



# South African Food Security Index 2024

Considering the state of the four dimensions  
of food insecurity in South Africa

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# Foreword

**Food insecurity in South Africa is at its highest levels in over a decade.**

After 30 years of democracy, it is unfathomable that hunger remains one of the top socio-economic issues facing our country.

Due to the complexity of this crisis, the Shoprite Group commissioned the South African Food Security Index 2024. It combines credible data and insights across the four dimensions of food security - namely availability, access, utilisation and stability. The Index aims to enable a deeper understanding of the real state of food security, to highlight where some of the biggest gaps may exist and to help inform better decision making across and beyond the value chain, including government and civil society.

While South Africa scored 64.9 on the Index in 2019, this number dropped to 45.3 in 2023 (zero indicates severe food insecurity).

25% of children in our country are growth stunted. To put this number into perspective: a lower-income and significantly poorer country like Zimbabwe has a stunting rate of 23.5%.

While a myriad of factors influence food security, information, collaboration and action-driven strategies are powerful tools to fight hunger and improve access to nutrition.

Concrete steps can be taken to ensure a more food-secure future in South Africa, for example by:



**prioritising nutrition interventions during the first 1,000 days of children's lives,**



**zero-rating VAT on certain key food products, especially protein-rich items used by lower income households,**



**and supporting especially rural communities and households to establish food gardens.**

The Shoprite Group's contribution to fighting hunger is intrinsic to our role as the largest food retailer in South Africa

and on the continent and food Security has long been of concern for us.

Our efforts to improve food security include affordable pricing for essentials, a surplus food donation programme, a fleet of mobile soup kitchens and the development of community and household food gardens.

Whether it is serving over 21 000 meals per day with our Shoprite Mobile Soup Kitchens or donating R233.9 million worth in surplus food and goods in vulnerable communities – we are committed to uplifting lives. Since 2015 we have been helping grow stronger communities by establishing over 240 community food gardens across the country and we are providing warm meals, or a loaf of bread, for just R5.

We have been working alongside our partners to support communities for decades and we take a holistic approach, considering both affordability and accessibility.



*Sanjeev Raghubir*

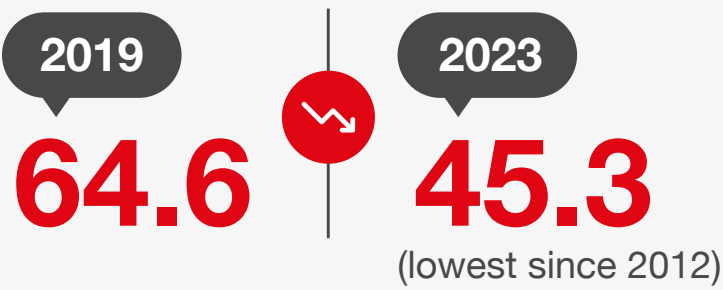
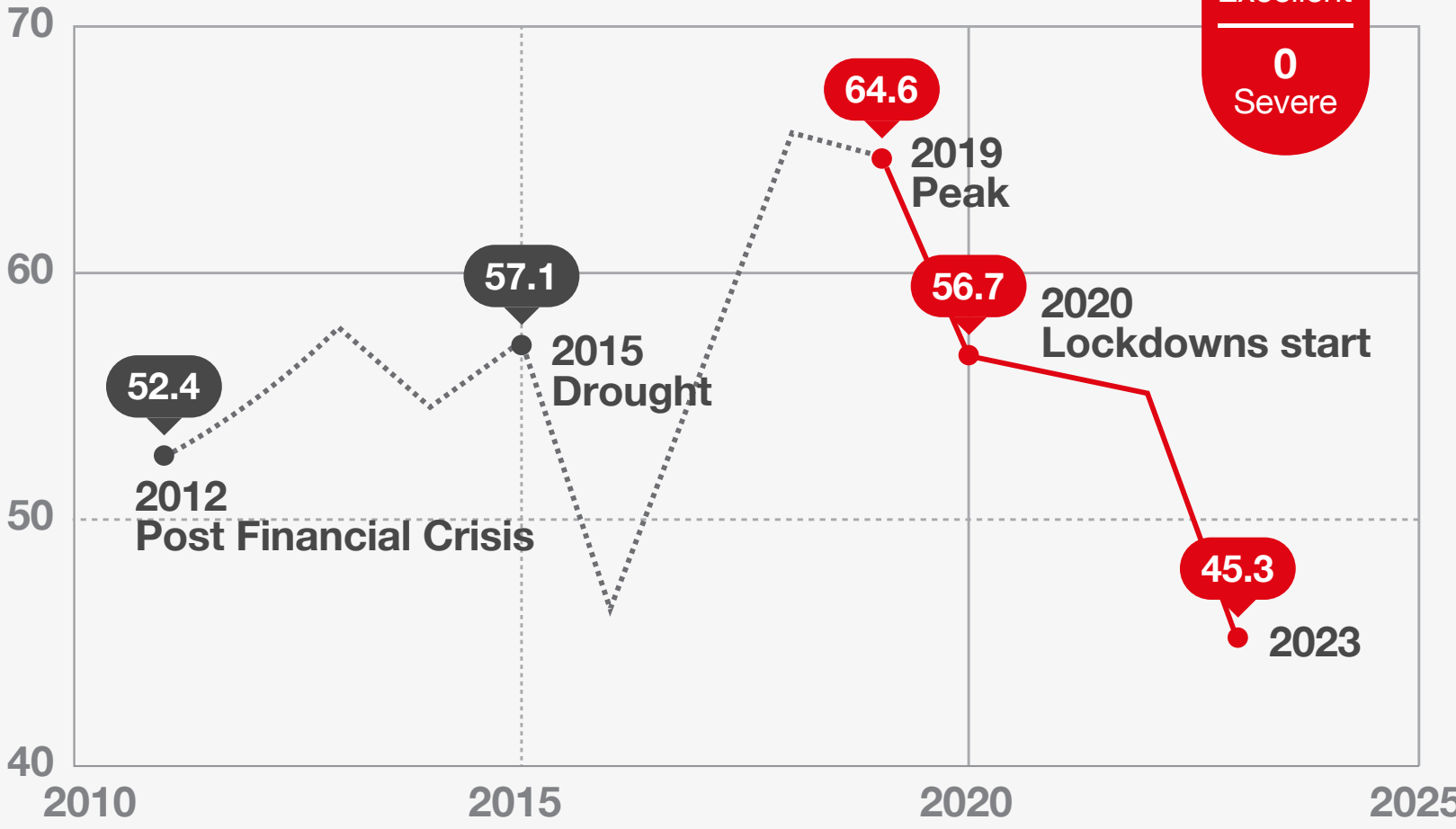
Chief Sustainability Officer



**Read more** about our hunger relief and food security programmes in the **Shoprite Holdings' Sustainability Report 2024.**

# South African Food Security Index 2024

Food security at its worst level



**Trends show potential for recovery**  
 2023 marks South Africa's lowest food security level, but long-term trends indicate potential for recovery.

## Provincial variation

Provinces like Limpopo fared well, but Eastern Cape declined from 'Good' in 2019 to 'Poor' in 2023.

## Key drivers

Inflation and weak economy impacted food security despite local cultivation efforts.

## South Africa's nutrition dilemma

### Persistently high stunting levels

Despite a decrease since the early 2000s, stunting rates remain alarmingly high in South Africa.



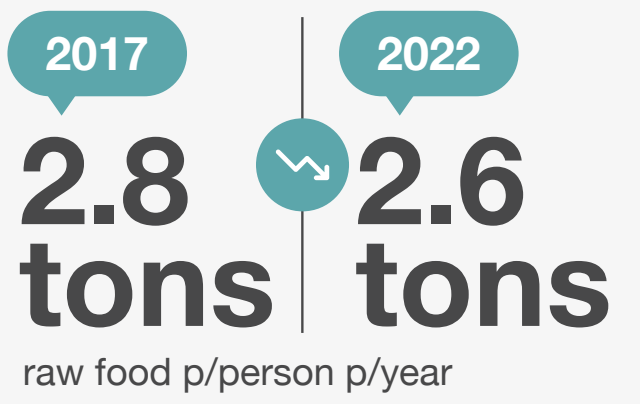
**1 in 4 children are growth-stunted**

highlighting a critical issue of inadequate nutrition during essential growth periods.

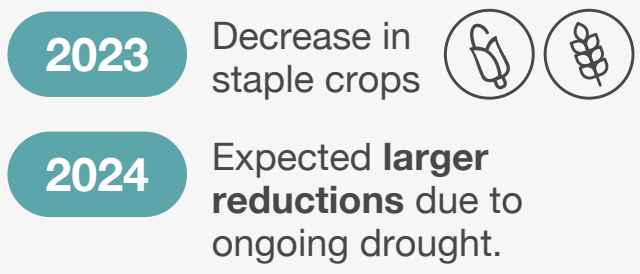


## Dimension 1 Availability

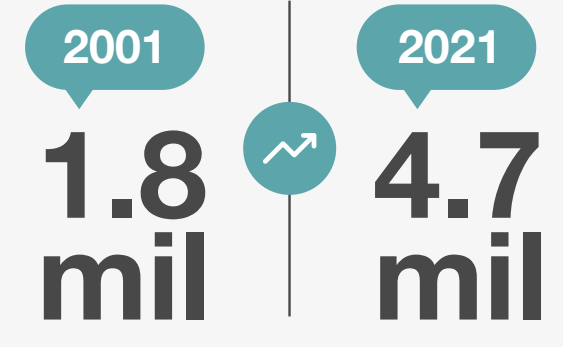
### Food availability



### Yield



### No. of people not meeting min kcal requirements



## Dimension 2 Access

### Child hunger



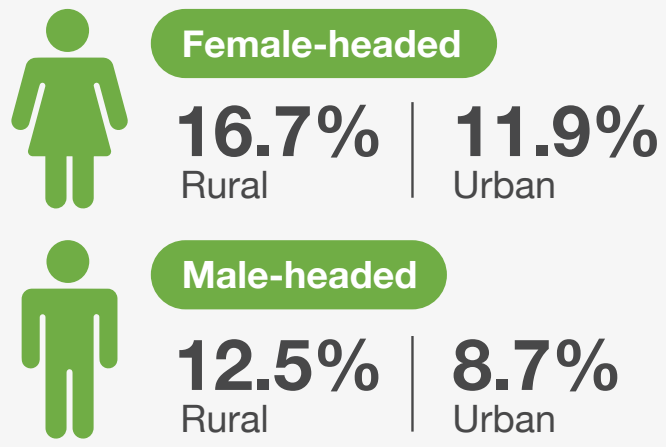
1 in 4 of the poorest households said children in their homes went hungry.



### Hunger rural vs. urban

Higher in rural areas for all demographic groups compared to urban areas.

### Hunger risk by household type



## Dimension 4 Stability

### Food security challenges

Recent years show instability in food security due to

- COVID-19 lockdowns
- economic hardship
- recent inflation

### Food variety

**Trend**

Increase in households reporting low food variety since 2019.

**2023**

**23.6%** of households consuming less food variety due to economic constraints.



## Dimension 3 Utilisation



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## What is food security?

The concept of food security was first defined at the 1996 World Food Summit. It is defined as a situation “where all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for a healthy life”.

It is a broad definition, and it will be difficult to completely fulfill this definition, especially with regards to food preferences which are not as essential to a healthy life as the dietary needs aspect of the definition.

More broadly, a country can be said to have food security when there is enough food in a country, its population has economic and physical access to food (it can purchase food and access it physically at convenient locations), there is a sufficient diversity in diet of its population and there are not periodic dips or deterioration in these dimensions, and they are stable over time.

## What are the dimensions of the South African Food Security Index?

The Index was created using four dimensions and drawing on the definition first shared at the 1996 World Food Summit. **The four main dimensions of food security include<sup>2</sup>:**



### Availability of food

This dimension refers to the overall food supply-side. The level of available food in a country or economy is determined by a combination of the level of internal food production, food stocks available and net trade (imports minus exports).

### Access (economic and physical) to food

Though a country may have a sufficient supply of food, households may not have adequate access to food due to economic and physical reasons. This dimension addresses whether households have access to enough food. Reported hunger is a way to measure access.

### Food utilisation

This refers to how once food is eaten, the body uses food to generate energy and help support an individuals' health. For food to be utilised properly, people or families need to consume a diverse diet where food is well prepared, ensuring maximum nutritional value.

### Stability of the other three dimensions over time

There may be periodic dips or deterioration in the above dimensions. Factors that can affect stability include weather conditions (floods or droughts), economic factors (food inflation and stable employment) and political instability like war.

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## Methodology

This Index uses a wide variety of data sources, ranging from original quantitative household survey data, as well as secondary data, academic literature and policy reports that have been produced on food security and nutrition in South Africa. The South African Food Security Index 2024 was created using similar methods to The Global Food Security Index, though using a narrower selection of indicators to ensure availability and replicability over time. The indicators were first rescaled relative to potential maximum values that represent catastrophic food insecurity, before being added into this Index.

The data sources for the dimensions of the South African Food Security Index 2024 (Appendix) were selected with the following objectives in mind:

- a. Replicability over time** – the data source needs to be available annually so the Index can be updated.
- b. Representativity** – representative at the national and provincial levels.
- c. Best original data source available:** It was important to use original source data, rather than estimates produced by others.



**South Africa has a shortage of good nutrition data.**



**How does food security in South Africa compare to other countries?**



**What are the biggest challenges facing South Africa?**

While there are many secondary data sources on nutrition, **good primary data** collected at the household level remains a **challenge**. Researchers conclude there is a need for far “more frequent, high-quality data on stunting that are comparable across time to accurately monitor trends”<sup>3</sup>.

As we will show in the report, South Africa’s **nutrition performance** is **not aligned** to its **level of economic development** in terms of nutrition outcomes such as stunting. In the Economist Impact Global Food Security Index (which included 114 countries in 2022), South Africa ranked 59th out of 113 countries in the Index<sup>4</sup> and first out of the 28 Sub-Saharan African countries which were included in the Index. So, while it outperforms its African peers, it performs below its economic peer countries e.g. Brazil.

**Hunger** continues to be an issue in the country, with more people facing starvation. The biggest population-level challenge has shifted to ensuring people have access to a sufficiently nutritious diet (food utilisation). Better nutrition in children leads to the **avoidance of stunting** while ensuring they receive enough kcals to learn in school. Furthermore, access to healthy food choices helps prevent obesity, which contributes to non-communicable diseases and other health problems. **Sufficient dietary diversity** (as captured in the food utilisation dimension) is necessary.



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# The South African Nutrition Dilemma



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# 01

## The South African Nutrition Dilemma

### The purpose of this section

Is to explore why nutrition matters and how a lack of good nutrition shows up in health outcomes in South Africa. We consider how South Africa's performance in stunting (as a nutritional outcome) compares to that of other countries.

### Section summary

**Stunting amongst children in South Africa** is much **higher than** the **country's economic peers**, comparing more closely to lower middle income countries such as Zimbabwe.

The poorest households struggle most with both hunger and consuming the desired diversity of foods. In 2023, in the **poorest 10% of households, nearly half of households** said they **consumed a lower variety of foods** than they would otherwise have due to insufficient funds.

There is **substantial inequality in how households of different income groups have access to nutrition**. This is a fundamental development problem to solve, affecting many health, education and broader development outcomes.

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## Why food security and nutrition matter

Access to more nutritious food is critically important for several health and development outcomes.

Good nutrition ensures the better health of infants, children and pregnant women – enabling better immune response against disease and decreasing the risk of non-communicable diseases (e.g. diabetes and heart disease) thus contributing to long and high-quality lives<sup>5</sup>.

Children that also learn better and people who have access to good nutrition are more productive citizens<sup>6</sup>.

## The health outcome(s) of poor nutrition: Stunting

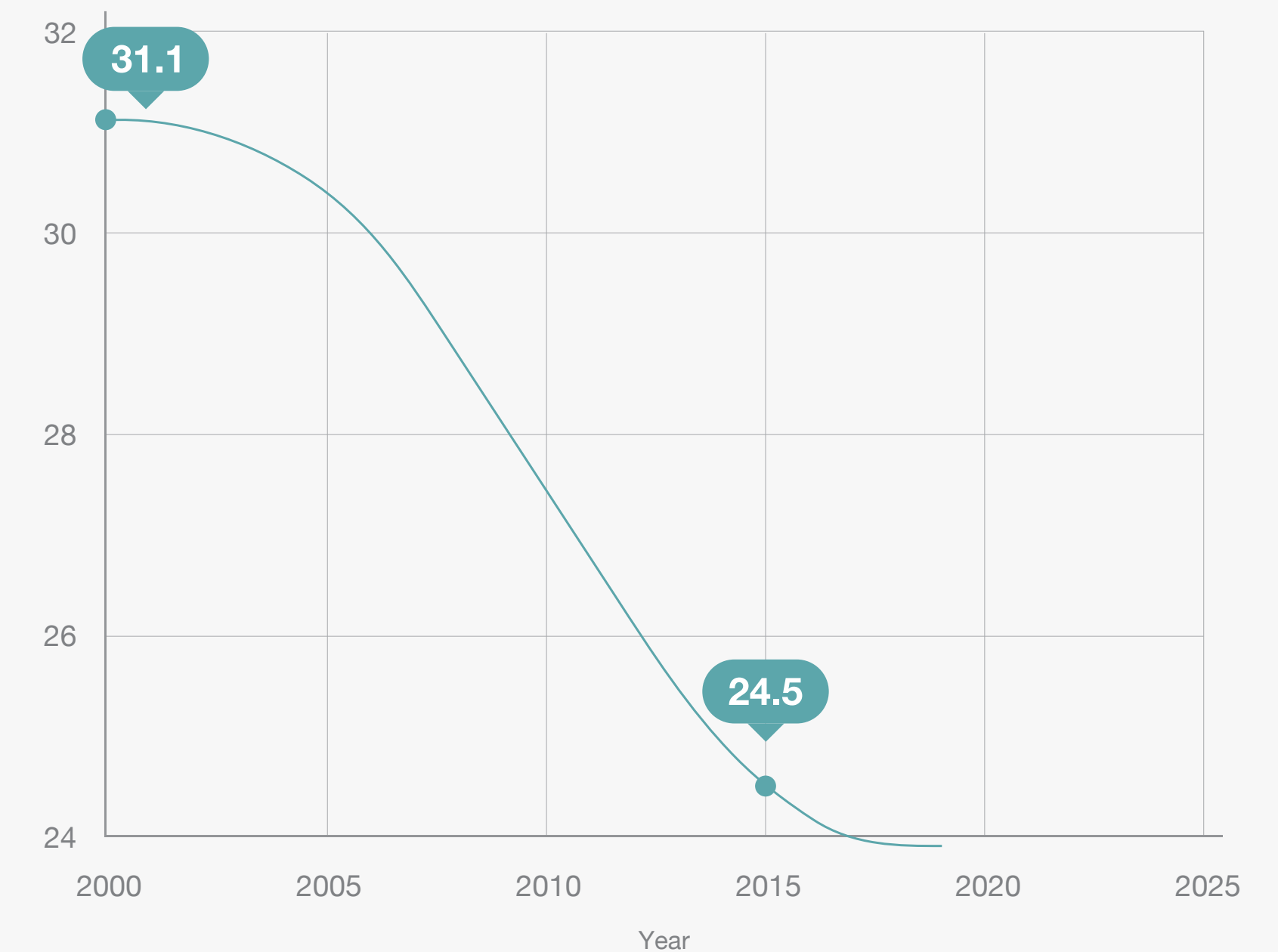
South Africa has a nutrition problem which is showing up in stunting. Stunting is a measure of impaired growth – children are stunted when they do not reach their full growth in terms of height relative to age<sup>7</sup>.

Stunting is not an easy indicator to measure. It requires trained enumerators to accurately measure the height of children when they visit their homes. There are arguably easier self-reported indicators. However, it forms the focus of the understanding human development because of its large impact on the later-life outcome of children. Children who are stunted achieve lower levels of cognitive outcomes, in turn going on to have lower later-life labour market earnings<sup>8</sup>.

While stunting can have many causes, it often occurs when young children are not getting the nutrients required to sustain proper growth and are therefore achieving lower levels of growth than is optimal. While it could be a result of an inadequate total amount of food (food access), it also strongly relates to the food utilisation dimension of food security.

Figure 1

### The stunting rate in South Africa (% of children under 5 years old) 2000-2019



Source: Institute of Health Metrics Child Growth Failure data<sup>13</sup>



**Children who are stunted achieve lower levels of cognitive outcomes.**



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# South Africa's relative performance in stunting: global comparisons

Stunting is expected to decline with the level of a country's wealth. But despite South Africa's status as an upper-middle-income country, our stunting rate is high. While studies have started to explore levels of stunting and contributors to stunting, more qualitative data is required at a household level to better understand domestic decisions and constraints that contribute to this outcome.

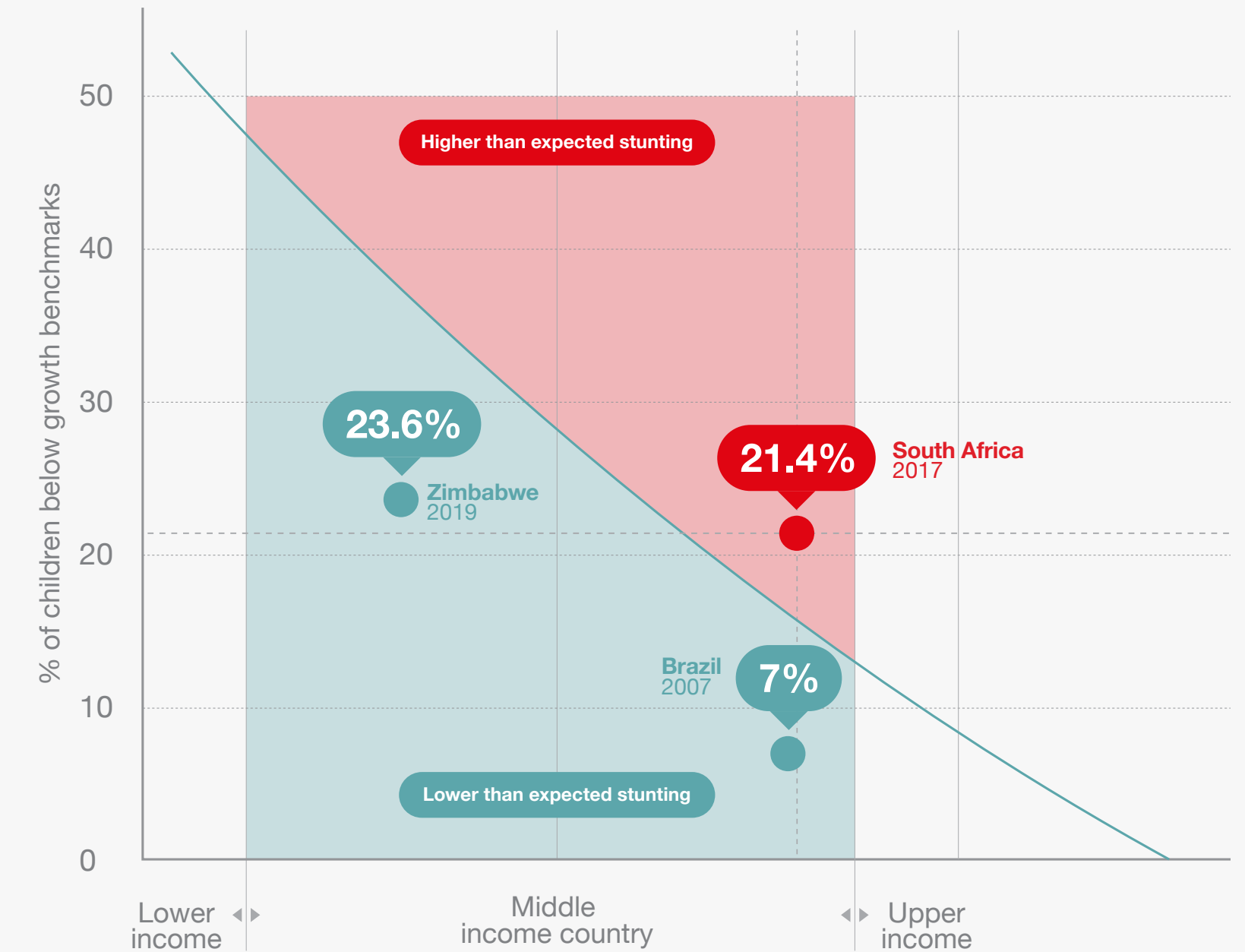
South Africa is one of 34 countries accounting for 90% of the world's stunted children putting us in the same group as some of the poorest countries in the world such as Mozambique, Afghanistan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo<sup>9</sup>.

It is useful to compare South Africa's performance in stunting to two countries selected for specific comparison purposes. Brazil, like South Africa, is

an upper-middle-income country with similarly high levels of inequality. With a similar Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per person, Brazil had a stunting rate of 7% (in 2007<sup>10</sup>), while according to data used by Our World in Data, in 2017 South Africa had a stunting rate of 21.4%. Other data sources put our stunting rates as high as 24.5% in 2015 (Figure 1) and around 24.0% in 2019<sup>11</sup>, i.e. about one in four children are stunted. It is, however, important to note that there has been improvement in stunting levels since the early 2000s to an estimated stunting level (World Health Organization's estimates) of 22.8% in 2022<sup>12</sup>.

Zimbabwe is classified as a lower middle income country and has faced many economic crises. In 2019, Zimbabwe was a significantly poorer country than South Africa but had a similar stunting rate (at 23.5%).

Figure 2  
**South Africa's nutrition performance as measured by stunting relative to other countries**



**Source:** Our World in Data, 2022<sup>14</sup>  
\*Blue line is the expected stunting rate given the level of a country's wealth. South Africa has higher stunting than we may expect for its level of economic development.



**Zimbabwe, although a lower middle income country, had a similar stunting rate to SA of 23.5%.**



**South Africa's stunting level in 2022 was 22.8%.**

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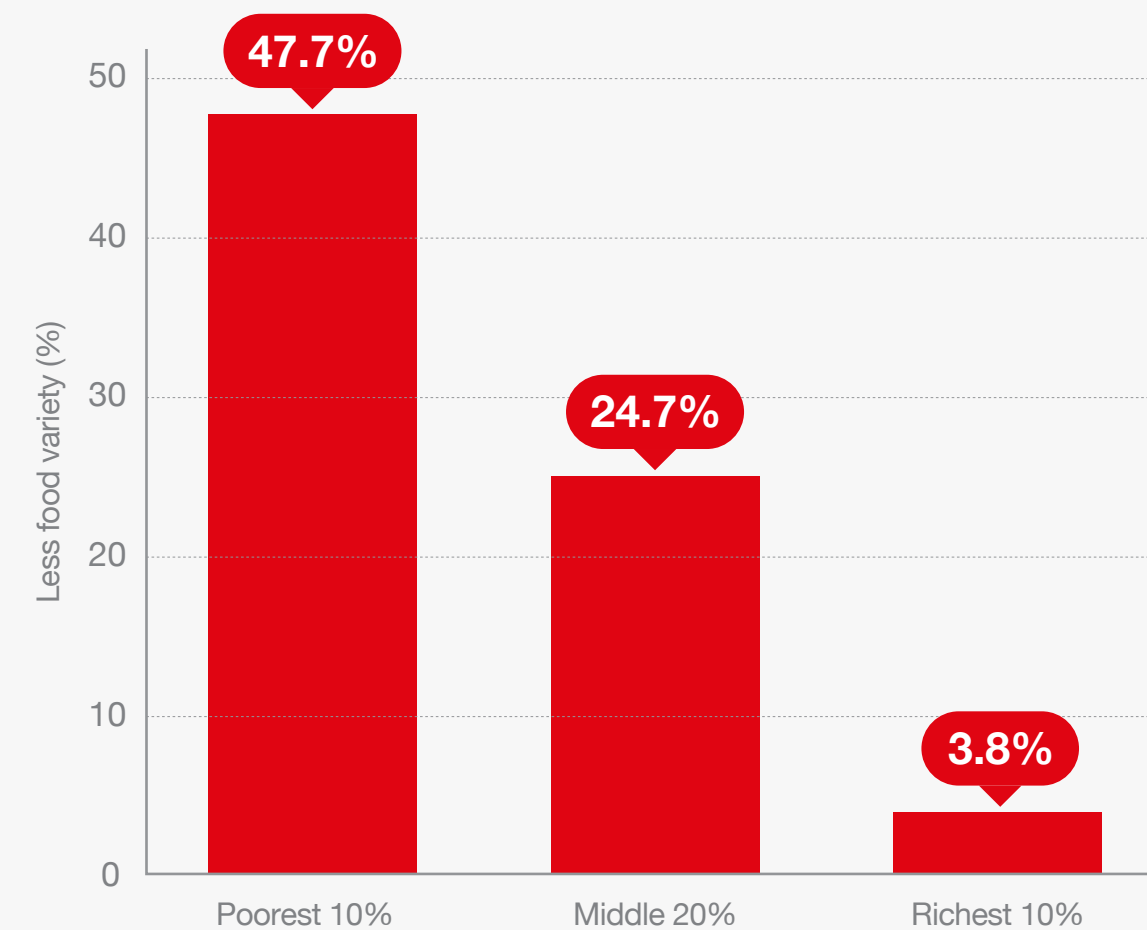
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It is the poorest households that struggle most with nutrition security. In 2023, in the poorest 10% of households, nearly half of households said they consumed a lower variety of foods than they would otherwise have (Figure 3) because they had insufficient funds to do so<sup>15</sup>. Food variety is a strong predictor of nutritional outcomes.

In the same year, about one in four of the poorest households reported that children in their homes went hungry “sometimes”, “often” or “always” in the previous year (Figure 3).

Figure 3  
**Household variety relative to income in 2023**



Source: General Household Survey 2023, authors' own analysis



**1 in 4 of the poorest households reported that children in their homes went hungry.**

Figure 4  
**Household hunger relative to income in 2023**

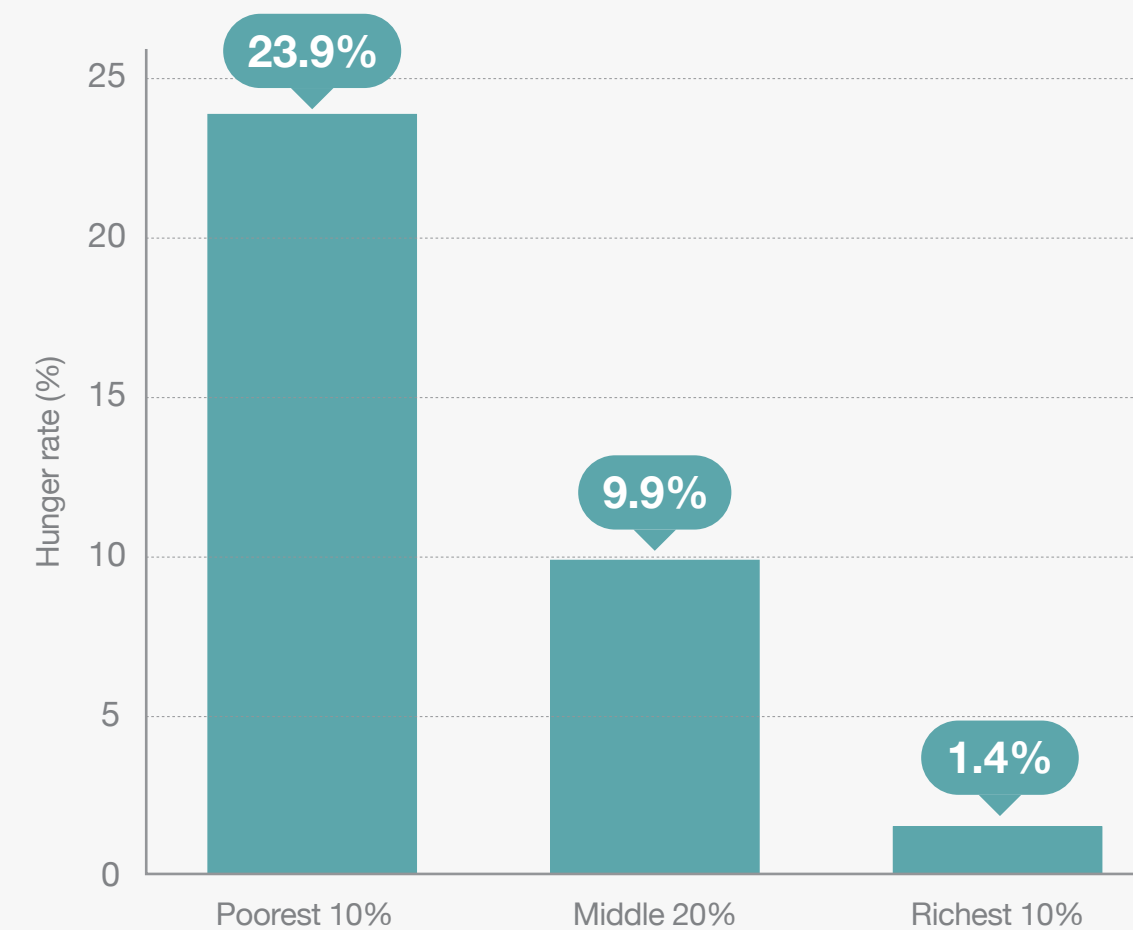
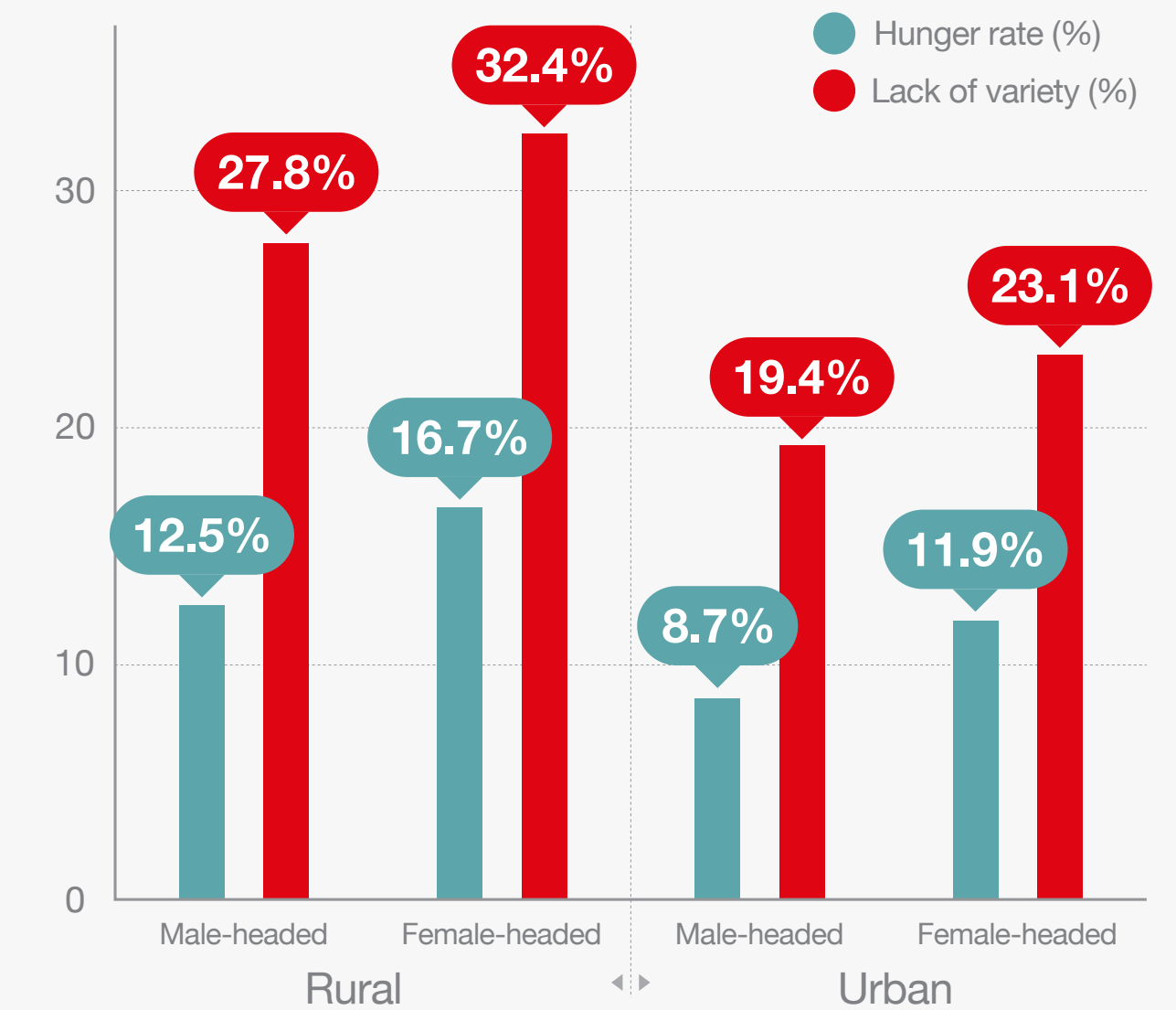


Figure 5

## Household hunger and food variety relative to location and gender of household head in 2023



Going hungry and not having access to sufficient food variety overlap strongly with location (urban vs. rural) and gender.

Figure 5 shows that male-headed households have lower risks of hunger (12.5% in rural areas and 8.7% in urban areas) than female-headed households (16.7% in rural areas and 11.9% in urban areas) (Figure 5). All demographic groups have higher hunger rates in rural areas than in urban areas. A lack of food variety in households follows similar patterns.

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# Section 02 Food Availability



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# 02

## Food Availability: The Broader Food Environment

### The purpose of this section

The availability of food continues to be a struggle for people in the country, with many people having very limited diets. Availability is impacted by how much food is being produced in the country, impacted by socio-economic and political conditions but also by environmental factors. This section sheds light on the issue, ensuring a clear differentiation with “access” – another dimension of food security.

### Section summary

It is both the overall quantity and the quality of food available which enable individuals’ to obtain the needed energy.

Overall **food availability in South Africa declined from a peak of 2.8 tonnes** of raw food per person per year in 2017 **to 2.6 tonnes in 2022**. International data for 2023 is not yet available.

The number of people in South Africa **not meeting the minimum energy requirements (1,834kcal) increased from 1.8 million in 2001 to 4.7 million in 2021**.

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# What is food availability and why does it matter?

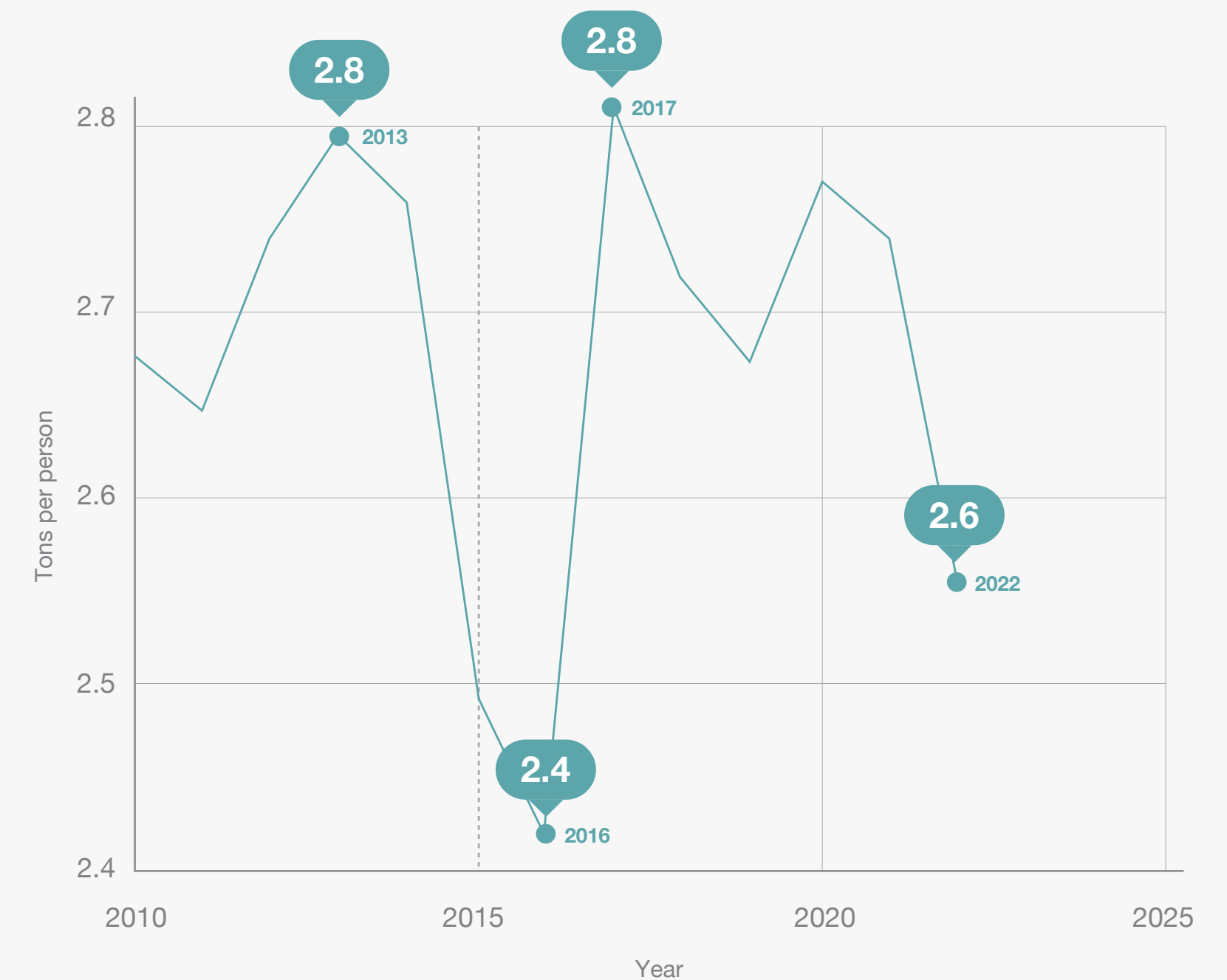
It is both the quantity and the quality of food available which enable individuals' bodies to obtain the needed energy to live more fulfilling lives and ensuring better overall health.

## The state of food availability in South Africa

Figure 6 shows official estimates of the total availability of food in South Africa over the period 2010-2022. This is measured as local production, plus imports but removing exports. Availability peaked at around 2.8 tonnes of raw food per person per year. While imports partially compensated for availability, the production shock associated with the 2015/2016 drought dropped availability to nearly 2.4 tonnes per person per year.

The broader food environment is determined both by how much food is available to the country, and how much of this food has potential to become available at household level.

Figure 6  
**Food availability per person in South Africa**



Source: Food And Agricultural Organisation (FAO), where availability per person is (production + imports - exports)/population



**Food availability peaked at around 2.8 tonnes of raw food per person per year.**

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These import numbers can be converted into kcal, depending both on volumes available and the type of food consumed. The decline in calories available for consumption continued beyond the drought. The types of foods South Africans can choose from is changing. **Slowly but surely food consumed is not yielding the same energy intake that was possible before** (Figure 7).

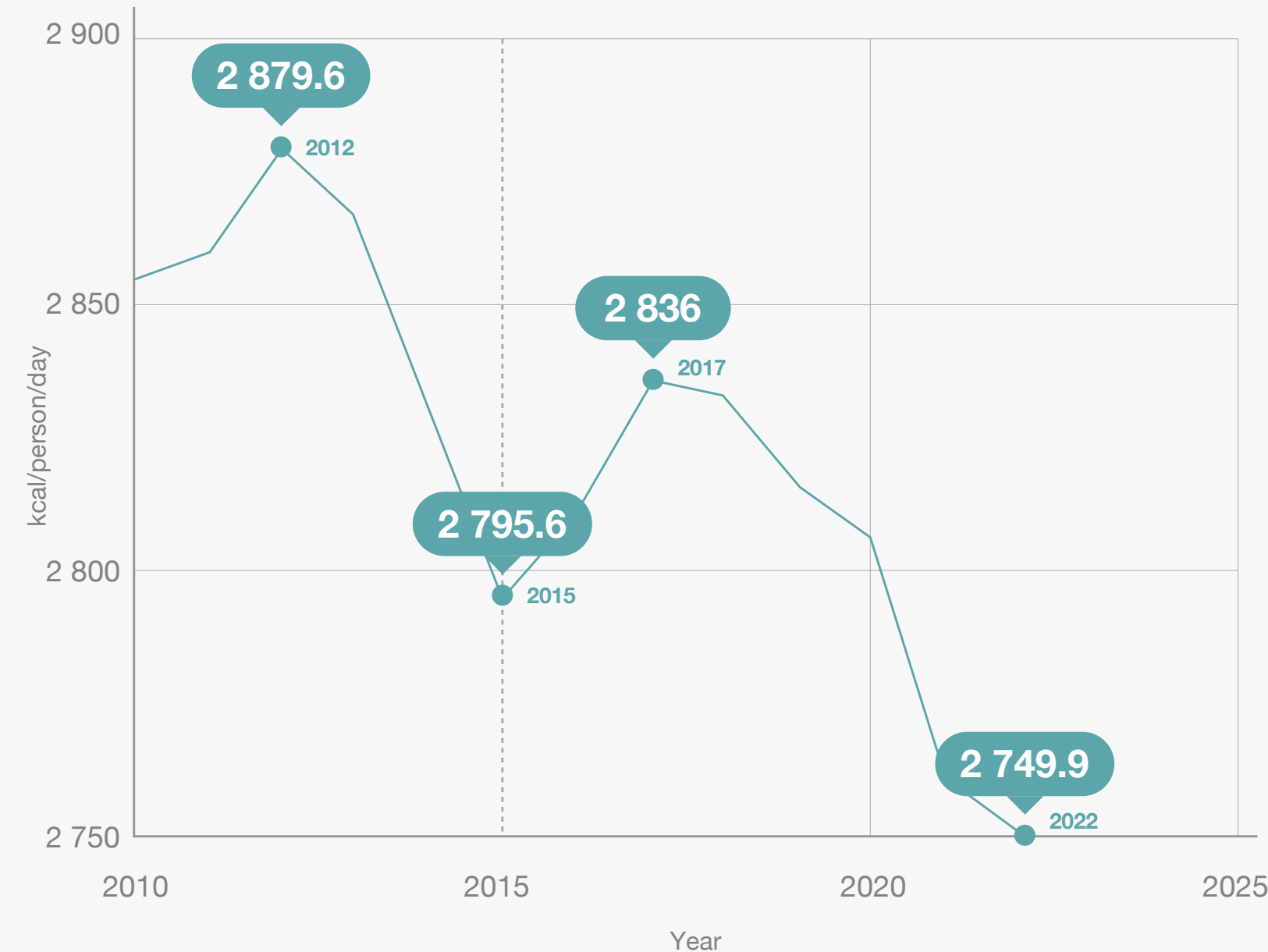
Recognising each person needs a different number of kcals for adequate nutrition intake, it is estimated that the number of people in South Africa not meeting the minimum energy requirements increased from 1.8 million in 2001 to 4.7 million in 2021 (Our World in Data, using the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization data, 2024)<sup>16</sup>. For South Africa, this minimum energy requirement per person is 1,834 kcals.

The types of food we grow, sell and import therefore strongly determine the availability of food for South Africans.

Figure 7

## The number of kcal available per person per day in South Africa

Source: Food And Agricultural Organisation (FAO)



For South Africa, this minimum energy requirement per person is 1,834 kcals.



Expected commercial maize crop in SA for the year is 18.4% less than 2023.

2015 was a pivotal year in South Africa's food system. Drought shocked local food production, affecting available kcal significantly. This was, however, also mirrored in food prices, which started to grow faster than general inflation. Rising price pressures continued into the COVID-19 period and the shocks resulting from the war on Ukraine. Food prices therefore follow supply patterns and availability closely.

We currently find ourselves in a similar situation due to the 2023/24 El Niño-induced drought in Southern Africa<sup>17</sup>. The food stocks of many Southern African countries have been depleted and they are now reliant on imports from South Africa. The South African Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) reported in June 2024 that reductions in the yield of staple crops such as maize and wheat occurred in 2023. Given below average rainfall in South Africa in 2024, the expected commercial maize crop for the year is 13,405 million tonnes, 18.4% less than the 16,430 tonnes of maize harvested in the 2023 season<sup>18</sup>.



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# Access to Food



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# 03

## Access to Food

### The purpose of this section

Access to food is a basic human right, however South Africa is seeing a sharp increase in issues with access to nutrition leading to greater food insecurity. Access is often misunderstood – the access to food is the ability of a person to eat a balanced, high quality and diverse diet. The location of stores, or the availability of items in store has an impact on the access dimension.

### Section summary

Economic and physical access to food is arguably the most important dimension of food security. Without good access, it will be hard to achieve many of the higher-order nutritional needs (such as utilisation which can be measured through diversity).

Like food access, there has been an increase in the proportion of households reporting low food variety since 2019. By 2023, 23.6% of households said they were consuming a lower variety of food than usual given economic constraints.



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While availability has remained stable, access to food has improved. In 2002 one quarter of all households experienced some form of child hunger. By 2023 one quarter, or one in four, of the poorest households experienced child hunger, compared to only 11.8% (or one in ten) of all households.

Hunger declined rapidly with the expansion of social grants in the early 2000s, especially the Child Support Grant (CSG). By 2007, hunger rates dipped to 12% of households. But the financial crisis briefly reversed some of this progress, as did the short period after the 2015 drought. While there were small dips and increases in hunger between the early 2000s and 2020, there has been an overall decrease in hunger. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, hunger has however increased.

Self-reported hunger as captured by the NIDS-CRAM survey was highest at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and slowly decreased into 2021. However, even by the fourth wave of the survey in February/March 2021, 17% of households still reported having run out of money for food. At the same, the authors concluded that give the long duration of the pandemic and the slow economic recovery, the South African government should

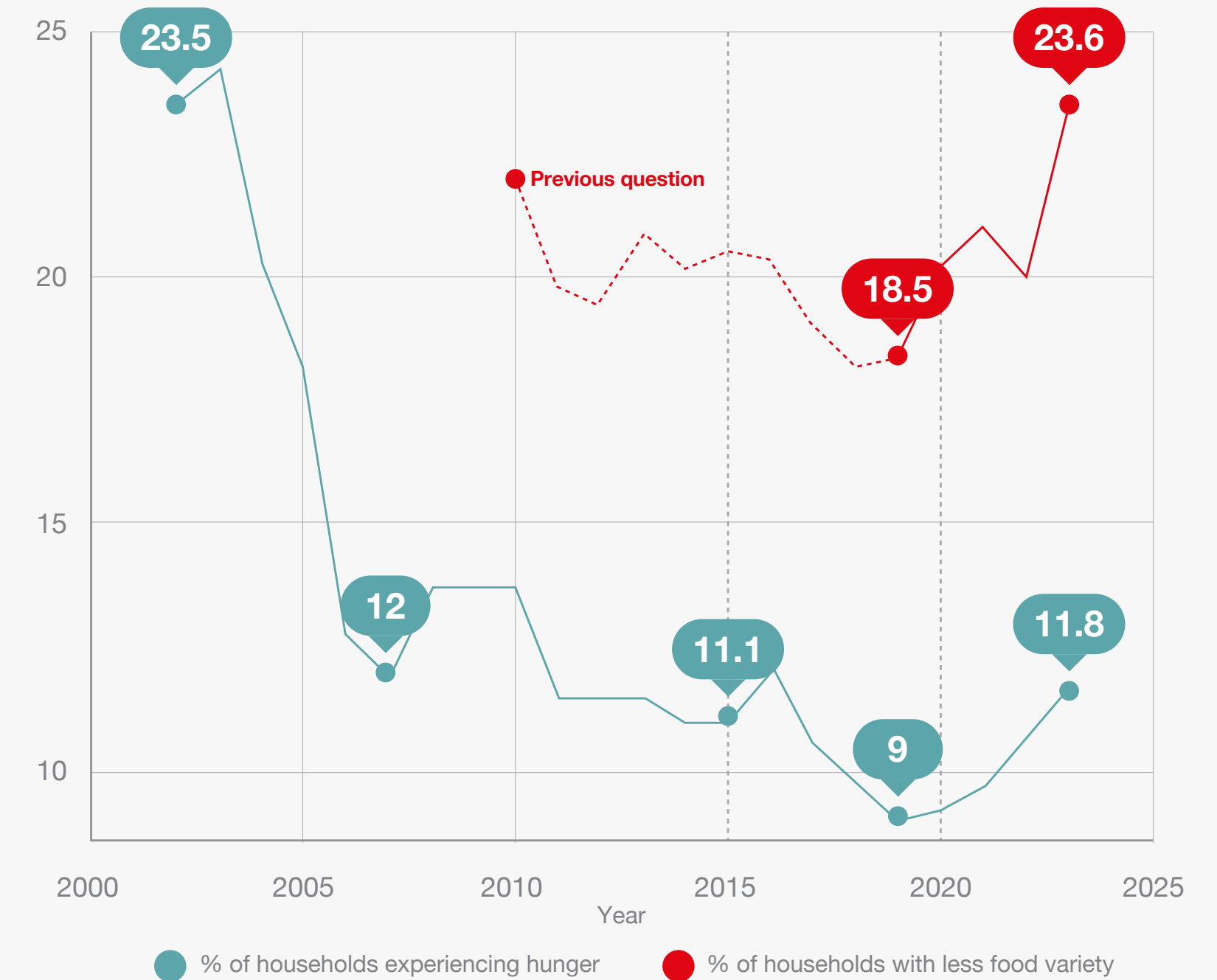
make hunger and food security a central focus in dealing with the impacts of the pandemic – still being felt in the country<sup>19</sup>.

The situation had not improved by October 2021 when a nationally representative cross-sectional survey was rolled out by Ipsos and researchers from the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) to capture hunger, food insecurity and social vulnerability. 20.6% and 20.4% of adults were found to be socially vulnerable and food insecure, respectively. The risk of food insecurity was almost three times higher among the socially vulnerable group in the study<sup>20</sup>.

The Pietermaritzburg Household Affordability Index, managed by the Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice & Dignity Group [PMBEJD], collects monthly data on 44 food items in five locations. Data has been collected since 2019. In the monthly reports on the Affordability Index, both monthly average food price increase and the annual food price increase are presented. As an example of the devastatingly high food price inflation over recent years, in April 2023 the average cost of the foods bought first in the household food basket had increased by R331,31 (13,7%) from R2 414,09 in April 2022<sup>21</sup>.

Figure 8

## Access to food (reported hunger) and utilisation of food (variety of food consumed) 2002-2023



Source: General Household Survey 2002-2023, authors' own analysis



**Social grants play an important role in helping people gain access to food, providing them the means to afford food.**

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# Utilisation of Food



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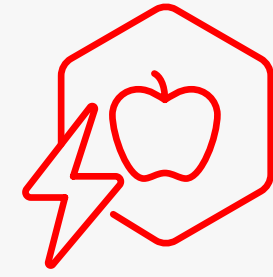
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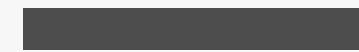
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# 04

## Utilisation of Food



### The purpose of this section

Food utilisation is important because it allows us to know whether individuals and households are receiving the variety and types of food needed to produce energy and support growth for optimal body function.

### Section summary

As with food access (hunger), there has been an increase in the proportion of households reporting low food variety since 2019. By 2023, 23.6% of households said they were consuming a lower variety of food than usual given economic constraints.

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Food utilisation followed a remarkably similar pattern to the previous food security dimension, access to food. Over the long run, a declining number of households reported a lower than usual variety of food consumption, because they faced financial strain (Table 1). In other words, fewer households over time said they were consuming a lower variety of foods than usual.

It is not only the percentage of households (breadth of nutrition deprivation) who say they are consuming a lower variety of food which is worrying, but also the variety (composition) of food consumed. Since the indicator does not capture what types of food are being consumed less of, we do not know the full extent of nutrient reduction (the depth of nutrition deprivation) and the population-level increase in nutrition deprivation paints only a superficial picture.

Using baseline screening data of the South African Diabetes Prevention Programme (SA-DPP) study, the

dietary intake of a sample of 693 adults in Cape Town, South Africa was analysed<sup>22</sup>. 70.4% of study participants had low Dietary Diversity (DD) Scores (<5 food groups). In this study, Low DD was associated with higher blood triglycerides scores, a predictor for cardiovascular disease.

Declines in stunting rates, from 31% in 2000 to 24% in 2015, corresponded with the reduction in the percentage of households reporting consuming a lower food variety diet, this trend was noticeable until 2019.

After 2019, these two indicators are less aligned. However, stunting takes a while to show up in data (it is not a short-term health outcome) and there have not been recently updated nationally representative household-level data collection on stunting.

Food variety estimates are an important “real-time” utilisation indicator that (could over time) reflect in long-run nutrition outcomes such as stunting.



**Food variety and a balanced diet prevents stunting.**

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# Section 05

# The Food Security Dimensions Across Provinces



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The three dimensions of food security, namely (un)availability, lack of access and limits on food utilisation vary substantially by province.

The rapid decline in hunger in the early 2000s was most noticeable in provinces which contain former Apartheid-era homelands (such as Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Eastern Cape, North West and KwaZulu-Natal), areas which were also strongly favoured in the roll-out and eligibility of receiving child support grants (Table 1). Similar trends in food utilisation are observed, as households report increasing ability to afford their desired food variety (Table 2). But the relatively good performance in each of these indicators is now threatened by climate change, unemployment, pandemics and international food supply and prices.



**Food security progress in former Apartheid-era homeland provinces are at risk due to climate change, unemployment, and global food challenges.**

Table 1

## Access to food (reported hunger) % of households

Source (for all tables): General Household Survey 2005-2023, authors' own analysis

	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GP	MP	LIM	SA
2005	16.6	27.6	17.8	18.9	16.8	21.6	12.2	20.4	18.2	18.2
2010	12.8	19.8	28.1	10.2	20.7	18.3	8.4	11.1	7.2	13.8
2015	15.1	8.5	18.2	10.5	16.2	14.7	9.3	9.7	3.6	11.1
2019	10.4	5.2	16.4	12	11.7	12.2	7.5	11.1	4.1	9
2020	12.1	7.1	20	12.4	7.7	15.3	8.2	15.8	1.7	9.2
2021	14.4	7.5	19.2	11.5	12.3	14.3	6.9	13.5	2.4	9.7
2022	13.4	5.4	22.7	13.1	14.8	15.1	8.5	13.9	3.4	10.7
2023	14.2	6	25	9.7	18.3	17.7	9.1	14.3	3.7	11.8

Table 2

## Utilisation of food (reports of less food variety) % of households

	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GP	MP	LIM	SA
2010	19.8	19.1	24.1	25.6	25.8	32.8	17.9	24.4	21	22.1
2015	20.8	23.7	29	21.6	22.4	37.9	15.5	30.1	5.6	20.6
2019	18.9	22.3	29.8	27.6	17.6	30.9	14.5	24	6.1	18.5
2020	24.6	22.5	25.5	25.2	15.9	34.6	17.8	31.2	5.1	20.3
2021	21.5	25.1	36.2	23.5	20.2	33	17.6	31.8	6.6	21.1
2022	18.7	24.4	33.4	25.5	22.3	29.4	16.6	26.7	5.5	20.1
2023	16.6	28.9	39.8	22.4	29	32.4	21.5	29.8	8.9	23.6
Total	19.7	23.4	30	22.4	20.9	34.1	16.6	28.2	8	22.1

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# South African Food Security Index 2024



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# 06

## South African Food Security Index 2024

The South African Food Security Index 2024 is a composite measure of food security. It combines all four dimensions of food security into one number, and it provides a snapshot of food security in the country.

The Index provides a **baseline** of the overall state of food security in the country to assist with monitoring the situation annually.

\*The Index is robust to the change in GHS questionnaire, though the most reliable and consistent segment is the solid line from 2019 onwards. Note that the Index ranges from 0 to 100, but the graph axis has been limited.

## Index summary

According to the South African Food Security Index 2024 the country achieved its lowest value in food security levels in 2023 since 2012. It decreased from a peak value of 64.6 in 2019 to 45.3 in 2023. South Africa was therefore at its lowest level of food security in 2023 over the Index period.

The values of the Index range from zero (severe food insecurity) to 100 (excellent food security). The Index series starts after the Global Financial Crisis when food security was near an average value of 52.4 (Figure 9). The series shows a brief recovery after this difficult economic period. A small drop in food security values followed the 2012 global food price crisis, before returning to the mean value in 2015. However, the drought of 2015/6 had a sudden and sharp downward impact on the South Africa Food Security Index before recovering dramatically. The start of the COVID-19 lockdowns took the Index down from its peak value of 64.6 in 2019. Inflationary pressures during the Ukraine war period and tough economic circumstances in South Africa assisted in creating further drops in Index values to the lowest food security levels in 2023 to a value of 45.3.



# Interactive Index

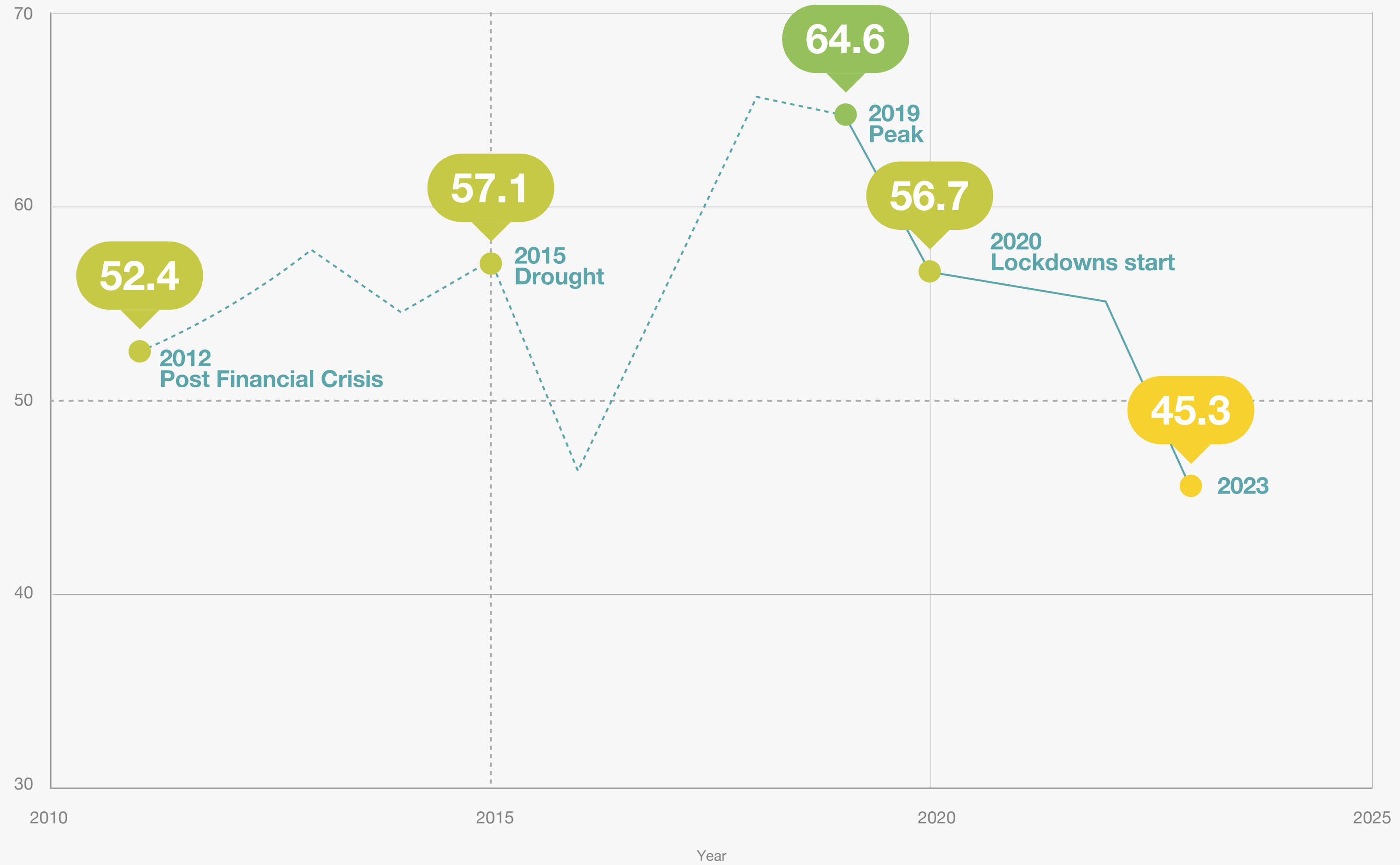
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Figure 9  
**South African Food Security Index review of period 2010 to 2023, providing a baseline for future reports.**

Source: Authors' Own, estimated using various data sources



## Food Insecurity Range

- Excellent
- (90,100]
- (80,90]
- (70,80]
- (60,70]
- (50,60]
- (40,50]
- (30,40]
- (20,30]
- (10,20]
- (0,10]
- Severe

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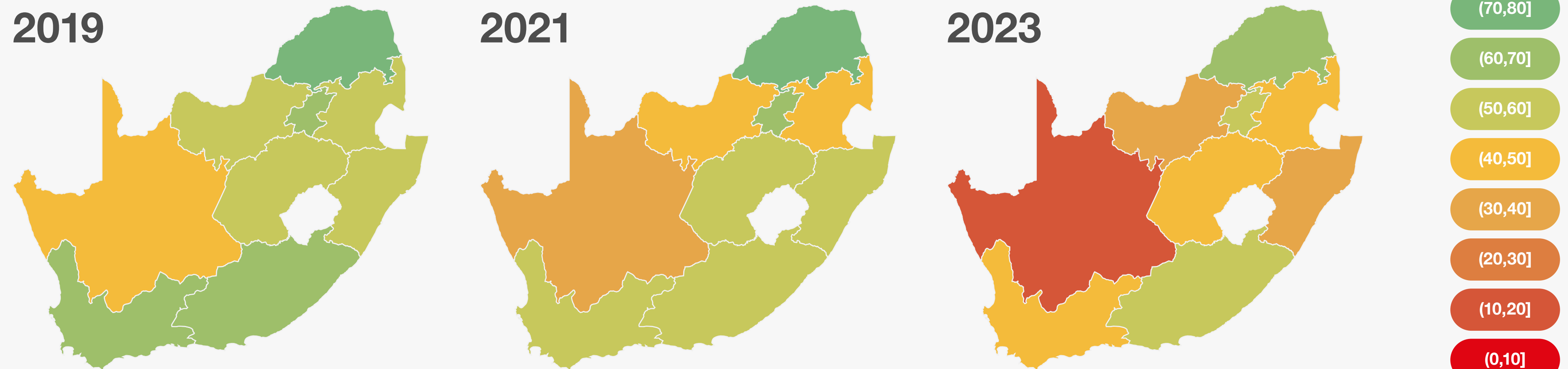


## South African Food Security Index by province

The South African Food Security Index's performance varies substantially by province. Some provinces like Limpopo fare surprisingly well in the South African Food Security Index 2024. The Index deteriorated substantially in the

Northern Cape from the 40-50 range in 2019 to the 10-20 range in 2023 (Figure 10). Many other provinces (such as the Western Cape, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal) started out at higher levels of food security in 2019, but the situation sharply deteriorated towards 2023.

Figure 10  
**South African Food Security Index 2024 reflects on the period 2019 to 2023 at the provincial performance level**



Source: Authors' own, estimated using various data sources

\*Note on interpretation: Categories of Food Security Index values range from 0 (no food security) to 100 (perfect food security).

# Interactive Index

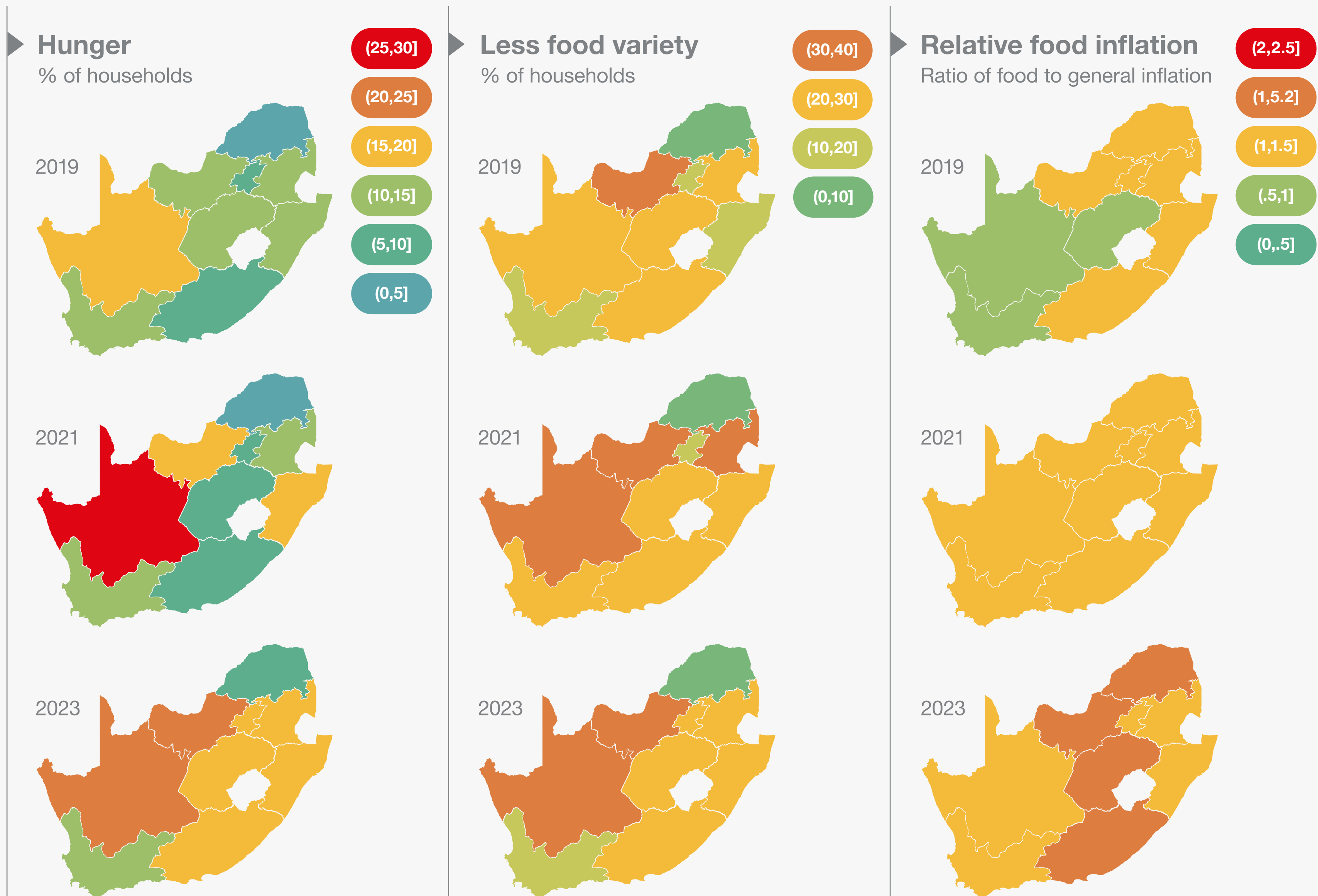


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Figure 11  
**Food security dimensions 2019-2023, by province**



\*Note on interpretation: Categories for the food security dimensions are measured in percentages and ratios

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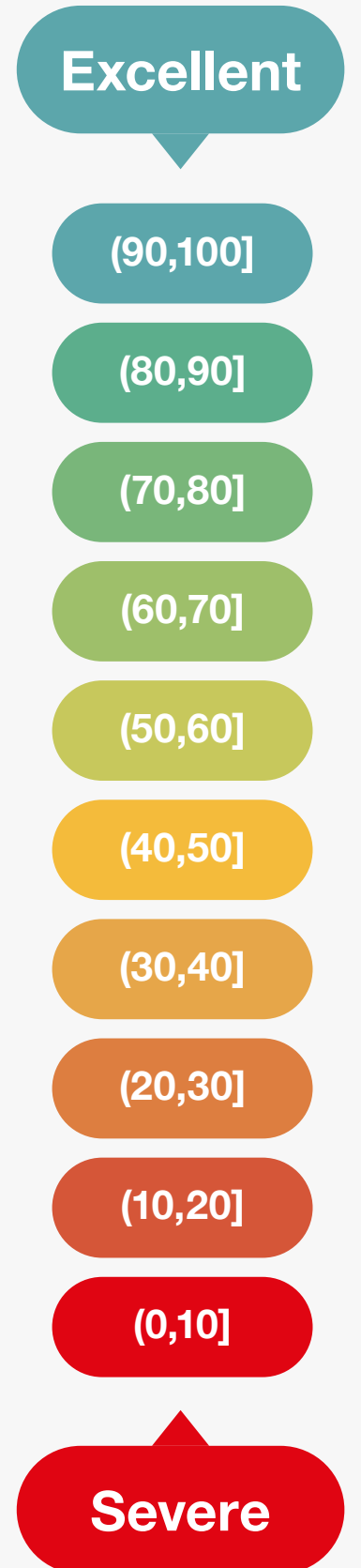
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Table 3  
**South African Food Security Index (0 to 100) (2011-2023), by provinces and nationally**

	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GP	MP	LIM	Total
2011	41.2	44.3	20.5	43.7	49.9	43.4	52.8	48.8	64.1	52.4
2015	51.2	56.1	39.5	57.2	49.4	41.2	63.7	53.4	77.7	57.1
2019	65.7	64.5	49.5	55	58.1	50.8	65.5	51.9	73.5	64.6
2020	44.8	57.5	37.1	46.6	59.8	36	55	35.9	79.9	56.7
2021	50.1	59.3	34.4	52.2	52.2	46.3	63.5	45.5	76.9	56.1
2022	49	60	27.2	46.9	44.5	38.9	56.8	44.6	73.4	55
2023	49.8	52.7	19.6	49.5	36.3	34.2	56.3	42.1	68	45.3

## Food Insecurity Range



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# 07

## Conclusion, recommendations and resources

In summary, the South African Food Security Index indicates that food security in South Africa was at its lowest point in 2023 relative to the period 2010-2023. On average, it means that more South Africans are experiencing greater (deeper) food insecurity than earlier in the period.

Although South Africa has been able to improve food insecurity in the past, the Index indicates that the situation could worsen over the next decade if immediate interventions are not implemented with speed.

South Africa has drastically reduced hunger levels in the past. It is possible to do this again.

## Section summary

In this section we consider what can be done to improve food security in South Africa, given the context described earlier in the report.

The recommendations range from the more centralised, national actions by policymakers and relevant stakeholders, to more localised actions like supporting the establishment of food gardens and caregivers in feeding young children a range of specific nutritious food.

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## The following concrete steps can be taken to

reduce food insecurity and the country's low performance across a range of nutrition indicators. It will assist to promote the wellbeing of households, and specifically women-headed households and children:



The following more affordable and accessible foods have been identified as easy options that can be provided to children by caregivers to help avoid stunting. This list draws on work by Ryckman et. al., (2021) and the revised South African Paediatric Food-Based Dietary Guidelines (Du Plessis et al., 2021)<sup>25</sup>:

- chicken liver;
- small tinned fish such as sardines;
- eggs, chicken, or peanut butter;
- milk, maas, or plain unsweetened yoghurt;
- dark green leafy vegetables such as spinach or indigenous green leaves; and
- yellow, orange and deep red vegetables and fruit, such as carrot, tomato, pumpkin, orange-flesh sweet potato, apricot, or mango.



To support access to more nutritious food for young children, women and households, National Treasury must strongly consider **zero-rating VAT on certain key food products, especially protein-rich items used by lower-income households**. There is currently a process underway to reconsider the food items which are VAT-exempt and to potentially expand the zero-rated VAT list. Multiple stakeholders have argued for adding affordable protein sources to this list – which is supported by the meat and poultry industry. **This needs to be urgently considered and put into action considering both the hunger and nutrition problem in South Africa.**



The rapid decline in hunger in the early 2000s was most noticeable in provinces which contain former Apartheid-era homelands (such as Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Eastern Cape, North West and KwaZulu-Natal), areas. These are also provinces which are more rural in nature and have more land available for food gardens. **Households require substantial support in establishing food gardens with nutritious vegetables and fruit.**



**Prioritise nutrition interventions during the first 1,000 days of children's lives**, as per the recommendation of the DG Murray Trust's Grow Great campaign<sup>23</sup>. **To achieve this, stakeholders need to be mobilised at multiple levels (national, meso-level and local level)**. Ultimately, very targeted interventions are needed to support the nutrition of young children, to prevent stunting (and other illnesses). This should include the provision of appropriate protein-rich food at early childhood development centres, as well as at early learning programmes.



**We need better, more frequent survey and nutritional outcomes data to track the wellbeing of South African households**, and especially female-headed households and children, over time. There has been a suggestion for the establishment of a national nutrition surveillance system to help collect and track data on a variety of nutritional indicators, including both stunting and obesity<sup>24</sup>.

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# Appendix

## South African Food Security Index 2024 Data Source

### Food Security Dimension

### Data source



**Availability:**  
Physical availability of food

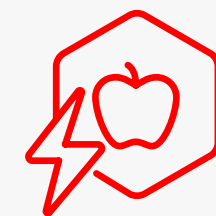
StatsSA food inflation relative to general inflation (2010-2023)

Rationale: Data is nationally and provincially representative and correlates strongly with food availability



**Access:**  
Economic and physical access to food

General Household Survey (2010-2023)<sup>26</sup>, StatsSA



**Food utilisation:**  
Diversity of food consumed

General Household Survey (2010-2023)<sup>27</sup>, StatsSA



**Stability:**  
Stability of above three dimensions over time

A combination of the above three dimensions over the Index period<sup>28</sup>



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**Prof  
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Dieter von Fintel is the Vice Dean for Research, Internationalisation and Postgraduate Affairs in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at Stellenbosch University. He is a development economist and economic historian who has worked in the Research on Socioeconomic Policy (ReSEP) and Laboratory for the Economics of Africa's Past (LEAP) since both research groups' inception. He completed his PhD in Labour Economics in 2014 at Stellenbosch, having spent 2012 as a visiting Commonwealth PhD scholar at Oxford University. His research focuses on uncovering the impacts of historical and contemporary policies and events on agricultural, labour, food security and health outcomes of households and firms in various parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

An expert in applied micro-econometrics, Dieter analyses differences in economic and human development using a combination of survey, administrative and satellite data, with a particular focus on inequalities between people and places. He has consulted on development economic and statistical issues to the World Food Programme, the United Nations Children Fund, the Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy, the South African Reserve Bank, and various national statistics offices. He also sits on the National Research Foundation's Specialist Ratings Committee for Economics.



**Dr  
Anja Smith**

Anja Smith is a development economist, data-driven story-teller and co-founder of Beam, an organisation that helps to translate complex data and ideas into simple, clear communication. Anja Smith is also a part-time researcher at Research on Socio-Economic Policy (<http://resep.sun.ac.za/>) at the Economics Department of Stellenbosch University.

After spending the first eight years of her career in consulting, she returned to Stellenbosch University on a full-time basis in 2012 to pursue a PhD in Economics, graduating in 2016. Her PhD focused on various topics related to the financing, delivery, and user acceptability of healthcare in South Africa. Anja's postdoctoral research examined questions related to the measurement of quality of healthcare and access to contraception and reproductive care for vulnerable women in South Africa. Since then, her research has focused on deepening her work on sexual and reproductive care, health financing and substandard and falsified medicine. Anja is a Y1-rated researcher (by the National Research Foundation of South Africa).



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