

Factors Influencing Food Security in Rural South Africa

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Most food security studies are normative and often lack empirical grounding, and such studies often make broad generalisations. This article provides a district-wide microanalysis of three factors affecting food security in the OR Tambo District: food access, availability, and stability. Food security in the OR Tambo District is a 'hybrid' of household food production and commercialisation intent. Contrary to the norm of food security discussion, this paper presents a discussion on food access, availability, stability, and marketing considerations. The chapter reports on a study that used a qualitative approach to explore food security aspects linked to storage, processing, and markets. It finds that household income, distance to retailers, and household food production impact food access in rural South Africa. Further, it found that food production, storage, processing, and community animals' impact on food availability in the district. Lastly, the study found stability influenced by state agencies' timing of production input supplies, sufficient production, fencing, marketing, and favourable climatic conditions. The above shows that food availability and food stability variables are closely linked. The food security policy can do more to improve infrastructure, namely, fencing and irrigation, subsidies for those furthest from town, and post-harvest management for enhanced food availability and stability.

Keywords: Food security, Availability, Access, Stability & stability, OR Tambo.

Introduction

Food security is a basis for societal development which contributes towards human survival, health, and effective life. Food security is "A situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (FAO, IFAD & WFP, 2015: 53). FAO, IFAD & WFP (2015) gives a comprehensive definition of food security's critical aspects: availability, access, stability, food safety, dietary needs, and preference. Despite huge investments by governments worldwide, food security remains a significant challenge in many parts of the world (Ganiyu & Omotayo, 2016:107).

While many studies focus on the three variables of importance in food security, i.e. availability, access, and stability, the discussions are primarily normative and lack empirical

grounding in differing contexts. This article is based on an empirical study conducted in the OR Tambo District of the Eastern Cape. The following discussion focuses on the three variables of interest: food availability, access, and stability.

Food Availability

Food availability is about food supply and can be impacted by natural disasters such as drought and floods. Intervention by the state can minimise the impact of some of the above external factors on food availability. Drought mainly results in a decline in production yield (Koo, Mamun & Martin, 2020:833). Household food production remains one of the essential aspects for food security to be realised and sustained. This is primarily because own food production minimises reliance on external food sources. Prices of critical production inputs have escalated due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This price increase could further affect availability.

Access

Access to food is about physical, social, and economic measures to have food. According to the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE) (2020), food should be accessed by all, irrespective of status (HLPE, 2020:10). This is where access is subject to economic status as it depends on the ability of individuals, families, or the community's financial means to have food. Since the financial means of individuals and households is unequal, it follows suit that the same will apply to food access. Food prices have generally been increasing over the past few years but worsened by the Covid pandemic, resulting in the loss of livelihoods. Rising food prices impacted South African households' food security (van Wyk & Dlamini, 2018:1); exorbitant fuel increases further cause this escalation because fuel offsets the rise and fall of economic values, including food security and access (Devereux, Béné & Hoddinott, 2020:769). The HIV-AIDS pandemic's impact on food access is two-fold, i.e., lack of economic means to access food and deprived access to nutritious and safe food for growth and development (Ojo et al., 2022:1101).

Distance from retailers and logistics for transporting food to homesteads introduces another dimension to the challenges to food access. Higher food prices because of demand and supply factors limit food accessibility. Moreover, climate change and climate-related issues such as drought and natural disasters lead to decreased yields, higher food prices, and, inadvertently, limited access to food.

Stability

Stability in food security is about ensuring that food is always available. HLPE (2020:28) views stability as sustaining food security in unpredictable situations (economic, conflict,

hostile climate) and seasonal insecurity. In the South African context, where the state is still at the centre of ensuring food security, state agencies responsible for food security should invest effort in providing necessary support and governance arrangements to cushion households against food security shocks. Investment in food storage, processing, and preservation may go some way into proving a form of 'safety net' in the short to medium term. Further, diversification of food security strategies may also contribute to stability. A specific focus should be on vulnerable households and communities.

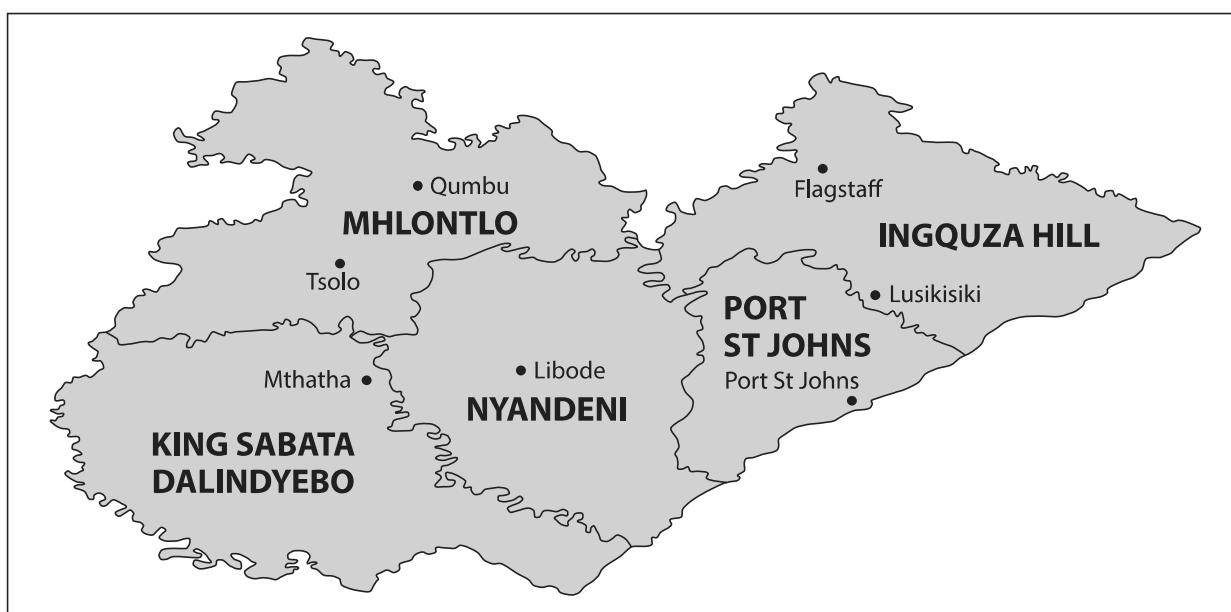
The above discussion defined food security and associated variables. The food security context was highlighted as linked to factors impacting food security. The following section discusses the methodology followed in the study to respond to the research questions.

The OR Tambo District

The study was conducted in the OR Tambo District in the Eastern Cape Province. The following local municipalities have constituted the OR Tambo: Mhlonthlo, Ingquza Hill, Port St Johns, King Sabatha Dalindyebo and Nyandeni (see Figure 1).

The study used a purposive sampling strategy, a non-probability strategy. Purposive sampling involves the selection of information-rich cases (participants or material). Cases are selected based on knowledge and experience (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016:2). Fifty-eight purposively selected respondents participated in the semi-structured face-to-face interviews. The sample comprised the Department of Rural Development and Agrarian Reform, Local

Figure 1: Map of the OR Tambo District



Source: Statistics South Africa (2011)