working with students were interviewed.

Their understanding of the problem showed views suggesting food insecurity as a systemic issue, a product of bad luck, or a result of poor choices. The systemic issues had to largely deal with structural inequality. This understanding sees the problem as a product of racism, poverty, segregation and these root causes must be considered in addressing the problem. The bad luck understanding sees food insecurity as an unfortunate individual problem of the student. Poor choices are related decisions regarding food, appropriate meals and purchasing amongst others, which holders of the view believe will not go away except better choices are made.

The views do not totally represent the realities of all students who are food insecure as the evidence is overwhelming that food insecurity is a structural problem rooted in inequality. If parents are wealthy, there is a likely chance that the child will be wealthy and vice versa. These varied understandings of the problems also provoke different responses. While those who hold the view that the problem is a systematic one adopt an approach that seeks to address the challenges on a broader level, the bad luck understanding provides an individualised response to the problem. Students in this case may have to seek help and only a short-term relief. On the aspect of poor choices, the approach was mainly to protect the image of the institution as the problem is seen as a product of the student's own choices rather than a collective one requiring concerted efforts to address.

On how to respond to food and basic needs insecurity, Katherine noted that there is a role for all stakeholders such as students, university administration, researchers, policy makers and higher education leaders in drawing up immediate as well as long term solutions. The scope and depth of the problem is one which universities may not be able

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<sup>9</sup> Prof Katherine Broton is an Assistant Professor of Higher Education & Student Affairs and Sociology by courtesy at the University of Iowa. She attained a Ph.D. and M.S. in Sociology and a B.S. in Sociology and Afro American Studies with an African Studies certificate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her research broadly focuses on sociology of education, social stratification, and education policy.

to address singlehandedly. Rather, it is one that requires a collaborative effort aimed at addressing the systemic issues, which are drivers of student's food and basic needs insecurity. Possible solutions can be put forward and tested, in a bid to determine which works and provides a lasting solution to the problem.

### **Open Discussion**

The discussions reiterated the fact that the food insecurity problem among students is a systemic issue that requires approaches which takes care of the root causes such as poverty, social inequality amongst others. Though immediate interventions are vital, there is need for the development of long term solutions which considers those root causes with the cooperation of all relevant stakeholders. Though universities are in direct contact with students, they are not capable of addressing food insecurity. The depth of the problem requires the collaborative effort of relevant stake holders such as researchers, policy makers, government departments, non-state actors and university administration. The importance of research which unpacks the prevalence, extent and dynamics of the issue were emphasised as important in the planning and development of solutions.

### **PANEL SESSION FOUR: DESTIGMATISING HUNGER IN SOUTH AFRICAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS- THE ROLE OF CHAPTER 9 INSTITUTIONS**

This session was moderated by Prof Ebenezer Durojaye, from the Dullar Omar institute. The panel featured representatives of the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), Commission for Gender Equality and the Competition Commission who gave insights into their contributions to addressing the food insecurity among students.

#### **The role of the South African Human Rights Commission in Addressing food insecurity – Mr Lesego Raphaelane ,<sup>10</sup> South African Human Rights Commission**

The SAHRC has the main mandate of ensuring the protection of human rights guaranteed in the constitution. The speaker noted that not much has been done about the issue of food insecurity by the commission. This is partly because the right to food seems to have been obscured by the emphasis that has been placed overtime on the realisation of other socio-economic rights such as water and sanitation, housing and health care. It may also be attributed to constitutional guarantee of access, which limits the government obligation to creating favourable conditions to access food. However, the levels of inequality and poverty make access to food difficult for a large part of the population who

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<sup>10</sup> Mr. Lesego Raphaelane is a Legal and Education Officer (Western Cape) at the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC)



are below the food poverty line. This raises questions about how much the government has performed in its obligation to provide and ensure that citizens are able to access food. He emphasised the interconnectedness between the right to food and the enjoyment of other rights such as life, health, and dignity amongst others. For students, it influences their learning outcomes and school completion rates. In conclusion, the speaker stated that it is important for the Chapter 9 institutions to be held to their constitutional mandate as it affects the food security issue of vulnerable populations including students of tertiary institutions.

### **The Commission for Gender Equality's response to gendered implications of food insecurity- Mr Kamraj Aniru Dhra,<sup>11</sup> Commission for Gender Equality**

Kamraj noted that from the discussion in the program, he has been able to gain insights into the food insecurity problem among students as well as the resultant issues which have never been brought to the attention of the commission. He saw this as a welcome development which the commission needs to take seriously in its investigation and intervention efforts especially with respect to the gendered aspects of the issue. Kamraj suggested the development of a policy to address the issue of food insecurity among students of tertiary institutions as a more feasible solution to the problem. Also emphasised was the importance of determining the department that is responsible for addressing the food insecurity issue given the absence of a particular government department or commission that deals directly with access to food. This is important to ensure accountability and avoid denials of responsibility.

### **The role of the competition commission in addressing food insecurity- Mr Sipho Mtombeni,<sup>12</sup> Competition Commission**

The Competition commission was borne out of the need to introduce competition as a result of the social context of the South African market prior to 1994 featuring a high level of monopolies, abuse of dominance and high levels of unemployment. This was done through the Competition Act 1998 which aims to among others promote efficiency and development of the economy, provide competitive pricing and product choice, and advance the economic welfare of South Africans. The main functions of the commission are enforcement (prosecution of cartels and abuse of dominance by dominant firms, and

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<sup>11</sup> Adv Anirudhra has a strong education and policy development record built primarily during his tenure as an educator and Parliamentary Officer. In his capacity as the parliamentary officer for the CGE he has worked closely with the legislature and also as a member of the South African Law Reform Commission Advisory Committee on Maternity and Paternity Benefits. These platforms have enabled Adv Anirudhra to influence numerous key legislative initiatives as a representative of the CGE in order to promote gender equality and the status of women.

<sup>12</sup> Mr Sipho Mtombeni is currently a Principal Analyst in the Advocacy Division of the Competition Commission.

other prohibited conduct); regulating mergers and acquisitions; conducting market enquiries; and advocacy. The commission is currently making enquiries into private health care pricing, grocery pricing, public transport, and data prices.

The commission prioritises its focus on food and agro-processing due to the impact on a majority of the population. Mr Sipho noted that in the South African economy, levels of concentration are very high especially in the agro-processing sector. There are few dominant firms existing for years. The commission is concerned about increase in prices especially of staple food as a result of activities of large retail firms. This affects the food value chain and access to food for the general population and particular vulnerable groups such as students. Sipho noted that the commission has received complaints regarding the management of NSFAS bursaries especially the living allowances. The commission is particularly concerned about the denial of product and pricing choice for students through channelling their purchase to particular retailers. There are on-going engagements with NSFAS and universities to address the problems.

The commission is also interested in how universities make procurements and commercial transactions and its impact on the provision of funds for student welfare. They are also engaging with emerging farmers and retailers to explore the possibility of supplying their goods to universities. These are models which universities could explore in addressing food insecurity of students. Sipho noted the problem of policy misalignment in addressing issues which makes it important to ensure a coordination of policy objectives.

### **Open discussion**

In this session, concerns were expressed regarding the attitude of the Chapter 9 institutions especially the SAHRC to student hunger. Reports on human rights violations hardly capture the food insecurity of this vulnerable group. In line with their mandate, it was noted that they ought to institute an investigation into student hunger and practices affecting access to food of students rather than wait for a formal complaint to be made. This demonstrates the level of importance attached to food insecurity of students who form a vulnerable group. It was noted in response that it is important for complaints to be lodged with the SAHRC regarding issues of concern in order to facilitate investigative processes. Also regarding limited concentration on the right to food by the SAHRC, it was noted that this is a result of more focus being given to the realisation of other human rights for which they receive numerous complaints which makes the right to food somewhat obscured amongst the other socio economic rights. The SAHRC also faces challenges with lack of cooperation from government departments in fulfilling their mandates. A lot of letters of inquiry into alleged human rights violations are left unanswered.

## **PANEL SESSION FIVE: REALISING THE RIGHT TO FOOD OF STUDENTS IN SOUTH AFRICAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS**

This panel session was moderated by Prof Benyam Mezmur, Dullah Omar Institute, University of the Western Cape. This session explored the human rights perspective to the issue of food insecurity. Prof Ebenezer, one of the panellists provided insights on the right to food; its meaning, normative content as well as exploring a right based approach to food insecurity in South African tertiary institutions. Bright Nkruma gave insights on the role of advocacy and mobilisation in holding relevant stakeholders accountable to realising the right. Dr Emma Lubale from the University of Venda, explored the link between the management of NSFAS bursaries and the violation of the right to food.

### **A right based approach to food insecurity in South African Tertiary Institutions - Prof Ebenezer Durojaye, Dullah Omar Institute, University of the Western Cape**

Prof. Ebenezer addressed some key issues including; the content of the right to adequate food; the basis for the responsibility of States to realise this right; the significance of advancing the right to adequate food; and the challenges in realising the right in South Africa. Referring to the relevant international and regional human rights instruments and other soft law dealing with the right to food as well as the work of the Committee on Economic Social and Cultural right in its General Comment 12, Prof Ebenezer provided a comprehensive explanation of the meaning and normative content of the right to food. According to the general comment, the right to food includes the right of people to feed themselves in dignity, the availability of sufficient food, ease of access (physical and economic accessibility), food must be safe, free of adverse substances and meet nutritional requirements and also culturally acceptable. The right to food is not a stand-alone right as it is highly interdependent and interrelated with the enjoyment of other rights such as the right to life, health, human dignity, work, education amongst others. This makes the realisation of this right a key issue which governments must take seriously.

The presentation also placed emphasis on the obligation of the governments as duty bearers of the good welfare of the people in the realisation of the right to food. The government has the duty to respect, protect, and fulfil the right to food of everyone including vulnerable groups. Respect means the government must refrain from any act that interferes with the right. The duty to protect means ensuring that third parties do not through their activities interfere with the enjoyment of the right. The obligation to fulfil requires the government to take positive and targeted measures to realise the right through laws, policies, and budgetary allocations for the realisation of the right.

In South Africa, the right to food is provided for all and particularly for children and persons who are in detention. The right in section 27 giving access to the food requires the government to take reasonable measures within available resources to realise the

right to adequate food. This is an immense qualification on the obligation of the government which could affect the extent of government's commitment to the right and provides a leeway for the underperformance in that regard.

Prof Ebenezer concluded by highlighting several challenges to realising the right to food in South Africa. The absence of a dedicated department to coordinate the realisation of the right to food impacts negatively on the realisation of the right and consequent food insecurity in South Africa. Lack of legislation on the right to food unlike other socio economic rights is also a challenge. Lack of oversight to monitor the activities of non-state actors who have a role to play in access to food as well as the issues regarding safety of food is an issue that still needs attention from the government departments such as the Competition Commission. Lack of coordinated civil society campaign to realise the rights to food also affects the important component of holding relevant government departments accountable for realising the right to food. Also, the absence of judicial interpretation of the right as well as the obligation of the government in its realisation in the South African context like other socioeconomic rights is a challenge.

### **The role of advocacy/mobilisation in addressing food insecurity among students in tertiary institutions – Dr Bright Nkrumah,<sup>13</sup> University of Witwatersrand**

Bright's presentation largely focused on the role of advocacy and mobilisation in realising the right to food given the underperformance of government in meeting its obligation. This speaks to the willingness of civil society, NGOs and other stakeholders in coming together and holding government accountable. He noted that a lot had been said about the problem but these must be matched with action through mobilisation. On how the mobilisation can be effective in tackling the issues, he gave some guidelines, which he categorised into 5 Ps.

The first is having a philosophy behind the mobilisations that participants can easily articulate and relate with. The demand must be easy to understand and not be intellectually complex. Secondly, the personality of the leader of the mobilisation is important. The mobilizer must be willing to consider and coordinate views. Thirdly, there must be a pretext. There must be a call for example the issue of NSFAS that students can relate with and given the role it plays in the food security situation of students across South African campuses. The fourth is propaganda, which can be achieved through the media. The last is prefix emphasising the use of contemporary social media, which is able to convey the message faster, and in a more attractive manner especially to young people

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<sup>13</sup> Dr. Nkrumah is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow to the NRF/British Academy Chair in Political Theory, Department of Political Studies, University of the Witwatersrand. He holds the degrees DPhil, Mphil (University of Pretoria) and BA(Hons) University of Ghana. He previously served as a researcher at the South African Human Rights Commission. His research interests cover various topics in constitutionalism, socioeconomic rights obligations, peace and security, good governance, resistance, freedom and democratisation.

providing an opportunity for views and support to be gathered. Given all these, the big question is who is willing to take up the responsibility of conceptualising and leading such mobilisations?

**NSFAS: Beyond just a loan but students' right to access to food- Dr Emma Lubaale,<sup>14</sup> University of Venda**

Emma in her presentation explored the link between the management of NSFAS bursaries and the violation of the right to food. The presentation highlighted issues with delays in the disbursement of NSFAS bursaries and students protest leading to a shutdown of the University of Venda for some weeks. She asked some pertinent questions such as; can students translate the NSFAS agreement into rights considering that it is a contractual agreement? Can they claim a violation of the right to food due to the delays with the payment of NSFAS bursaries? She answered in the affirmative when considered in the context of it being a means of providing access to food for students of tertiary institutions. NSFAS bursary caters for tuition, accommodation and food, which touch on the right to education, housing and food. As such, NSFAS cannot be viewed just as a loan but something that has implications for the human rights of qualified recipients especially touching on these three socio-economic rights guaranteed in the South African Constitution.

With respect to the right to food, NSFAS bursary has an implication for the economic accessibility of food, which is one of the vital elements of the right to food as shown in General comment 12 which Prof Durojaye had explained. Looking at student's interaction with NSFAS from a rights based perspective could influence thinking about the amount of the bursary allocated to food and how the utilisation of the bursary is regulated. It speaks to how well the amount of NSFAS bursaries remaining after settling tuition, accommodation and study materials can enable students to access adequate food with the adequate dietary requirements. It speaks to how third parties or non-state actors such as retailers interact with the use of the NSFAS bursaries. It is important for NSFAS to reconsider the funds allocated in a bid to realise these rights implicated for students in tertiary institutions. Emma noted that the limited understanding of the right to food has manifested overtime in the lukewarm attitude of stakeholders to glaring violations of the right. Emma concluded that NSFAS is beyond just a loan, but has implication for the rights

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<sup>14</sup> Dr Emma Charlene Lubaale is a senior lecturer in the Department of Jurisprudence at the School of Law of the University of Venda. Prior to teaching at the University of Venda, she taught and researched law in the capacity of a post-doctoral research fellow at the University of Pretoria's Institute of International and Comparative Law in Africa. She holds a doctorate in law from the University of Pretoria, a master's degree in Law from the University of Pretoria, a bachelor's degree in Law from Makerere University and a post-graduate diploma in legal practice from Uganda's Law Development Center. Her current areas of interest are international human rights law, international criminal law, constitutional law and criminal law in the domestic perspective.

of students. She emphasised the importance of understanding the right to food and ensuring it is at the forefront of measures aimed at addressing food insecurity of students in tertiary institutions.

## **Open Discussion**

In this session, questions were asked regarding how students can ensure respect for law and order and at the same time get university management to act. This is considered important given the unresponsiveness of university management to student complaints which usually result to violent protests. On this issue Emma noted that with students protest, the resort to violence is a problem which could lead to involvement of law enforcement agents and possible victimisation. To ensure management responds, it is important for students to ensure they conduct peaceful protests. According to Prof Mezmur, a good idea implemented in a bad way is nothing short of a bad idea. So limiting violence is an important way to get the message across.

If students are singled out as a vulnerable group in the discussion of the right to food and emphasis placed on this group, what is the implication for other vulnerable populations in South Africa? Prof Ebenezer noted that those vulnerable to food insecurity include other population groups and government in the realisation of the right has the obligation to identify all vulnerable groups. Students are vulnerable because they are not beneficiaries of social grants. Similarly, young people of same age as tertiary education students are also vulnerable because they are not catered for by the social security scheme.

Can the lack of judicial authority on the definition and the content of the right to food not be required from the SAHRC? Prof Ebenezer noted that it is an option that can be explored by the SAHRC, which however depends on the willingness of the commission to take that step.

With respect to mobilisations and cases where the media is unresponsive in aiding the efforts, Bright Nkrumah stated that it is a real problem but other options such as the social media can be taken advantage of in mobilising responses from a large audience.

On how sustainable the intervention of government departments are in addressing food insecurity, it was noted that although the interventions are emergency responses, they help in the short term while efforts are made to develop lasting solutions. The food insecurity is a problem which is systemic and requires systemic responses to create long term solutions.

## **DAY TWO**

After extensive discussions on the first day, uncovering the depth of the problem of food insecurity among students, the impact, coping strategies, the responses so far, as well as the shortcomings in the interventions, the deliberations of day two centred largely on addressing the problem by different stakeholders.

The focus for the second day was on identifying where the obligation lies, and more sustainable interventions to address student hunger. The discussions also highlighted the importance of relevant laws and policies on access to food as well as the necessity of having a designated government department to oversee the implementation. The discussions also emphasised looking beyond student hunger to the general welfare of students. Among the activities of the day was taking a hands on approach through engaging participants in deliberations on the possible ways of addressing food insecurity among students. The highpoint of the day was the presentation of reports of deliberations by working groups composed of participants, on how the food insecurity problem amongst students of tertiary institutions can be addressed.

Participants came up with feasible short and long-term solutions to addressing student hunger in South African Tertiary institutions. The deliberations highlighted amongst others- the need for more research into the depth of the food insecurity on campuses; creation of a focal department to address issues related to access to food as is the case with other socio-economic rights in the Constitution; holding relevant stakeholders in the food production and distribution chain to account as they have a role to play in addressing food insecurity for the general population and for students in particular. At the university level, the use of residency cafeterias in campuses; food gardens; introduction of subsidised food outlets; sale of school agricultural produce to students; regulating food prices on campus and revisiting the tender process for food business operations on campuses were suggested as sustainable interventions which university management could implement.

### **BEYOND EDUCATING THE MIND: ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY STUDENTS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS - PROF KATHERINE BROTON, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA**

Prof Broton's address brought on board perspectives on student food insecurity in the United States as well as providing ideas and insights on interventions which could possibly be implemented in the South African context. The presentation showed that nicely painted pictures, beliefs or stereotypes about students in tertiary institutions largely do not capture the lived realities of most of them. Prof Broton provided statistics from research showing that the quintessential college experiences are largely absent for some students due to challenges with meeting basic necessities including feeding, shelter, working while studying or having dependants. In addition to the rising price of college

attendance, a large number of students are living in poverty without support from their families which makes it difficult to meet basic needs. Financial aid scheme for student from low income families cannot address their college needs as the government funding provides a small part of their fee requirements. Given financial situations which impacts on food security, students adopt coping strategies as earlier mentioned such as working, skipping or cutting down meals or choosing cheaper options etc. These impacts negatively on academic performance; physical and mental health; as well as cognitive development. Her research also shows that students of colour are more likely, compared to white and rich students, to face these challenges. As such, there is a large gap in college degree attainment when the students of different races and income levels are compared.

Speaking on solutions, Prof Broton noted that there is a need for a multifaceted response in addressing the issue of student food insecurity ensuring all stakeholders are brought on board. Also in ensuring that the needs of students are adequately met, she suggested that interventions whether immediate or long term, should be woven into the fabric of the university life.

She also shared some interventions that can be implemented in the South African context. In cases where student debt after completion of studies hinder getting a job because of lack of proof of completion, she noted that such cases are sorted through an emergency aid programme. The programme provides funds to such students to offset the debts without having to payback. The emergency aid programme is funded by university alumni and private individuals or organisations. She also shared instances of similar initiatives to assist students who are about graduating but have dropped out for financial reasons or are unable to continue schooling due to other needs or work interference. Such interventions enable such graduates to break the cycle of poverty and be food secure.

Acknowledging the efforts of students themselves in addressing student hunger despite limited resources in their various campuses, she noted that in the US, college Presidents have rose up to the challenge in a somewhat different manner. College Presidents come together and liaise with researchers in a bid to determine impact of interventions and their workability in different institutions.

On the issue of students who try to address their problems working some hours in addition to studying, Prof Broton, noted that a well-structured work study programme in the university is a better and more rewarding option. This is particularly important considering that for students work, academic performance and college completion are interlinked. Where students work jobs that are related to their study interest for a reasonable time, it provides a better work and academic experience. As such, quantity and quality of work is important when it is considered in the light of ensuring academic performance and college completion. Also, with respect to dignity which makes students suffer in silence, a well-structured work study programme instead of hand outs, affords the opportunity to get assistance in a dignified manner.



## **PANEL SESSION SIX: INFLUENCING THE POLICY SPACE TO GUARANTEE ACCESS TO FOOD FOR STUDENTS IN SOUTH AFRICAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS**

This session brings together representatives of different government departments to discuss the role of the different levels of government as well as various government departments in ensuring access to food for students in South African tertiary institutions. Prof Jaap De Visser's presentation focused on determining based on the constitutional division of powers, on which level of government the obligation to realise the right to food lies.

### **Understanding the role of different levels of government in realising access to food for students in tertiary institutions in South Africa - Prof Jaap De Visser, Dullah Omar Institute, University of the Western Cape**

Prof Visser's discussion focused on the Constitutional division of powers in determining which level of government has the obligation to realise the constitutional right to food and addressing food insecurity. Given that budgets are needed to back up strategies aimed at addressing food insecurity, the big question is who has the responsibility to make this budget? This important issue requires defining where the obligation lies. The Constitution in Schedule 4 and 5 divides obligations between the three levels of government with some issues left at exclusive national competency. Prof Visser noted that with respect to the right to food, it is a multifaceted issue and cannot be situated as an obligation of a particular level of the government when considered in light of the way obligation are shared in the Constitution.

While the national government has exclusive competence in matters dealing with higher education, issues related to housing, agriculture amongst others are concurrent obligations. In an issue such as food insecurity for students in tertiary institution, where the obligation lies could be an issue, given that matters that are critical to the realisation of the right to food do not lie solely in one level of government. Issues such as agriculture, higher education, and transport amongst others, have a bearing on the achievement of the right to food as such bringing different levels of government into the picture. Likewise, unlike other socio-economic rights in the constitution, the right to food has not been given content within the South African legislative framework, as well as where the obligation to realise the right lies. Given this situation, at all spheres, there is always the issue of who has the obligation to address food insecurity and particularly among students of tertiary institution. Even at the university level, the management might question if its duty of care extends to providing food for hungry students or cater for their welfare needs. As such, there is the passing of batons and denials of responsibility however with sometimes-reasonable explanations.

In conclusion, Prof de Visser noted that the national, provincial and local government as well as universities have a role to play in addressing student hunger. In addition, he

suggested the adoption of a law that deals with the implementation of the right to food and specifying who has what obligation will better serve the realisation of the right of access to food in South Africa in general and also address specific cases such as student hunger.

**Influencing the policy space to guarantee access to food for students in South African Tertiary institutions: The role of the DHET – Ms Thandi Lewin,<sup>15</sup> Department of Higher Education and Training**

She touched on the contribution of the DHET in addressing student hunger. A major policy concern of the department is the high rate of university drop out giving available figures. The DHET is also concerned about many young people not getting into the university. Creating opportunity for students to succeed at tertiary institutions is thus a key mission of the department which make ensuring access to funds for students remains at the heart of DHET's activities. Research by the DHET shows that student on NSFAS on the average do better than students in need and without funding and attaining their degrees. This show that student funding is critical to success. They also give grants subsidy funding, infrastructure, university capacity development (teaching and learning) to universities all aimed at student development and ensuring a successful and transformed university and student development is at the heart of it.

The DHET is getting more acquainted in the wake of fees must fall with financial stress of students particularly in meeting their day to day expenses including food especially among first generation students. She noted that addressing food insecurity through NSFAS funding is an issue that could be dealt with through policy involving a right based approach. Addressing the issue is however beyond the capacity of NSFAS. Rather it requires concerted efforts and partnership by different stakeholders.

**Influencing the policy space to guarantee access to food for students in South African Tertiary institutions: The role of the Department of Social Development – Mr Mondli Mbhele**

Mr Mbhele's presentation considered some policies on food security in South Africa particularly the National Food and Nutrition Security Policy and the National Food and Nutrition Security Plan highlighting the shortcoming in them. The policies simply identifies food insecurity as an issue that needs to be addressed and rolls out a number of plans aimed at addressing food insecurity. It is however not clear which government

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<sup>15</sup> Ms Thandi Lewin is the Chief Director-General: University Governance and Management Support at the Department of Higher Education and Training.

department has the obligation to implement the policy plans. This is a challenge which allows a denial of responsibility by different organ of government.

Though the food supply chain in South Africa is largely well organised, it unfortunately works for the rich as the poor are unable to afford nutritious food. This is a product of an unequal society, that has not bridged the gap between the rich and the poor. He noted that students are a group that could be without support as they are not captured within the social security system. Given that they grow out of the qualification for child grant, NSFAS should readily come in aid to those who get into higher institutions. He however noted that there is a problem of lack of an integrated information system which enables them monitor those who are receiving child support, how many finished their matric and also gained university education and as such need NSFAS assistance. This would help in ensuring they break the cycle of poverty in that household ensuring that the child is not left without aid at critical moments in life such as while in a tertiary institution.

He noted that the social grants are not enough to address individual food insecurity, hence, the need for other stakeholders to play a role. This is the same issue that student in tertiary institutions under NSFAS face as well hence the need for universities, corporate organisation, foundation to come in to provide assistance. With respect to interventions to address food insecurity, Mr Mbhele he emphasised the need for relevant structures to be in place. For example, non-functional residence dining hall services hampers interventions that could have been successful if functional. As previous speakers, he recommended that beyond the discussions, efforts should be made to develop sustainable interventions to address student hunger.

### **Influencing the policy space to guarantee access to food for students in South African Tertiary institutions: The role of University administrations- Ms Gretna Andipatin, University of the Western Cape**

This presentation emphasised like others that addressing food insecurity among students of tertiary institutions require a collaborative effort of different stakeholders as well as developing sustainable interventions. Coming from within the university and particularly Student Development and Support Services, UWC, a department that meets with and provides assistance to students in need, the speaker emphasised that research on student welfare concerns including hunger as well as interventions cannot be done in isolation. It must of necessity involve those who come in contact with the students on a daily basis. Policy development in this regard must factor in the research but also get a full understanding of the dynamics of the problem from those who deal with the students on a day to day basis. Also noted is the importance of harmonising research findings in a bid to inform better and sustainable interventions. Also, given that the dignity of students in need is a delicate issue, it was suggested that it must be an important consideration in interventions ensuring fair and humane treatment.

## **Open discussion**

In the open engagement with the panellists, it was emphasised that NSFAS needs to consider increasing the amount allocated for student funding including tuition, housing and food, in a bid to meet all the needs. This is important given that students on NSFAS are hardly able to meet all their needs. Secondly, it was considered important to pay particular attention to historically disadvantaged universities that have the highest beneficiaries. Thirdly, it was considered important to give some form of training to students especially those on NSFAS on how best to manage limited funds.

Also noted was the possibility of having a generalised student welfare framework rather than dealing with specific issues given that students face several challenges that impact on the quality of their learning experience, academic performance as well as degree attainment. Another lesson from the discussions in this session is that although addressing food insecurity involves different stakeholders, making solutions it a responsibility of all poses a risk of making it a responsibility of no department. There must be specified a department that is fully responsible for the issue. Others could play supportive roles. A department must of necessity be held accountable.

## **PANEL SESSION SEVEN: RETHINKING DONOR APPROACHES TO STUDENT HUNGER ON SOUTH AFRICAN CAMPUSES**

This panel, anchored by Ms Vicky Simpson of the University of the Free State, featured representatives of donor organisations that provide financial assistance to needy and deserving students of tertiary institutions in South Africa. They gave insights into how their bursary programmes work, their impact, challenges and suggestions to make donor approaches better meet the needs of food insecure students.

### **WITS Citizenship and Community Outreach Office- Ms Karuna Singh<sup>16</sup>**

Karuna in her presentation noted that with regard to donor approaches to student hunger, emphasis should be on encouraging potential donors to think about ways they can approach the issue as no much thought is given to student hunger by potential donors. Donations can be made in form of cash and non-cash contributions such as product and service donation, employee volunteering among others. According to Karuna, the attitude of donors does not portray a commitment to alleviating the plight of food insecure people including students. Very few organisations give out donations

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<sup>16</sup> Karuna currently works at the Wits Citizenship and Community Outreach office at the University of Witwatersrand, where she has been for the past 6 years. A new and exciting new area of work in the Wits Citizenship arena that Karuna now champions is the Wits Food Programme as part of a broader vision to establish the Wits Food Sovereignty Centre to not only meet the needs of students who are hungry on campus but to look at food pathways for the city through collaborative activities.

despite their huge resources at their disposal and even given the amount of waste of valuable products produced by these corporations especially those producing food. She also noted that in some cases assistance is given by corporate organisations without due consideration of the impact.. If such impacts considerations are made, that would affect the amount of and continued commitment to providing assistance.

With regard to attracting donor assistance in dealing with student hunger, she considered it important to determine who has an obligation to make a case for students. Is it the students, university management or social justice organisations? In her opinion, the social justice organisations are well equipped to make the calls on behalf of students as part of their advocacy efforts and commitment to alleviating the plight of vulnerable groups. In concluding, Karuna stated that potential donors should make giving assistance a priority and equally aim to providing reasonable and consistent assistance that makes a good impact.

### **Moshal Foundation - Ms Nokuthula Zama<sup>17</sup>**

Founded by Martin Moshal in 2009, the Moshal Foundation Scholarship Program organised by the Moshal Foundation provides access to university education to students who would otherwise be unable to. The registered charity operates in Israel, Ukraine and South Africa. The program support tenacious and determined students from challenging backgrounds to obtain high quality, sought-after degrees that lead to successful careers. It also aims to develop a range of soft skills and values in its scholars that support their evolution into resilient, responsible and respected people and professionals. The foundation currently sponsors 450 students in eight universities in South Africa. Students are supported through funding, academic and psycho-social support; employment and training support and building community networks

Despite the announcement of free education for first year students on NSFAS, the foundation still considered it important to provide bursaries to first year students due to delays in payments of NSFAS bursaries and the absence of support other than finance which is in many cases insufficient. The program has recorded immense success in not only assisting students who would otherwise not be able to get a university education but also ensuring a quality university experience as students are able to learn without being weighed down by the inability to meet their needs.

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<sup>17</sup> Nokuthula currently works for the Moshal Scholarship Program as the Western Cape coordinator, providing full wrap around support to students studying at University of Cape Town and Stellenbosch University. Prior to this role, she worked at the CSIR for 10 years in the Human Capital Development division, tasked with assisting the organisation grow and transform its human capital.

### **Cyril Ramaphosa Foundation- Ms Alice Moyo<sup>18</sup>**

Like the Moshal Foundation Scholarship Trust, the Cyril Ramaphosa Education Trust under the Cyril Ramaphosa Foundation provides funds for students in order to ensure they have a quality learning experience. Full funding to students under the Trust covers tuition, books, and accommodation and living stipends to cater for daily needs including food. The Trust however provides for each student beneficiary according to their needs which makes the funds given to each student different. For example, some students could have their tuition, study materials and living expenses catered for but not accommodation because they live close enough to the campus. Stipends are given to students directly in their bank accounts despite the possibility of students using the money to assist their families who are also food insecure. This gives them the opportunity to seek cheapest options to spend the money rather than being restricted to particular shops. The trust also provides psychosocial and academic support to the students funded. They also try to instil the attitude of giving back in students no matter how much. This has brought about the alumni fund which is used to support more students including other private initiatives set up by former beneficiaries.

Alice was of the view that a focus on student hunger could mask other challenges students encounter which could affect the quality of their learning experience. As such, she suggested that donors in their intervention efforts should focus on students' wellbeing as a whole rather than on just one of the challenges. She also suggested that corporate organisations should be more involved and be concerned about the impact of their contribution. For example, they could aim more than providing food packs as that sorts out hunger for the moment but look to give contributions that impact more on the welfare of students.

### **Foundation of Human rights - Mr Enver Moothoosamy<sup>19</sup>**

Enver's presentation emphasised that student hunger is just a part of student welfare concerns. As such a holistic approach targeted at students general welfare is important considering that most students who are food insecure face other challenges which could affect their academic outcomes negatively.

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<sup>18</sup> Alice Moyo is a Programme Manager for the Cyril Ramaphosa Education Trust (CRET), a bursary programme that currently supports 106 students. She holds an Honours degree in Psychology as well as a professional diploma in HIV/AIDS Management and Development studies.

<sup>19</sup> Enver is a Grants Manager at Foundation for Human Rights.

## **Open Discussion**

In the interactive session, several issues relating to donor approaches to student hunger were brought to the fore. One of the issues that came up was how donors in giving bursaries determine students who qualify. Particularly, it was important to know whether they seek out students themselves through applications or get assistance from the university to nominate students who qualify for assistance. Nokhutula from the Moshal Foundation stated that they work with the management of the university in which they have beneficiaries to ensure access to the student and facilitate regular engagement in a bid to monitor their progress. They also request the university management to suggest suitable candidates for their bursaries who they further assess to determine their qualification for assistance. She noted that in a bid to ensure the most impact of their support to students, in considering students, they try to ensure they choose those who have made the right career choice rather than fund someone who has no passion for what they are studying. The Cyril Ramaphosa Education Trust on the other hand picks beneficiaries through making calls for applications and interviews. They maintain close contact with the university management and bursary offices. This helps to monitor student progress and also receive applications through them as students also make requests to their bursary offices.

Another issue considered was how the foundations manage corporate contributions. Considering that the discussions suggest that corporations appear to direct their funds to areas that do not make the most impact, some participants wanted to know how they interact with corporations to address this and ensure funds are directed areas that impact on the rights of students. According to Alice from the Cyril Ramaphosa Trust, while some corporate organisations give out rightly to the fund, some others require a benefit for example having the students work for them after schooling. Similarly, some organisations also require to give support specific type of students probably from specific backgrounds. In such cases, the Trust acts accordingly and picks a beneficiary according to the terms.

Concerns regarding why some universities especially historically disadvantaged one experience difficulty in getting donor funding, was noted to be largely a product of the inequality that exists in the society and the constraints in attaining social justice.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Finding solutions to the problem of food insecurity among students of tertiary institutions is the aim of bringing together different stakeholders to engage with each other on the issue. In the course of the colloquium, during panel presentations and open discussions, recommendations were made regarding how the issue of student hunger can be addressed both in the short and long term. The most important session of the program was the working group session which brought participants together solely to discuss and come up with feasible long and short term solutions to student hunger.

The working group session divided the participants into two groups. The first group chaired by Mr Florian Kroll, from the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies had the task of mapping out practical strategies to address food insecurity in tertiary institutions. The second group Chaired by Remoneiliwe Mogatosi focused on discussing community and social approaches to addressing food insecurity in tertiary institutions.

The first working group came up with the following strategies both in the short and long term to address food insecurity in tertiary institutions

1. The need for more advocacy efforts to make the reality of student hunger which is often overlooked better known to relevant stake holders.
2. Regulation of food prices and the food options on campuses as well as the tender process for vendors.
3. Learning from best practices existing in other campuses.
4. Giving feedbacks to donors on the impact of interventions.
5. Media representation needs to be available and proper relation of the message to make a meaning to the targeted audience.

The second working group provided the following approaches to addressing food insecurity in tertiary institutions

1. There should be a proper vehicle to address the food insecurity problem including identifying relevant stakeholders and bringing them on board
2. Research is needed to determining the extent of the problem in various campuses
3. Effective reporting of intervention measures.
4. Research into providing nutritious rich foods at affordable cost in universities.

Some recommendations from panel presentations and open discussions include;

1. The discussions reiterated the fact that the food insecurity problem among students is a systemic issue that requires approaches which take care of the root causes such as poverty, social inequality amongst others. Though immediate interventions are vital, there is need for the development of long term solutions which considers those root causes with the cooperation of all relevant stakeholders.
2. Though universities are in direct contact with students, they are not capable of addressing food insecurity. The depth of the problem requires the collaborative effort of relevant stake holders such as researchers, students, policy makers, government departments, non-state actors and university administration. Also in ensuring that the needs of students are adequately met, interventions whether immediate or long term, should be woven into the fabric of the university life.
3. The importance of research which unpacks the prevalence, extent and dynamics of the issue was emphasised as important in the planning and development of solutions. Policy development in this regard must factor in the research but also



get a full understanding of the dynamics of the problem from those who deal with the students on a day to day basis. Also noted is the importance of harmonising research findings in a bid to inform better and sustainable interventions.

4. The issue of food insecurity among students should be viewed from a rights based perspective creating an obligation in the relevant stakeholders to realise the right.
5. Initiatives to address food insecurity must take into consideration students concern regarding food, their acquisition and consumption experiences, and food availability and affordability. Efforts must include educating students on healthier food options; ensuring a supportive food environment through making nutritious food available on campus. Also, efforts to alleviate food insecurity amongst students should be at par with the magnitude of the problem in the university.
6. The amount provided as well as the regulation of the NSFAS bursaries should be reviewed to better serve its purpose. This might involve looking at student's interaction with NSFAS from a rights based perspective that could influence the amount of the bursary allocated to food and how the utilisation of the bursary is regulated.
7. Considering that food has various aspects to it, the intervention in food security should factor into the programmes other aspects of foods other than access such as acceptability and nutritional values that influence how people relate with food.
8. Work study opportunities on campuses should be structured to ensure that it is available to students who are really in need.
9. There was also a suggestion that facilities on campus such as dining halls in residences should be used to address the food insecurity problem.
10. Efforts to address food insecurity whether in the long or short term should take into consideration the dignity of students and associated stigma. It involves ensuring that food insecure students are not unnecessarily singled out as well as a fair and humane treatment.
11. Given that the problem may vary between campuses and different students, workable intervention could equally vary. As such, it is important that possible solutions be put forward and tested in a bid to determine which works and provides a lasting solution to the problem.

## **Conclusion**

Food insecurity is a systemic issue touching on structural inequalities and poverty in South Africa which makes it a problem that short term solutions alone cannot address. The colloquium has emphasised the fact that sustainable long term solutions need to be in place. This would involve treating the right to food like other socio economic rights in the constitution such as legislation on the right to food and an establishment of a government department to coordinate activities relating to its implementation. The need to take a hands-on approach in addressing food insecurity for students has been shown to require also the identification of relevant stakeholders and holding them accountable.

In addition, although short term interventions to addressing student hunger taking place in campuses are commendable, they need to be matched up with more sustainable and permanent solutions. It is this effort that the coalition formed in this colloquium seeks to facilitate.

Going forward, the Socio Economic Rights Projects aims to take the advocacy further through forming a National Coalition on Access to Food for Students, which is designed to bring on board relevant stakeholders. It is envisaged that such advocacy efforts from a coalition rather than on an individual basis would be better received. In the near future, the coalition as well as the Dullah Omar Institute aims to submit complaints to relevant Chapter 9 institutions and make representations before Parliament. Addressing student hunger cannot be done in a flash, however this hands-on approach is a long awaited right step in the right direction towards addressing a problem that has an impact on educational attainment and the future of affected students.