Urban Food Futures

Report

March 2025

With pots and pens to parliament

Uncovering the invisible: A feminist call to urban food system transformation with community kitchens in Cape Town

A joint publication by TMG Research
and partners in Cape Town

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ThinkTankforSustainability
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With pots and pens to parliament

Uncovering the invisible: A feminist call to urban food system transformation with community kitchens in Cape Town

March 2025

Written by

Written by Nicole Paganini with contributions from Avril Andrews, Bonang Libuke, Caroline Peters, Nomonde Buthelezi and Jes Weigelt

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Abbreviations

ACC	African Centre for Cities
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CANs	Community Action Networks
CFS	Committee on Food Security
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EPWP	Expanded Public Works Programme
FACT	Food Agency Cape Town
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FIAN	FoodFirst Information and Action Network
FIES	Food Insecurity Experience Scale
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GHI	Global Hunger Index
GNRTFN	Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus, Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
IEJ	Institute of Economic Justice
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
LCS-FS	Livelihood Coping Strategies – Food Security
NGO(s)	Non-governmental organisation(s)
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
rCSI	Reduced Coping Strategies Index
RtF	Right to Food
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency
Stats SA	Statistics South Africa
SUN	Sustainable Urban Neighbourhood Development
TMG	TMG Research gGmbH
UCT	University of Cape Town
UWC	University of the Western Cape
UN	United Nations
UNCESCR	United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
UNCSW	United Nations Committee on the State of Women
UNESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
WEF	World Economic Forum
WFP	World Food Programme

Executive Summary English

Cities are pivotal in shaping sustainable food systems amid growing global challenges, including the cost-of-living crisis, energy shortages, and persistent inequities. In an era marked by polycrises, cities worldwide are not only grappling with how to design sustainable food systems but also serve as key spaces for social innovations and food system transformation. The Urban Food Futures programme focuses on two case studies in Sub-Saharan Africa – Cape Town, South Africa and Nairobi, Kenya. This interdisciplinary action-research programme, led by TMG Research in partnership with civil society and academia, explores how a strengthened informal sector can contribute to the progressive realisation of the right to food. To this end, we co-created pathways for transformation to address systemic challenges within urban food system in each city. This report presents the findings from Cape Town.

Historical injustices continue to shape food access in South Africa, disproportionately affecting racially marginalised groups. The legacies of colonialism, apartheid, and structural inequalities have left deep scars on society. Woman-headed households and larger family units are particularly vulnerable, with nearly two-thirds of food-insecure households located in urban areas (Stats SA, 2021). The rapid pace of urbanisation further intensifies food insecurity as cities struggle to accommodate growing populations while addressing poverty, spatial segregation, and economic inequality. Many urban and peri-urban communities struggle to access affordable, nutritious food, a problem exacerbated by unemployment and inadequate infrastructure. As urbanisation accelerates, these pressures are expected to grow. Despite South Africa's economic leadership on the continent, the country's food system remains precarious due to structural inequalities, the historical legacy of apartheid, and contemporary socioeconomic challenges.

South Africa's ongoing crises, including chronic unemployment, energy shortages, social inequality, gender-based violence, and the impacts of climate change (such as droughts and heavy rainfalls), exacerbate food insecurity, particularly in urban low-income areas. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the country struggled with these issues, but the pandemic deepened them, worsening access to adequate and nutritious food, especially in low-income and informal areas. The Cape Flats, on the outskirts of Cape Town, epitomises the intersection of these crises, resulting in a vulnerable food environment that mirrors broader national challenges and global trends. Our research highlights how factors such as poverty, unemployment, and social inequality drive food insecurity in the six research sites, we worked in Cape Town: Bridgetown, Gugulethu, Hanover Park, Mfuleni, Mitchell's Plain, and the Winelands.

Our empirical quantitative research in Cape Town reveals a worsening food security crisis in recent years. Food insecurity increased between 2020 and 2024, based on household surveys conducted in the Cape Flats in 2020, 2023, and 2024. The last two surveys involved over 2,000 households. In 2020, 28 % of surveyed households were severely food insecure, with 17 % moderately food insecure. By 2023, severe food insecurity rose to 35 %, moderate food insecurity to 35 %, and mild food insecurity to 17 %. In 2024, these figures stood at 32 % severely insecure, 33 % moderately insecure, and 21% mildly insecure. The proportion of food-secure households declined from 42 % in 2020 to just 13–14 % in 2023 and 2024. Households are increasingly adopting coping strategies, raising concerns about long-term vulnerability. A critical finding is the rising reliance on community kitchens as a tool to mitigate the impacts of hunger: in 2023, 40 % of surveyed households had visited a community kitchen at least once, with 23 % citing

it as a primary food source. By 2024, 52 % had visited community kitchens, with 33 % relying on them regularly. Additionally, we identified a strong correlation between food insecurity and gender-based violence: in September 2023, 61 % of those self-reporting gender-based violence lived in severely food-insecure households, rising to 69 % by January 2024. Statistical analysis further revealed that people who have experienced gender-based violence are more likely to be severely food insecure.

Our empirical qualitative data reveals that food insecurity is more than just a statistic. Qualitative methods, including reading circles, community food dialogues, and data-digest workshops, uncovered the profound emotional and psychological burdens experienced by affected individuals. These methods highlighted pervasive feelings of shame and inadequacy that conventional metrics, such as the Food Insecurity Experience Scale, fail to capture. The research also illuminates the concept of 'polycrises,' where overlapping stressors – such as economic inflation, energy shortages, and rising gender-based violence – exacerbate vulnerabilities, further undermining community well-being. The need for healing, both individually and collectively, was expressed in various forms, emphasising the importance of kitchens as safe spaces and community hubs. Collectively, these findings underscore the urgent need for holistic policy responses that address both the material and psycho-social dimensions of food insecurity, reaffirming the right to food as a fundamental human right.

Community kitchens play a crucial role as an informal social protection system in Cape Town's low-income areas. Emerging at scale during the COVID-19 pandemic, these kitchens initially provided emergency food relief but have since evolved into key community hubs. After the first lockdown, many women leading community kitchens reported exhaustion from long workdays, emotional challenges, and donor fatigue following months of providing meals from their homes to thousands. While many of the kitchens established during the pandemic have since closed, some remain active and have expanded their services beyond crisis response. Over four years, a group of 20 women from seven kitchens engaged in a collaborative action-research process to reimagine these spaces – not just as emergency food providers, but as hubs for long-term community resilience. Today, these kitchens play vital roles in preventing gender-based violence, act as first responders for survivors, foster social cohesion, and serve as platforms for community food dialogues. Women in these spaces carry the burden of care work and their contributions are often invisible to policymakers. Recognising their work is essential in addressing food insecurity and advancing gender equality in urban food systems.

Documenting the operations of community kitchens reveals both their significant contributions and the stark challenges they face. The core team, consisting of seven kitchen heads, 21 staff members, and 34 volunteers, collectively accounts for almost 900 hours staff time and over 5,000 volunteer hours per month, enabling the provision of approximately 60,000 meals monthly. The annual operational expenditure, covering food, transport, and energy costs over 11 months totals R4,287,497[1]. This equates to an average cost of R6.80[2] per meal; however, this cost would rise to R11.27[3] if all staff and volunteers compensated at the minimum wage. Notably, these estimates exclude additional labour costs, as larger kitchens contribute between 2–3 per cent of their running costs from personal funds, while smaller kitchens may contribute up to 30 per cent through pensions or income derived from training and consultancy.

In addition to food provision, the kitchens have delivered critical gender-based violence first responders services, including legal, counselling, and medical referrals to 1,100 individuals in 2024 at no cost. The operational demands extend far beyond cooking, involving extensive organisation, administration, logistics, fundraising, and stakeholder engagement. These responsibilities impose considerable physical and emotional strain on the predominantly female leadership. These findings underscore the urgent need to rethink operational models, aiming to establish frameworks that are both socially sustainable and economically less dependent on donations.

Feminist action-research has led to the co-creation of sustainable models for community kitchens. Heads of community kitchens, who contributed their knowledge and expertise as co-creators to Urban Food Futures' action research programme, have tested initiatives such as savings schemes, hydroponic farming, establishing Early Childhood Development centres, and collaborations with restaurants. Findings suggest that no single model is universally effective; rather, a combination of approaches tailored to individual kitchens proves most successful, though scaling these models is challenging. Systemic change requires collaboration between community kitchens and state actors, with targeted investment in circular economies and social support programmes. Targeted support for gender-based violence prevention and early childhood development initiatives within these kitchens can strengthen their role as community anchors, ensuring long-term impact beyond immediate food relief. Partnerships to support hydroponic productions are emerging with the City of Cape Town and the Department of Agriculture. A long-term partnership programme is also in development, with a restaurant partnership approach securing mentorship for the operations of kitchens as communal restaurants.

1 R4,287,497 is the equivalent of 225,422€ in February 2025
2 R6.80 is the equivalent of 0.35€ in February 2025
3 R11.27 is the equivalent of 0.59€ in February 2025

The emergence, development, and strengthening of the kitchen network was rooted in solidarity and is a key outcome of the Urban Food Futures programme. Community kitchens existed long before the COVID-19 pandemic; however, many new kitchens emerged during this time. Some of these kitchens met at an initial retreat hosted by the Urban Food Futures programme and the Heinrich Boell Foundation, marking the beginning of the action research. Predominantly female community leaders, emerging from a backdrop of exhaustion, frustration, and mental health challenges, fostered a collaborative environment that formed the foundation of the subsequent research and co-creation processes. Over the following years, the research employed a range of methodologies, including photovoice and narrative analysis, while also training kitchen heads as Gender-Based Violence (GBV) first responders. This initiative established community kitchens as vital safe spaces, not only for nutritional support but also for psychosocial care. The GBV first responders programme was launched early in the action research phase in 2021. Initially involving approximately twenty women from community kitchens, the programme expanded to train 24 participants through a week-long GBV first responder course led by Caroline Peters from the Callas Foundation. This intensive training equipped the first responders with the skills to sensitively identify and support survivors of gender-based violence – often encountered in everyday community settings, such as kitchen queues. The training enabled them to provide legal advice, medical referrals, emergency support, and counselling services. Locally, the network has positioned itself as a key partner for government programmes by demonstrating its capacity for collaboration. Globally, the network's alignment with broader social justice movements, particularly within feminist circles and women's groups, has been crucial. Regular internal learning meetings, biannual retreats, and participation in high-level international forums such as the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) and the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) reflect the network's deep-rooted solidarity, empowering these women to collectively address systemic challenges.

Informal social protection systems like community kitchens require sustained governmental and structural support. Our research not only examined pathways for transformation with these kitchens and proposed systemic change but also sought partnerships with key stakeholders to facilitate this process. To engage the government in the progressive realisation of the right to food, we employed a two-pronged approach. First, the community-led campaign *Pots and Pens to Parliament* served as an advocacy platform, amplifying the research findings and mobilising public support. Second, *Learning Journeys* with selected government officials provided a more direct and constructive space for dialogue. These journeys facilitated discussions with the City of Cape Town and the Western Cape Province on creating an enabling environment for community kitchens. As part of this process, models developed through crisis-response initiatives were presented to decision-makers, leading to two significant outcomes. Government representatives shared insights on existing support structures within their programmes, helping to better understand how government works and identify partnerships according to community kitchens' needs. Simultaneously, kitchen representatives provided feedback on how these structures could be more effectively implemented or adapted to local contexts. Importantly, the participation of the broader kitchen network reinforced the solidarity among women from diverse backgrounds, demonstrating that these kitchens, built on mutual aid and sisterhood, represent a credible and unified partner for future government collaboration.

Learning Journeys represent a transformative, participatory methodology that bridges the gap between unrecognised informal social protection systems and formal food governance processes. By convening government officials, policymakers, community stakeholders, and grassroots activists in shared, interactive spaces, these journeys facilitate the exchange of knowledge, the building of trust, and the co-creation of context-specific solutions. In the Cape Town context, Learning Journeys have enabled the community kitchen network – predominantly led by women and underpinned by strong solidarity within feminist and local women's groups – to articulate their lived experiences and innovative practices. This bottom-up approach challenges conventional top-down policymaking by incorporating critical feedback from community representatives on existing support structures and by highlighting practical adaptations for local contexts. Moreover, the iterative exchange of perspectives has demonstrated that community kitchens, as informal yet vital social protection systems, can evolve into credible partners for formal food governance. In three learning journeys, we presented that there is no community kitchen model, that has a one-fits-it-all solution, but a combination of models would improve the kitchens' operation. The discussion of models such as the Gardens4Change initiative and the GBV Ambassador programme within the Learning Journey framework further illustrates how co-developed social innovations with communities, can be discussed for scalability in an encouraging but constructive environment. Ultimately, the success of these methodologies relies on sustained engagement through structured follow-up sessions and continuous dialogue, ensuring that those in decision-making power can be hold accountable in their respective mandates. This last step, is yet to be taken based on the learning journeys conducted.

Community kitchens highlight the political nature of food provision and the need for systemic change. Operating within welfare gaps, these kitchens fill essential roles but also sustain exploitative structures. Volunteers, often facing economic precarity themselves, find meaning in their work while simultaneously upholding a system that undervalues care. Transforming these kitchens into spaces of resistance and collective action offers an alternative approach – one that challenges food charity norms and integrates food justice with broader struggles for gender equality, and systemic transformation. The call for a feminist urban food future reaffirms the right to food as a human right and advocates for a truly inclusive urban food system that serves all citizens.

Beknopte oorsig Afrikaans

Stede staan sentraal tot die vorming van volhoubare voedselstelsels te midde van groeiende wêreldwye uitdagings, insluitende die lewenskostekrisis, energietekorte en voortdurende ongelykhede. In 'n tydvak wat deur veelvuldige krisisse gekenmerk word, worstel stede wêreldwyd nie net met hoe om volhoubare voedselstelsels te ontwerp nie, maar dien dit ook as belangrike ruimtes vir maatskaplike innoverings en die transformasie van voedselstelsels. Die *Urban Food Futures*-program konsentreer op twee gevallestudies in Afrika suid van die Sahara – Kaapstad, Suid-Afrika en Nairobi, Kenia. Hierdie interdissiplinêre aksienavorsings-program, gelei deur *TMG Research* in vennootskap met die burgerlike samelewing en akademici, ondersoek hoe 'n versterkte informele sektor kan bydra tot die progressiewe verwesenliking van die reg op voedsel. Vir hierdie doel het ons saam weë vir transformasie geskep om sistemiese uitdagings in stedelike voedselstelsels in elke stad aan te spreek. Hierdie verslag bied Kaapstad se bevindinge aan.

Historiese ongeregtighede gee steeds gestalte aan toegang tot voedsel in Suid-Afrika, wat randstandige groepe op grond van ras buite verhouding beïnvloed. Die nalatenskap van kolonialisme, apartheid en strukturele ongelykheid het diep letsels op die samelewing gelaat. Huishoudings waar vroue aan die hoof staan en groter gesinseenhede is veral kwesbaar, met bykans twee derdes van voedsel-onseker huishoudings wat in stadsgebiede woon (Stats SA, 2021). Die vinnige tempo van verstedeliking vergroot voedselonsekerheid verder, aangesien stede sukkel om groeiende bevolkings te huisves terwyl armoede, ruimtelike segregasie en ekonomiese ongelykheid aangespreek word. Baie stedelike en omstedelike gemeenskappe sukkel om toegang tot bekostigbare, voedsame voedsel te kry; 'n probleem wat vererger word deur werkloosheid en onvoldoende infrastruktuur. Namate verstedeliking versnel, sal hierdie druk na verwagting toeneem. Ondanks Suid-Afrika se ekonomiese leierskap in Afrika, bly die land se voedselstelsel benard weens strukturele ongelykhede, die historiese nalatenskap van apartheid en eietydse sosio-ekonomiese uitdagings.

Suid-Afrika se voortdurende krisisse, insluitende chroniese werkloosheid, energietekorte, maatskaplike ongelykheid, geslagsgebaseerde geweld en die impakte van klimaatsverandering (soos droogtes en swaar reënval), vererger voedselonsekerheid, veral in stedelike lae-inkomstegebiede. Selfs vóór die COVID-19-pandemie het die land met hierdie probleme gesukkel, maar die pandemie het dit verdiep en toegang tot voldoende en voedsame voedsel bemoeilik, veral in lae-inkomste en informele gebiede. Die Kaapse Vlakte, aan die buitewyke van Kaapstad, verteenwoordig die sameloop van hierdie krisisse, wat lei tot 'n kwesbare voedselomgewing wat breër nasionale uitdagings en wêreldwye tendense weerspieël. Ons navorsing benadruk hoe faktore soos armoede, werkloosheid en maatskaplike ongelykheid voedselonsekerheid dryf in die ses navorsingsentrums waar ons in Kaapstad gewerk het: Bridgetown, Gugulethu, Hanoverpark, Mfuleni, Mitchellsplein en die Wynlande.

Ons empiriese kwantitatiewe navorsing in Kaapstad toon 'n verergerende voedselsekerheidskrisis in onlangse jare. Voedselonsekerheid het tussen 2020 en 2024 toegeneem, op grond van markopnames van huishoudings wat in 2020, 2023 en 2024 op die Kaapse Vlakte gedoen is. Die laaste twee markopnames het meer as 2 000 huishoudings behels. In 2020 het 28 % van die huishoudings wat aan die markopname deelgeneem het, erge voedselonsekerheid ervaar, met 17 % wat matige voedselon-sekerheid ervaar het. Teen 2023 het erge voedselonsekerheid tot 35 %

gestyg, matige voedselonsekerheid tot 35 % en effense voedselonsekerheid tot 17 %. In 2024 was hierdie syfers op 32 % erg onseker, 33 % matig onseker en 21 % effens onseker. Die verhouding van voedselsekere huishoudings het gedaal van 42 % in 2020 tot net 13–14 % in 2023 en 2024. Huishoudings begin al hoe meer hanteringstrategieë toepas, wat kommer wek oor langtermyn kwesbaarheid. 'n Kritieke bevinding is die groter afhanklikheid van gemeenskapskombuise as 'n hulpmiddel om die impak van honger te versag: in 2020 het 40 % van die huishoudings wat aan die markopname deelgeneem het, 'n gemeenskapskombuis minstens een keer besoek, met 23 % wat dit as 'n primêre voedselbron noem. Teen 2024 het 52 % gemeenskapskombuise besoek, met 33 % wat daarop staatmaak. Boonop het ons 'n sterk verband tussen voedselonsekerheid en geslagsgebaseerde geweld geïdentifiseer: in September 2023 het 61 % van diegene wat geslagsgebaseerde geweld self aanmeld, in huishoudings met erge voedselonsekerheid gewoon, wat teen Januarie 2024 tot 69 % gestyg het. Statistiese ontledings het verder getoon dat, hoe erger voedselonsekerheid is, hoe groter is die waarskynlikheid om geslagsgebaseerde geweld te ervaar.

Ons empiriese kwalitatiewe data toon dat voedselonsekerheid meer as 'n statistiek is. Kwalitatiewe metodes, soos leserskringe, gemeenskapsvoedseldialoë en werkswinkels vir die verwerking van data, het die enorme emosionele en sielkundige laste ontbloot wat deur geaffekteerde individue ervaar word, wat diepliggende gevoelens van skaamte en onvolwaardigheid beklemtoon wat konvensionele maatstawwe soos die Voedselonsekerheid-ervaringskaal nie kan vaslê nie. Die navorsing werp voorts lig op die konsep van 'veelvuldige krisisse' waardeur oorvleuelende stressors soos ekonomiese inflasie, energietekorte en toenemende geslagsgebaseerde geweld, kwesbaarhede vererger en gemeenskapswelstand gevolglik ondermyn. Boonop was die behoefte aan genesing, individueel, gesamentlik en as samelewing, deur verskillende vorme uitgedruk, wat 'n punt maak vir kombuise as veiliger ruimtes en vir gemeenskapsentrums, maar ook vir 'n strategie om rolspelers in die regering te betrek om meer as net "plak-'n-pleister-programme" te bied. Gesamentlik benadruk hierdie bevindinge die dringende behoefte aan holistiese antwoorde wat beleid betref, wat die materiële sowel as die psigososiale dimensies van voedselonsekerheid aanspreek en die reg op voedsel as 'n fundamentele mensereg herbevestig.

Gemeenskapskombuise speel 'n deurslaggewende rol as 'n informele maatskaplike beskermingstelsel in Kaapstad se lae-inkomstegebiede. Hierdie kombuise, wat tydens die COVID-19-pandemie op skaal ontstaan het, het aanvanklik noodvoedselverligting gebied, maar het sedertdien in belangrike gemeenskapsentrums ontwikkel. Ná die eerste inperking het baie vroue wat gemeenskapskombuise gelei het, uitputting weens lang werksdae, emosionele uitdagings en skenkeruitputting aangemeld nadat hulle vir maande etes vir duisende mense uit hul huise verskaf het. Terwyl baie van die kombuise wat tydens die pandemie gestig is, sedertdien toegemaak het, bly van hulle aktief en het hul dienste uitgebrei na meer as krisisreaksie. Oor vier jaar het 'n groep van 20 vroue van sewe kombuise betrokke geraak by 'n medewerkende aksie-navorsingsproses om nuwe gestalte aan hierdie ruimtes te gee, nie net as noodvoedselverskaffers nie, maar as sentrums vir langtermyn gemeenskapsveerkragtigheid. Vandag speel hierdie kombuise 'n belangrike rol in die voorkoming van geslagsgebaseerde geweld, tree op as eerste respondente vir oorlewendes, koester maatskaplike samehorigheid en dien as platforms vir dialoog wat gemeenskapsvoedsel betref. Vroue in hierdie ruimtes dra die las van versorgingswerk, en beleidmakers sien hul bydraes dikwels nie eens raak nie. Erkenning van hul werk is noodsaaklik om voedselonsekerheid

aan te spreek en geslagsgelykheid in stedelike voedselstelsels te bevorder.

Om die bedrywighede van gemeenskapskombuise te boekstaaf, onthul beide hul beduidende bydraes en die groot uitdagings wat hulle in die gesig staar. Die kernspan, bestaande uit sewe kombuishoofde, 21 personeellede en 34 vrywilligers, is gesamentlik verantwoordelik vir 108 opskepdae per maand en meer as 5 000 vrywilliger-ure, wat die voorsiening van om en by 60 000 etes per maand moontlik maak. Die jaarlikse bedryfsuitgawes, wat kos-, vervoer- en energiekoste oor 11 maande behels, beloop R4 287 497[4], wat gelykstaande is aan 'n gemiddelde koste van R6,80[5] per ete; hierdie koste sou tot R11,27[6] styg as alle personeel en vrywilligers teen die minimum loon vergoed sou word. Let daarop dat hierdie beramings bykomende arbeidskoste uitsluit, aangesien groter kombuise tussen 2–3 % van hul bedryfskoste uit eie fondse bydra, terwyl kleiner kombuise tot 30 % deur pensioene of inkomste wat uit opleiding en konsultasie afkomstig is, kan bydra. Behalwe vir voedselvoorsiening, het die kombuise gratis kritieke eerste reaksie op geslagsgebaseerde geweld – regs-, beradings- en mediese verwysings inkluis – aan 1 100 mense gelewer. Die bedryfsvereistes strek veel verder as om kos te maak, en sluit grootskaalse organisering, administrasie, logistiek, fondsinsameling en betrokkenheid deur belanghebbers in, wat gesamentlik aansienlike fisiese en emosionele spanning op die hoofsaaklik vroueleierskap plaas. Hierdie bevindinge benadruk die dringende behoefte om nuwe oorweging aan bedryfsmodelle te skenk, met die doel om raamwerke te skep wat maatskaplik volhoubaar sowel as ekonomies minder afhanklik van skenkings is.

Feministiese aksienavorsing het gelei tot die medeskepping van volhoubare modelle. Hoofde van gemeenskapskombuise, wat hul kennis en kundigheid as medeskeppers van *Urban Food Futures* se aksienavorsingsprogram bygedra het, het inisiatiewe soos spaarskemas, hidroponiese boerdery, vennootskappe met vroeë kinderontwikkelingsentrums en medewerking met restaurante getoets. Bevindinge dui daarop dat geen enkele model universeel doeltreffend is nie; 'n kombinasie van benaderings wat vir individuele kombuise aangepas is, blyk eerder die suksesvolste te wees, alhoewel die skaal van hierdie modelle uitdagings bied. Sistemiese verandering verg medewerking tussen gemeenskapskombuise en rolspelers in die regering, met geteikende beleggings in sirkulêre ekonomieë en maatskaplike steunprogramme. Geteikende steun vir die voorkoming van geslagsgebaseerde geweld en vroeë kinderontwikkelingsinisiatiewe in hierdie kombuise kan hul rol as gemeenskapsankers versterk, wat 'n langtermyn impak verseker wat verder as onmiddellike voedselverligting strek. Vennootskappe om hidroponiese verbouing te ondersteun, ontstaan met die Stad Kaapstad en die Departement van Landbou. 'n Langtermyn vennootskapprogram word ook ontwikkel, met 'n restaurantvennootskapbenadering wat befondsing vir die bedryf van kombuise verseker.

Die ontstaan, bou en versterking van die kombuisnetwerk was 'n proses van solidariteit en een belangrike gevolg van die *Urban Food Futures*-proses. Gemeenskapskombuise het lank vóór COVID-19 bestaan, maar tydens die pandemie het baie kombuise egter ontstaan en van hulle het tydens 'n aanvanklike kombuiswegbreeksessie wat deur die *Urban Food Futures*-

4 R4 287 497 is gelykstaande aan 225 422 € in Februarie 2025
5 R6,80 is gelykstaande aan 0,35 € in Februarie 2025
5 R11,27 is gelykstaande aan 0,59 € in Februarie 2025

program en die Heinrich Boell-stigting aangebied is, wat die begin van die aksienavorsing was, vergader. Oorwegend vrouegemeenskapsleiers, wat uit 'n agtergrond van uitputting, frustrasie en geestesgesondheid-suitdagings kom, het 'n medewerkingsomgewing gebou wat die daaropvolgende navorsings en medeskeppingsprosesse ondersteun het. Oor die daaropvolgende jare het die navorsing uiteenlopende metodologieë gebruik, soos foto-stem en vertellingsontleding, terwyl kombuishoofde terselfdertyd opgelei is as Ambassadeurs vir Geslagsgebaseerde Geweld, wat sodoende gemeenskapskombuise as noodsaaklike veilige ruimtes vir voedingsvoorsiening sowel as psigososiale steun gevestig het. Die GBV Ambassadeursprogram is in 2021 tydens die vroeë fase van die aksienavorsing van stapel gestuur. Die inisiatief, wat aanvanklik om en by 20 vroue uit gemeenskapskombuise betrek het, het uitgebrei om 24 deelnemers in 'n weeklange GBV eerste-respondentprogram onder leiding van Caroline Peters van die Callas-stigting, op te lei. Hierdie intensiewe opleiding het die Ambassadeurs toegerus met die vaardighede om oorlewendes van geslagsgebaseerde geweld, wat dikwels in alledaagse gemeenskapsomgewings soos kombuistoue aangetref word, sensitief te identifiseer en te ondersteun deur die verskaffing van regsadvies, mediese verwysings, noodleniging en beradingsdienste. Plaaslik het die netwerk daarin geslaag om as 'n vennoot vir regeringsprogramme op te tree deur die vermoë te toon om saam te werk. Wêreldwyd was die netwerk se belyning met breër maatskaplike geregtigheidbewegings, veral in feministiese kringe en vrouegroepe, deurslaggewend. Gereelde interne leervergaderings, wegbreeksessies twee keer per jaar en deelname aan hoë vlak internasionale forums soos UNCSW en CFS benadruk 'n diepgesetelde solidariteit wat hierdie vroue bemagtig om sistemiese uitdagings saam die hoof te bied.

Maatskaplike beskermingstelsels, soos gemeenskapskombuise, verg volgehoue regerings- en strukturele steun. Ons navorsing het hierdie kombuise nie bloot ondersoek en sistemiese verandering voorgestel nie, maar wou ook vennootskappe met groot belanghebbers aanknoop om hierdie transformasie te fasiliteer. Ten einde die regering te betrek by die progressiewe verwesenliking van die reg op voedsel, het ons 'n tweeledige benadering gevolg. Eerstens dien die gemeenskapsgeleide veldtog Pots and Pens to Parliament as 'n platform vir voorspraak, wat die navorsingsbevindinge versterk en openbare steun mobiliseer. Tweedens, bied Learning Journeys met uitgesoekte staatsamptenare 'n meer direkte en opbouende ruimte vir gesprekvoering. Hierdie weë het gesprekvoering met die Stad Kaapstad en die Wes-Kaapse Provinsie oor die daarstel van 'n bemagtigende omgewing vir gemeenskapskombuise mootlik gemaak. As deel van hierdie proses is modelle wat deur krisisreaksie-inisiatiewe ontwikkel is, aan besluitnemers voorgelê, wat twee beduidende uitkomste tot gevolg gehad het. Staatsverteenwoordigers het insigte oor bestaande steunstrukture in hul programme gedeel, wat gehelp het om beter te verstaan hoe die regering werk en vennootskappe volgens gemeenskapskombuise se behoeftes identifiseer. Terselfdertyd het verteenwoordigers van kombuise terugvoer gegee oor hoe hierdie strukture meer doeltreffend in werking gestel of by plaaslike kontekste aangepas kan word. Wat belangrik is, is dat die deelname van die breër kombuisnetwerk die samehorigheid onder vroue van uiteenlopende agtergronde versterk het, wat getoon het dat hierdie kombuise, op wat op wedersydse hulp en susterskap gebou is, 'n geloofwaardige en verenigde vennoot vir toekomstige medewerking met die regering verteenwoordig.

Learning Journeys verteenwoordig 'n transformerende, deelnemende metodologie wat die gaping tussen onerkende informele maatskaplike beskermingstelsels en formele voedselbestuursprosesse oorbrug. Deur staatsamptenare, beleidmakers, belanghebbers uit die gemeenskap en aktiviste op grondvlak in gedeelde, interaktiewe ruimtes byeen te roep, fasiliteer hierdie weë die uitruil van kennis, die bou van vertroue en die medeskepping van konteksspesifieke oplossings. In die Kaapstad-konteks het *Learning Journeys* die netwerk van gemeenskapskombuise, wat grotendeels deur vroue gelei en deur sterk solidariteit in feministiese en plaaslike vrouegroepe ondersteun word, in staat gestel om hul lewenservarings en innoverende praktyke te verwoord. Hierdie van-onder-af-boontoe-benadering daag konvensionele van-bo-af-ondertoe-beleidmaking uit deur kritiese terugvoer van gemeenskaps-verteenwoordigers oor bestaande steunstrukture in te sluit en deur praktiese aanpassings vir plaaslike kontekste uit te lig. Boonop het die iteratiewe uitruil van perspektiewe getoon dat gemeenskapskombuise, as informele dog noodsaaklike maatskaplike beskermingstelsels, in geloofwaardige vennote vir formele voedselbestuur kan verander. In drie *learning journeys* het ons getoon dat daar nie enige oplossing met betrekking tot 'n gemeenskaps-kombuismodel is wat almal pas nie, maar dat 'n kombinasie van modelle die kombuise se bedrywighede sal verbeter. Die bespreking van modelle soos die *Gardens4Change*-inisiatief en die GBV Ambassadeursprogram in die *Learning Journey*-raamwerk, illustreer verder hoe mede-ontwikkelde maatskaplike innoverings met gemeenskappe vir aanpasbaarheid van skaal in 'n bemoedigende dog konstruktiewe omgewing bespreek kan word. Op die ou einde berus hierdie metodologieë se sukses by volgehoue betrokkenheid deur gestruktureerde opvolgsessies en deurlopende gesprekvoering, wat verseker dat diegene wat besluite kan neem, aanspreeklik gehou kan word in hul onderskeie mandate. Hierdie laaste stap op grond van die learning journeys wat onderneem is, moet nog geneem word.

Gemeenskapskombuise beklemtoon die politieke aard van voedselvoorsiening en die behoefte aan sistemiese verandering. Hierdie kombuise, wat in die leemtes van welsyn funksioneer, vervul 'n noodsaaklike rol, maar onderhou ook uitbuitende strukture. Vrywilligers, wat dikwels self ekonomiese onsekerheid in die gesig staar, vind betekenis in hul werk terwyl hulle terselfdertyd 'n stelsel staande hou wat sorg nie na waarde skat nie. Om hierdie kombuise te verander in ruimtes van weerstand en gesamentlike aksie, bied 'n alternatiewe benadering; 'n benadering wat norme rondom voedselliefdadigheid uitdaag en voedselgeregtigheid integreer met die breër stryd vir geslagsgelykheid en sistemiese transformasie. Die oproep vir 'n feministiese stedelike voedseltoekoms herbevestig voedsel as 'n mensereg en maak voorspraak vir 'n werklik inklusiewe stedelike voedselstelsel wat alle burgers bedien.

ISishwankathelo samaNqaku anguNdoqo

Izixeko zibalulekile ekubumbeni iinkqubo zokutya ezizinzileyo phakathi kwemingeni yehlabathi ekhulayo, kuquka intlekele yemali efunekela iindleko ezisisiseko zokuphila, ukunqongophala kombane, kunye nokungalingani okuzingileyo. Kwixesha elo liphawulwa kukwenzeka kweentlekele ezininzi ngaxeshanye, izixeko jikelele azijongananga nje kuphela nendlela yokuyila iindlela zokuveliswa kokutya kuye ekutyiweni kwako ezizinzileyo kodwa zisebenza njeengeendawo ezingundoqo kananjalo zokuveliswa kwezinto ezintsha ekuhlaleni kunye notshintsho kwiindlela zokuveliswa kokutya kuye ekutyiweni kwako. Inkqubo yeUrban Food Futures ijolise kwimizekeliso emibini kwiAfrika ekwiSub-Sahara – eKapa, eMzantsi Afrika naseNairobi, eKenya. Inkqubo yophando ebandakanya ukusombulula ingxaki ngexa kuphandwa equka iinkalo zonke, ikhokelwa yi-TMG Research ngentsebenziswano noluntu ekuhlaleni nazizifundiswa, iphononongа indlela icandelo elingekho sikweni elomeleleyo elingafaka isandla ngayo ekuphunyezweni okuqhubekayo kwelungelo ekutyeni. Ukuza kuthi ga ngoku, siyile kunye amanyathelo anokuthathwa kutshintsho ukuthathela ingqalelo imingeni echaphazela inkqubo xa iyonke kwinkqubo yokuveliswa kokutya kuye ekutyiweni kwako ezidolophini kwisixeko ngasinye. Le ngxelo ithi thaca izinto ezifunyaniswe kuphando eKapa.

Izinto ezingalunganga ezenziwe ngaphambili zisaqhubeka ukubumba ufikelelo ekutyeni eMzantsi Afrika, zichaphazela ngokungenamlinganiso amaqela ebebekelwe bucala ngokohlanga. Ilifa lenkqubo yezithanga, ucalulo, kunye nokungalingani, kunye nenkqubo eyenza ukuba amaqela athile ahleleleke zishiye iziva ezinzulu kuluntu. Imizi eyonganyelwe ngabasetyhini kunye neeyunithi ezinkulu zosapho zisesichengeni ngakumbi, phantse ibe sisibini esithathwini semizi engenalo ufikelelo ekutyeni okoneleyo ikwimimandla yasezidolophini (Stats SA, 2021). Isantya esikhawulezayo sabantu abafudukela ezidolophini sikwandisa ngokungaphaya ukungafumaneki kokutya okwaneleyo njengoko izixeko zisokola ukuhlalisa abemi abandayo ngexa zithathela ingqalelo ubuhlwempu, ukohlukaniswa kwamaqela abantu, kunye nokungalingani ngokoqoqosho. Uninzi loluntu lwasezidolophini kunye neendawo ezingqonge iidolophu bayasokola ukufikelela ekutyeni okufikelelekayo, okunesondlo, ingxaki yenziwa mbi nangakumbi yintswelangqesho kunye neziseko zophuhliso ezingonelanga. Njengoko kukhawuleza ukufudukela kwabantu ezidolophini, olu xinzelelo kulindelwe ukuba lwande. Nangaphandle kobunkokeli kwezoqoqosho koMzantsi Afrika eAfrika, inkqubo yokuveliswa kokutya kuye ekutyiweni kwako yelizwe isahleli ikwimo esengozini ngenxa yolwakheko olungalinganiyo, ilifa lembali yocalulo, kunye nemingeni yala maxesha enxulumene nezentlalo noqoqosho.

Intlekele eqhubekayo yaseMzantsi Afrika, equka intswelangqesho engamandla, ukunqongophala kombame, ukungalingani ekuhlaleni, ubundlobongela obusekelwe kwisini, kunye neempembelelo zotshintsho lwemozulu (ezifana nembalela neemvula ezingamandla), zikwenza kube kubi nangakumbi ukungafumaneki kokutya okoneleyo, ingakumbi kwimimandla yasezidolophini enengeniso esezantsi. Nangaphambi kwawo na ubhubhane we-COVID-19, ilizwe belisokola ngale miba, kodwa ubhubhane wayenza nzulu nangakumbi, usenza mandundu ufikelelo ekutyeni okoneleyo nokunesondlo, ingakumbi kwimimandla enengeniso esezantsi kunye nasematyotyombeni. ICape Flats, ngaphandle kweKapa, ngumzekelo ogqibeleleyo wokuhlangana kwezi ntlekele, oko kukhokelela kwimo esesichengeni yokutya ebonakalisa imingeni ebanzi yesizwe nemizila yehlabathi. Uphando lwethu

luqaqambisa indlela imiba efana nobuhlwempu, intswelangqesho, kunye nokungalingani ekuhlaleni eqhuba ngayo ukungafumaneki kokutya okoneleyo kwiindawo ezintandathu zophando, sisebenze eKapa: EBridgetown, Gugulethu, Hanover Park, Mfuleni, Mitchell's Plain, naseWinelands.

Uphando lwethu lokuqokelela nokuhlalutya idatha olusekelwe kumava eKapa luveza ukuba mandundu kwentlekele yokufumaneka kokutya okoneleyo kule minyaka yakutsha nje. Ukungafumeneki kokutya okoneleyo konyuka phakathi kuka-2020 no-2024, kumaphando emizi aqhutywa kwiCape Flats ngo-2020, 2023, nango-2024. Amaphando amabini okugqibela abandakanya ngaphezulu kwemizi engama-2,000. Ngo-2020, ama-28% emizi ekwenziwa kuyo uphando ayengakufumani ukutya okoneleyo ngamandla, nge-17% ingafumani kutya koneleyo ngokuphakathi. Ngo-2023, ukungafumaneki kokutya okoneleyo okungamandla konyuka kwaya kuma-35%, ukungafumaneki kokutya okoneleyo ngokuphakathi kwaya kuma-35%, kwaye ukungafumaneki kokutya okoneleyo okungephi kwaya kwi-17%. Ngo-2024, la manani ayeme kuma-32% ekungafumanekini okungamandla kokutya, engama-33% ekungafumanekini ngokuphakathi kokutya, kwaye engama-21% ekungafumanekini ngokungephi kokutya. Umlinganiselo wemizi enalo ufikelelo ekutyeni okoneleyo wehlile usuka kuma-42% ngo-2020 usiya nje phaya kwi-13-14% ngo- 2023 no-2024. Imizi yamkela ngokonyukayo izicwangcio zokumelena nemeko, iphakamisa iinkxalabo malunga nokuba sesichengeni ixesha elide. Okufunyanisiweyo kokuphandiweyo okubalulekileyo kukomelela okunyukayo kamakhitshi oluntu njengesixhobo sokunciphisa iimpembelelo zendlala: ngo-2020, ama-40% yemizi ekwenziwe kuyo uphando atyelele ikhitshi loluntu ubuncinane kanye, ngama- 23% ewaxela njengomthombo ongundoqo wokutya. Ngo-2024, ama-52% atyelele amakhitshi oluntu, ngama-33% ethembele kuwo. Ukongeza, sichonge unxulumano olungamandla phakathi kokungafumaneki kokutya okoneleyo kunye nobundlobongela obusekelwe kwisini: ngoSeptemba ka-2023, ama-61% abo babuxele ngokwabo ubundlobongela obusekelwe kwisini, ebehlala kwimizi ethwaxwa kanobom kukungafumaneki kokutya okoneleyo, oko okonyukele kuma-69% ngoJanuwari 2024. Uhlalutyo lwezeenkcukacha manani luveze ngokungaphaya ukuba okukhona kungamandla ukungafumaneki kokutya, kokukhona kunokwenzeka bube phezulu ubundlobongela obusekelwe kwisini.

Uphando lwethu lokuqokelela nokuhlalutya idatha olusekelwe kumava lubonisa ukuba ukungafumaneki kokutya okoneleyo kungaphezulu kolwazi olusekelwe kuphando. Iindlela zophando eziphonononga iimbono zabantu – kuquka amaqela okufunda, iingxoxo zokutya koluntu kunye neentlanganiso zeengxoxo zokufunda ngolwazi olutsha – zifumanise ngemithwalo yasemoyeni neyengqondo enzulu eyehlela abantu abachaphazelekayo, kuqaqanjiswa iimvakalelo zeentloni ezikho jikelele kunye nokungoneli oko iindlela eziqhelekileyo zokuhlola ezifana neSikali saMava okungaFumaneki kokuTya okoNeleyo zisilelayo ukuzibamba. Uphando lucacisa ngakumbi umba 'iintlekele ezininzi ezenzeka ngexesha elinye', apho izihlo ezibanga uxinzelelo ezingenelelanayo ezifana nokonyuka kwamaxabiso kwezoqoqosho, ukunqongophala kombane kunye nobundlobongela obusekelwe kwisini obunyukayo zandisa ukuba sesichengeni, ngaloo ndlela, zijongela phantsi impilontle yoluntu. Ngaphaya koko, imfuno yokuphila, ukuba wedwa, ukuhlangana kunye nokuba luluntu yavakaliswa ngeendlela ezohlukeneyo, kunika uluvo lwamakhitshi njengeendawo ezikhuselekileyo kunye neendawo zoluntu, kodwa kananjalo esisicwangciso sokubandakanya abo badlala indima kurhulumente

ngaphaya kweenkqubo zezisombululo ezingonelanga. Ngokuhlanganyeleneyo, ezi zinto zifunyanisiweyo ziyenza icace imfuno engxamisekileyo yokusabela kumgaqonkqubo ngokupheleleyo othathela ingqalelo omabini amacala abonakalayo emiba enxulumene neyengqondo neyasekuhlaleni yokungafumaneki kokutya okoneleyo kunye nokuqinisekisa ilungelo ekutyeni njengelungelo loluntu elingundoqo.

Amakhitshi oluntu adlala indima ebalulekileyo kwinkqubo yokhuselo engekho sikweni ekuhlaleni kwimimandla enengeniso esezantsi yaseKapa. Evela ngesikeyile ngexesha likabhubhane we-COVID-19, la makhitshi ekuqaleni ayenika isiqabu sengxakeko ekutyeni kodwa ukusukela ngoko atshintshe aba ziindawo zoluntu. Emva kokuma ngxi kweentshukumo kokuqala, abasetyhini abaninzi abakhokela amakhitshi oluntu baxela ukudinwa okuvela kwiintsuku ezinde zokusebenza, imingeni yasemoyeni, kunye nokudinwa kwabanikeli kulandela iinyanga zokunika izidlo kumakhaya abo kumawaka abantu. Ngexa uninzi lwamakhitshi lwasekwa ngexa likabhubhane avalwa, athile asasele esebenza kwaye andise iinkonzo zawo zaba ngaphaya kokusabela kwintlekele. Kule minyaka mine, iqela labasetyhini abangama-20 abavela kumakhitshi asixhenxe bazibandakanye ngokuhlanganyelana kwinkqubo yophando oluthatha amanyathelo ukuzihlela ngokutsha ezi ndawo – hayi ukuba babe ngababoneleli bokutya kwingxakeko nje, kodwa abe ziindawo zokomelela koluntu ixesha elide. Namhlanje, la makhitshi adlala indima ebalulekileyo ekuthinteleni ubundlobongela obusekelwe kwisini, asebenza njengabasabeli bokuqala kumaxhoba, efaka unamathelwano ekuhlaleni, kwaye asebenza njengamaqonga eengxoxo zokutya koluntu. Abasetyhini kwezi ndawo bathwele umthwalo womsebenzi wokukhathalela, kwaye amagalelo abo ixesha elininzi awabonwa ngabenzi bemigaqonkqubo. Ukuqonda ukuba umsebenzi wabo uyimfuneko ekuthatheleni ingqalelo ukungafumaneki kokutya okoneleyo kunye nokusa phambili ulingano ngokwesini ekuveliswenі kokutya kuye ekutyiweni kwako ezidolophini.

Ukubhala imisebenzi yamakhitshi oluntu kuveza zombini amagalelo awo abalulekileyo kunye nemingeni enzima ajongene nawo. Iqela elingundoqo, elineentloko ezisixhenxe zamakhitshi, amalungu abasebenzi angama-21, namavolontiye angama-34, ngokuhlanganyeleneyo libalelwa kwi-108 leentsuku zokwaba ngenyanga kwaye lineeyure zamavolontiye ezidlule kwezingama-5,000, oko okwenza ulungiselelo lwezidlo ezimalunga nama-60,000 ngenyanga. Inkcitho yokusebenza yonyaka – efaka ukutya, izithuthi, kunye neendleko zombane kwiinyanga ezili-11 – yenza i-R4,287,497 , oko okulingana neendleko eziphakathi ze-R6.80 ngesidlo; ezi ndleko ziza konyuka ziye kwi-R11.27 apho bonke abasebenzi namavolontiye babuyekezwa ngomvuzo obubuncinane. Okuqaphelekayo, ezi ngqikelelo aziquki iindleko ezongezelelekileyo zokusebenza, kuba amakhitshi amakhulu arhuma ngaphakathi kwesi-2 ukuya kwisi–3 seepesenti zeendleko zawo zokusebenza kwimali yawo yobuqu, ngexa amakhitshi amancinci anokurhuma ukuya kma kuma-30 eepesenti ngemihlalaphantsi okanye ingeniso evela ekuqeqesheni nasekucebiseni. Ngaphaya kolungiselo lokutya, amakhitshi anike ukusabela okubalulekileyo kokuqala kubuNdlobongela obuSekelwe kwiSini – kuquka ukuthunyelelwa ezomthetho, ululeko ngqondo nolwezonyango – kubantu abali-1,100 – simahla. Imfuno yokusebenza inabela ngaphaya kokupheka, ifaka ququzelelo, ulawulo, ulungiselelo, ukunyusa ingxowa, kunye neengxoxo namahlakani ezibanzi, oko ngokuhlangeneyo kufaka uxinzelelo olukhulu emzimbeni nasengqondweni kubunkokheli kakhulu obubobasetyhini. Ezi zinto zifunyanisiweyo zicacisa imfuno engxamisekileyo yokucinga kwakhona iimodeli zokusebenza, ezijolise ekusekeni iinkqubozikhokelo

ezo zombini zizinzileyo ekuhlaleni kwaye zixhomekeke ngokusezantsi kuqoqosho ngokweminikelo. Uphando oluphanda imiba kwaye luyisombulula kwangaxeshanye lwabo baxhasa amalungelo abasetyhini lukhokelele ekudalweni kunye kweemodeli ezizinzileyo. Iintloko zamakhitshi oluntu, ezifake isandla ngolwazi kunye nobugcisa kwinkqubo yophando oluphanda imiba kwaye luyisombulula kwangaxeshanye yeUrban Food Futures, zivavanye amaphulo afana nezikim zolondolozo, ukutyala izityalo kwiziqulatho, intsebenziswano namaziko okuphuhlisa abantwana beselula, kunye nokuhlangana neerestyu. Okufunyanisiweyo kuphando kucebisa ukuba akukho modeli inye isebenza jikelele; kunoko, indibaniselwano yeendlela ezenzelwe ngokukodwa amakhitshi engamanye ingqina ukuba yeyona inempumelelo kakhulu, nangona ukulungisa ubungakanani bezi modeli kucela umngeni. Utshintsho kwinkqubo xa iyonke lufuna ukuhlangana phakathi kwamakhitshi oluntu kunye nabadlali ndima bakarhulumente, ngotyalomali ekujoliswe kulo kuqoqosho olo imathiriyeli ingabi yinkcitho kunye neenkqubo zenkxaso ekuhlaleni. Inkxaso ekujoliswe kuyo kuthintelo lobundlobongela obusekelwe kwisini kunye namaphulo okuphuhliswa kwabantwana beselula kula makhitshi kunokomeleza indima yawo njengeeankile zoluntu, eqinisekisa iimpembelelo zexesha elide ezingaphaya kokwabelwa kwabantu abafuna ukutya ngokukhawuleza. Intsebenziswano yokuxhasa ukutyalela kwiziqulathi iyaduma kwiSixeko saseKapa kunye nakwiSebe lezoLimo. Inkqubo yentsebenziswano yexesha elide nayo iyaphuhliswa kananjalo, ngendlela yentsebenziswano neerestyu ekufumaneni inkxaso kwimisebenzi yamakhitshi. Ukuvela, ukwakha nokomeleza uthungelwano lwamakhitshi yayiyinkqubo yomanyano kunye nesiphumo esinye esingundoqo senkqubo yeUrban Food Futures. Amakhitshi oluntu ayekho ngaphambi kwe-COVID-19, nakuba kunjalo, ngexa likabhubhane, kwavela amakhitshi amaninzi kwaye amanye awo adibana ngexa lendibano yokuqala yamakhishi eyayisingethwe yinkqubo yeUrban Food Futures kunye neHeinrich Boell Foundation, okwaba sisiqalo sophando oluphanda imiba kwaye luyisombulula kwangaxeshanye. Kakhulu ziinkokeli zoluntu zabasetyhini – ezivela kwimvelaphi yokudinwa, ukukhathazeka, kunye nemingeni yempilo yengqondo – ezakha imo engqongileyo yokuhlanganyelana ezanika inkxaso uphando olulandelayo kunye nenkqubo yokusebenza kunye kuyilo. Kwiminyaka elandelayo, uphando lwasebenzisa iindlela zokusebenza ezahlukeneyo, ezifana nokusebenzisa iifoto kuphando kunye nokubaliswa kwamabali kunye nokuhlalutywa kwamabali abaliswa ngabantu, ngexa kwangaxeshanye kuqeqeshwa iintloko zamakhitshi njengooNozakuzaku bobuNdlobongela obuSekelwe kwiSini, ngalo ndlela kusekwa amakhitshi oluntu njengeendawo ezikhuselekileyo eziyimfuneko kwimiba yomibini ulungiselelo lwesondlo nenkxaso enxulumene nengqondo nezentlalo. INkqubo yooNozakuzaku ye-GBV yaphehlelelwa ngexa lesigaba sakwangoko sophando lokusombulula ingxaki ngexa luyiphanda kwananjalo ngo-2021. Ekuqaleni yayibandakanya malunga nabasetyhini abangamashumi amabini abavela kumakhitshi oluntu, iphulo laye lanatyiswa ukuze liqeqeshe abathathi nxaxheba abangama-24 kwinkqubo yeveki ubude yomsabeli wokuqala kwi-GBV eyayikhokelwa nguCaroline Peters owayevela kwi-Callas Foundation. Olu qeqesho lunzulu lwaxhobisa ooNozakuzaku ngezakhono zokuchonga ngobuntununtunu nokuxhasa amaxhoba obundlobongela obusekelwe kwisini – kaninzi obehla kwiimeko bume zoluntu imihla ngemihla ezifana nemigca yamakhitshi – ngolungiselelo lweengcebiso zomthetho, ukudluliselwa ezonyango, inkxaso yengxakeko, kunye neenkonzo zoluleko ngqondo. Ekhaya, uthungelwano lwakwazi ukuzimela ngokwalo njengehlakani kwiinkqubo zikarhulumente ngokubonisa ukukwazi ukuhlangana kwaye basebenze kunye.

Kwihlabathi, ulungelelwaniso lothungelwano nemibutho yobulungisa ekuhlaleni ebanzi, ingakumbi kwimibutho yabaxhasi babasetyhini kunye namaqela abasetyhini, iye yabaluleka; iintlanganiso zokufunda zangaphakathi zarhoqo, iindibano ezibanjwa kabini ngonyaka, kunye nothatho nxaxheba kumaqumrhu enqanaba eliphezulu amazwe ngamazwe afana ne-UNCSW kunye ne-CFS kucacise umanyano olunzulu oluxhobisa aba basetyhini ukuba baphononongo imingeni ekwinkqubo xa iyonke ngokuhlanganyelana.

Iinkqubo zokhuselo ekuhlaleni ezifana namakhitshi oluntu zifuna inkxaso ezinzileyo karhulumente neyolwakheko. Uphando lwethu aluphononongi nje la makhitshi kuphela kwaye luphakamise utshintsho kwinkqubo xa iyonke kodwa lufuna kananjalo intsebenziswano namahlakani angundoqo ukuququzelela olu tshintsho. Ukubandakanya urhulumente ekuphunyezweni okunenkqubela kwelungelo ekutyeni, sisebenzisa indlela eneenxenye ezimbini. Eyokuqala, iphulo elikhokelwa luluntu lePots and Pens ePalamente lisebenza njengeqonga lenkxaso, lisandisa izinto ezifunyanisiweyo kuphando kwaye lihlanganisa inkxaso yoluntu. Eyesibini, iiHambo zokuFunda namagosa akhethiweyo karhulumente zinika isithuba esingqale ngokungaphaya nesakhayo sengxoxo. Ezi hambo ziququzelele iingxoxo neSixeko saseKapa kunye nePhondo laseNtshona Koloni ekudaleni imeko engqongileyo evumayo kumakhitshi oluntu. Njengenxenye yale nkqubo, iimodeli eziphuhliswe ngamaphulo okusabela kwintlekele zathiwa thaca kubenzi bezigqibo, oko okwakhokelela kwiziphumo ezibini ezibalulekileyo. Abameli bakarhulumente babelana ngengqiqo ngamaqumrhu enkxaso asele ekhona kwiinkqubo zawo, benceda ukuqonda ngcono indlela asebenza ngayo urhulumente kunye nokuchonga intsebenziswano ngokweemfuno zamakhitshi oluntu. Kwangaxeshanye, abameli bamakhitshi banika ingxelo ngokwenziweyo ngendlela la maqumrhu anokuphunyezwa ngayo ngempumelelo ngokungaphaya okanye aqhelaniswe nemixholo yasekhaya. Okubalulekileyo, uthatho nxaxheba lothungelwano lwamakhitshi olubanzi lomeleza umanyano phakathi kwabasetyhini abavela kwiimvelaphi ezahlukeneyo, lubonisa ukuba la makhitshi, akhelwe kwintsebenziswano yokunceda uluntu kunye nobudlelwane phakathi koodade, amele ihlakani elithembekileyo nelimanyeneyo ekuhlanganyelaneni kwixesha elizayo norhulumente.

IiHambo zokuFunda zimele inkqubo yenguqu, yothatho nxaxheba evala isikhewu phakathi kweenkqubo zokhuselo zasekuhlaleni ezingekho sikweni ezingaqondwayo kunye neenkqubo zolawulo lokutya ezisesikweni. Ngokubiza amagosa karhulumente, abenzi bemigaqonkqubo, amahlakani oluntu, kunye namatshantliziyo asezantsi kwihambo ekwabelwana ngazo, iindawo ezikhuthaza abantu, ezi hambo ziququzelela ukutshintshiselana ngolwazi, ukwakha ukuthembana, kunye nokusebenza kunye kuyilo lwezisombululo ezingqalene nomxholo. Kumxholo waseKapa, iiHambo zokuFunda zenze ukuba uthungelwano lwamakhitshi – kakhulu olukhokelwa ngabasetyhini kwaye luxhaswa lumanyano olungamandla kumaqela abaxhasi bamalungelo abasetyhini kunye nawabasetyhini basekhaya – ukuba bavakalise amava abo abawaphilileyo kunye neendlela ezintsha Le ndlela iqala ngeenkcukacha ezincinci icela umngeni ekwenziweni kwemigaqonkqubo ngabakwinqanaba eliphezulu lobunkokeli ngokufaka ingxelo ebalulekileyo ngokwenziweyo evela kubameli boluntu ngolwakheko lwenkxaso osele lukhona kunye nangokuqaqambisa utshintsho lolwakheko kwimixholo yasekhaya. Ngaphaya koko, utshintshiselwano oluphindaphindwayo lweembono lubonise ukuba amakhitshi oluntu, engekabikho sikweni enjalo kodwa eziinkqubo zokhuselo lwezentlalo olubalulekileyo, anokutshintsha abe

ngamahlakani amangalisayo kulawulo lokutya olusesikweni Kwiihambo zokufunda ezintathu, sithe akukho modeli yekhitshi loluntu, enesisombulo esifanayo, kodwa indibaniselwano yeemodeli inokuphucula ukusebenza kwamakhitshi. Ingxoxo yeemodeli ezifana nephulo leGardens4Change kunye nenkqubo yooNozakuzaku be-GBV kwinkqubosikhokelo yoHambo lokuFunda ibonisa ngokungaphaya indlela izinto ezintsha ezivelisiwe kunye ekuhlaleni noluntu, zinokuxoxelwa ukuba nokutshintshwa kwazo kwimo ekhuthazayo kodwa eyakhayo. Ekugqibeleni, impumelelo yezi ndlela ithembele kwingxoxo ezizinzileyo ezenziwe ngeeseshoni zolandelelaniso ezimiselweyo kunye neengxoxo eziqhubekayo, kuqinisekiswa ukuba abo banamagunya okwenza izigqibo bathwaliswa uxanduva kumagunya abo awohlukahlukeneyo Inyathelo lokugqibela, lisaza kuthathwa ngokusekelwe kwihambo zokufunda eziqhutyiweyo. Amakhitshi oluntu aqaqambisa uhlobo lwezopolitiko lolungiselelo lokutya kunye nemfuno yotshintsho kwinkqubo xa iyonke. Esebenza kwizithuba zentlalontle, la makhitshi avala iindima eziyimfuneko kodwa exhasa kananjalo ulwakheko oluxhaphazayo. Amavolontiye, ixesha elininzi ejongene nokungaqiniseki kwezoqoqosho ngokwawo, afumana intsingiselo emsebenzini wawo ngexa kwangaxeshanye egcine inkqubo engaluxabisanga ukhathalelo. Ukutshintsha la makhitshi abe ziindawo zoxhathiso kunye namanyathelo ahlangenyelweyo kunika indlela eyenye – leyo icela umngeni kwimithetho yesisa ekutyeni kwaye efaka ubulungisa ekutyeni ngentsokolo ebanzi yolingano ngokwesini, kunye notshintsho kwinkqubo xa iyonke. Isimemo seUrban food future exhasa amalungelo abasetyhini siqinisekisa kwakhona ukutya njengelungelo loluntu kwaye sixhasa inkqubo equka ngokwenene yeUrban food system enceda bonke abemi.

1 Introduction – Pathways to transformation in times of polycrises

In an era characterised by multiple, overlapping crises (polycrises), cities globally face significant challenges in ensuring food security; at the same time, they play a key role as solution spaces for sustainable urban food systems. The Urban Food Futures programme focuses on two case studies in Sub-Saharan Africa: Cape Town, South Africa and Nairobi, Kenya. In both cities, we seek to answer the question, "How can a strengthened informal sector contribute to the progressive realisation of the right to food?" To strengthen the informal sector, this research programme co-created pathways for transformation of identified challenges within the urban food system (Paganini & Weigelt, 2023).

In a world capable of producing sufficient food, hunger is increasingly normalised for vast segments of the population, even as diets deteriorate, and obesity levels rise. Poor diets are a pervasive issue across all urban areas, with many simultaneously experiencing hunger alongside the prevalence of non-communicable diseases linked to obesity. Addressing this crisis necessitates a greater focus on the inequities embedded within food systems that are shaped by structural factors in the global political economy: finance, trade, and debt frameworks, compounded by global climate change and deficiencies in international governance (IDS, 2023; Mbow et al., 2019; Patel, 2008; Porter et al., 2014; Webb et al., 2018).

Polycrises are characterised by the simultaneous occurrence and convergence of multiple crises. These crises increase societal fragility and contribute to political instability, forced migration, unrest, violence, and hunger (Lawrence et al., 2024; WEF, 2023b). In this context, food insecurity emerges as a multifaceted issue, with structural causes deeply rooted in societal systems of racism, gender inequality, systemic violence, and land alienation. Consequently, it is unsurprising that the urban poor and women are particularly susceptible to these polycrises (Swinnen & McDermott, 2020).

In South Africa, the interconnected challenges of polycrises predated the global COVID-19 pandemic, encompassing chronic high unemployment, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, energy supply shortages, entrenched income and wealth inequality, and high rates of crime and violence, including gender-based violence. The COVID-19 pandemic introduced an additional layer of complexity, exacerbating the difficulties faced by many South African households in accessing adequate and nutritious food. This is particularly true in urban low-income areas (Lewis, 2015). The Urban Food Futures programme sought to engage with these environments by exploring pathways to transformation. The Cape Flats, an area on the outskirts of Cape Town, exemplifies the intersection of these crises, resulting in a complex and vulnerable food system that reflects broader national challenges and global trends. Urban Food Futures investigated the food system in Cape Town, with a specific focus on the Cape Flats, in the context of polycrises, highlighting how interrelated factors such as poverty, unemployment, and social inequality contribute to heightened food insecurity in the region.

Food insecurity in times of polycrises in South Africa

At a national level, data from the pandemic years in 2020–2022 indicates that 20 % of South Africans experience moderate food insecurity, while 9 % endure severe food insecurity – amounting to

approximately 5.3 million people (Stats SA, 2025). This alarming prevalence is further compounded by South Africa's double burden of malnutrition, where a significant proportion of children under five are stunted, while adult obesity rates remain among the highest globally. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, intensifying existing food and nutrition insecurity and laying bare the stark disparities in food access across the country.

Research conducted during the COVID-19 lockdown underscores the fragility of South Africa's food system. Food insecurity, household hunger, and poverty all increased during this period, with child hunger nearly doubling between May and June 2020 compared to pre-pandemic levels (Van der Berg et al., 2022). Vulnerable groups, including those with fewer resources, unemployed individuals, and those without a high school qualification, were disproportionately affected (Mtintsilana et al., 2022).

South Africa exemplifies the global "double burden of malnutrition," where both undernutrition and overnutrition coexist within the same population. Bartlett and Tacoli (2021) describe this phenomenon, noting cases where overweight adults and stunted children reside within the same household. For example, stunting affects 27 % of children under five, a figure indicative of chronic undernutrition, while 38 % of adult women and 12 % of adult men are classified as obese (Global Nutrition Report, 2021). This duality represents a critical public health challenge, with implications for long-term health outcomes and economic productivity.

Despite being classified as an upper–middle-income country with Africa's largest gross domestic product (GDP), South Africa faces persistent food insecurity challenges rooted in structural inequities. Key factors include high unemployment rates, rising food prices, and entrenched poverty. Women-headed households and rural communities are disproportionately affected, further widening the vulnerability gap. Other contributory factors include fluctuating food prices, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, recurring droughts, reduced governmental support for agriculture, and systemic urban and rural poverty (Drimie & McLachlan, 2013).

South Africa's history of colonialism, apartheid, and persistent structural inequality has left an indelible mark on food security. Historical legacies continue to shape patterns of food access, with households headed by Black Africans[7] and Coloured individuals significantly less likely to have adequate access to food compared to those headed by Indians/Asians and Whites (Stats SA, 2019). These statistics show that women-headed households and larger family units are particularly vulnerable, with severe food insecurity more prevalent among these groups. Nearly two-thirds of households vulnerable to hunger are located in urban areas (Stats SA, 2021).

Urbanisation presents another layer of complexity to food security. Within the context of rapid urbanisation across Africa, cities face mounting pressures to accommodate expanding populations while grappling with entrenched poverty, spatial segregation, and inequality (Vastapuu et al., 2019). In South Africa, urban and peri-urban communities increasingly struggle to feed themselves, with limited access to affordable, nutritious food exacerbated by high levels of unemployment and insufficient infrastructure. Lewis (2015) predicts that these pressures will only intensify as urbanisation accelerates.

7 The ethnic terms "Black", "Coloured", "White" and "Indian", intended by the apartheid laws for "racial classification", are still widely being used in post-apartheid South Africa, although these terms are highly contested (Durrheim, Mtose, and Brown 2011).

1.1 Cape Town's food environment

Cape Town, located on the southwestern tip of South Africa, is the legislative capital of South Africa. It is a hub of cultural diversity, economic activity, and historical significance. According to the latest census, the city is home to approximately 4.8 billion inhabitants (Stats SA, 2025). Known for its striking natural beauty, the city is also a place of stark inequalities, with informal settlements juxtaposed against affluent suburbs. Cape Town's unique geography and rapid urbanisation present both opportunities and challenges, particularly in the context of food security, poverty, and climate resilience. The Cape Flats, a low-lying area on the city's periphery, exemplifies these dynamics, and is the focal point of this report's exploration of urban food system transformation.

The Cape Flats were developed during the Apartheid as a low-income suburb (officially called a "township" during the Apartheid era) for non-White residents. Those who were categorised as Coloured or Black people were forcibly removed from various parts of the city under the Group Areas Act 47 of 1950 and were relocated to the Cape Flats area, where most of the city's low-income townships were established before the fall of Apartheid in 1994. This historical context laid the foundation for enduring socioeconomic disparities and environmental challenges that continue to affect food systems in the region today. The hope in the demise of Apartheid in South Africa was that with the removal of racially discriminatory restrictions on population movement that accelerated migration to major cities, particularly in Gauteng and the Western Cape, would translate into increased opportunities, a decrease in food insecurity, and increase in wellbeing, particularly for those marginalised by socioeconomic disparities and environmental factors. Over the last three decades, Cape Town has experienced substantial population growth because of rural–urban migration, increasing domestic population and many South Africans moving from other urban centres to the Cape. The pace, nature, and form of this change brought about serious challenges around inequality, reinforcing existing concentrations of poverty and exclusion and reproducing established social and spatial divisions. What is evident is that decades after the end of the Apartheid, Cape Town remains one of the most unequal and segregated cities globally (Turok et al., 2020).

According to 2018 population estimates, the Cape Flats district had a population size of 662,120 which represents approximately 15 % of the City of Cape Town's total population (City of Cape Town, 2022).

Today, constrained access to urban land, housing, and public services means that the impoverished are forced to settle in marginalised areas in and around existing townships, thereby exacerbating inequalities by income, race, and socioeconomic status (Turok et al., 2020). This presents a distinctly polarised food security landscape with pronounced differences in access to basic services, economic recovery, and social wellbeing across spatially proximate areas.

Unemployment and informal employment

In today's global economy, two billion people – more than 61 % of the world's employed population – make their living in the informal economy (ILO, 2018). They are engaged in both traditional and modern economic activities and in most branches of industry (Chen, 2012). Well over half of all workers globally are informally employed, 90 % of whom reside in developing countries and 67 % in

emerging economies (ILO, 2018). While the informal economy offers resilience and flexibility in the absence of sufficient formal employment opportunities, it perpetuates economic vulnerability and social inequality. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, including policies that stimulate job creation in the formal sector, enhance skills development, and improve the regulatory framework to support and protect informal workers without stifling their economic activities.

At present, South Africa's economic growth rate and the number of new jobs is outpaced by the number of people entering the labour market annually (World Bank, 2024). According to the quarterly labour force statistics, in 2024, 32 % of the population were unemployed, with youth unemployment reaching an alarming 60%, making it one of the highest globally (Statistics SA, 2024). Unemployment in South Africa is a critical socio-economic challenge, characterised by persistently high rates that disproportionately affect marginalised groups, particularly youth and women. Unemployment rates are significantly higher among Black South Africans (37.6 %) compared to white South Africans (7.9 %).

The formal labour market's inability to absorb the growing workforce has led to the expansion of the informal sector, which now serves as a vital source of livelihood for many. The informal sector plays a significant role in South Africa's economy, despite being smaller relative to the formal sector compared to other African countries. Estimates of its size vary, with Statistics South Africa reporting around 3 million non-agricultural informal workers, while the International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates about 8 million when including agriculture (Codera analytics. n.d.). The sector contributes approximately 5.1 % to 6 % of the country's GDP (Institute for Economic Justice, 2020). Women are overrepresented in the informal sector. The sector is marked by precarious working conditions, low wages, and limited access to social protections, reflecting structural inequalities rooted in the country's history of apartheid and economic exclusion (Chen, 2018).

Several Cape Flats' residents rely on the informal employment for their livelihoods. Informal food vendors and street markets play a critical role in the local food system, providing accessible and affordable food options for low-income communities; however, these vendors often encounter regulatory challenges and lack of support, exacerbating their vulnerability. While there are disadvantages in the precarious nature of employment in the informal sector, it does have relatively low barriers to entry compared to formal sector employment and has the potential to reduce poverty levels.

Figure 1 presents an infographic with key criteria on demographics and equality in South Africa.

Inequality

Inequality is a crucial factor to consider in the South African context where the top 10 % of South Africa's population own more than 85 % of household wealth (StatSA, 2024). Despite the government's progress in providing basic services and expanding social welfare programmes, inequality has increased over three decades since the advent of democracy. This trend contradicts the commitments of the South African Constitution and social policy provisions, raising significant questions about rights and social justice. The unemployment rate of Black Africans has been higher than other population groups and higher than the national average for the past 10 years (Stats SA, 2024).

South Africa consistently records one of the highest Gini coefficients globally, highlighting extreme levels of income inequality. Recent estimates place the country's Gini coefficient at approximately 0.63, with little improvement over time. South Africa's high inequality, measured by the Gini coefficient, is well documented at 0.67 (Valodia, 2023). However, even at the city and district level, income inequality remains high and has decreased from 0.62 in 2009 to 0.59 in 2018 (City of Cape Town, 2022). This measure indicates that income distribution remains heavily skewed and reflects structural disparities rooted in historical socioeconomic exclusion and limited access to wealth-generating opportunities for the majority population. This condition echoes the 1998 sentiment of then-Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, who famously claimed a "two-nations" thesis: one White and prosperous and the other Black and poor. The contradiction is sharpened by the relative economic growth experienced during the first decade of democracy, yet worsening income inequality persists in current-day South Africa.

In addition to income inequality, South Africa faces severe inequities stemming from high levels of violence, which further exacerbate socioeconomic challenges. High crime rates, including gang-related activities, act as significant barriers to accessing essential resources such as food. Violence and insecurity disrupt food supply chains, deter businesses from operating in affected areas, and make it dangerous for residents to access markets and shops. For example, the taxi strike in August 2023 disproportionately affected Cape Town's townships, leading to loss of life, price increases for essential food items due to supply constraints, and a surge in violence within these areas (Forde, 2023). Such incidents highlight the interconnection between systemic inequality and the pervasive impact of violence on vulnerable communities.

Gender inequality

Gender equality is crucial to democracy, yet the foundations of democracies globally are under threat due to growing economic disparities, societal and political polarisation, and shrinking civic spaces. If current trends persist, global gender equality may not be realised until the twenty-second century. Between 2019 and 2022, nearly 40 % of countries, home to over 1.1 billion women and girls, saw a stagnation or decline in gender equality (Equal Measure, 2024).

South Africa remains a profoundly violent society grappling with the enduring legacies of institutionalised racism, sexism, and structural violence, all of which undermine human development and social cohesion (GovSA, 2020). Gender-based violence (GBV) is a stark manifestation of entrenched gender inequalities and power imbalances, perpetuated by patriarchal culture, religion, and societal norms (Buqa, 2022). Individual risk factors, such as low educational attainment, substance use, and histories of childhood abuse, further compound the issue (Abramsky et al., 2011; Usman et al., 2019). Poverty, unemployment, and food insecurity exacerbate GBV, reflecting its intersection with broader socio-economic inequalities. Violence against women is pervasive, often perpetuated by intimate partners. One in five women over the age of 18 has experienced physical violence, with prevalence as high as 45% in certain provinces, such as the Western Cape (Alber et al., 2018). This violence, deeply rooted in patriarchal traditions, reflects systemic failures to address power dynamics and the invisibility of women's suffering (Snodgrass, 2017).

Crises amplify GBV, with the COVID-19 pandemic starkly illustrating this phenomenon as women faced increased risks while confined with abusive partners (Buqa, 2022). Socioeconomic pressures, overcrowded living conditions, and limited access to support services compound women's vulnerability,

Population Group

Name	Frequency	Percentage
Black African	50 485 026	81,4%
Coloured	5 052 299	8,2%
Indian/Asian	1 697 468	2,7%
White	4 503 780	7,3%
Other	247 353	0,4%

Dwelling Group

Name	Frequency	Percentage
Formal dwelling	15 776 130	88,5%
Traditional dwelling	560 415	3,1%
Informal dwelling	1 435 535	8,1%
Other	56 698	0,3%

Energy for cooking

Name	Frequenc	Percentage
Electricity from mains	11 571 636	64,9%
Gas	4 588 608	25,7%
Paraffin	482 420	2,7%
Wood	1 084 905	6,1%
Coal	39 773	0,2%
Animal drug	3 521	0,0%
Solar	11 839	0,1%
Other	15 346	0,1%
Animal dung	30 730	0,2%

National School Feeding Programme: 9,7 million learners in over 21 000 schools depend on the programme.
That's about 3 in every 4 learners, if we consider the total number of 12,7 million attending public education.
Nationally: the percentage of individuals who experienced hunger declined from 29,3% in 2002 to 11,1% in 2019, according to the latest General Household Survey. However, hunger has seen some resurgence, rising to 15,0% in 2023.

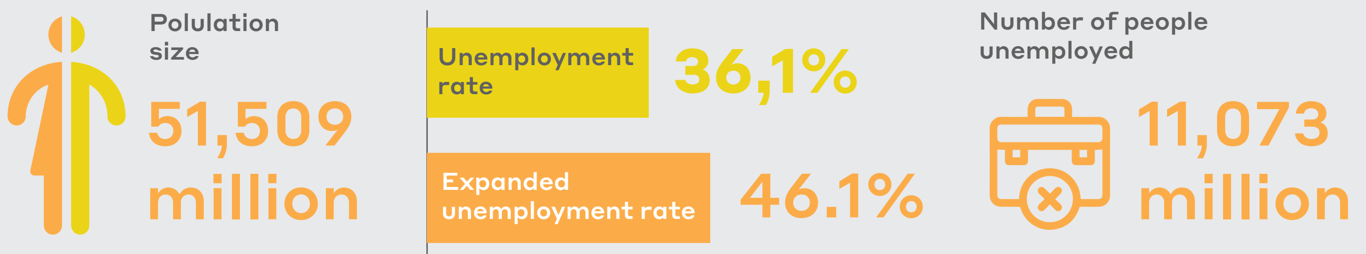
Sources:
https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=17681
https://pmbejd.org.za/index.php/2024/12/30/key-data-from-december-2024-household-affordability-index/
https://census.statssa.gov.za

Figure 1 Dashboard – Statistics from South Africa

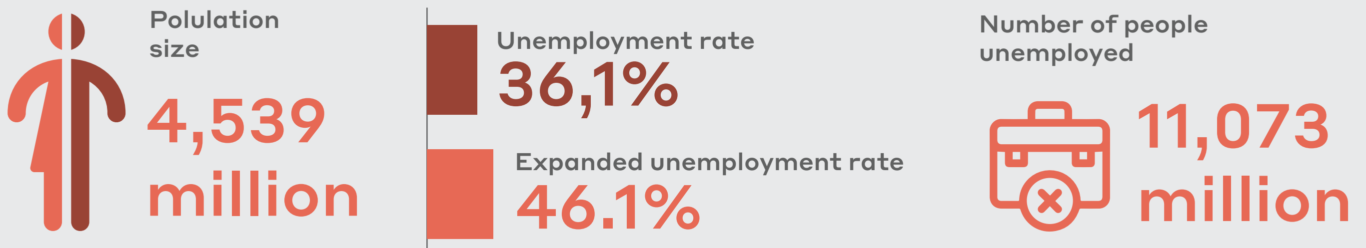
Summary of Statistics South Africa's (and other) Economic and Social Data

All South Africans

Black South Africans



White South Africans



The maximum value of the Nation Minimum Wage [NMW] per hour	R27,58
Level of NMW at 10% exemption	R24,82
The value of the Social Relief of Distress Grant (SRD)	R370,00
The value of the Child Support Grant [CSG]	R530,00
The value of the Old-age Grant [OAG]	R2 190,00
The number of children receiving a CSG	13,2 million
The number of pensioners receiving an OAG	4,1 million
The upper-bound poverty line [UBPL]	R1 634,00
The lower-bound poverty line [LBPL]	R1 109,00
The food poverty line [FPL]	R796,00
% of people living below the UBPL (30,4m)	55,5%
% of people living below the FPL (13,8m)	25,2%
% of Black South Africans living below the UBPL	64,2%

intensifying cycles of violence and poverty. GBV has severe consequences for women's physical and mental health, including heightened risks of HIV infection, chronic pain, and pregnancy complications (Enaifoghe et al., 2021). Addressing GBV requires an intersectional approach that acknowledges how gender intersects with race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status to shape vulnerability and access to resources (UN Women, 2021). Government interventions, strategic implementation, and transformative societal change are essential to dismantle entrenched patriarchal norms and create equitable support systems (Enaifoghe et al., 2021; Snodgrass, 2017).

1.2 Background – The Right to Food in South Africa and Cape Town

The Right to Food (RtF) is recognised as an international human right within the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1966. This right, widely interpreted as the right to feed oneself with dignity, necessitates that food is available, accessible, and adequate for all individuals at all times. States are obligated to ensure a stable supply of food in sufficient quantities and at affordable prices, as well as to provide food directly to those unable to secure it due to circumstances beyond their control. Over time, the interpretation of the Right to Food has evolved to include nutrition as a fundamental element, emphasising the importance of food quality, its sourcing, and production in promoting dignified lives (FIAN International, 2016; GNRTFN, 2021).

South Africa's constitution explicitly enshrines the Right to Food in sections 27 and 28. Section 27(1)(b) asserts that "everyone has the right to have access to sufficient food", while Section 28(1)(c) ensures that "every child has the right to basic nutrition" (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996).

However, despite repeated calls from civil society, South Africa has not enacted a comprehensive legal framework to implement this constitutional right, leaving the state's obligations and the roles of private sector actors undefined. This lack of a clear legislative framework limits the ability to hold stakeholders accountable for upholding the Right to Food (Joala & Gumede, 2018). In response, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) has recommended the adoption of framework legislation aligned with international standards, including the 2004 Voluntary Guidelines and General Comment No. 12 on the right to adequate food. Nonetheless, such legislation has yet to materialise, leaving the Right to Food largely unimplemented compared to other socioeconomic rights such as housing and education (De Visser, 2019).

Despite the absence of a dedicated legislative framework, South Africa allocates significant resources to food-related social expenditure, which constituted approximately nine per cent of the national budget in 2022 (National Treasury, 2022). This spending encompasses agricultural support programmes, direct food aid, social grant transfers, and nutrition initiatives led by the Department of Health. Among these, direct cash transfers represent the majority, benefitting nearly 30 million South Africans monthly. This approach reflects a shift from agriculturally focused policies to welfare-oriented strategies that emphasise food accessibility and nutrition. While these programmes play a crucial role in fulfilling the Right to Food, the state's efforts in the areas of respect and protection remain limited. Measures to prevent third-party interference with access to adequate food, such as regulating food retailers and implementing sugar taxes, are relatively underdeveloped, although some efforts have been undertaken by the South African Competition Commission and Revenue Service (Bassermann, et al., 2023).

Programmes aimed at fulfilling the Right to Food have increasingly adopted a child-centred approach, recognising the pivotal role of nutrition in early development and its broader social and economic benefits (see the overview of Right to Food programmes in South Africa in Bassermann et al., 2022). Community-based participation, particularly by women, is integral to these initiatives, as women often bear the responsibility for childcare, which is largely unpaid (Brooks, 2021). Investments in early childhood development (ECD) and school nutrition programmes not only enhance child protection and development but also promote women's labour participation and create opportunities for decent work. These areas have seen significant gains in budget allocations, highlighting the growing recognition of their importance within South Africa's social welfare landscape. However, this progress underscores the need for greater collaboration and resource alignment across government spheres to effectively address gaps in service delivery and support.

Relative to other socioeconomic rights, such as housing and education, the Right to Food has been the focus of limited social mobilisation and legal action in South Africa. This lack of advocacy raises questions about public awareness and the practical utility of expanding legal frameworks without accompanying societal engagement. Strengthening the Right to Food in South Africa requires not only comprehensive legislation but also sustained efforts to build public understanding of the right, ensuring its realisation through both legal and social mechanisms. By fostering greater awareness and community participation, South Africa can address the structural barriers impeding equitable access to adequate food and nutrition, fulfilling its constitutional and international obligations.

1.3 Our Theory of Change: Pathways for transformation

At the heart of the action research presented in this report lies our call for a holistic understanding of food systems that transcends mere production and consumption. This approach departs from the concepts of planetary boundaries and social foundations as articulated by Rockström et al. (2009). Leach et al.'s (2010) pathways approach underscores the importance of developing alternative, yet safe and just, strategies for sustainable development. This approach emphasises diverse perspectives and diverse forms of knowledge that acknowledge complexities and the critical examination of the politics and power dynamics that shape sustainable futures.

Pathways are understood as the various trajectories that can lead to sustainability, influenced by socio-technical systems, environmental changes, and societal choices (Leach et al., 2010). These authors particularly emphasise that sustainability is not achieved through a singular route; rather, there are multiple possible pathways, each with distinct societal and environmental implications. The goal is to foster pathways that respect planetary boundaries while avoiding the risk of falling below essential social foundations. This approach seeks to challenge and provide alternatives to the dominant narratives surrounding sustainability issues by introducing and validating alternative perspectives.

Urban Food Future's approach is structured into several types of pathways. Firstly, we emphasise the importance of community-driven innovations, advocating for the development of local solutions that are tailored to specific contexts and aligned with cultural norms. Secondly, we co-designed, tested and adopted social innovations. Thirdly, we focus on building social capital within communities

by supporting the establishment of collaborative networks among local communities, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders. These networks are vital for sharing knowledge and resources, amplifying community voices, and influencing policy decisions, often through the formation of associations or formal networks. Lastly, pathways include identifying opportunities for strategic collaboration with governmental bodies, ensuring that the interests of local communities are effectively represented in the identified government frameworks.

The pathways include a mechanism for social accountability through Learning Journeys, advocating that duty bearers are held responsible for their commitments to uphold the right to food. This may involve the design of monitoring systems that track progress and provide feedback from the communities most affected by food insecurity. Engaging in dialogue and collaboration with these communities allows for the continuous refinement of strategies and the incorporation of their lived-experiences into policy-making processes.

The pathways which the Urban Food Futures programme developed, tested and adapted must remain adaptable, addressing local needs while remaining informed by global trends and challenges. They also must be scalable and replicable for similar context.

The Urban Food Futures programme in Cape Town

This report chronicles feminist action research conducted in Cape Town as part of the Urban Food Futures programme, a five-year initiative led by TMG Thinktank for Sustainability and implemented in partnership with Civil Society and Academia. Over three interconnected phases – scoping, implementing, and validating – we co-developed, tested, and adapted transformative pathways to address critical challenges in the urban food system. In the course of the research, we partnered with the African Centre for Cities (ACC) at the University of Cape Town, Alcardo Andrews Foundation, Callas Foundation, The Centre for Excellence for Food Security at the University of the Western Cape, Charmaine's Kombuis, Design4Development, Food Agency Cape Town (FACT), the Heinrich Boell Foundation's Cape Town office, Gogo's kitchen, Intervisionary Community Kitchen, Social Change Assistance Trust (SCAT), SUN Development, uPhakanini Community Kitchen, and Ubuntu Rural. Rooted in collaboration, this work synthesises diverse voices, lived experiences, and interdisciplinary interpretations, offering a nuanced perspective on the pressing issues at hand. Regular meetings, workshops, and retreats provided a foundation for collective reflection, allowing us to situate findings within the broader complexities of the Cape Flats and its socio-economic landscape. The integration of art-based methods further enriched the process, fostering ways of sharing insights with varied audiences and ensuring accessibility and resonance across different communities.

Photo 1 Ramadan in Cape Town also means sharing meals together and overcoming community boundaries. Singlee, 2022

While the Cape Town work formally began under the Urban Food Futures programme, its roots extend back to co-research that started during the first days of COVID-19. Building on this legacy, this report offers a comprehensive analysis of the action research undertaken, focusing on two primary pathways: the rethinking of community kitchens and the development of mechanisms for mutual accountability around the right to food. These interventions reflect not only practical solutions but also a commitment to co-creating equitable and inclusive systems of food governance (Paganini et al., 2025).

The report concludes with three future-oriented visions, each grounded in the successes and lessons of the past four years. These visions are not just aspirational but grounded in research, demonstrating the tangible impact of collaborative efforts between grassroots, action research and government exchanges. This work underscores the power of bold, imaginative thinking as a catalyst for systemic change and offers a hopeful blueprint for the future of urban food systems in Cape Town and beyond.

2 Making the invisible visible: A feminist call for urban food systems transformation

A feminist approach to urban food systems transformation examines how these systems are shaped by patriarchal and capitalist structures that marginalise women, informal food workers, and caregivers. As Nancy Fraser (1995; 2009) argues, social justice requires both redistribution and recognition; however, urban food governance often neglects the latter by failing to acknowledge the vital, yet undervalued roles women play in sustaining food security. Women, especially those from marginalised communities, are the primary food providers in both household and community spaces, but their contributions remain largely unrecognised in formal policy frameworks. This exclusion reflects a broader issue of structural injustice, where the voices and expertise of those most engaged in food provisioning are systematically sidelined, reinforcing gendered inequalities in decision-making processes.

Feminist political economy offers a critical lens for understanding how gender, class, and race intersect to shape food access and participation in urban food networks. Silvia Federici (2012) argues that capitalist economies rely on the exploitation of women's unpaid reproductive labour, a dynamic that extends to food systems, where women's contributions – whether through subsistence farming, food vending, or community kitchens – are systematically devalued. Carolyn Steel (2008) further illustrates how urban food systems prioritise market-driven efficiency over social well-being, leading to food insecurity that disproportionately affects low-income and racialised communities. By centring feminist political economy, it becomes clear that food systems do not merely reflect economic structures but actively reproduce social hierarchies that determine who eats, who profits, and who is excluded from governance.

This raises an important question: should those who have been rendered invisible strive to make themselves seen, or should those in power acknowledge and support their efforts?

A focus on intersectionality and care work further highlights the invisiblised labour that sustains urban food systems. Arlie Hochschild's (1983; 2012) work on emotional and care labour underscores how women, particularly those from working-class and racialised backgrounds, perform the bulk of unpaid or underpaid food-related work, from household provisioning to running mutual aid networks. Patricia Hill Collins (1990; 2000) extends this analysis by demonstrating how race, gender, and class intersect to shape women's experiences in these roles, often reinforcing cycles of economic precarity and social exclusion. In the context of urban food systems, these forms of labour are essential yet remain outside the scope of formal policy and funding structures. Therefore, recognising and supporting these contributions through feminist-informed governance and economic redistribution is crucial for creating more equitable and just food futures.

2.1 Visibility & Invisibility

The governance of urban food systems primarily recognises formal institutions, market-driven economies, and state-led policies, which reinforces a limited understanding of food security and provisioning. Within this framework, visibility is granted to large-scale agricultural production, corporate food chains, and state-administered welfare programmes, while grassroots and community-based food initiatives are often overlooked. This is particularly evident in the South African context, where large-scale agriculture plays a

key role in state food governance (Greenberg, 2017). As Nancy Fraser (1995) argues, institutional recognition is a crucial aspect of social justice; however, dominant governance structures routinely exclude non-market-based and informal food economies. Consequently, policymaking tends to favour actors and institutions within formal economic frameworks, (unintentionally) rendering alternative food networks, subsistence farming, and localised mutual aid initiatives invisible within urban food governance. This lack of recognition not only exacerbates the economic precarity of those engaged in informal food work but also imposes hidden costs, as volunteering in community food initiatives often comes at the expense of paid employment and personal well-being. While formal food governance structures dominate the policy landscape, informal food systems play an equally significant role, often filling gaps left by formal provision, especially for vulnerable communities. For example, in Cape Town, informal food vendors provide daily sustenance for thousands of residents, yet they face constant challenges from both local authorities and the broader economic system that devalues their work (Kushitor et al., 2022).

This invisibility extends to the considerable amount of unpaid and underpaid labour that sustains food systems at the household and community levels. Informal food economies – including street vendors, small-scale growers, and community-run food distribution networks – are crucial to food security, particularly for marginalised populations. However, as Hochschild (1983; 2012) emphasises, care work, which includes feeding, nurturing, and sustaining communities, is disproportionately feminised and systematically undervalued. Oxfam (2020) reports that women globally perform over 75% of unpaid care work, contributing an estimated $10.8 trillion[8] annually to the global economy – yet these contributions remain largely unrecognised in economic and policy frameworks. Community kitchens, which often serve as essential social protection mechanisms, particularly during crises, exemplify this paradox. Despite their role in addressing food insecurity and fostering social solidarity, they frequently lack institutional recognition, resulting in limited financial support, precarious working conditions, and exclusion from critical food governance discussions.

Visibility is intrinsically linked to recognition. A feminist perspective on invisibility challenges the structural mechanisms that render certain forms of labour and knowledge unacknowledged in policymaking and economic systems. Fraser's (2009) theory of recognition asserts that justice demands more than redistribution; it also requires the acknowledgment of marginalised groups and their contributions. Similarly, Federici (2012) critiques capitalist economies for devaluing reproductive and subsistence labour, which disproportionately affects women. When applied to urban food systems, these frameworks reveal that the exclusion of informal food networks from governance processes is not coincidental, but rather a result of deeply entrenched socio-economic hierarchies. The failure to recognise and integrate these actors perpetuates their precarity and limits their capacity to influence policies that directly impact their lives. The consequences of invisibility extend beyond economic hardship to political disenfranchisement. Without formal recognition, grassroots food initiatives struggle to access funding, secure legal protections, and participate in decision-making within urban food governance. This lack of recognition leads not only to economic hardship but also to a policy framework that ignores the true scope of food insecurity. By sidelining community-driven food initiatives, policy-makers miss opportunities to create resilient, inclusive, and equitable urban food systems.

8 10.8 trillion USD = €10,470,000,000,000 currency conversation in January 2025

2.2 Community kitchens as informal social protection systems

Community kitchens operate as informal social protection systems that address food insecurity through mutual aid and solidarity, rather than through state-led welfare programmes. Unlike traditional food assistance schemes, which often reinforce hierarchical relationships between donors and recipients, community kitchens foster participatory, horizontal forms of food provisioning. In these spaces, those in need are also active contributors to the process.

Social protection systems are institutional frameworks designed to support individuals and communities facing economic hardship, typically through state-led grants such as welfare programmes, unemployment benefits, and pensions. These systems aim to reduce poverty, provide a safety net, and mitigate the risks associated with economic instability, often relying on formal mechanisms and structured policies (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2004). However, informal social protection systems differ fundamentally in both structure and operation. Rather than being state-run or regulated by formal governance, informal social protection systems operate through community-based mechanisms, such as mutual aid networks, informal savings groups, and community kitchens (Molyneux, 2008). These systems are characterised by collective solidarity and localised responses to need, often driven by grassroots organisations – frequently led by women and marginalised groups.

Unlike formal social protection systems, which are typically based on state provision and welfare entitlements, informal protection systems fill the gaps left by state neglect. They are more adaptable to immediate local needs, though they often operate outside legal and financial frameworks, leaving them vulnerable to funding instability and policy exclusion. The decentralised nature of informal social protection allows for greater flexibility and empowerment, but it also highlights the precariousness of these systems, which rely heavily on volunteer labour, informal networks, and solidarity, rather than formal state support.

Beyond their immediate function as food providers, community kitchens serve as critical spaces for social cohesion, empowerment, and skill-building. They facilitate knowledge exchange, provide emotional support networks, and act as platforms for political mobilisation, particularly during times of economic crisis and austerity. In many community kitchens, food preparation is not simply a necessity but an act of solidarity and empowerment, challenging dominant narratives that portray food aid as charity rather than a basic right to food and dignity (Nyaba et al., 2024). However, despite their transformative potential, community kitchens face significant structural barriers, including limited funding, volunteer burnout, and exclusion from policy discussions. Despite their critical role, community kitchens often face exclusion from policy discussions and formal funding structures. This marginalisation can result in a lack of long-term financial sustainability, as these initiatives typically rely on short-term grants, volunteer labour, or donations. Moreover, their exclusion from formal policy discussions limits their ability to influence the broader urban food governance landscape, reducing their potential for systemic change. The state's failure to formally recognise and support these initiatives exacerbates their precariousness, even as they fill crucial gaps in urban food systems.

While community kitchens in the case study presented here from Cape Town face challenges, examples from Peru and Brazil demonstrate how government programmes can offer support and ensure the longevity of these crucial community resources.

Examples from Latin America

Community kitchens have long served as vital resources for urban communities facing socio-economic challenges in Latin America, providing essential food security through collective effort and solidarity. Particularly in informal settlements, these kitchens, mostly run by women, mobilise local resources to prepare large-scale meals for the community (Pinto, 2020). These kitchens have a long history, particularly in Peru, where they function as collective institutions that provide crucial support during times of hardship, such as in mining regions. Often not tied to a fixed location but rather to a core group of people responsible for cooking and serving, community kitchens are increasingly seen as a response to crises. Sethuparvathy (2021) discusses how food not only invokes memory but also fosters physical, in-person gatherings that create social and cultural memories, particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, community kitchens are frequently characterised by a lack of continuity in funding and a reliance on various informal resources, which makes them highly temporary in nature. Nonetheless, two examples from Brazil and Peru challenge this instability and suggest how government programmes could enhance the sustainability of community kitchens.

In Peru, *comedores populares* – or community kitchens – serve as spaces where women from different families collectively prepare food that is later consumed either in communal spaces or taken home. These kitchens aim to reduce food costs and improve the nutritional quality of local diets through economies of scale and food donations (Mujica, 1994). Created in the 1960s as a survival strategy in response to urban poverty and economic crisis, particularly in major cities, these kitchens were not designed to generate profit but to meet the immediate needs of the community (Garret, 2001). The kitchens function on the basis of solidarity rather than market logic, with members directly subsidising the kitchens by donating ingredients, providing labour, and other forms of support (Blondet & Trivelli, 2004). Women involved in these kitchens operate within a framework of economic solidarity rather than following commercial imperatives (Zibechi, 2008).

In Brazil, the *Zero Hunger Programme*, launched in 2003, is a national initiative aimed at combating hunger. It incorporates various strategies to ensure access to food, promote equality, and foster social inclusion. This includes school meal programmes, distribution of basic food baskets, food banks, and community kitchens, also known as *restaurantes populares* (de Araujo et al., 2016). The *restaurantes populares* programme, a key public food assistance initiative, follows the guidelines of Food and Nutrition Security and is financed by the Ministry of Social Development and the Fight against Hunger in Brazil (Botelho et al., 2019; Brasil, 2005). For the first seventeen years of the programme, all users paid a minimal fee – one Brazilian real for lunch and even less for breakfast or dinner – removing much of the social stigma associated with accessing food assistance. This approach upheld the principle of "food with dignity" while promoting social inclusion. Additionally, schools participating in the programme operated their own kitchens, ensuring that meals were prepared from scratch and sourced primarily from small local farms (Chappell, 2018).

The motivations behind the establishment of community kitchens – making food production and consumption a collective responsibility – continue to reflect past experiences, yet they also respond to the new challenges faced by contemporary cities. Today, the motivations for establishing community kitchens, which still share similarities with past efforts, are increasingly shaped by the pressing challenges of contemporary cities – namely austerity, overcrowding, and climate crises. As

these challenges mount, it becomes more critical than ever for governments to formalise and sustain such initiatives to ensure equitable access to food for all.

2.3 Politics of the provision

The politics of provision refers to the processes and power dynamics that determine how resources – such as food – are allocated, distributed, and accessed within a society. It involves examining the roles of state institutions, NGOs, grassroots organisations, and international actors in shaping not only the availability of resources but also the rules and structures that govern their distribution (Bohstedt, 2016). These power dynamics influence who has access to provision, under what conditions, and who is involved in decision-making processes, linking food provision to broader debates on power, justice, and inequality.

While the state often plays a central role in formal food assistance programmes, NGOs and grassroots organisations frequently step in to address gaps left by state welfare mechanisms, particularly during crises or periods of economic instability. However, the power dynamic between these actors is rarely equal. State policies, donor agendas, and the interests of large-scale NGOs often dictate the nature and scope of food provision. Decisions about what is provided, and how, reflect broader social and political structures, which often marginalise community-driven solutions in favour of top-down, institutionally controlled frameworks.

In this context, food provision is not merely about addressing immediate hunger but is intrinsically linked to the exercise of power. Larger political and economic structures influence the distribution and accessibility of resources, making food provisioning a site of contestation over justice and equity (Harvey, 2005). This hierarchical approach risks reinforcing existing power imbalances, where vulnerable populations remain dependent on external aid instead of gaining the resources and autonomy necessary to build sustainable, self-determined food systems (Clapp, 2012).

Food provisioning is not only deeply gendered but also embedded in societal structures that devalue care work – primarily performed by women. These women, particularly from marginalised communities, often carry the double burden of paid and unpaid labour. The undervaluing of their work in community kitchens is rooted in broader societal norms that see care and sustenance as 'women's work,' reinforcing gender inequalities in both the public and private spheres. These women play a central role in sustaining local food networks, yet their labour remains largely invisible to policymakers. This absence of recognition leads to the systematic devaluation of the knowledge, skills, and time they invest in food provisioning, despite its critical role in addressing food insecurity.

Although community kitchens are essential during crises, they often function as temporary solutions that perpetuate rather than transform existing food systems. Rather than reinforcing hierarchical models of aid, community kitchens have the potential to reshape food governance by advocating for structural policy recognition, financial support, and long-term solutions that prioritise food as a human right in the context of the right to food rather than a charitable act. By stepping in where the state fails, these kitchens absorb the responsibility of food provisioning, enabling governments to outsource social protection to volunteer-led, resource-constrained initiatives.

To move beyond temporary solutions, there is a need for a systemic shift towards recognising the right to food. This includes integrating community kitchens into formal food governance frameworks, securing long-term financial support, and ensuring that the people who contribute to these systems are part of the decision-making processes.

3 Methodological approach of Urban Food Futures – From Pathways to Action

The following sections provide an overview of Urban Food Futures' research approaches. The pathways were implemented as a transdisciplinary and participatory action research programme between 2022 and 2024, following a scoping phase in 2021 (see Paganini & Weigelt, 2022).

The research consortium was led by TMG Research in collaboration with the community-based activist organisation Food Agency Cape Town (FACT) and a wider network of community-based organisations, namely the Alcardo Andrews Foundation, Callas Foundation, Charmaine's Kombuis, Gogo's Kitchen, InterVisionary, Ubuntu Rural, and uPhakanini Kitchen. Their grantmaker and fiscal host was the Social Change Assistance Trust (SCAT). The consortium benefited from academic partnerships with the African Centre for Cities (ACC) at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and the Centre of Excellence on Food Security at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). The Cape Town office of the Heinrich Böll Foundation supported the research through knowledge sharing, feedback and advocacy.

Many other organisations and individuals provided advice, support, and insights to Urban Food Futures. The core team of partners held regular meetings and check-ins to strengthen collaboration, facilitate exchange among partners, and establish a co-learning process. The findings of this report are based on feminist approaches, incorporating crowd-sourced data to inform the research, contextualising findings through qualitative methods, and conducting a three-year action research process to develop social innovations and government engagement strategies.

Photo 2 Regular partner meetings with the Urban Food Futures research team. Paganini, 2024

3.1 Feminist approaches

The research is grounded in a feminist framework as outlined in chapter 2 and employs an intersectional lens to better understand how identities and lived experiences shape individuals' access to food and resources. By integrating multiple forms of knowledge – including lived experience, observations, local knowledge, statistics, qualitative data, and co-created knowledge – the participatory process enables a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis of research findings. All pathways adopt a community-centred approach to foster a sense of ownership over the research process.

This approach draws on Fanon's (1963) emphasis on collective ownership and community stewardship as central to food security discourses. It aligns with Andrews and Lewis' (2017) call for a more nuanced understanding of food security that prioritises lived experiences and embodiment. By recognising the diverse and intersecting realities of communities, the research seeks to address systemic inequities within food systems while empowering individuals to reclaim agency over their participation in food governance. Crucially, this perspective acknowledges that food security extends beyond access to resources; it encompasses the cultural and social dimensions of food practices that reflect the identities, histories, and lived realities of the communities engaged (Smith, 2012).

3.2 Crowdsourcing data

Place-based, quantitative data formed the foundation of all research pathways to provide statistical insights into community coping strategies, levels of food security, and the use of community kitchens. A conventional quantitative research approach and storytelling techniques were incorporated, enabling a robust and representative methodology for the six research areas (see results in chapter 4. Crowdsourcing data).

The household survey was conducted in six low-income areas across Cape Town including Bridgetown, Gugulethu, Hanover Park, Mitchell's Plain, Mfuleni, and the Cape Winelands where Elsenburg and Klapmuts were targeted. Face-to-face interviews were carried out with 2,165 households during Round 1 (August–September 2023) and 2,135 households during Round 2 (January–February 2024). Both sample sizes are statistically significant at a 95 % confidence level. The survey employed a structured questionnaire comprising both closed- and open-ended questions to capture household experiences of food insecurity and coping strategies. Random walk sampling was used to identify participating households. Enumerators utilised a random number generator to guide the selection process, ensuring randomness and objectivity in data collection. The surveys were conducted by 18 enumerators, all of whom were residents of the research sites.

Photo 3 Eighteen enumerators, six communities, and two researchers oversaw the four-week digital crowdsourcing data collection in 2023 and 2024. Paganini, 2023

Enumerators were identified and trained in collaboration with FACT. A two-day training was conducted prior to each survey round to equip enumerators with the necessary skills to operate the software (KoboToolBox) and equipment (tablets), adhere to survey protocols, and gain a thorough understanding of the questionnaire content and terminology. Daily check-ins in WhatsApp groups were carried out to evaluate the enumerators' grasp of key concepts and processes. Additionally, mock interviews were conducted to enhance enumerators' confidence and ensure readiness for fieldwork.

A combination of analytical methods was employed to interpret the data. Traditional statistical analysis was performed using STATA. To triangulate and contextualise the findings, complementary methods were applied including data digests, which facilitated contextual analysis of quantitative results, and focus group discussions, which enriched the data through narratives, lived experiences, and qualitative insights.

3.3 Qualitative methods

In this research, we primarily employed qualitative methods to explore and address the challenges faced within community kitchens and to develop pathways for innovation. A key method utilised during the scoping phase was **Photovoice.** This allowed participants to document and communicate their experiences, challenges, and perspectives through photography. This process not only highlighted critical issues but facilitated cross-site visits, fostering connections and shared understanding among community researchers. We further employed **action research** (described in detail in chapter 6), an iterative and participatory approach that involved co-designing, testing, and evaluating both technical and social innovations. This method was grounded in **collaborative learning and reflection**, ensuring that solutions were contextually relevant and responsive to community needs. Additionally, **storytelling and narrative research** were embedded throughout the process, capturing the lived experiences

Photo 4 Art-based approaches were used throughout the action research phase. Paganini, 2024

and voices of participants. By combining these methods, the research provided deeper insights into the social and technical dimensions of the challenges while promoting a reflective and participatory approach to innovation and learning.

Storytelling and lived experience are particularly crucial in addressing knowledge justice, as they elevate the voices of those who have historically been marginalised or excluded from dominant knowledge systems (Smith, 1999). In the South African context, this approach is especially significant due to the country's history of colonialism and apartheid, which systematically silenced the perspectives and knowledge of disadvantaged communities. By centring storytelling and lived experiences, the research acknowledges and values the unique, contextual knowledge held by individuals and communities, creating a more inclusive and equitable space for knowledge production. This approach is not only a means of documenting realities but a way of recognising the agency and wisdom of communities and challenging power imbalances on whose voices are heard and legitimised. In this context, storytelling's power extends beyond its use as a research method and stands as a means of resistance and transformation. This aligns with broader efforts to decolonise research and knowledge systems, fostering a more just and representative understanding of the challenges and innovations within South African communities (Nyaba & Paganini, 2022).

3.4 Co-research process with community kitchens

Co-research begins with the involvement of participants in the research design phase and involves all steps within the research process including dissemination and scaling of research findings (Paganini & Stöber, 2021). Communities are engaged in determining the research questions, methods, and tools to ensure the process aligns with their needs and priorities. As the research unfolds, results are either generated by the partners themselves, or data is shared with communities in accessible formats – such as workshops, visual tools, reports, or storytelling sessions – and participants are actively involved in analysing and interpreting the data to ensure the findings are accurate, meaningful, and reflective of their lived experience. This step honours principles of reciprocity, transparency, and knowledge justice by ensuring that research is not extractive but mutually beneficial. By sharing back, researchers validate participants' contributions and foster trust (Nyaba & Paganini, 2023). **Data triangulation** and sharing findings back with communities are critical components of co-research. By combining various data collection techniques such as interviews, Photovoice, focus groups, and story-telling, researchers can cross-check information and minimise biases, providing a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research topic.

3.5 Methods used to implement pathways

Table 1 Overview about the methods applied in each pathway

Pathways	Methods applied
Coping with crises	▶ **Photovoice** Photovoice is a participatory research method in which individuals capture and share their experiences and perspectives through photography to foster dialogue and influence social change. In 2022, community kitchens documented their challenges through Photovoice. These findings informed the implementation of the models. ▶ **Storytelling** Storytelling as a qualitative method involves collecting and analysing personal narratives to gain deep insights into individuals' experiences, perspectives, and cultural contexts. Storytelling and writing exercises during networking workshops allowed participants to explore the intersection of hunger and violence as part of their personal healing journeys. ▶ **Embodied introspection** Embodied introspection is a reflective practice where individuals explore and analyse their lived experiences by paying close attention to sensations, emotions, and awareness within their bodies, integrating physical and emotional insights to deepen self-understanding. The methodology was used at learning and retreat meetings as part of healing processes and was applied in a master research project on young mothers and food insecurity in Mfuleni. ▶ **Testing of innovation ("models")** Testing of innovation involves a design process, implementation, and evaluation of kitchen models to determine their effectiveness, feasibility, and potential impact in real-world conditions. This is done through trials to gather data for further refinement or scaling. The first trial phase took place in 2023, followed by a second phase in 2024. Each phase lasted six months and concluded with assessment workshops. ▶ **Learning and monitoring** Learning and monitoring is an iterative process of systematically collecting, analysing, and reflecting on progress, adapting strategies, and improving outcomes in ongoing initiatives. In this case, the monthly learning sessions further focussed on debriefing. ▶ **Research retreats** Research retreats are dedicated gatherings where researchers, collaborators, or stakeholders step away from their usual work environments to focus deeply on specific research topics, foster collaboration, share insights, and develop strategies in a concentrated and reflective setting. Retreats were carried out twice a year, outside the community researchers' environment to provide a focussed setting and "time off" from the challenging spaces in which they live and operate.

Pathways	Methods applied
Mutual accountability	▶ **Reading circles** Reading circles organised by FACT are guided sessions where communities come together to engage with research materials and develop deeper understanding of the texts. These sessions primarily focus on FACT's own research outputs; however, research from other agencies are discussed to broaden the community's perspective on the research topic and context. ▶ **Community food dialogues** Food dialogues are a collaborative discussions between community members (including FACT) that aim to identify key challenges, opportunities, priorities, and action plans for more democratic and localised food systems. These dialogues were initiated with the goal of destigmatising hunger, recognising community challenges, and working toward community-driven solutions. ▶ **Theatre of the Oppressed** The Theatre of the Oppressed is a participatory form of theatre that empowers individuals, particularly marginalised groups, to explore social issues, express their experiences, and rehearse solutions to real-life challenges through interactive and transformative performances. ▶ **Right to food training** A three-day right to food training served to map out policy documents and better understand the legal framework of the right to food in South Africa. During the training, facilitation materials were created and later used for the reading circles and community food dialogues. ▶ **Learning Journeys** A Learning Journey with government is a collaborative process where officials, policymakers, and stakeholders come together to exchange knowledge, build understanding, and co-create solutions. The goal is to foster trust, transparency, and cooperation in policy development and implementation. Given the complexity of Cape Town's politics, these conversations are targeted and grounded in carefully nurtured relationships. Learning Journeys have proven effective in bringing communities and decision-makers together. Traditional top-down approaches to policymaking often fail to address complex urban challenges. The 'Learning Journey' is a participatory action research method that unites decision-makers with grassroots communities to tackle issues like food security. It challenges the notion of one-size-fits-all solutions by prioritising locally specific challenges and remedies, enabling bottom-up system changes tailored to local needs and experiences. ▶ **Development of a campaign** A bottom-up campaign approach engages grassroots communities, individuals, or stakeholders to gather insights, feedback, and support for a cause, policy, or initiative. It focuses on mobilising local people to drive change and pressure policymakers to amend laws or regulations. In South Africa, such campaigns have historically challenged power structures and advocated for marginalised communities.

Pathways	Methods applied
Crowdsourcing data	▶ **Quantitative, representative household survey in 2023 and 2024** A household survey was conducted in six low-income areas of Cape Town and the Cape Winelands, with in-person interviews completed with 2,165 households in Round 1 (August–September 2023) and 2,135 in Round 2 (January–February 2024). Both rounds achieved statistically significant sample sizes at a 95% confidence level. The questionnaire included both closed- and open-ended questions on food insecurity and coping strategies. ▶ **Statistical analysis** Stata was used for statistical analysis of the findings including description of socio-demographic factors, FIES, rCSI, LCS-FS, and regression analysis. ▶ **Data digests** This analysis method contextualises research findings with enumerators and co-researchers. During sessions, statistical data, such as numbers and diagrams, are presented and discussed. Place-specific information is incorporated to provide context and enhance understanding. The sessions also aim to create simple language factsheets, helping enumerators effectively communicate the findings to their communities. ▶ **Narrative analysis** A narrative analysis is a qualitative research method used to examine and interpret stories, accounts, or experiences shared by individuals or groups. It focuses on how people construct meaning through storytelling, exploring the structure, themes, and underlying messages within narratives. Our focus was particularly on themes and patterns, which involves identifying recurring themes, motifs, or ideas within the narrative to reveal deeper meanings or societal influences. Themes and patterns identification, which we did through focus group discussions, included systematically recognising, categorising, and comparing recurrent ideas across narratives, thereby uncovering the underlying social, cultural, and personal influences that shape these stories.

Sources: Boal, 1974; Drimie et al., 2018; Krell & Lamnek, 2024; Nyaba & Paganini, 2023; Smith, 2012

4 Crowdsourcing data

Addressing food and nutrition insecurity in informal settlements and low-income areas requires innovative approaches that go beyond traditional, production-focused strategies (Paganini & Weigelt, 2023). Production-focused initiatives have historically failed to transform the lives of those in informal settlements and low-income neighbourhoods, indicating the need for alternative, consumer-centred solutions. In the scoping phase, a nuanced understanding of local realities and lived experiences, especially during crises, is essential. Crowdsourced data emerged as a critical tool in the Urban Food Futures programme in Cape Town, enabling community networks, decision-makers, and funders to better assess and respond to the unique challenges in our research sites.

The Theory of Change underpinning the crowdsourcing data pathway (see pathway 5 in Paganini & Weigelt, 2023) is rooted in the recognition that food insecurity in South Africa is not merely a result of resource scarcity but is deeply embedded in structural inequality and spatial segregation. In cities like Cape Town, these historical and systemic factors marginalise certain communities, rendering their experiences largely invisible to policymakers and excluding them from decision-making processes. Addressing this exclusion requires bridging critical knowledge gaps by integrating community-led data collection with participatory advocacy efforts. Crowdsourced data, when aligned with community-driven advocacy, can transform abstract statistics into actionable insights, fostering more inclusive, dialogic, and decentralised forms of accountability. By linking data with grassroots action, the research highlights how data, when placed in the hands of organised community actors, can become a powerful instrument for systemic change.

Results from two household surveys in 2023 and 2024

To address critical place-based data gaps, crowdsourced data surveys were implemented in two rounds of household surveys in 2023 and 2024. These efforts formed part of a broader social accountability strategy led by Urban Food Futures' partner FACT (see chapter, 7). The crowdsourced data offered valuable insights into the impact of crises on the state of food security, coping strategies, and food governance participation in six neighbourhoods of Cape Town. We applied a place-based approach, providing a comprehensive understanding of urban food environments in different areas of Cape Town to avoid generalising assumptions about "the townships".

The survey was conducted across six research sites in the Cape Flats and Cape Winelands, selected to represent the cultural and socio-demographic diversity of the region. The terms "Black" and "Coloured" are used in this context to reflect Apartheid-era racial classifications which remain relevant for understanding the historical and current dynamics of these communities. However, we acknowledge these terms as deeply contested (Durrheim et al., 2011). We did not analyse the results by race, but by place and other indicators such as gender.

Bridgetown, one of the oldest neighbourhoods in the Cape Flats, was classified by Apartheid urban planning as a "Coloured" township. Hanover Park, known for its high levels of gang violence, has a long-standing history of resistance against apartheid. Mitchell's Plain, another area historically designated for "Coloured" communities, primarily houses residents forcibly relocated from the city centre's Muslim community. Gugulethu is one of the first settlements designated for Black residents under the Apartheid regime. Mfuleni, another predominantly Black settlement, developed in the

1990s on the outskirts of the Cape Flats to address issues of overcrowding and the growing risks of fire and flooding. The Klapmuts/Elsenberg area in the Cape Winelands is home mostly to farm workers from both Black and Coloured communities.

4.1 Household descriptions

In each research site, approximately 360 interviews were conducted with the household member who is responsible for most food-related tasks in the household. More respondents were female and in the age range of 36–55. In both rounds, slightly more respondents were not engaged in paid employment than were employed (55 % in Round 1 and 53 % in Round 2). This research adopted ILO's definition of employment: at least one hour of paid work or work for profit in the last seven days (ILO, 2016). Of the respondents who were of working age, 29 % were employed mostly in the formal sector and 16 % were employed mostly in the informal sector in Round 1; in Round 2, a total of 31% of the respondents were mostly employed in the formal sector and 16 % were employed in the informal sector.

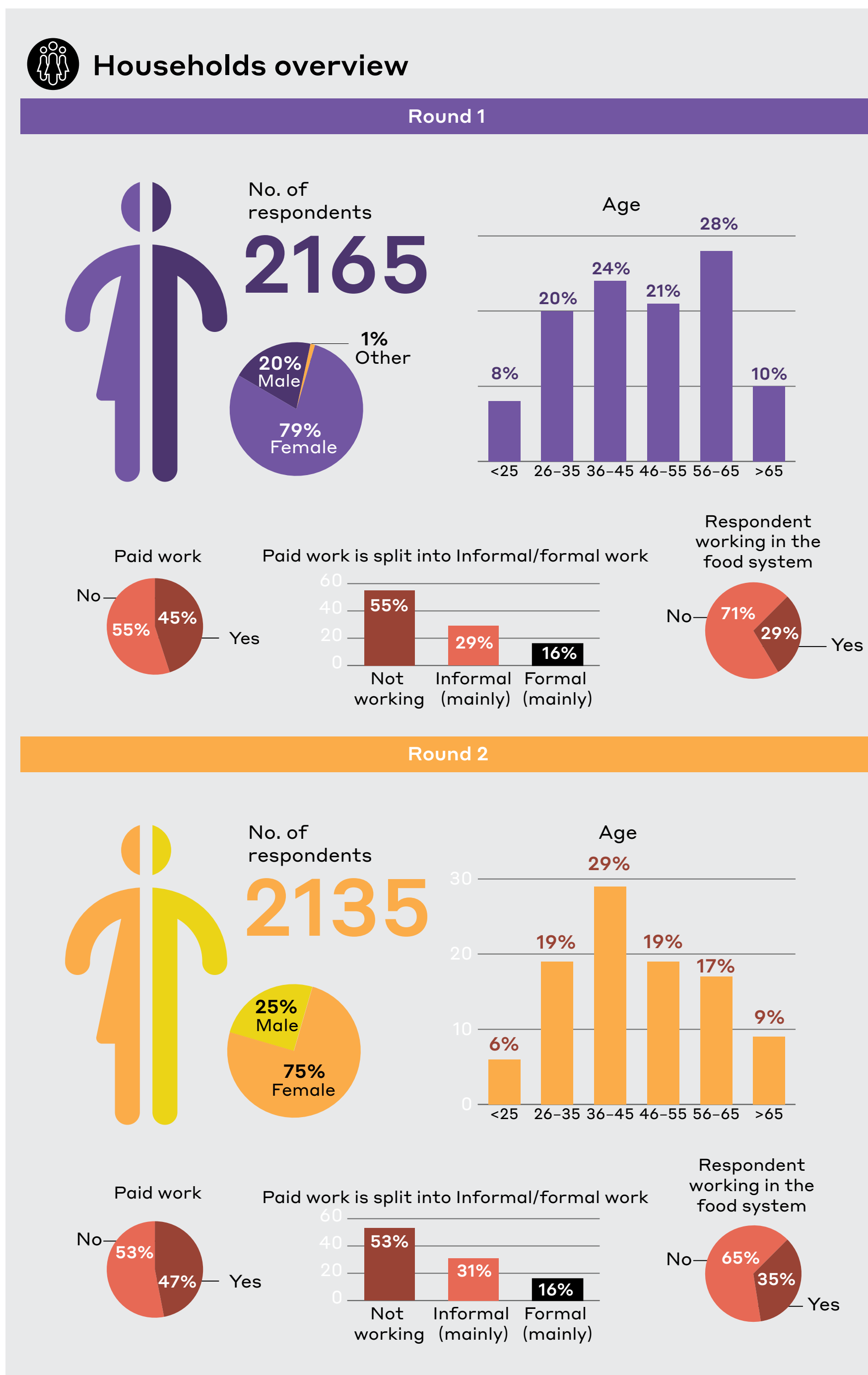


Figure 2 Description of the sample of all households

The table below summarises the demographics of respondents who participated in Round 1 (n= 2,165) and Round 2 (n=2,135) of the household survey across the six research sites.

Table 2 Characteristics of person responsible for most food related tasks in the household

	Bridgetown		Cape Winelands		Gugulethu		Hanover Park		Mitchell's Plain		Mfuleni	
	Round 1	Round 2	Round 1	Round 2	Round 1	Round 2	Round 1	Round 2	Round 1	Round 2	Round 1	Round 2
No. of respondents	n=360	n=362	n=360	n=360	n=361	n=325	n=362	n=360	n=358	n=360	n=364	n=368
Gender												
Female	75 %	76 %	94 %	95 %	71 %	68 %	91 %	78 %	76 %	67 %	70 %	63 %
Male	24 %	24 %	6 %	5 %	29 %	32 %	8 %	22 %	24 %	33 %	30 %	37 %
Other	1 %	-	-	-	-	-	1 %	-	-	-	-	-
Age												
25 and younger	12 %	3 %	7 %	6 %	7 %	1 %	4 %	4 %	8 %	4 %	11 %	12 %
26–35	15 %	12 %	20 %	20 %	18 %	18 %	17 %	16 %	20 %	20 %	31 %	29 %
36–45	26 %	29 %	22 %	23 %	24 %	35 %	15 %	22 %	22 %	28 %	34 %	40 %
46–55	21 %	27 %	24 %	23 %	19 %	16 %	19 %	17 %	24 %	20 %	18 %	14 %
56–65	16 %	20 %	21 %	19 %	17 %	14 %	27 %	26 %	19 %	21 %	6 %	5 %
Older than 65	10 %	9 %	5 %	9 %	16 %	14 %	19 %	16 %	8 %	8 %	1 %	-
paid work												
Yes	57 %	72 %	51 %	36 %	31 %	55 %	17 %	14 %	54 %	49 %	60 %	59 %
No	43 %	28 %	49 %	64 %	69 %	45 %	83 %	86 %	46 %	51 %	40 %	41 %
Paid work is split into Informal/formal work												
Informal (mainly)	10%	6%	18%	13%	13%	22%	8%	5%	18%	15%	33%	35%
Formal (mainly)	47%	66%	34%	23%	19%	33%	9%	9%	36%	34%	27%	24%
Food System Actor												
Yes	8 %	20 %	60 %	72 %	44 %	57 %	5 %	1 %	15 %	8 %	43 %	57 %
No	92 %	80 %	40 %	28 %	56 %	43 %	95 %	99 %	85 %	92 %	57 %	43 %

The majority of households were composed of two to five members, excluding the respondent. That is, 72 % and 75 % of households in Round 1 and 2. However, a considerable share of households had six or more members excluding the respondent (18 % for both rounds). Most interviewed households were headed by women in both rounds (66 % and 58 % in Rounds 1 and 2).

As Table 3 shows, 46 % and 45 % of households earned an income of R6,000[9] or less in Round 1 and 2 and 13 % and 14% of households had a household income of less than R1,000[10] in Round 1 and 2.

9 R6,000 – 315€ in January 2025
10 R1,000 – 53€ in January 2025
11 530R is 28€ in January 2025

Table 3 Average household income

	Bridgetown	Cape Winelands	Gugulethu	Hanover Park	Mitchell's Plain	Mfuleni
ZAR	9.182	3.607	3.404	2.669	5.129	9.850
€	482	190	179	140	270	518

Converted into € based on rates in February 25

Social grants are a major source of income for most households in the study area (see Table 4). South Africa's social grant system is designed to provide financial support to the country's most vulnerable populations, including the elderly, children, people with disabilities, and low-income households. The funding for these grants come from the South African government, with the grants being paid out by SASSA (South African Social Security Agency) using revenue from the national budget, which is primarily sourced from taxes levied on citizens and businesses. Among the most prominent grants is the Old Age Grant, which provides financial assistance to citizens over 60 who no longer have the means to support themselves. Eligibility is determined by the individual's income and assets. The grant amount is revised annually, but is generally set at a level that allows recipients to meet their basic living expenses. The Child Support Grant assists low-income caregivers (parents, grandparents, or legal guardians) of children under the age of 18 by helping meet the costs associated with raising children such as food, clothing, and education. The Care Dependency Grant provides financial assistance to caregivers of children who require full-time care due to their disabilities. The amount of each grant is subject to periodic review and adjustment based on the government's fiscal policies and inflation rates. At the time of writing, the Old Age Grant is typically R2,000 to R2,500/month and the Child Support Grant is approximately R500/child/month (SASSA, 2025).

Though data on student bursaries were not collected in the survey, enumerators reported that some respondents felt student bursaries were crucial income supplements. This income source is not reflected in our data.

Table 4 Percentage of households accessing social grants by place

Accessing social grants	Bridgetown		Cape Winelands		Gugulethu		Hanover Park		Mitchell's Plain		Mfuleni	
	Round 1	Round 2	Round 1	Round 2	Round 1	Round 2	Round 1	Round 2	Round 1	Round 2	Round 1	Round 2
	57 %	67 %	83 %	82 %	90 %	88 %	87 %	86 %	59 %	62 %	59 %	63 %

As many as 90 % households in Gugulethu received at least one type of social grant. Overall, 73 % and 78 % of households received social grants in Round 1 and 2. Social grants are an important poverty reduction mechanism in South Africa, although the value of the grants is relatively low (Patel & Sadie, 2024). South Africa operates one of the most extensive social grant systems globally, with approximately 47 % of the population relying on monthly social assistance (Patel et al., 2021). The majority of these grants are Child Support Grants, which provide R530[11] per month to the primary caregiver of a child, subject to a means test (SASSA, 2025).

In addition to permanent social grants, approximately 10 million individuals receive the Social Relief of Distress (SRD) Grant, which was introduced as a temporary form of assistance introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic. It targets working-age adults who do not qualify for formal social protection mechanisms, such as unemployment insurance, and those engaged in informal employment. Grant disbursements will come to an end in March 2025 (SASSA, 2025).

Nationally, social grants play a vital role, particularly in the country's poorest provinces. Libera (2024) tells us that, of South Africa's total population of 64 million, 28.7 million citizens receive social grants. Nationally, the percentage of households and individuals receiving social grants rose from 12.8 % in 2003 to 30.9 % in 2019 to 39.4 % in 2023, driven by the implementation of the special COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant (StatsSA, 2024). Unsurprisingly, the households in our survey were much more likely to receive social grants than neighbouring areas in the Western Cape, no doubt a disparity produced by Apartheid-era spatial planning.

4.2 Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)

We used the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) to measure food insecurity in our study. FIES is a robust and widely recognised tool that assesses households' access to adequate food based on their experiences with food-related challenges. The FIES findings show the prevalence and severity of food insecurity and highlight variations across demographic and spatial contexts. This following section explores the findings and offers a comparative analysis to understand temporal and contextual dynamics.

FIES categorises food insecurity into four distinct levels based on individuals' or households' experiences with accessing adequate food. The first category, **food secure**, refers to individuals or households that have regular and sufficient access to nutritious and safe food. The next level, **mild food insecurity**, reflects uncertainty about the ability to obtain food or a reduction in the quality and variety of food consumed. While basic food needs may still be met at this stage, individuals may worry about running out of resources or resort to consuming less preferred foods. **Moderate food insecurity** signifies a more pronounced compromise in food access, where the quantity of food consumed is reduced. This may involve skipping meals or eating smaller portions, with adults often prioritising children's needs. At the most extreme level, **severe food insecurity** represents serious deprivation, where individuals or households go entire days without eating due to lack of food or resources with profound implications for health and well-being. FIES assesses these experiences through eight questions on worry, quality of diet, and coping mechanisms such as meal skipping and documents the last four weeks, providing a comprehensive understanding of food insecurity severity.

Place-based findings on food insecurity from 2023 and 2024

The survey was conducted in the South African winter of 2023. During the enumeration period, we experienced heavy rainfalls and cold. In the initial days of data collection, a taxi strike in Cape Town disrupted food supplies. The 2024 survey, by contrast, was conducted in summer, shortly after New Year's – a period colloquially referred to as "Janua-worry" or the "season of hunger."

Both data collection periods could therefore be considered as times of heightened stress. However, discussions with enumerators suggest that while these seasonal events may have influenced conditions, they did not constitute an exceptional source of disruption. Instead, they emphasised that stress factors, violent events, and energy-related disruptions are persistent features of these environments. Thus, the two rounds of data collection provide insights into six distinct food environments within fragile and violent contexts.

The FIES results capture household's experience of food insecurity in the four weeks prior to the survey.

Figure 6 shows that households in Bridgetown (26 %) and Mitchell's Plain (22 %) were the most food secure in Round 1. Households in Hanover Park (59%) and Cape Winelands (45 %), specifically the areas of Elsenburg and Klapmuts, experienced high levels of severe food insecurity in Round 1.

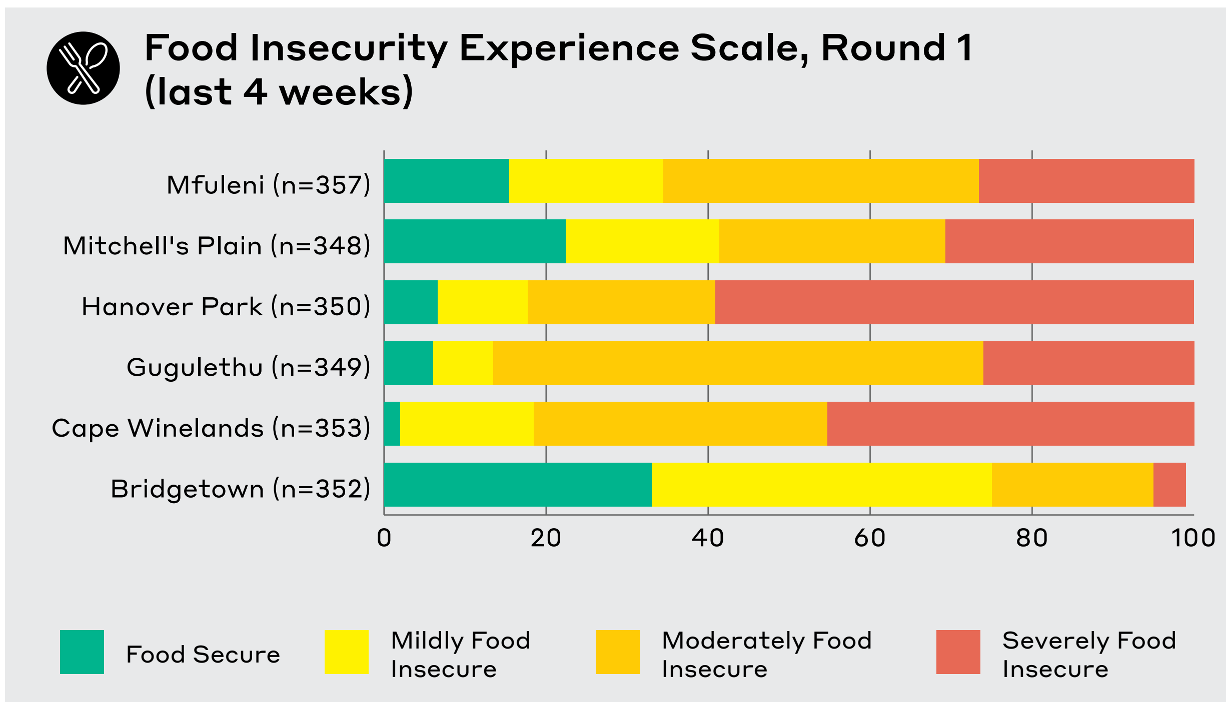


Figure 3 This diagram shows the state of food security in each research site in the four weeks preceding the survey in August 2023. The green part of the chart shows how many respondents fall under the category food secure, while red respectively indicates severely food insecure. The number behind the research sites show how many data sets we used from each research site. In some cases, not all respondents answered to all questions. In the second round, as per Figure 7, households in Bridgetown (33 %) and Gugulethu (19 %) were the most food secure, while once again, Cape Winelands (48%) and Hanover Park (43 %) experienced the highest levels of severe food insecurity in Round 2.

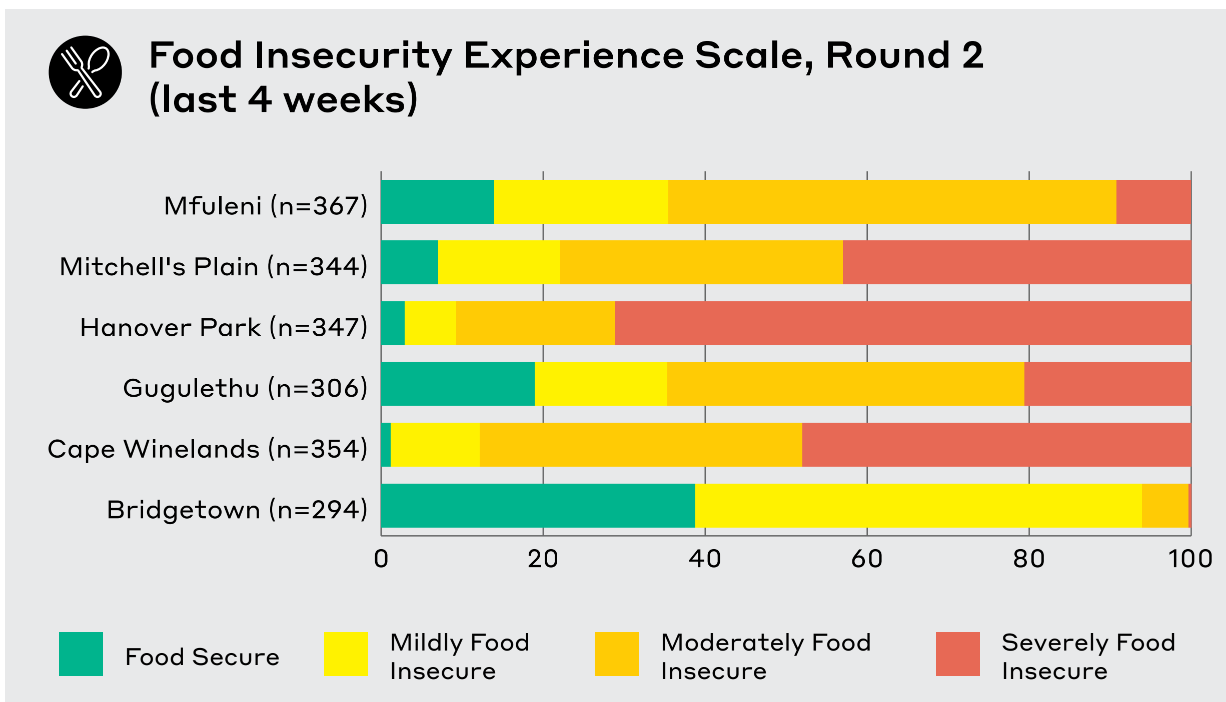


Figure 4 This diagram shows the state of food security in the different research sites. The data reflects the situation in January 2024 and is a snapshot of the respondents last four weeks. The green part of the chart shows how many respondents fall under the category food secure, while red respectively indicates severely food insecure. The number behind the research sites show how many data sets we used from each research side. In some cases, not all respondents answered to all questions

The consistent levels of severe food insecurity suggest entrenched vulnerabilities driven by structural inequalities, such as poverty, unemployment, and limited access to affordable, nutritious food. The uneven distribution of food insecurity across the research sites reflects broader social and economic disparities in the different communities. Communities facing higher levels of severe food insecurity often lack access to safety nets, infrastructure, and stable employment opportunities, further compounding their vulnerability. Meanwhile, areas with mild or moderate food insecurity, such as Bridgetown, demonstrate that, while basic needs are being met, households remain on the brink of crisis, especially if they encounter unexpected challenges like job losses or rising food prices. The contrast between urban settings and areas like the Cape Winelands reveals the role of geography in shaping food security outcomes. Urban areas, despite being close to markets, often struggle with the high cost of living and limited land for food production, whereas rural regions benefit from proximity to growing areas but remain highly susceptible to external shocks like drought, market disruptions, and fluctuations in seasonal employment opportunities as we see in the Cape Winelands, where mostly farm workers were interviewed. In contrast, Hanover Park, located in the urban Cape Flats, faces similarly high rates of food insecurity, yet its challenges are shaped by the unique socio-economic conditions of the area. While urban proximity to markets may provide some access to food, Hanover Park struggles with high levels of violence, gang activity, and widespread unemployment. These issues exacerbate the community's vulnerability, creating a volatile environment where economic instability and social unrest limit access to essential resources, deepening the cycle of food insecurity.

Food security in the last five years

We gain a longer view of food security in the area by comparing our FIES data with those of Paganini et al (2021a) who conducted the FIES from three of our research sites in 2020. To ensure comparability across datasets, we excluded 2020 data from St. Helena Bay and 2023/2024 data from the Cape Winelands so that only data from the Cape Flats research sites were compared. Despite differences in

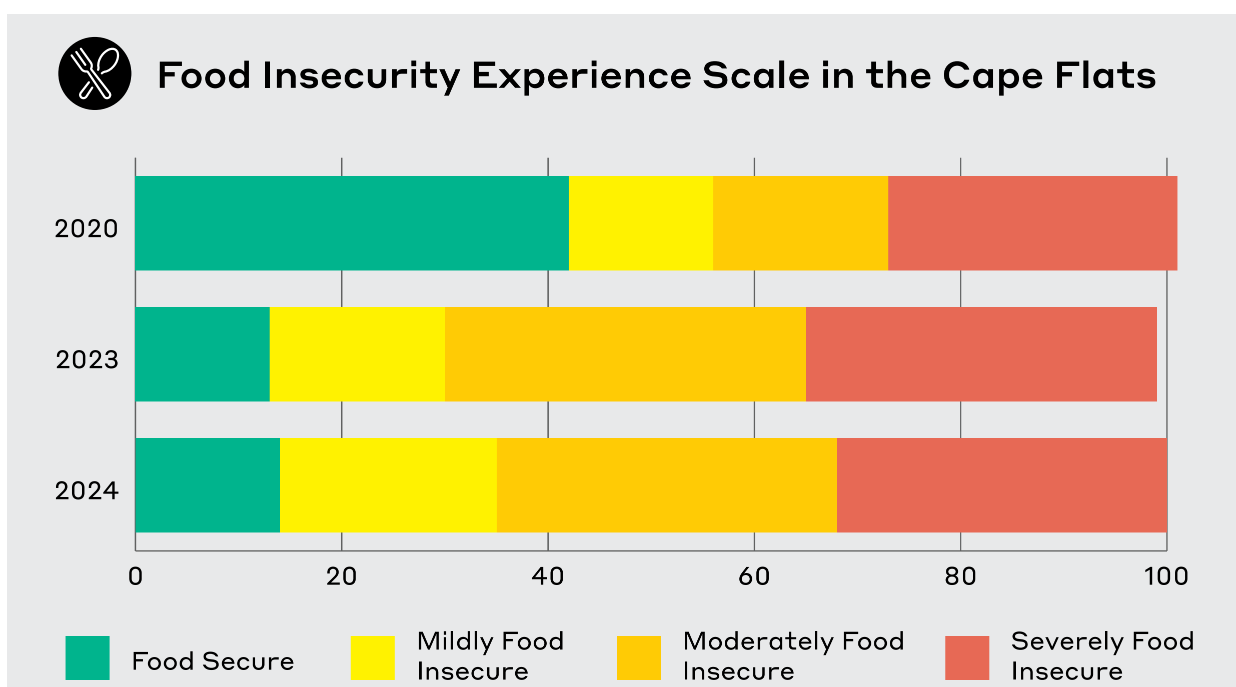


Figure 5 This chart presents FIES findings in the Cape Flats for 2020, 2023, and 2024. Overall, the data show an increase in food-insecure households (including both severely and moderately food insecure) and a decrease in food-secure households. Green represents food-secure households, while red indicates those that are severely food insecure.

sample size, the comparability of findings at a 95 % confidence level is maintained due to the use of relative proportions rather than absolute values. Figure 8 below presents the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) for the Cape Flats in 2020 (n = 1,305), 2023 (n = 2,110), and 2024 (n = 2,012).

In 2020, 28 % of surveyed households were severely food insecure and 17 % were moderately food insecure. In 2023, 35 % of surveyed households were severely food insecure, 35 % were moderately food insecure, and 17 % were mildly food insecure. By 2024, 32 % of surveyed households were severely food insecure, 33 % were moderately insecure, and 21 % were mildly food insecure. Food security declined considerably between 2020 and 2024 with the proportion of food secure households dropping from 42 % in 2020 to 13 % and 14 % in 2023 and 2024.

4.3 Crises coping

To better understand how communities cope with crises related to their food insecurity, we used two indicators: the Reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) and the Livelihood Coping Strategies (LCS) for Food Security. Using both, our data provides a comprehensive view by capturing immediate responses as well as households' long-term structural adjustments in response to crises. The rCSI focuses on short-term, day-to-day coping behaviours, such as reducing the number of meals in a day or prioritising children when rationing food. The rCSI provides a snapshot of how households are managing food access on a daily or weekly basis. In contrast, the LCS examines longer term systemic strategies, such as selling assets, moving into a low-income area, or migrating for work, that households adopt to sustain their livelihoods in the face of prolonged food insecurity. The rCSI highlights **immediate needs** that might require urgent food assistance, while the LCS identifies **underlying vulnerabilities** and systemic challenges that require more sustainable, long-term interventions.

Short-term strategies, as measured by the rCSI, refer to the immediate, day-to-day actions households take to manage food insecurity. These coping behaviours are typically reactive and aimed at addressing food shortages in real time. They are reversible and often reflect the urgency of food insecurity at a specific moment. The indicator captures information from the seven days prior to the survey.

Long-term strategies, measured by the LCS, represent more systemic, structural actions that households take to cope with prolonged or severe food insecurity. These behaviours often have lasting implications for a household's wellbeing and livelihood. They are typically irreversible in the short term and can compromise a household's ability to recover from food insecurity in the future. The indicator captures information from the five years preceding the survey. The LCS categorises strategies into three stages, each reflecting the severity of coping:

- Stress strategies: Actions that have some impact on future productivity but are less severe, such as borrowing money or selling non-productive assets like furniture.
- Crisis strategies: Strategies that directly affect household productivity and resilience, such as selling productive assets (e.g., livestock or tools) or withdrawing children from school.
- Emergency strategies: The most severe measures, indicating a household is in extreme distress, such as selling land, moving into a poorer neighbourhood, migrating for work, or relying entirely on aid for survival.

Reduced coping strategies index (rCSI)

To better understand how households cope with food shortages in the short term, respondents reported on the frequency of using predefined short-term strategies over the previous seven days using the rCSI[12]. Each strategy is weighted based on severity, with a higher total score indicating greater food insecurity.

The results of the rCSI in Round 1 and Round 2 are summarised in Figure 9 and Figure 10 below.

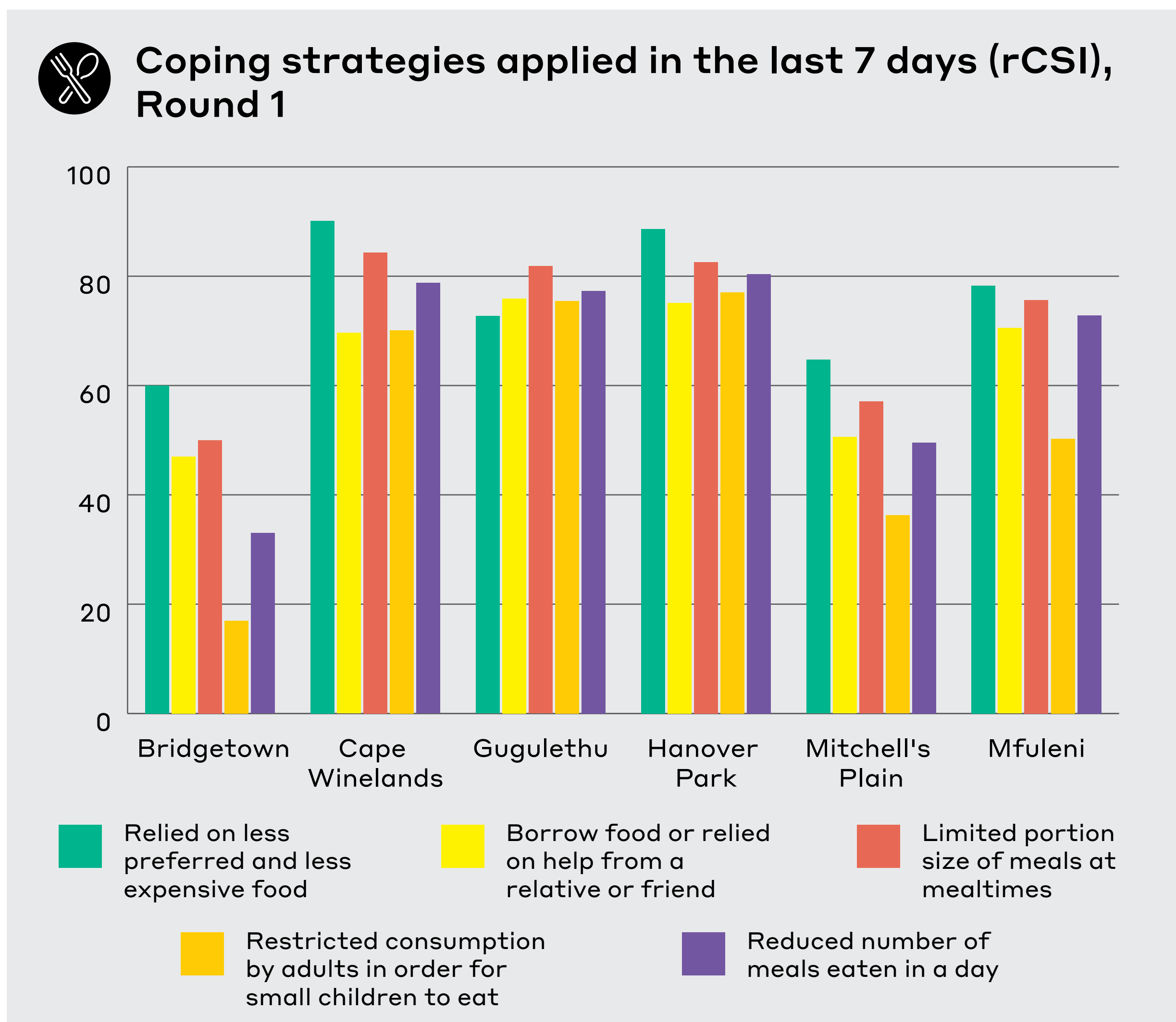


Figure 6 rCSI for Round 1. Participants could choose from five coping strategies. Each bar in the diagram represents a coping strategy. The height of the bar corresponds to the percentage of respondents in a research site who indicated using the strategy in the interview. Not all participants responded to every category, resulting in variations in sample size. There is a general tendency for areas such as Bridgetown and Mitchell's Plain to employ fewer coping strategies compared to the Cape Winelands, Gugulethu, or Hanover Park. Across all sites, coping strategies are used almost interchangeably, except in Gugulethu where people rely on non-preferred or cheaper foods.

12 The Reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) is a tool used to measure how households cope with food shortages, providing a quick assessment of food insecurity. It examines five common strategies: eating less-preferred food, borrowing food, reducing meals, reducing portion sizes, and prioritising children's consumption over adults. Each strategy is weighted based on severity, and households report how often they used these strategies in the past seven days. A higher total score indicates greater food insecurity.
The rCSI is widely used to assess and monitor food security, especially in crisis contexts. Its strengths include simplicity, quick administration, and global validation, making it a reliable and standardised measure. However, it only captures short-term coping behaviors and may miss cultural or long-term food security nuances. Despite these limitations, the rCSI remains a vital tool for targeting food assistance and shaping policies.

Comparatively, in Round 2, households in Bridgetown used the least number of coping strategies. It is important to note that the community kitchen in Bridgetown increased operations from 2023 to 2024, providing more food to the community and reducing households' need to rely on other coping strategies. This is reflected in Figure 21 where we see that the number of people visiting community kitchens in Bridgetown increased between Rounds 1 and 2.

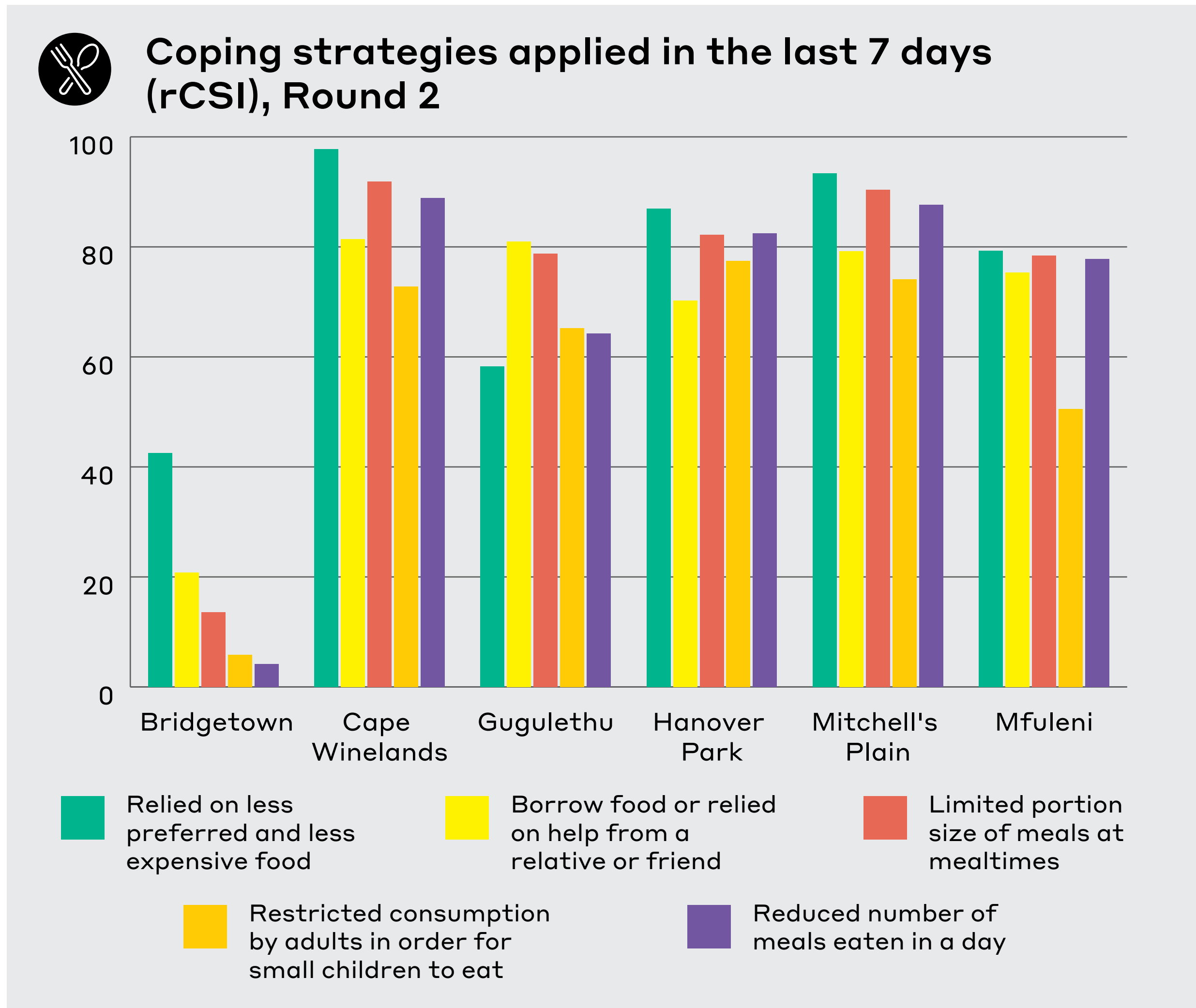


Figure 7 rCSI for Round 2

Is coping gendered?

When analysing gender disaggregated data, we note similarities and slight differences between the strategies used by the aggregate and by women-headed households. Firstly, 52 % and 53 % of women-headed households used all five coping strategies in Rounds 1 and 2; whereas, 47 % of the total sample applied all five strategies in both rounds. Only 15 % of women-headed households in both rounds reported not using any coping mechanisms, compared to 18 % and 17 % of the total sample in Rounds 1 and 2. While minor differences are noted, the gap is too small to be conclusive, particularly in light of the assumption that most women-headed households are single-headed households. Our assumption is supported by data suggesting that households headed by both a man and a woman tend to use fewer coping strategies than those led by either a single man or a single woman, suggesting decisions around coping strategies are not necessarily gendered, but rather linked to household income structure, with dual-income households being less reliant on coping mechanisms.

Livelihood Coping Strategies – Food Security (LCS-FS)

The LCS examines **long-term, livelihood-related strategies**, indicating how households adapt to sustain themselves over time. Survey respondents identified crises that affected their households in the last five years and answered ten questions about strategies they had used in the previous four weeks to address the crises. The progression between these categories reflects a spectrum of vulnerability, with emergency coping representing severe and difficult-to-reverse strategies that compromise future household productivity and resilience.

Stress coping strategies are the least severe and involve short-term adjustments that help households manage food insecurity without significantly harming their long-term livelihoods. These strategies indicate early signs of food stress but are typically reversible. Examples include spending savings to buy food, borrowing money from family or friends, reducing non-essential expenses such as education or healthcare, or purchasing food on credit. Households using stress coping strategies are struggling but still have the ability to recover without major long-term consequences.

Crisis coping strategies reflect a more serious level of food insecurity, where households take actions that directly affect their future sustainability and resilience. At this stage, they begin making sacrifices that could reduce their long-term productivity. This may include selling productive assets such as livestock or tools, withdrawing children from school to save money or make them work, frequently reducing portion sizes and skipping meals, or engaging in high-risk or exploitative labour. Households that rely on crisis coping strategies are experiencing significant food insecurity and are making decisions that could undermine their future well-being.

Emergency coping strategies are the most severe and indicate extreme desperation, often involving actions that permanently damage a household's ability to recover. These strategies are typically irreversible and signify a critical food crisis that threatens survival. Examples include selling essential assets such as land or housing to afford food, relying entirely on begging or humanitarian aid, engaging in illegal or highly exploitative activities to obtain food, completely depleting food reserves with no means of replenishment, or even migrating due to the lack of access to food. When households resort to emergency coping strategies, they are in a state of severe distress and require immediate assistance to prevent further harm.

These three levels of coping strategies – stress, crisis, and emergency – help assess the severity of food insecurity and determine the urgency and type of intervention needed. While stress coping strategies suggest a temporary struggle, crisis coping strategies indicate deeper vulnerability, and emergency coping strategies highlight a life-threatening situation requiring urgent action

The results are summarised in Figures 7 and 8. Note that the total percentage of responses exceeds 100% in all categories due to the nature of the survey, which allowed respondents to select multiple coping strategies. This reflects the complexity of food insecurity, where households often employ a combination of approaches rather than relying on a single strategy to navigate food shortages.

Applied livelihood coping strategies (LCS-FS) Round 1 (n=2164)

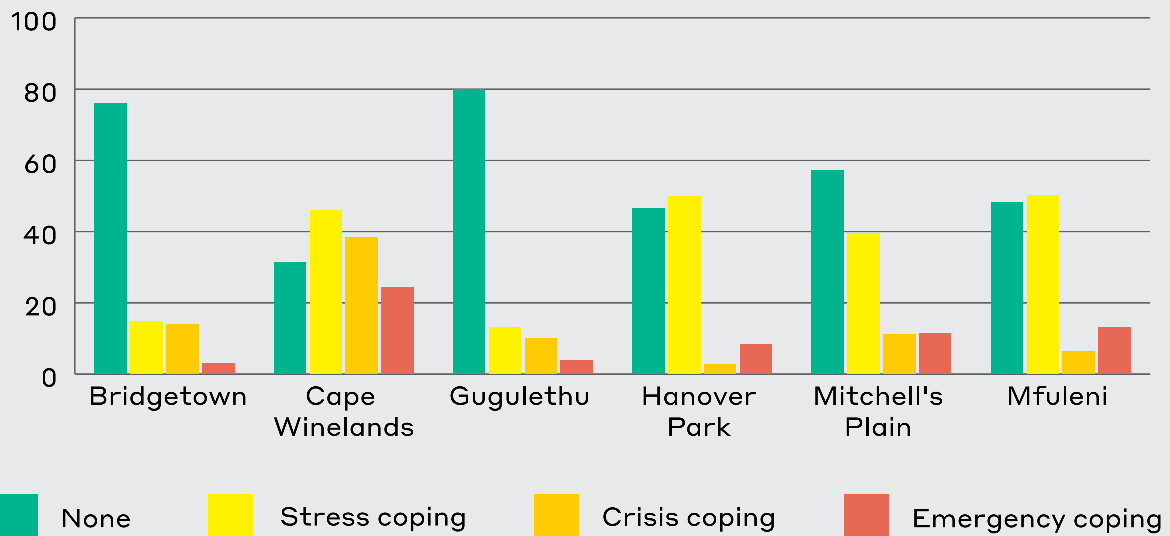


Figure 8 LCS-FS for Round 1 – Households employ a range of coping strategies to manage food insecurity. Each bar in the diagram represents a crises category which is a statistical analysis of a combination of questions posed during the survey. The height of each bar corresponds to the percentage of respondents in a research site who indicated using the strategy in an interview. These crises indicators are categorised by severity, ranging from stress coping to crisis to emergency coping. The categories reflect household-level responses and do not include community-based support systems, such as community kitchens. The graphic illustrates the proportion of households using each coping strategy. For example, in Bridgetown, 15% of households engage in stress coping mechanisms. Some of these households may also resort to more severe strategies, such as emergency coping, meaning that the categories are not mutually exclusive.

Applied livelihood coping strategies (LCS-FS) Round 2 (n=2135)

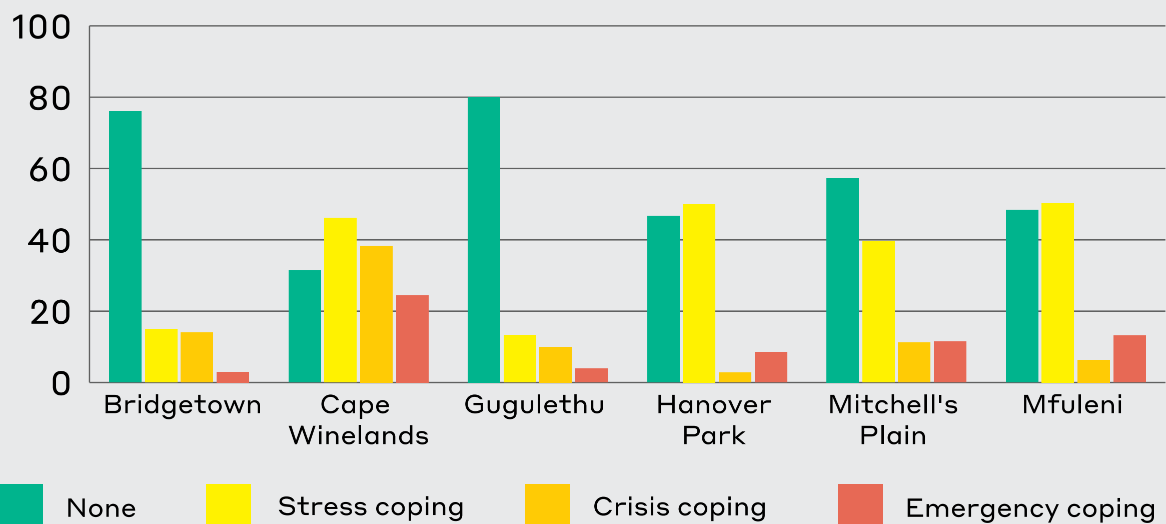


Figure 9 LCS-FS for Round 2

The two graphs illustrate the applied livelihood coping strategies (LCS-FS) across different research sites in two rounds of data collection. A key observation is the consistently high prevalence of stress coping strategies across all sites, highlighting the persistent and structural nature of food insecurity. In the second round, stress coping increased significantly in some areas, particularly in Hanover Park (from 47 % to 72 %) and the Cape Winelands (from 46 % to 54 %). These are fragile communities, with Hanover Park being exposed to violence and unrest on the streets and Cape Winelands' employment opportunities being seasonal with the agricultural calendar. This suggests that more households in these areas rely on short-term strategies, such as borrowing food or money, spending savings, or reducing non-essential expenses to manage food shortages. The widespread use of stress coping strategies indicates that food insecurity is a chronic issue rather than a temporary crisis, forcing people to make constant sacrifices to maintain access to food.

Use of emergency coping strategies also increased between the two data collection rounds in certain areas, particularly in Hanover Park, where the percentage of households using emerging coping strategies jumped from 9 % in the first round to 41 % in the second round. Mitchell's Plain saw an increase from 6 % to 15 %. Emergency coping strategies, which include selling essential assets, begging, or engaging in high-risk activities, signify a critical level of food insecurity that is likely unsustainable in the long term. The sharp increase in these figures suggests that some households are depleting their resources and reaching a breaking point where they are forced into extreme measures to survive. This is concerning as it reflects a deteriorating situation where families have exhausted less severe coping mechanisms and are now at significant risk of long-term hardship.

The percentage of households that did not report using coping strategies is particularly high in Bridgetown, where it stands at 55 % in the second round, suggesting that many households here have a more stable food situation. However, in Gugulethu, an area with high food insecurity, the "None" category is also relatively high at 71 % in the second round, and 80 % in the first round. One possible explanation for this is that some households in Gugulethu may have already exhausted all available individual coping strategies, meaning they no longer have the means to actively respond to food insecurity. However, in both areas, we know that there is another social safety net which is also not reflected in the categories: the community kitchen.

Households often use multiple coping strategies at once, reflecting the complexity of food insecurity and the need for multi-faceted interventions. Food insecurity remains a persistent issue across research sites, with stress coping strategies showing a general increase, highlighting ongoing food-related stress in households. While this indicator does not reflect it, informal social protection systems such as community kitchens play a crucial role in mitigating crises, as described in detail in chapter 6.3.

Coping strategies in the context of polycrises

The gravity of the situation is underscored when our 2023 and 2024 survey results are compared with literature on LCS-FS surveys conducted in the area prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (see Paganini et al., 2021a). To provide context, we provide aggregated data in Figure 13 which shows how households in three of our research sites increasingly employed each coping strategy over the period of 2020–2024.

Coping strategies in the Cape Flats 2020, 2023, 2024

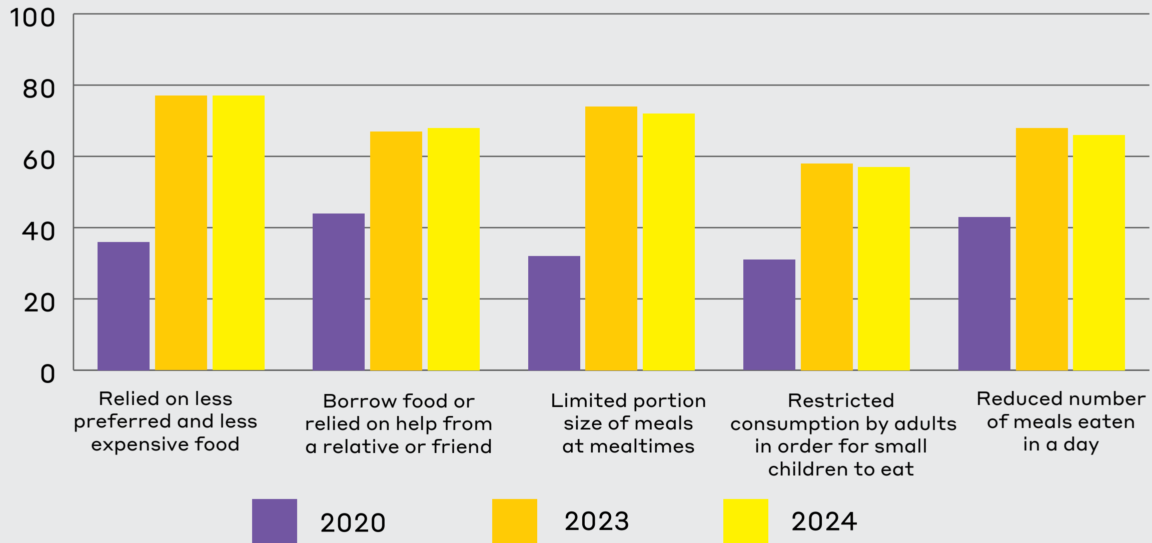


Figure 10 Coping strategies in the Cape Flats. This diagram shows trends from the period following the first Covid-19 lockdown to the present. Similar to the comparison of FIES in the previous section, the diagram only displays results from communities located in the Cape Flats. Source: Own data from the research areas in the Cape Flats in 2023 and 2024 and 2020 data from Paganini et al. (2021a)

The graph depicts trends in food-related coping strategies among households in the Cape Flats for the years 2020, 2023, and 2024. Across all five strategies, there is a clear increase in the use of these coping mechanisms from 2020 to 2023, reflecting a worsening of food insecurity during this period. For instance, the proportion of households relying on less preferred or less expensive food rose significantly from 36 % in 2020 to 77 % in 2023, remaining at this high level in 2024. Similarly, the proportion of households limiting portion sizes increased from 32 % in 2020 to 74 % in 2023, with a slight dip to 72 % in 2024. Borrowing food or seeking help from relatives and friends also grew steadily, from 44 % in 2020 to 68 % in 2024.

The slightly higher figures for 2023 may be attributed to specific challenges experienced during that year. Winter often reduces opportunities for seasonal work, leaving many without income, and this was compounded by a series of taxi strikes that disrupted transport and work life for many residents. Additionally, persistent load shedding (power cuts) added to the difficulties, further limiting economic activity and household resilience. By 2024, there were slight improvements in some coping strategies, such as reduced meal sizes or skipping meals, though the levels remain high. These findings highlight that, while the acute challenges of 2023 may have subsided slightly, households in the Cape Flats continue to struggle with significant food insecurity, underlining the urgent need for sustained interventions and support.

4.4 Vulnerability to food insecurity

Our 2020 research showed that certain households tend to be at higher risk of experiencing food insecurity: female-headed households, households with no income, households where members work in the food system, households in marginalised communities, and households with many members (see Paganini et al., 2021a). Using the results from the household surveys from 2023 and 2024, we identified a number of dependent variables to assess the odds of experiencing moderate and severe food insecurity. An odds ratio greater than 1 indicates higher odds of being moderately or severely food insecure; whereas, an odds ratio less than 1 indicates lower odds of being moderately or severely food insecure.

Textbox 1: Understanding Odds Ratios and Interpreting the Table

An **odds ratio (OR)** is a statistical measure used to examine the relationship between an exposure (such as "working" or "female head") and an outcome (in this case, food insecurity). It compares the odds of the outcome occurring in one group to the odds of it occurring in a reference group.

If the OR is greater than 1, it indicates that the exposure increases the likelihood of the outcome, making it a risk factor. Conversely, if the OR is less than 1, the exposure reduces the likelihood of the outcome, meaning it is a protective factor. An OR of 1 suggests no effect on the odds of the outcome. For instance, an OR of 2 would mean the odds of food insecurity are twice as high for the exposed group compared to the reference group, while an OR of 0.5 would mean the odds are half as high.

The table also includes a **95 % confidence interval (CI)** for each OR, which represents the range within which the true OR is likely to fall with 95 % certainty. If the CI does not include 1, the result is considered statistically significant, meaning the variable has a meaningful effect on the outcome. A narrow CI indicates precise results, whereas a wide CI suggests less certainty.

In addition, the table uses asterisks to denote statistical significance levels. Three asterisks (***) ***indicate a p-value of less than 0.001, meaning the result is highly significant. Two asterisks*** (**) *mean the p-value is less than 0.01, and one asterisk* (*) means it is less than 0.05. Results with no asterisks are not statistically significant.

To interpret the rows in the table, each variable represents a factor being analysed for its impact on food insecurity. For example, in Round 1, the variable "Working" has an OR of 0.268 with a 95 % CI of 0.207–0.346. This means that people who are working are 73.2 % less likely to be food insecure compared to those who are not working. This result is highly significant, as indicated by the confidence interval, which does not include 1, and the presence of three asterisks.

Another example is "Household size" in Round 2, which has an OR of 1.218 with a 95% CI of 1.163–1.274. This indicates that for each additional household member, the odds of being food insecure increase by 21.8%. This result is also statistically significant, as the confidence interval does not include 1 and is marked with three asterisks.

Who bears the brunt of food insecurity?

Table 5 Odds ratios for being moderately or severely food insecurity for all research sites

	Round 1			Round 2		
Variables	OR	95 % CI	%	OR	95 % CI	%
Working	0.268***	0.207–0.346	-73 %	0.281***	0.217–0.364	-72 %
Working formal	0.577***	0.456–0.732	-42 %	0.694***	0.549–0.877	-31 %
Female headed	1.654***	1.355–2.020	65 %	–	–	–
Both headed	0.461***	0.280–0.756		0.576***	0.453–0.733	-42 %
Food system actor	2.344***	1.880–2.924	-54 %	1.628***	1.341–1.977	63 %
Kitchen user	4.015***	2.996–5.379	134 %	3.417***	2.731–4.275	242 %
Hhold size (+1)	1.386***	1.319–1.457	302 %	1.218***	1.163–1.274	21 %
Experienced GBV	3.801***	1.704–2.880	39 %	3.216***	2.796–5.167	222 %
			280 %			

Note: (a) calculated using bivariate logistic regressions (b) *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1 (c) OR = Odds Ratio; CI = Confidence Interval
1 Kitchen user refers to at least one household member accessing a community kitchen in the last 4 weeks.

The results of the regressions suggest **how different socio-demographic characteristics** impact the odds of experiencing food moderate or severe food insecurity.

- Households with at least one employed member were significantly less likely – by approximately 73 % in Round 1 and 72 % in Round 2 – to experience moderate or severe food insecurity.
- Households with at least one formally employed member were significantly less likely – by approximately 42 % in Round 1 and 31 % in Round 2 – to experience moderate or severe food insecurity.
- Households headed by two adults were significantly less likely – by approximately 54 % in Round 1 and 42 % in Round 2 – to experience moderate or severe food insecurity compared to single-headed households.
- Each additional household member increased the odds of being moderately or severely food insecure by 39 % in Round 1 and 22 % in Round 2.
- Female-headed households were significantly more likely – by approximately 65 % in Round 1 – to experience moderate or severe food insecurity compared to male-headed households, while the effect was not statistically significant in Round 2.
- Households with food system actors were significantly more likely – by approximately 134 % in Round 1 and 63 % in Round 2 – to experience moderate or severe food insecurity compared to households without food system actors. The survey classified food system actors as those who are street vendors, own spaza shops, work in spaza shops, process food, work or volunteer in a community kitchen, transport food, work at a supermarket or restaurant, or are engaged in other food-related activities.
- Households who visited a community kitchen in the four weeks prior to the survey had higher odds of being moderately or severely food insecure compared to households that did not visit a community kitchen in the four weeks prior to the survey.
- Households that visited a community kitchen in the four weeks prior to the survey were significantly more likely – by approximately 301 % in Round 1 and 242 % in Round 2 – to experience moderate or severe food insecurity compared to those that did not.
- Respondents who experienced gender-based violence were significantly more likely to face moderate or severe food insecurity. In Round 1, they were nearly three times (282 %) more likely to experience food insecurity compared to those who did not experience GBV, while in Round 2, they were 222 % more likely.

The findings highlight critical factors that influence food insecurity. Employment is serving as a protective factor. Larger household sizes, single households, and GBV experiences exacerbate risk. Involvement in food-related activities and visiting community kitchens correlate with higher food insecurity, suggesting that these households may be facing broader challenges that go beyond direct food access.

We observe differences between the two rounds in three categories and examined the survey data to understand the decline in food insecurity odds for food system actors. This change is particularly evident in the Cape Winelands where, in Round 1, many respondents reported not working on farms, whereas in 2024, more had seasonal jobs and identified as being employed within the food system. Despite this shift, food insecurity remained high in this area regardless of employment status. However, the increase in seasonal employment likely contributed to the lower measured impact of being a food system actor on food insecurity in Round 2.

A difference in the likelihood of food insecurity among households that visited the community kitchen was noted between rounds: it decreased from 301 % in Round 1 to 242 % in Round 2. In most sites, and particularly in Bridgetown, kitchen operations increased in 2024 and have provided more consistent or widespread support, potentially helping some households stabilise their food security. As a result,

while households relying on community kitchens were still significantly more food insecure than those who didn't, the gap slightly narrowed in Round 2, reflecting a potential mitigating effect of expanded food relief through established community kitchens.

4.5 Agency

Since the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE, 2020) recognised agency as a fundamental pillar of food security, the concept has played a central role in our research (see Epilogue). Understanding where individuals and communities perceive their ability to effect change is crucial for identifying pathways toward more just and resilient food systems. This research sought to explore the extent to which communities feel they have the power to influence their diets, shape the availability of food, and raise concerns about food-related issues.

Through community food dialogues conducted since 2020, FACT actively fostered awareness and political education within research sites, strengthening local capacity to engage with food system challenges. Agency can be conceptualised in multiple ways, but fundamentally, it begins with knowledge – both access to information and the ability to use it to make informed decisions. As Amartya Sen's work (1981) on capabilities suggests, empowerment is not just about formal rights but also about the ability to exercise them meaningfully within social and political structures.

To assess this, we asked households whether they feel empowered to change their diets, whether their communities can influence the availability of food, whether they know how and where to raise food-related concerns, and whether they believe their communities have a collective voice in shaping food-related policies and decisions. By examining these dimensions, we can better understand the role of agency in navigating food insecurity and advocating for systemic change.

Agency, in our work, refers to the capacity of individuals and communities to access and control resources required for food production and consumption, to secure accurate information about food and food systems, and to exercise their Right to Food within a legal jurisdiction (HLPE, 2020). Achieving agency is both an individual and collective endeavour, requiring sufficient knowledge and the power to effect change. By understanding where communities feel informed and empowered, this work highlights the gaps and opportunities to enhance capabilities and freedoms within the food system. The following section presents an overview of results gathered from participants, shedding light on their perspectives and experiences in this domain.

The household survey questions tackling dietary choices and food governance participation emerged from FACT's food dialogues (see Buthelezi & Libuke, 2024; Buthelezi & Metelerkamp, 2022). Food dialogues are discussions with community members hosted by FACT that destigmatise hunger and guide community members in identifying key challenges, opportunities, priorities, and action plans for more democratic and localised food systems.

Respondents answered survey questions using the following Likert scale.[13]

- All the Time: This indicates that the perception occurs constantly, without exception.
- Most of the Time: This represents frequent perception but allows for occasional exceptions. The behaviour or event happens regularly and is common but not constant.
- Sometimes: This is a moderate level of frequency, implying that the perception occurs occasionally or intermittently. It happens often enough to notice, but not regularly.

13 The Likert scale is a psychometric scale commonly used in surveys and questionnaires to measure people's attitudes, opinions, perceptions, or behaviours and allows respondents to express the intensity of their feelings or agreement with a given statement.

- Rarely: This signifies infrequent occurrence. The perception happens sporadically or only under certain conditions, with long gaps in between.
- Not at All: This means the perception does not occur. It represents the lowest level of frequency, essentially a complete absence.

Diet-related agency

Figure 14, focusing on individuals' ability to change their diets according to preferences, indicates persistent constraints, with a notable proportion of participants in both rounds reporting limited or no ability to adjust their diets as they desire. While there was a slight improvement from Round 1 to Round 2, the low percentage of those feeling empowered "all the time" (from 8 % in Round 1 to 14 % in Round 2) underscores ongoing challenges. Figure 15, which explores the perceived

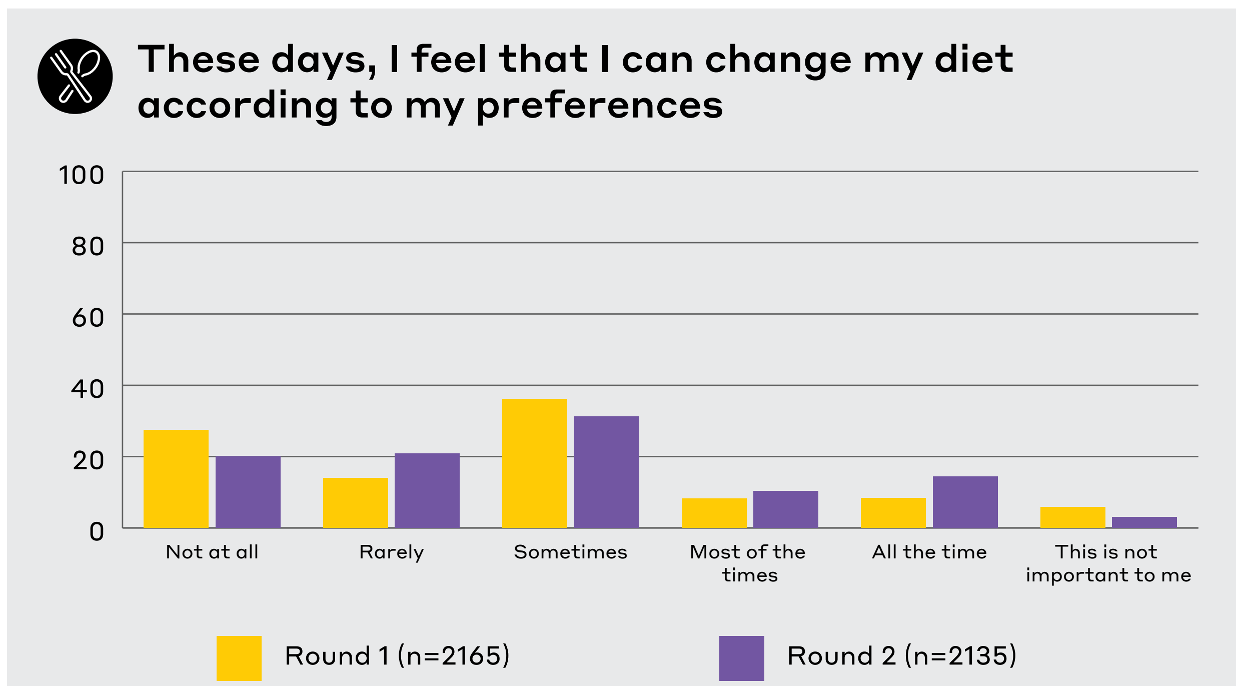


Figure 11 Individual perception of agency over dietary choice

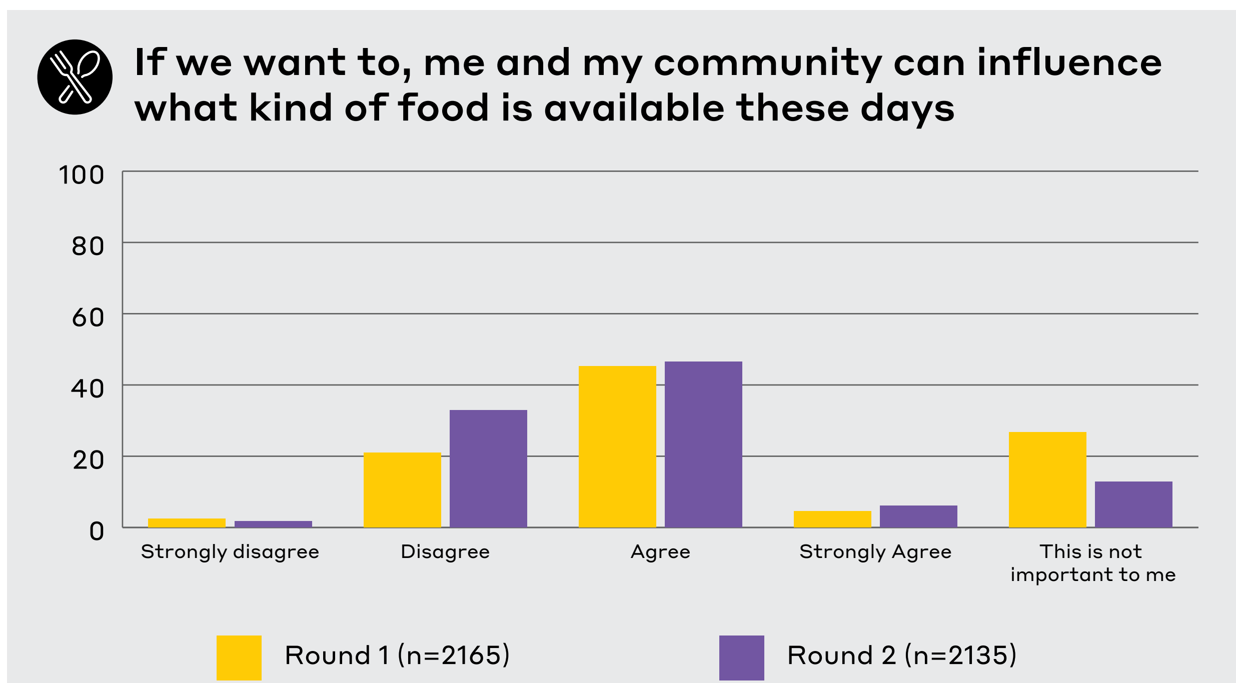


Figure 12 Individual perception of community's agency to influence food availability

collective ability of communities to influence the types of food available, shows a more positive perspective, with consistently high levels of agreement (45 % in Round 1 and 46 % in Round 2).

Round 1 took place during the winter when heavy rains and taxi strikes may have limited food availability and, therefore, participants' responses around individual choice. Although physical food availability – via supermarkets and spaza shops – was present in most research sites, affordability remained a critical barrier.

Agency for participation

The findings for the next indicator show the perceptions of community influence on the food system. 50% respectively 53% indicated to agree with that, an additional 9% in both rounds strongly agrees. A minority found the issue unimportant (12–14%) and a very small proportion strongly disagreed (2% in both rounds).

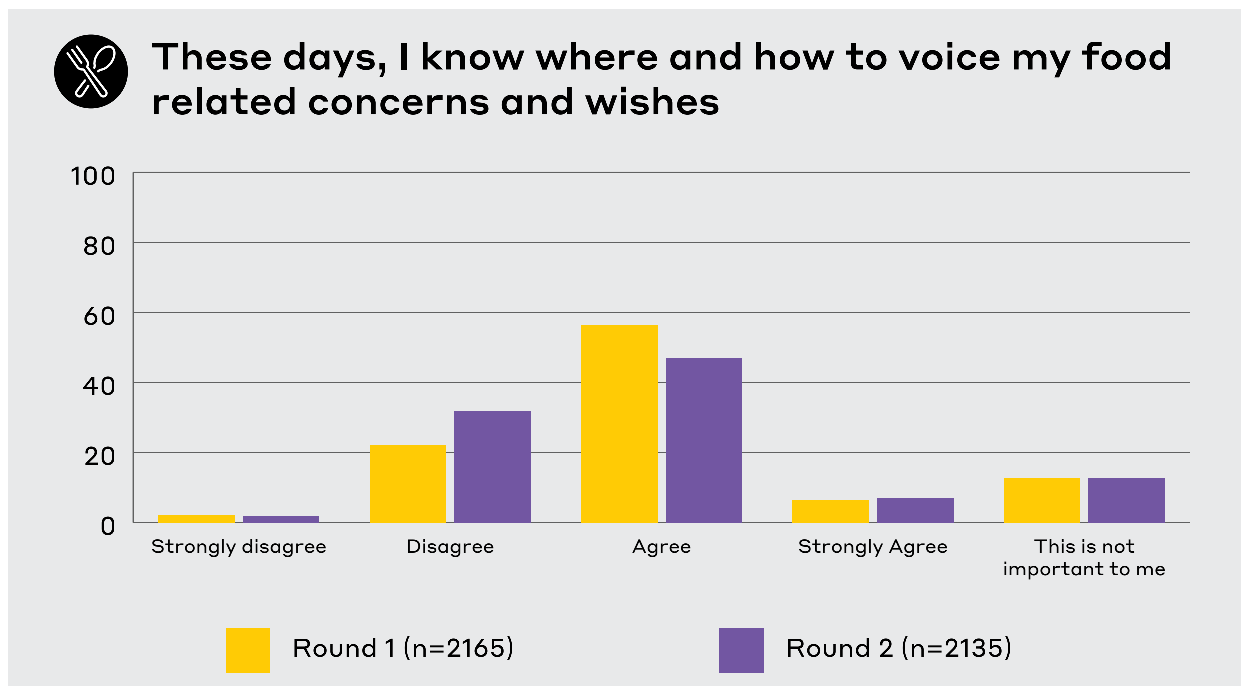


Figure 13 Individual perception of communities' power to change food systems through participation

Situating the results in context

A potential explanation for this paradox lies in the distinction between perceived and actual agency. Perceived agency refers to an individual's belief in their ability to make decisions and influence their circumstances, whereas actual agency concerns the capacity to enact meaningful change within structural constraints (Sen, 1999). Respondents may feel they possess the knowledge and strategies to influence their diets, yet structural barriers such as poverty, fluctuating incomes, and over-reliance on informal food systems restrict their ability to act on this knowledge.

Our research indicates that individuals in food-insecure communities adopt a range of coping mechanisms, such as meal stretching, prioritising certain foods, or leveraging social networks to mitigate food shortages. These strategies provide a sense of control, albeit within a limited set of choices. Additionally, informal social protection systems – such as community kitchens and local mutual aid initiatives – serve as crucial safety nets, reinforcing a perception of influence over food access, even though these mechanisms remain precarious and insufficient to address food insecurity at scale. Therefore, while individuals may perceive a degree of control, this agency is highly circumscribed by economic precarity and systemic constraints that ultimately shape their food security outcomes.

Moreover, this contradiction highlights the disconnect between individual agency and structural transformation. Although individuals may believe they can voice their concerns about the food system, meaningful change requires more than personal expression – it demands institutional responsiveness, political will, and systemic reform. The participation of some individuals in initiatives such as the FACT food dialogues demonstrates a platform for engagement.

Whilst these dialogues were conducted twice a year and aimed at reaching a wider audience, it is only 7 % in the overall sample size (n = 2,135) who know that the dialogues exist and after the enumerators explained the concept of the dialogues (the survey included a description section) 43% of the respondents considered that a strategic roll-out of community dialogues could make a difference in including communities' voices into food governance.

The area where most of the respondents knew of the dialogues was Mfluni (25 % of respondents) followed by Gugulethu (8 %) and the Cape Winelands (6 %). In Hanover Park and Bridgetown, FACT started hosting dialogues in 2023, while this practice goes back to 2021 in Mitchells Plain, Mfuleni and Gugulethu.

An important observation from these dialogues is that transformation often takes longer than communities anticipate.

It is crucial to recognise that mere expression does not automatically result in change; developing new policy programmes and frameworks frequently requires multi-year processes.

Simply articulating demands does not equate to structural change, especially in contexts where decision-making power is concentrated in state and market institutions that may be unresponsive to grassroots voices. The persistence of food insecurity, despite perceived agency, suggests that existing mechanisms for community participation do not translate into substantive policy shifts or resource redistribution. This underscores the need for more robust pathways of engagement between communities and formal governance structures, ensuring that expressed agency is not merely symbolic but materially transformative. Without such systemic shifts, communities may continue to perceive agency while remaining trapped in cycles of food insecurity that they are unable to disrupt.

5 There is a human face behind the numbers

The crowdsourcing data reveals a concerning deepening and broadening of food insecurity over the last five years. In 2023, a significant portion of households were classified as moderately or severely food insecure, with the situation deteriorating further in 2024. The decline in food-secure households between 2020 and 2024 suggests fewer families can cope with food insecurity without resorting to coping strategies.

However, beyond these statistical findings, the research focused heavily on understanding the human experiences behind the data. This was achieved through qualitative methods, including reading circles, community food dialogues, and data digests. By combining quantitative crowdsourced data with qualitative research, the team facilitated the co-creation of knowledge through narrative analysis and storytelling. Sharing personal stories allowed for a deeper exploration of the emotional and psychological impacts of food insecurity, such as feelings of shame and inadequacy. These insights not only informed social accountability strategies but also highlighted the need for empathy and healing.

The following sections provide a summary of the qualitative research findings.

5.1 First data digest in 2023: From the pandemic to the polycrises

After each round of household data collection (see Chapter 4), a data-digest workshop was held. These workshops, typically lasting three days, were held outside Cape Town to minimise travel burdens, included the 18 enumerators, women who manage community kitchens, and other community members, who are engaged in the co-research process.

The first data-digest workshop focused on interpreting datasets, equipping enumerators and co-researchers with the tools to relay the findings to their communities. During this session, participants jointly developed a shared understanding of the data and its significance. The term "data digest" emerged, reflecting the emotional toll of the process. Enumerators, who came from communities grappling with food insecurity and violence, expressed profound personal reflections. One participant remarked:

» Knowing that me, my family, my neighbours and many in our community are part of the charts is difficult to comprehend. It is even more difficult to understand that most of us are on the red bar [severely food insecure]. I didn't think it was so hard in our communities. «

Photo 5 Gallery walk with photovoices. Paganini, 2022

Another participant added:

»Without social grants, the red part of the diagram would be much higher. Without our grannies and their SASSA grants, many families would have no income – unless they manage to send a child to university and secure a bursary. In my family, we don't use it for books, transport to campus, or moving into a student apartment; instead, we use it to pay for electricity, water, and other family needs.«

The first data-digest workshop focused on interpreting food security data, analysing coping strategies, the role of social grants, and exploring the correlation between gender-based violence (GBV) and food insecurity. Those discussions set the stage for the subsequent in-depth qualitative analysis alongside the statistical review. One participant remarked:

»Embodied experience is not only about knowing that so many in our communities really struggle to make ends meet; it is also about the pain in our bodies that needs to be released after interviewing so many people and listening to their stories.«

Narrative Analysis

The narrative analysis examined data from interviews, focus groups, and personal reflections collected during the data-digest workshops. This method identified recurring themes, patterns, and lived experiences, providing deeper insights into the statistical findings. Key themes that emerged include emotional distress, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of systemic inequities. An iterative approach was used to categorise narratives, thus highlighting both individual and collective experiences. Key themes developed during this process include:

Emotional Distress and the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)

The Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) serves as a robust tool for quantifying the physical manifestations of hunger; however, it fails to account for the significant emotional distress experienced by individuals facing food insecurity. Qualitative narratives consistently reveal pervasive feelings of shame and psychological suffering, highlighting the inadequacy of purely quantitative measures in capturing the full scope of food insecurity. The lived experience of food deprivation extends beyond mere caloric insufficiency, encompassing profound emotional burdens that shape individuals' well-being and social interactions. Addressing these psychological dimensions is essential for developing a more comprehensive understanding of food insecurity.

Coping Strategies and Polycrises

Since 2020, there has been a marked increase in the adoption of coping strategies as communities navigate overlapping and compounding crises. This phenomenon has given rise to the concept of "polycrises," which describes the convergence of multiple, interrelated stressors that amplify societal vulnerabilities. Examples include geopolitical conflicts, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine, alongside economic inflation, energy shortages (e.g., loadshedding), and rising gender-based violence (GBV). In response to these multifaceted challenges, social cohesion has emerged as a critical factor in resilience. Strong community networks – often referred to as social capital in scientific discourses – play a fundamental role in facilitating collective adaptation. Without these interpersonal and often informal support systems, coping with the cascading effects of polycrises would be exceedingly difficult.

Structural Inequities and Violence

Violence is a pervasive and multi-dimensional issue, extending beyond physical acts to include verbal abuse, threats, and systemic oppression rooted in patriarchal structures. In communities such as the Cape Flats, gang violence has emerged as a particularly urgent concern, shaping both social interactions and economic survival strategies. Mapping the region's food landscape has revealed intricate connections between formal and informal food systems, where street vendors purchase supermarket goods in bulk and resell them in smaller portions, ultimately reinforcing the dominance of the larger food industry. Violence, in its various manifestations, is embedded in daily life, influencing economic activity, mobility, and psychological well-being. Although quantitative measures struggle to fully capture the extent of this embedded violence, community narratives highlight its inescapable presence, underscoring the need for holistic interventions that address both structural inequities and lived experiences of food insecurity.

The integration of narrative analysis contextualises the quantitative findings, offering a more comprehensive understanding of food insecurity. The concept of "polycrises" has become central to the research discussions since the first data digest in 2023. As one co-researcher remarked:

»It's not that polycrises came out of the blue. We always speak in the research about C-R-I-S-E-S and never crisis, we don't wake up and say good morning loadshedding, there you are. We wake up and our children are hungry, our boys fight in gangs, our girls don't go to toilets in the middle of the night because it's too dangerous and the mealie meals are too expensive to buy enough for a whole month. They say it's because of their war [Russia's war in the Ukraine] but do they know, we have a polycrises because of their war, does our government know we have a polycrises because of their corruption.«

To further explore polycrises, we curated a "polycrises dinner", where each course symbolised different facets of the crises. We posited that recipes for resistance exist, as exemplified by the capacity of Capetonian women to nurture social capital during times of crisis (see Paganini & Khan, 2023). The dinner served as a metaphorical exploration, helping community members and researchers reimagine everyday practices such as cooking a dish which symbolically represents a crisis. The starter, cooked in dimmed lighting using fire and paraffin, symbolised the energy crisis and consequently a risk of fire hazard through changed ways of cooking, for example using open fire. The second course, eaten alone in isolation, reflected the loneliness of the COVID-19 pandemic. This dish also alluded to the paradox wherein many individuals, despite increased hunger, began to focus on food preparation – engaging in fermentation and sourdough production – once they could afford to do so. The main course, an empty plate of staple food, symbolised the high cost of food, and the final egg dish served as a multifaceted symbol of gender-based violence: representing fertility, fragility, and femininity on one hand, and masculinity on the other. The dinner concluded with a digestif and posing challenging questions, like, "Where do the pockets of hope lie? And, are those pockets sufficiently deep to lay a new spread on our table?"

Starter

1st course

Main course

Hard to swallow

5.2 Second data digest: Getting the story out and telling it well

The second data-digest workshop, held in 2024, revisited the central question posed in the first workshop: "Where do the pockets of hope lie?" With the second round of household data collected, we compared crowd-sourced data indicators across two seasons. Identifying these "*pockets of hope*" became the guiding framework for synthesising the key messages of the research. This session was inspired by Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) decolonial methodology, particularly her emphasis on "getting the story out and telling it well". The research reaffirmed that statistics alone are insufficient; each number carries a story that must be told. Every statistic is only as good as the lived-experience that contextualises the message behind the number. This challenge – producing narratives that are academically rigorous, persuasive for policymakers, and accessible to the communities they represent – shaped the methodology used in the research. The second component was addressed in the second data-digest workshop, a three-day session designed to contextualise the findings from both the quantitative analysis (see Chapter 4) and the four-year action research process (see Chapter 6) for the *pots and pens campaign*.

To refine this narrative, we employed a combination of focus group discussions and arts-based research, specifically lino printing. The themes emerged from this process speak to the perceived non-recognition by communities, increasing violence and the role of community kitchens and were summarised by Sanelisiwe Nyaba and Bonnie Libuke and described in the next sections:

Strategically Undervalued Communities: The Impact of Spatial Planning in Cape Town

One striking finding was correlation between geographic location and food insecurity. This is not coincidental; rather, it is a direct consequence of systemic injustices that have deliberately positioned marginalised communities on the periphery of Cape Town. The spatial legacy of Apartheid remains embedded in contemporary urban planning, ensuring that low-income communities are physically and economically distanced from essential services, economic opportunities, and affordable food sources.

Food insecurity is inextricably linked to income inequality, as households with limited financial resources are forced to make difficult choices between essential expenses, including food. This leads to reliance on low-cost, highly processed foods, contributing to negative health outcomes. Additionally, the high cost of transportation exacerbates food insecurity, as many residents struggle to access affordable grocery stores. Our research reaffirms previous findings that demonstrate a clear correlation between income constraints and food. It is critical to acknowledge the enduring impact of apartheid-era spatial planning, which continues to structurally exclude marginalised communities from the formal food system.

Violence on the Body: How Food Insecurity Violates the Body

Food insecurity is not merely an economic or logistical challenge; it is a form of embodied violence. The data revealed a significant correlation between food insecurity and GBV, shedding light on the emotional and physical toll of this lived experience.

GBV is a pervasive violation of human rights in South Africa, rooted in patriarchal norms and sustained by intersecting power inequalities, including gender, race, class, and sexuality. The relationship between GBV and food insecurity is particularly pronounced: women who experience economic, social, and physical violence often have limited access to financial resources, employment, and education – factors that directly impact their food security. Moreover, trauma caused by GBV affects women's ability to participate in food-related activities, further exacerbating cycles of poverty and hunger.

Placing the human body at the centre of this analysis allows for a critical re-examination of food insecurity as a form of structural and interpersonal violence. The inability to access nutritious food is both a reflection of economic hardship and an embodied struggle that manifests in physical deprivation, chronic stress, and deteriorating health outcomes.

Community Kitchens Beyond Hunger

The role of community kitchens emerged as a key theme. Early reflections on this subject were captured in the Uphakanini podcast series, and over time, the research has identified the social functions that extend beyond the provision of food. While they provide food, they also serve as spaces for social cohesion, safety, and resistance.

Co-researching managing these kitchens questioned how to define success: Is it merely feeding more people as hunger grows, or transforming lives so that food aid is no longer necessary? What happens when the ultimate goal – a food-secure community – renders these kitchens obsolete?

As community kitchen organisers increasingly recognise the intersection of food insecurity and GBV, they have taken proactive steps to create safe spaces and identify vulnerable individuals. This underscores the broader social function of these kitchens, which not only address hunger but also provide refuge, solidarity, and empowerment.

From here, where to?

The data digest reaffirms the critical role of community kitchens in addressing food insecurity. However, it also poses an important question: What happens to these spaces in an utopian future where hunger no longer dictates their existence? While community kitchens are essential in times of crisis, their broader social function – building social capital, fostering community cohesion, and providing spaces for dialogue, resistance, and care – remains invaluable. As such, the research recognises community kitchens as critical sites of social transformation. If nurtured, these spaces can evolve from temporary solutions into foundational elements for a more just and food-secure society.

6 Coping with crises: Feminist action research with Community kitchens

The following chapter delves into the role of community kitchens in Cape Town, a critical element of Pathway 1, which focuses on our pathway coping with crises (see Paganini & Weigelt, 2023). In collaboration with community kitchens, we implemented a theory of change aimed at supporting transformation processes through learning from community-led social innovation. Urban low-income communities are often faced with a range of crises and, during the COVID-19 pandemic when governments struggled to address food security amid economic collapse and curfews, community kitchens emerged as vital lifelines. This pathway sought to identify successful coping mechanisms that could be scaled, particularly by finding entry points for institutionalised collaboration between local governments and community kitchens.

In this chapter, we will explore the action research conducted between 2020 and 2024 with a network of 20 women managing seven community kitchens (see their location in Figure 14). We describe new ways to enhance the sustainability of these kitchens and outline three potential avenues for scaling their impacts. Finally, we examine international examples of good practice to inform future initiatives in Cape Town and beyond.

6.1 Context – It started with COVID-19

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 profoundly disrupted societies worldwide, with significant implications for public health, economic stability, and food security. In South Africa, the government implemented stringent lockdown measures to curb the spread of the virus, including restrictions on movement, business operations, and informal trading. These measures, while essential to managing the epidemiological threat, amplified pre-existing vulnerabilities within marginalised communities, particularly those in urban areas like Cape Town. The initial lockdown phase shut down much of the economy and informal sector, depriving millions of their

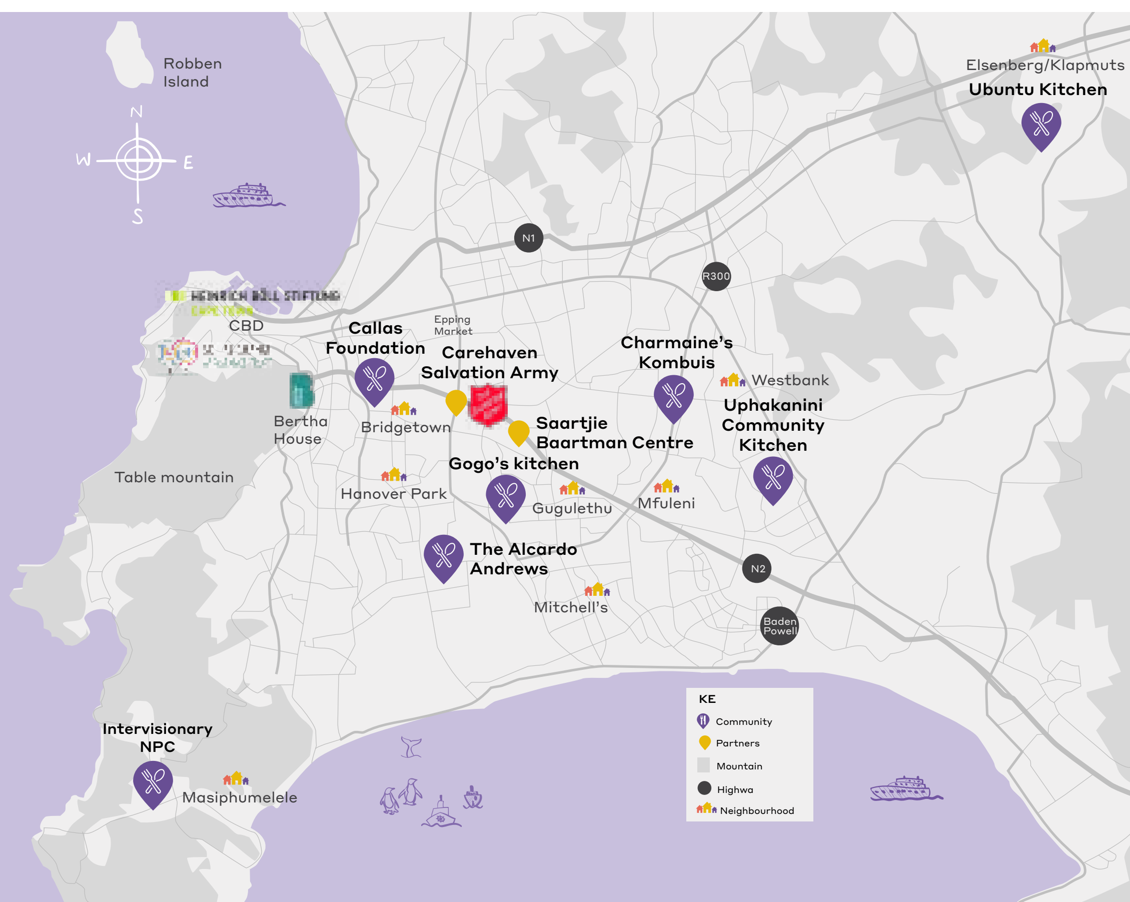


Figure 14 Map of the Cape Flats highlight the location of the community kitchens, which formed part of the action research

livelihoods and exacerbating already high levels of hunger and food insecurity. As a result, South Africa was identified as a "hunger hotspot" by Oxfam warning, of rising inequities and vulnerabilities among poorer households in cities (Oxfam, 2020a).

The COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying lockdown measures implemented to contain the spread of the virus had profound and multifaceted impacts on South Africa's food system. The sudden and prolonged restrictions on movement and business operations disrupted food production, distribution, and access, exposing the vulnerabilities of a system already strained by inequality. During the initial hard lockdown, informal food traders, a critical lifeline for many urban poor households, were forced to cease operations during the first weeks, leaving communities without access to affordable and locally available food. Supply chains were disrupted as border closures and transport restrictions delayed the movement of goods, leading to shortages of staple foods and increased prices, particularly for perishable items. These dynamics disproportionately affected low-income households, who spend a significant portion of their income on food and were already experiencing financial precarity. Over time, as subsequent lockdown phases varied in stringency, the cumulative impacts included a loss of employment in both the formal and informal sectors, heightened food insecurity, and an increased reliance on inadequate and unevenly distributed food relief programmes (Battersby, 2020; Kroll & Adelle, 2022; Paganini, et al., 2021).

The pandemic exposed the fragility and systemic inequities of South Africa's food system, which had failed to adequately address the needs of communities even before the crisis. The urban poor, unable to comply fully with lockdown measures due to overcrowded living conditions and reliance on public spaces for livelihoods, faced compounded risks of viral transmission and food insecurity. Job losses during the lockdowns meant that many households could not afford even basic food items, leading to widespread reliance on food relief aid. However, as Buthelezi et al. (2020) highlighted, these interventions were often inadequate, diminished by corruption, or inaccessible to those in need. The pandemic thus brought longstanding structural inequalities into sharp focus, prompting urgent discussions about the failures of neoliberal agro-food systems and the need for more equitable and resilient frameworks to ensure food security (Kesselman, 2023).

The heightened visibility of food insecurity during the pandemic also catalysed new forms of civic engagement and community cooperation. Food emerged as a central focus of public discourse, activism, and political debate. Communities organised mutual aid initiatives, protests, and dialogue to demand their constitutional right to food, bridging divides between technocratic policymaking and grassroots action. These efforts highlighted the necessity of addressing underlying inequities within food systems (Paganini & Weigelt, 2023). Against this backdrop, the question arose: how can communities, especially in urban settings like Cape Town, develop strategies to cope with and adapt to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic?

6.2 Context of polycrises

In mid-2023, following the formal cessation of COVID-19 prevention measures, households were asked during the first round of crowdsourcing data to identify the most significant crises they had faced over the preceding five years. This question aimed to capture a holistic understanding of community-level challenges and the evolving nature of perceived threats during and before the pandemic. The responses are summarised in Figure 17, which provides insights into the broad spectrum of crises experienced by respondents and highlights the continued impact of COVID-19 alongside other pressing issues.

Perceived crises in 2023 (n=2136)

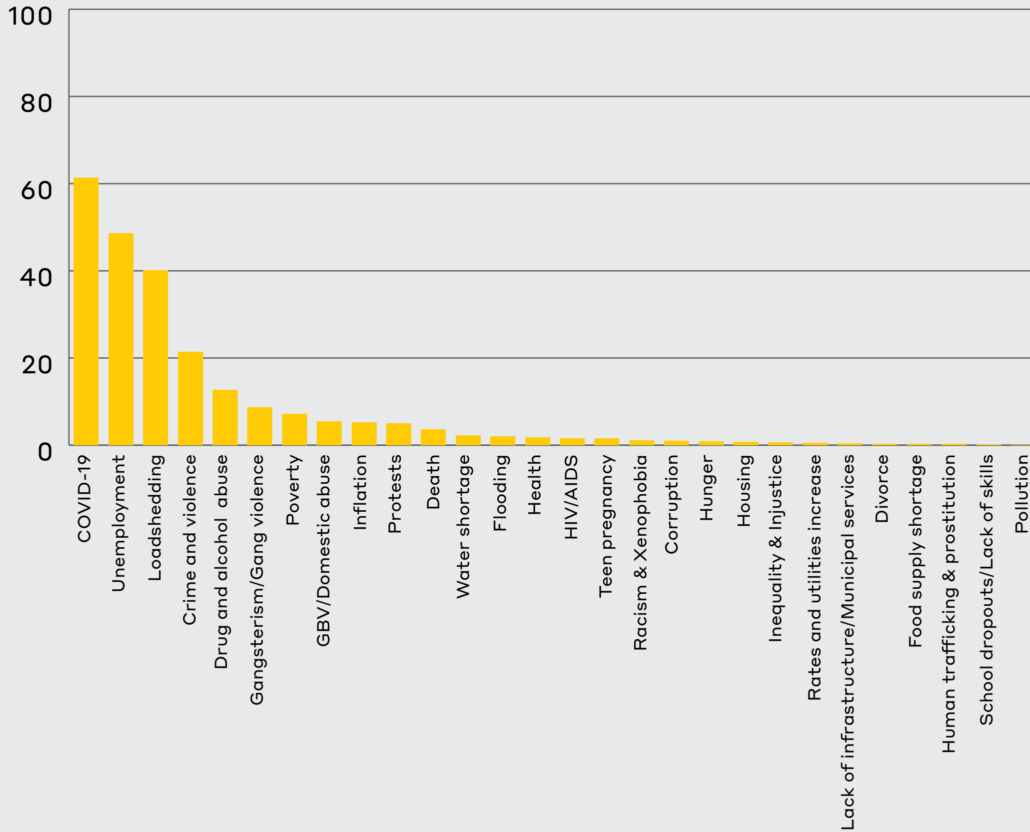


Figure 15
This diagram depicts 2,136 respondents' view of the crises that have affected their household in the last five years. This question was an open-ended question in Round 1, respondents could give more than one answer, and answers were categorised.

The graph illustrates that 61 % of respondents identified COVID-19 as the most significant crisis affecting their household, underscoring the profound and lingering effects of the pandemic on health, livelihoods, and daily life. This was followed by unemployment (49 %), reflecting the long-term economic disruptions and job losses exacerbated by pandemic lockdowns and subsequent economic instability. The third most commonly mentioned crisis was loadshedding (40 %), a persistent challenge tied to South Africa's ongoing energy crisis, which has disrupted livelihoods and further strained household resources. Other significant issues included crime and violence (21 %) and drug and alcohol abuse (13 %), both of which point to deeper societal vulnerabilities that have intensified during recent years.

Less frequently mentioned but still notable were crises such as gender-based violence/domestic abuse (9 %), poverty (7 %), and inflation (5 %), which reflect the complex interplay of economic, social, and structural inequities.

Concerns about protests (5 %), water shortages (5 %), and health (4 %) indicate the diversity of challenges faced by households, though they were perceived as less prominent than the leading crises. Issues like food supply shortages and housing, while mentioned by fewer respondents, reveal persistent struggles for specific segments of the population. The survey didn't reveal a different perception of crises per gender.

During a focus group discussion in 2023 with the enumerators (who were also residents of the surveyed areas), we unpacked their perception of why the pandemic continues to play a significant role in their community members' lives. Feedback from enumerators and community sessions revealed that respondents viewed COVID-19 as more than a health crisis; it symbolised the cumulative impact of economic and social disruptions. This included wide-spread job losses, particularly in the service sector, where many individuals have yet to recover from years of lost income. Additionally, respondents emphasised the psychological toll of

the pandemic, characterised by heightened feelings of loneliness, isolation, and uncertainty, as well as an escalation of violence and deepening social inequalities. To capture the interconnected and compounding nature of these challenges, the term polycrisis has been deliberately employed in the context of the Urban Food Futures programme, reflecting the multifaceted economic and social vulnerabilities that the pandemic exposed and exacerbated.

Polycrisis is a concept which describes a situation "where multiple crises intersect, heightening vulnerabilities and instabilities" (Paganini & Khan, 2023, p. 3). Crucial in the distinction of polycrisis to the state of multiple crises is the causal inter and intra-connectedness of polycrisis (Lawrence et al., 2024). Specifically, these crises include the lingering impact of the pandemic; global food and energy market volatility; geopolitical conflicts, political instability and unrest due to economic insecurity and political polarisation; and increasingly severe and unpredictable weather patterns caused by climate change (Lawrence et al., 2024). In Cape Town, our research supports the argument that we are in a polycrisis due to the global crises mentioned previously as well as gender-based violence and crime, unemployment, loadshedding (see Text box 2), and drug and alcohol abuse plaguing communities in the Cape Flats.

6.2.1 Food price crises

The general trend of rising food prices is occurring at global and local spheres. However, crisis levels of rising food prices received more attention as an after-effect of COVID-19 and the Russia–Ukraine war. Sihlobo (2022) cautions against an oversimplification of the reasons behind rising food prices in the case of South Africa. While these two major global events certainly impacted food prices, numerous other external shocks such as the drought in South America put pressure on South African food prices. Therefore, with or without COVID-19 and the Russia–Ukraine conflict, food prices would still be high, although likely to a lesser extent (Sihlobo, 2022).

The challenge of combating food insecurity is not an issue of supply given that South Africa produces enough food to feed its residents; instead, affordability[14] is a challenge for many households. On this premise, the Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice and Dignity Group (PMBEJD) also makes use of crowdsourced data to provide stronger empirical evidence of household affordability challenges nationwide, focusing on how low-income families navigate rising costs, job losses, stagnant employment, worsening food insecurity, deepening poverty, and entrenched inequality during a financial and economic crisis (PMBEJD, 2024). Low-income women have, for many years, monitored the price of a household food basket of 44 items every month in their communities of Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Mtubatuba, and Springbok. This crowdsourcing is similar to other early warning systems for potential food crises such as the FAO's Food Price Monitoring Analysis; however, the indexes developed by PMBEJD offer an analysis that represents food purchases by groups who are more at risk to adverse price shocks. Additionally, the methodology adopted by PMBEJD is unique in that it captures behaviour changes of the women who collect the data because they absorb the price shocks by switching to cheaper brands (PMBEJD, 2024). While the data provides good insights into the behaviour of local food prices, a notable weakness is that the index does not include foods sold informally.

The PMBEJD data reflects real, lived affordability, showing how wage levels and social grants measure up against food costs. However, a key limitation of their work is that it focuses on a specific demographic and does not represent national food price trends comprehensively. In contrast, the legal

14 "Affordability, in its simplest form, is relative to income levels and the cost of goods and services (expenses)" (PMBEJD, 2024, p. 6).

Right to Food framework assesses food security through broader structural indicators, including affordability, availability, and accessibility on a systemic level, often relying on government and international data. Food price rises directly impact whether people, especially low-income households, can afford a nutritionally adequate diet. If wages and social grants do not keep pace with food inflation, people are effectively denied their right to food. Affordability is a key dimension in determining whether food is economically accessible to all. We use PMBEJD data because it highlights general trends in food price inflation from the perspective of low-income households, making visible the daily economic pressures that affect food security in vulnerable communities.

PMBEJD's data on the monthly cost of a food basket in South Africa from 2020 to 2024 are presented in Figure 18. Nationally, the average cost rose from R3,221 in March 2020 to R5383,38 in December 2024[15], representing a total increase of approximately 63%.

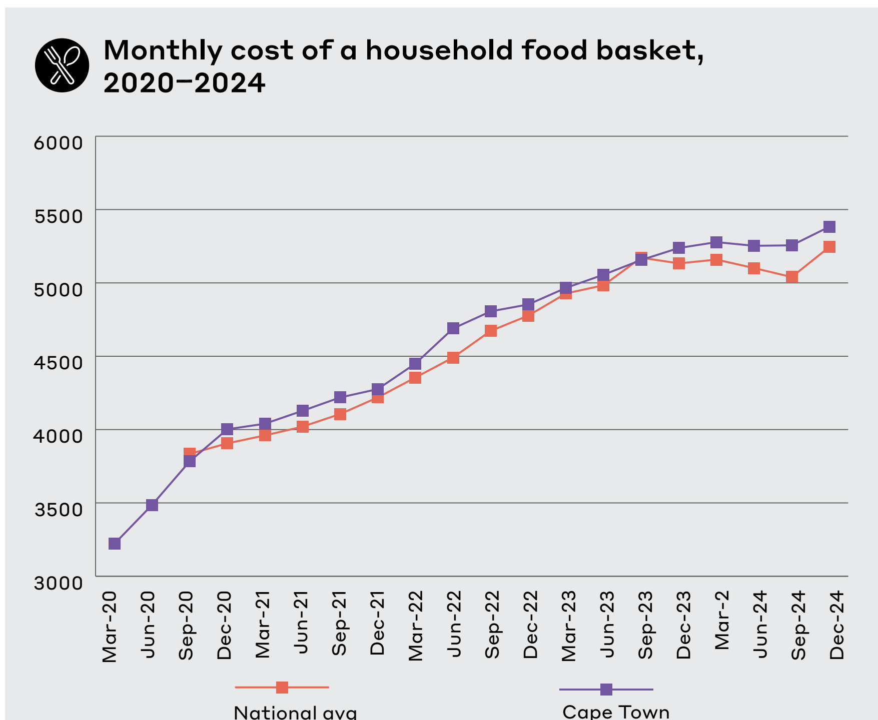


Figure 16 Cost of household food basket of 44 key food items. Source: PMBEJD, 2024

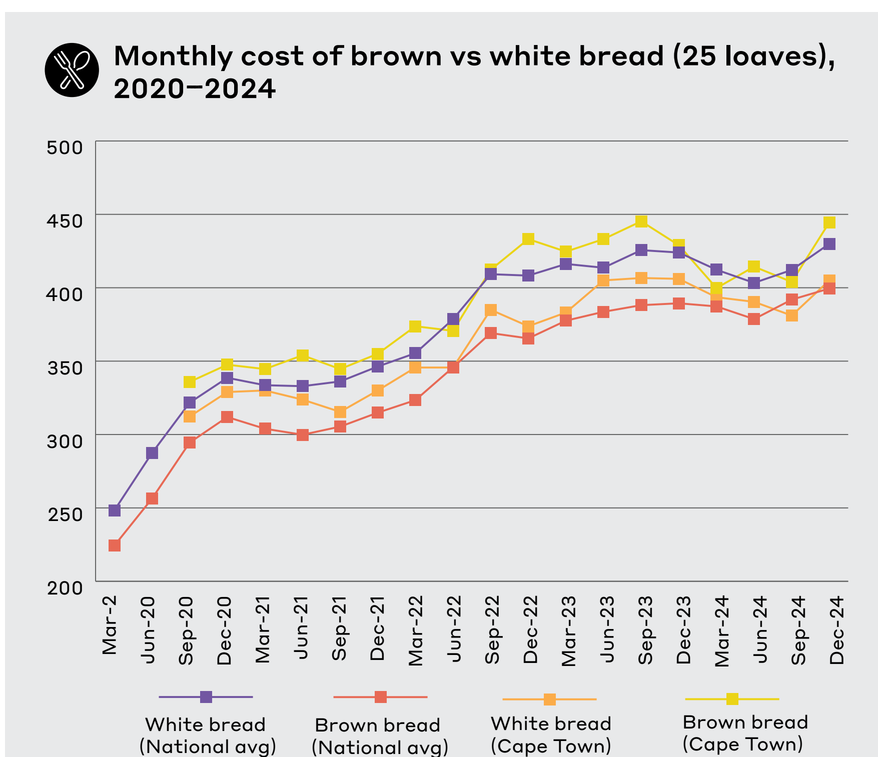


Figure 17 Bread prices in Cape Town and South Africa. Source: PMEJD 2024

15 R3221 – 169€ in February 2025 and R5383 – 283€ in February 2025

Cape Town, however, consistently records lower food basket costs than the national average. This trend can be explained by Cape Town's proximity to major agricultural production areas in the Western Cape, reducing transportation costs for certain foods. Additionally, the city's better infrastructure and access to local markets may contribute to more competitive pricing. However, despite these cost advantages, Cape Town residents still face affordability challenges due to income disparities and higher living costs in other areas like housing and transport.

Bread is a dietary staple in the Cape Flats, where it is an essential and affordable food source for low-income households. Brown bread is often preferred for its slightly lower cost and perceived health benefits, while white bread remains a popular choice for its texture and taste. The price of bread has seen a notable increase over the years. Nationally, the cost of 25 loaves of white bread rose from R248 in March 2020 to R412 in September 2024, a 66% increase. Similarly, brown bread prices increased from R224 to R391 during the same period, a 75% rise . In Cape Town, while bread prices initially remained lower, they eventually matched or exceeded the national average. For instance, in September 2024, white bread in Cape Town was priced at R414, slightly higher than the national average (PMBEJD, 2024).

The rise in bread prices, as indicated in Figure 19, can be attributed to multiple factors, including increases in wheat prices due to global supply chain disruptions, currency depreciation, and higher fuel costs, which inflate transportation and production expenses, particularly since Russia started its war on the Ukraine. Brown bread has also seen sustained demand due to its affordability, keeping its prices competitive, albeit still rising. For families in the Cape Flats, this steady price escalation strains already tight budgets, reducing the accessibility of this critical staple and further exacerbating food insecurity concerns.

6.2.2 Loadshedding and South African's energy crises

Text box 2: Shining a light on load shedding

Load shedding is defined as scheduled, regular power outages where part of the electricity network is shut down to prevent collapse of the entire grid and to mitigate against a potential national blackout (Walsh et al., 2021). A study examining the economic cost of load shedding in South Africa since it was first implemented in 2007 until 2019 found that loadshedding cost the country approximately R35 billion which is same as the financial crisis of 2008/9 (Walsh et al., 2021). The energy crisis disproportionately affects the most vulnerable and poorest households and further deepens existing inequalities in South Africa (Inglesi-Lotz, 2023). Income inequalities limit the access of vulnerable groups to absorb the impact of load shedding on their livelihoods and disruption to their daily lives (Inglesi-Lotz, 2023). In addition to the economic impact of load shedding, which continues even in 2024, research finds that some communities are exposed to more violence and safety concerns resulting from the persistent power outages as well as threatening social cohesion and the mental health of individuals (Marchetti-Mercer et al., 2024).

Our own crowdsourced data revealed how loadsheeding impacted communities. In 2023, survey participants were asked if and how load shedding impacted their household's daily life. To this, 31 % of households listed that it most impacted their meal preparations, rendering them "unable to cook" as well as affecting mealtimes, changing diets and buying pattern, sleeping without eating, eating cold food, and being unable to prepare bottles for feeding babies. Following that, 25 % of households said that loadshedding impacted their households by damaging appliances, electronic devices, geysers, electricity boxes, and lights. 14 % of

households pointed out that load shedding led to food loss/waste as food spoiled in the fridge. Others reported mental and physical health impacts of load shedding; for example, feelings of sadness or anxiousness, loss of use of electric medical devices, and inability to take medications that must be taken with food. Loadshedding also impacted household income for casually employed individuals and people who run their own businesses from home. Safety was often raised as the lack of street lighting and dark homes invited criminal activity such as break-ins.

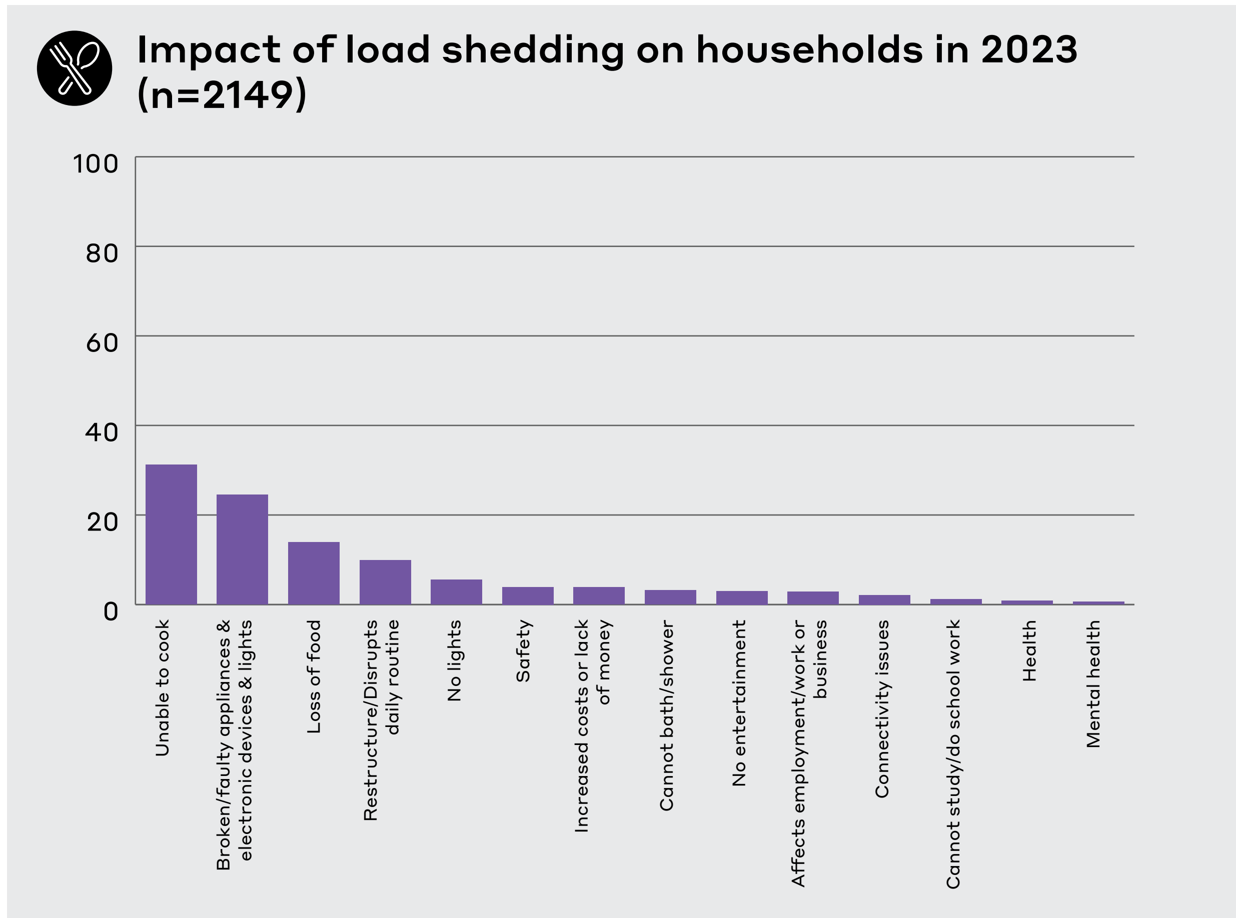


Figure 18 2,140 respondents' views of how loadshedding most affected their household was collected via an open-ended question asked in the first data collection round. Some respondents provided more than one answer.

6.2.3 Gender-based violence

Photo 6 GBV is a endemic crisis in South Africa. Callas Foundation 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic offers a poignant example of how crises can escalate GBV. During the first week of South Africa's national lockdown, GBV cases reported to the police surged by 30% compared to the same period in 2019 (MSF South Africa, 2020). UN Women-Africa (2020) also recorded a 37 % increase in the weekly average of GBV cases during the pandemic, highlighting the exacerbating multiplicative effect of crises on women's vulnerability. The tension caused by economic strain during crises leads to physical and verbal violence within households, further intensified by the loss of income and increased domestic burdens on women. Additionally, Dduring such times, women may resort to survival strategies, including engaging in transactional sex or even being coerced into forced marriages, as negative coping mechanisms aimed at securing financial security and safety for their families (Giovetti, 2019; UN Women, 2021). Women are most at risk of experiencing food insecurity and gender-based violence due to gender inequality (Iredale & Conrad, 2022; Masuku & Garutsa, 2021). These issues are interlinked and cannot be addressed in isolation. GBV in South Africa is particularly entrenched, as the country continues to grapple with the legacy of institutionalised racism, sexism, and structural violence, which have deep-rooted social and cultural impacts. This historical legacy, coupled with entrenched patriarchal norms, makes violence against women and children a pervasive and often accepted phenomenon, especially in rural and informal settlement areas (Alber et al., 2018).

Women are most at risk of experiencing food insecurity and gender-based violence due to gender inequality (Iredale & Conrad, 2022; Masuku & Garutsa, 2021). Polycrisis compounds this risk as it further entrenches gender inequality and worsens violence against women (BMZ, 2023; Tricontinental, 2023). In the Cape Flats, we see how women bear the brunt of polycrisis in two ways.

Firstly, due to the relationship that exists between GBV and food insecurity (Paganini, 2024), women experience more violence in the home from partners and family members or households or households are forced to adopt extreme coping strategies (Iredale & Conrad, 2022). To elaborate, gender inequality makes women more vulnerable to hunger as they often eat last and the least, and women are more at risk of experiencing violence because of unequal power dynamics and social norms when additional stressors from hunger appear (Iredale & Conrad, 2022). The scarcity of resources can intensify power imbalances and make women more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. This means that food insecurity exacerbates gender-based violence given that those who are more likely to experience hunger are also more likely to experience violence.

Secondly, most responders to the immediate crisis of hunger and food insecurity are women, both in terms of applied coping strategies and in terms of volunteering to support others. For example, most community kitchens are run by women, and women also make up the majority of volunteers who ensure that thousands of meals are prepared for community members (Paganini & Khan, 2023). Evidence suggests that women provide the majority of unpaid care work (ILO, 2018) with women in lower income household experiencing an even larger share of this burden (Dugarova, 2024).

Community kitchens were established in certain parts of the study area as a response to escalating violence, with the specific aim of alleviating tensions, through the provision of food particularly to men. This strategy has been successful in reducing violence within these communities. Statistical analysis highlights a clear link between food insecurity and gender-based violence. These findings suggest that addressing food insecurity could be an important factor in reducing gender-based violence. When we analysed data on the presence of gender-based violence in relation to food insecurity rates, a

clear connection emerged: individuals facing food insecurity were more likely to have experienced gender-based violence compared to those with greater food security.

Photo 7 Activists of the Callas Foundation. Singlee 2023

Photo 8 16 Days campaign against GBV with a protest organised by the Callas Foundation. Singlee 2023

6.2.4 Findings on the correlation between food insecurity and GBV in Cape Town

Our study revealed that there is a relation between having experienced gender-based violence and food insecurity. In 2023, 61 % of respondents who reported experiencing any form of gender-based violence were from households classified as severely food insecure. By January 2024, this figure had risen to 68 %. The findings indicate that the more severe the level of food insecurity, the higher the likelihood of gender-based violence occurring within the household (Paganini, 2024). The relationship between GBV and food insecurity becomes even more pressing when considering that crises such as pandemics, evictions, and climate change, often worsen the prevalence of GBV (Davies & Bennett, 2016; Wenham et al., 2020; WHO, 2007).

The data reveals that individuals who have experienced GBV are significantly more likely to face food insecurity than those who have not. For Round 1, the odds ratio (OR) is 3.801, meaning that individuals who experienced GBV were **280 % more likely** to be moderately or severely food insecure than those who did not. The 95 % confidence interval (1.704–2.880) suggests that the true effect is likely within this range, meaning the association is statistically significant. For round 2, the odds ratio (OR) is 3.22, meaning those who experienced GBV were **222 % more likely** to face food insecurity in this round compared to those who hadn't. The confidence interval (2.796–5.167) indicates statistical significance, suggesting a strong relationship between experiencing GBV and food insecurity.

The risk varies across different research areas. For instance, in Elsenburg, those who have faced GBV are twice as likely to be food insecure. In Gugulethu, the risk is almost six times higher, while in Bridgetown, survivors are 2.5 times more likely to struggle with food insecurity. In Mitchells Plain, the odds are approximately three times higher, and in Mfuleni the likelihood is 3.2 times greater. However, in Hanover Park, no significant correlation was found between GBV and food insecurity.

As the data shows, the relationship between food insecurity and GBV is not a matter of coincidence, but a strong, causal connection that highlights the need for integrated interventions.

Table 6 The correlation between having experienced GBV and food insecurity

	Odds ratios for being moderately or severely food insecurity for all research sites					
	Round 1			Round 2		
Independent Variables	OR	95 % CI	%	OR	95 % CI	%
Respondent experienced GBV						
Yes	3.801-1	1.704218 2.88019	280 %	3.22-1	2.796034 5.166639	222 %

6.3 The rise of community kitchens during Covid-19 and their role in Cape Town's food system

In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted livelihoods and intensified food insecurity, hundreds of community kitchens emerged across Cape Town to address the urgent need for sustenance (Paganini et al., 2021a). While many of these kitchens operated only briefly due to limited resources, their efforts were supported by food emergency relief funds managed by the Economic Development Programme (EDP). Local support groups, particularly the Cape Town Action Networks (CAN), played a crucial role by linking wealthier communities with these kitchens to provide much-needed assistance.

Text box 3: Cape Town Action Networks (CAN)

The Cape Town Action Networks (CANs) is a grassroots movement that arose in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. They are neighbourhood-based groups that organise resources and support to address the specific needs of their communities, emphasising local solidarity and mutual aid. Operating independently, each CAN prioritises local challenges, such as food relief, healthcare access, education support, and broader advocacy for systemic change. Despite their decentralised nature, CANs collaborate with one another, sharing resources and strategies to strengthen their impact across Cape Town, for example in online platforms hosted by different food system actors. CANs from wealthier areas sometimes partner with CANs from low-income areas to provide support during crisis. At their core, these networks are driven by a commitment to inclusivity and solidarity, fostering stronger, interconnected communities that work collectively to navigate both immediate crises and long-term inequalities (Paganini et al., 2021b).

In March 2020, the South African government intensified efforts to "flatten the curve" of the pandemic by enforcing stringent lockdown measures. These measures were formally introduced on 25 March 2020 under the Disaster Management Act of 2002, confining citizens to their homes unless they were involved in essential services or had essential reasons to leave. The lockdown was strictly enforced by the South African Police Service and the South African National Defence Force. Particularly concerning was the brutality faced by people living in densely populated, low-income areas during the "Stage 5 lockdown" (Knoetze, 2020). These harsh measures exposed the government's lack of understanding of how the poor access food, as well as the government's ongoing preference for large-scale formal food systems over informal ones (Battersby, 2020).

Initial regulations recognised *spaza* shops as essential services and allowed them to remain open. From 25 March 2020 onwards, however, all essential businesses had to register on a dedicated portal to obtain operating permits, effectively freezing the informal sector. In mid-April 2020, the Minister of Small Business Development announced that only South African-run *spaza* shops could trade. This sparked xenophobic attacks and the closure of operating shops ran by Zimbabweans or Nigerians. This statement was later rescinded and, by the fourth week of lockdown, permits were granted to spaza shops. As the lockdown continued, it became clear that the restrictions were exacerbating hunger in the country, as many people lost their livelihoods due to retrenchments and children were no longer able to access school meal programmes, which often provided their only meal of the day. In response, both local and national governments launched food parcel and voucher schemes, though these initiatives were often criticised for inconsistent and corrupt implementation (Buthelezi et al., 2020). A range of grassroots responses emerged, including self-organised networks that connected wealthier communities with

low-income areas to provide food and sanitiser (van Ryneveld, 2020). In Cape Town, new coalitions, such as the C19 Coalition, formed in solidarity to address a broad spectrum of issues, including the flaws in the agro-food system. These groups called for systemic transformation to better meet the food security needs of the poor. The Western Cape Economic Development Partnership (EDP) became a key coordinating body, virtually bringing together local and provincial governments to facilitate knowledge exchange and strengthen local resilience during the lockdown. The CANs (See box 3) supported emerging community kitchens in low-income areas. Often run by women from their private homes, these kitchens served as the only option at a time when the government failed to provide essential services and emergency relief.

Hundreds of community kitchens mushroomed in the first months of lockdowns. In 2021, a detailed study of 21 active community kitchens active in Gugulethu, including interviews with 113 kitchen workers, was conducted by Urban Food Future's partner, SUN Development. These kitchens, which were generally situated in formal areas of low-income areas, were typically run from private homes and operated without formal registration. Most of them had been established in 2020 during the initial wave of the pandemic. On average, a kitchen had a fluctuating team of five staff members who were typically middle-aged South African women with high school certificates who were receiving social income grants and lived close to the kitchens. The kitchens functioned on a limited schedule, usually opening on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays to serve lunch. The kitchens' offerings depended on available ingredients and often included staples such as soya, rice, potatoes, oil, and carrots. Protein-rich foods, though highly desired, were rarely included due to financial constraints. Meals were prepared using large pots on outdoor gas burners and distributed at the kitchen door in containers provided by customers, who usually chose to consume the food at home. Kitchens maintained a register of clients, the majority of whom were children and men from the surrounding communities. The majority of the kitchens in Gugulethu did not provide additional services, such as offering second servings or diversifying their menu, due to resource limitations (Battersby et al., 2022).

The kitchens were equipped with essential tools such as large pots, refrigerators, and preparation areas made available largely through funding from CANs, the EDP's coordination of relief programmes between April and September 2020, or the communities themselves. Kitchens faced numerous challenges, but most notable was their inability over time to meet growing demand due to food shortages and diminishing donations from both inside and outside the community. In 2021, securing consistent funding and supplies became increasingly difficult for these kitchens. The urgent need for ingredients and improved equipment underscored the precarious nature of their operations. Though they continued to play a vital role in their communities, their capacity to serve vulnerable populations remained heavily dependent on external donations.

Since 2022, the number of community kitchens in Cape Town has decreased as kitchens that continued to rely solely on donations and volunteers could not maintain operations while the demand for kitchens is still high. During Urban Food Future's two rounds of crowdsourcing data in 2023 and 2024, we inquired about households' reliance on kitchens in six research sites. In the first round, we specifically asked households whether they frequent the kitchens that are part of the action research (excluding Mitchell's Plain). In the second round, we broadened our scope, asking not about visits to specific kitchens but about the use of any kitchens within the research area (including Mitchell's Plain).

Percentage of households accessing community kitchens, by place

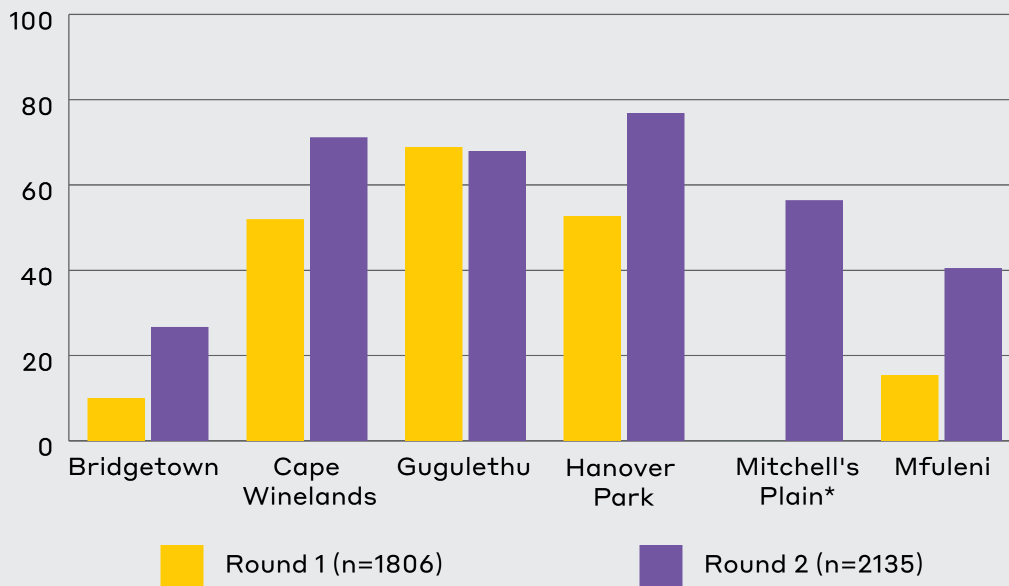


Figure 19 The diagram shows how many responds accessed community kitchens at least once per month in their communities. In the first round, we did not ask this question in Mitchell's Plain.

Results from the household survey show that household members from all communities make use of community kitchens. When asked if at least one member of the household accessed a community kitchen in the previous four weeks, 40% and 52% of households had done so in Round 1 and Round 2.

Though we worked primarily with Callas Foundation in Bridgetown, uPhakanini Kitchen in Mfuleni, Gogo's Kitchen in Gugulethu, Aunty Charmaine's Kombuis in Wesbank, Alcardo Andrews Foundation in Hanover Park, Intervisionary Kitchen in Masiphumelele, and Ubuntu in Klapmuts and Elsenburg (Cape Winelands), we are aware of other kitchens operating in the study area. We are aware of two kitchens in Bridgetown, six in Mfuleni, ten in Gugulethu, one in Wesbank, eleven in Hanover Park, two in Masiphumelele, and one in the Cape Winelands.

Serving as more than just a place to receive a meal, community kitchens have evolved into spaces where people seek advice, training, and safety. This is partly because the kitchen heads are well-connected leaders in their neighbourhoods. Most were already active in their community before opening a kitchen, engaging in initiatives such as violence prevention, serving as spokeswomen in neighbourhood watch groups, or participating in local councils. Many of these women have worked in community cohesion programmes and possess skills in facilitation and mentoring.

Their leadership is further demonstrated by the psychosocial support they provide to community members affected by gang violence, as well as their legal and emotional support for women and children who have survived gender-based and domestic violence. Additionally, kitchens distribute sanitary products and clothing to families in need, while some offer skills training for young people in gardening and literacy to enhance their employment prospects.

In recent years, kitchens have expanded their role by developing programmes such as women's circles and boys' programmes, which create safer spaces for boys and are facilitated by male role models who present positive alternatives to traditional male stereotypes. Other initiatives include collaborations with healthcare providers to facilitate health check-ups. Notably, during the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine, kitchens played a crucial role in supporting vaccination efforts. Some kitchens also serve as cultural hubs, hosting community events such as jazz performances.

Photo 9 uPhakanini community kitchen in Mfuleni. Libuke, 2025

Photo 10 Community kitchen at the Alcardo Andrews Foundation. Paganini 2024

Photo 11 Callas community kitchen. Nyaba, 2022

6.4 The economic model of a community kitchen

This section describes the setup of the seven community kitchens that participated in the implementation of the action research. The data presented here provides an overview of the kitchens, their services, and how they operate. The information in the following sections was gathered through a six-month documentation process, using bi-weekly surveys and monthly check-ins.

Data was provided by the Callas Foundation, uPhakanini Kitchen, Gogo's Kitchen, Aunty Charmaine's Kombuis, Alcardo Andrews Foundation, and Intervisionary Kitchen and Ubuntu Rural (see map of the kitchens, Figure 14).

The kitchen heads of these kitchens, along with some of their volunteers and FACT co-researchers, formed the Cape Town Kitchen Network. Together, we conducted action research over three years (see Methodology). The following chapters provide background information on the economic model of the kitchens from the network. This data was collected in 2024.

Table 7 Description of kitchens in the action research project

Community Kitchen	Dishing days	Kitchen staff	Average hours worked per person	Volonteers	Average hours worked per volonteer	ECD	Other services	Main funding source
Alcardo Andrews Foundation	5	2	8	12	6	yes	2 monthly, 2 twice a year, Opera Art, GBV, Hydroponics	unpaid, SASSA**
Callas Community Kitchen	5	10	8	5	8		6 monthly, 1 weekly, GBV, Boys programme	paid GBV projects
Charmaine's Kitchen	3	1	6	2	6		2 weekly Gardening, GBV	unpaid, SASSA
Intervisionary	5	5	8	3	4		1 monthly GBV, 1 monthly garden	paid GBV projects
Gogo's Community Hub	3	1	8	8	4		2 biweekly, 1 monthly, health education	unpaid, SASSA
Ubuntu	3	1	8	2	6	yes		
Uphakanini	3	1	6	2	6	yes	1 monthly gardening	unpaid, SASSA
Total kitchen network per month	108	21	Total hours: 3056	34	Total hours: 2144			

6.4.1 Meals served

Hot meals served at community kitchens include soup, stew, rice and beans, and other warm dishes. Some kitchens also serve peanut butter sandwiches when bread is donated. The number of sandwiches listed in the table is the monthly average. The quantity of food served in all kitchens varies with available resources.

Table 8 Number of hot meals and sandwiches prepared by each kitchen per month in 2024

Community Kitchen	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	Average sandwiches per month
Alcardo Andrews Foundation	24.150	20.000	22.000	26.500	26.250	26.250	26.000	1.418
Callas Community Kitchen	12.000	12.000	12.000	15.000	15.000	17.000	17.500	14.755
Charmaine's Kitchen	2.000	2.000	2.000	3.150	3.150	4.000	1.500	550
Intervisionary	7.500	7.890	10.684	10.325	10.325	8.295	5.670	-
Gogo's Community Hub	3.800	3.800	3.800	4.158	4.158	4.158	4.780	6.000
Ubuntu	1.200	1.200	1.200	1.200	1.200	1.200	1.200	
Uphakanini	3.600	3.600	3.600	3.780	3.780	3.780	3.150	
Total kitchen network	*54.250*	*50.490*	*55.284*	*64.113*	*64.113*	*64.683*	*59.800*	*22.723*

6.4.2 Food and running costs

Reported monthly expenses include the costs of food, with the estimated costs of donated food also factored into these calculations. The estimates are based on the kitchen network's costing guide, which allocates a cost per food item. Running costs cover expenses such as electricity, gas, petrol, Uber/taxi fares, and mobile phone data. Intervisionary, located in Masiphumelele on the Cape Peninsula, incurs significantly higher petrol costs due to its location. The Callas community kitchen serves as a hub for other kitchens. Over the years, the Callas Foundation has built numerous partnerships, resulting in significantly more food donations compared to other kitchens. These donations, primarily consisting of dry foods and bread, are distributed by the Callas Foundation to other kitchens. Callas community kitchen, Intervisionary, and Ubuntu pay their staff using additional project funds and co-finance their kitchen operations through other activities.

Based on the table, we calculated the average monthly cost for the year, covering **11 months** to account for the fact that most kitchens close around mid-December and reopen in mid-January. The kitchen network, consisting of seven kitchens, has an estimated **annual cost**[18] **of R4,287,497.**

Table 9 Monthly expenditure and running costs per kitchen

Community Kitchen	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	Average cost per kitchen
Kitchen 1	58.000	60.00	60.000	62.000	64.800	66.400	60.000	
Average running costs per month	*13.600*	*13.600*	*13.600*	*13.600*	*13.600*	*13.600*	*13.600*	**526.400**
Kitchen 2	165.200	126.200	126.200	134.015	134.200	15.400	15.400	
Average running costs per month	*17.120*	*17.120*	*17.120*	*17.120*	*17.120*	*17.120*	*17.120*	**836.455**
Kitchen 3	2.000	2.600	1.500	2.934	6.000	1.200	1.500	
Average running costs per month	*4.400*	*4.400*	*4.400*	*4.400*	*4.400*	*4.400*	*4.400*	**48.534**
Kitchen 4	78.265	99.850	141.760	136.375	110.080	105.925	112.042,5	
Average running costs per month	*18.500*	*18.500*	*18.500*	*18.500*	*18.500*	*18.500*	*18.500*	**913.797,5**
Kitchen 5	26.850	28.000	27.000	20.100	30.000	29.000	26.850	
Average running costs per month	*7.300*	*7.300*	*7.300*	*7.300*	*7.300*	*7.300*	*7.300*	**238.900**
Kitchen 6	4.600	4.600	4.600	4.600	4.600	4.600	4.600	
Average running costs per month	*1.400*	*1.400*	*1.400*	*1.400*	*1.400*	*1.400*	*1.400*	**78.100**
Kitchen 7	7.800	9.800	8.000	15.400	7.800	9.800	9.700	
Average running costs per month	*2.560*	*2.560*	*2.560*	*2.560*	*2.560*	*2.560*	*2.560*	**86.220**
Total kitchen network								***2.728.406,5***

6.4.3 Own contributions

Table 10 Own contributions per kitchen from May to October

	Alcardo Andrews Foundation	Callas Community Kitchen	Charmaine's Kombuis	Gogo's Kitchen	Intervisionary	Ubuntu	uPhakanini
Total own contribution 6 months	7.800	28.000	11.434	19.000	90.000	0	22.500
Total costs last 6 months	452.800	803.935	42.634	204.750	783.255	67.000	73.960
Per centage paid through own contributions	2	3	27	9	11	0	30

A portion of the monthly expenditure was covered out of pocket, accounting for a percentage of the total expenses. These own contributions included SASSA grants, personal funds, money from family, donations from the immediate community, and income generated through jobs and consultancy work. For example, Intervisionary generated income through GBV awareness programmes, while Uphakanini Kitchen earned funds through garden training. In both cases, the entirety of this income was directed into supporting their projects. Generally, the smaller the kitchens are (e.g., Charmaine's Kombuis and uPhakanini kitchen), the more own

18 R4,287,497 is the equivalent of 225.047€ in February 2025

contribution is required and the less economically sustainable the operation is. Project-funded kitchens (Callas Foundation and Alcardo Andrews Foundation) required few private contributions. Gogo's kitchen is not project funded, but receives income from the model "Food is not for free".

6.4.4 Price per plate in average based on 6 months

The following overview calculates the actual cost of a plate of food based on the documented expenses of kitchens for food, energy, and transport. The second calculation includes labour costs, assuming all kitchen heads and volunteers were paid. The rate of pay for staff was calculated at minimum wage and the rate of pay for volunteers was calculated based on the EPWP programme rates. Even with modest remuneration, the price of a plate of food is relatively low. However, both the current operational costs and the costs including labour exceed the kitchens' capacity in absence of external support or other income-generation models and are too high for the community to afford on a daily basis.

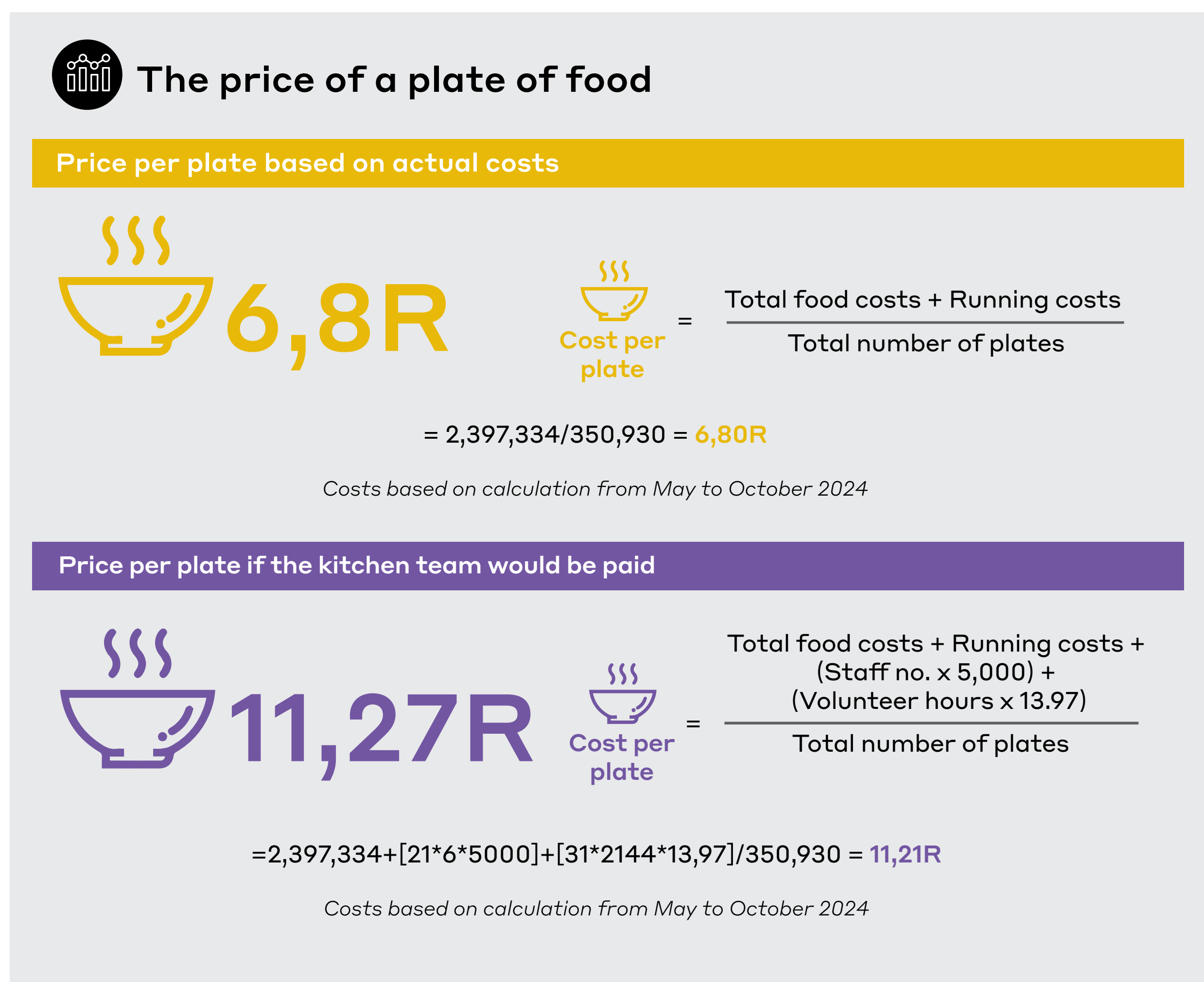


Figure 20 Costs of a plate of food vs what would a plate of food costs, if those working in the kitchens were paid a stipend

19 The EPWP (Expanded Public Works Programme) is a South African government initiative aimed at providing temporary employment and skills development opportunities for unemployed individuals, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It covers sectors such as infrastructure, environment, social services, and non-state (NGOs and community projects). Workers employed under the EPWP receive stipends rather than full salaries, based on government rates, which are generally lower than the national minimum wage

20 R6.80 is the equivalent of 0.35€ in February 2025

The average cost per plate of food was analysed using monitoring data collected from May to October 2024 and was initially calculated at 6.80R. This cost covers food costs, operational costs, and, where applicable, labour expenses for paid staff. Two alternative scenarios were then calculated. In this scenario, all kitchens compensate their staff and volunteers based on EPWP stipend rates for volunteers and minimum wage for staff employed by community-led organisations. Under this scenario, a plate of food costs approximately 11.27R.

6.4.5 GBV Cases

The following overview shows which kitchens provided GBV support through GBV first responders: documenting the case, providing medical and legal advice, and conducting client referrals to counselling services (within the network or externally) and to safe houses. The numbers here reflect the first contact, which typically consists of a two-hour session. In most cases, the kitchens provide follow-up support, including additional meetings and counselling sessions after the initial contact. This service, provided by the kitchen heads and, in some kitchens, also by the kitchen staff, is offered free of charge.

Table 11 GBV cases per kitchen per month in 2024

	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Alcardo Andrews Foundation	11	2	6	2	7	2	4	4	3	2	7	3
Callas Community Kitchen	23	49	30	41	64	68	42	75	62	39	26	15
Charmaine's Kitchen	5	1	3	2	2	5	4	0	0	0	1	0
Gogo's Community hub	4	3	6	4	1	1	6	11	8	4	2	2
Intervisionary	17	24	16	38	42	23	17	6	18	38	11	23
Ubuntu	0	10	2	3	5	5	10	10	22	25	30	7
uPhakanini	0	0	0	0	2	5	8	5	6	6	2	2
Total	**60**	**89**	**63**	**90**	**123**	**109**	**91**	**111**	**119**	**114**	**79**	**52**
											Total	**1100**

6.5 Co-research with community kitchens

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, community members' reliance on the kitchens for food provision has been growing. In 2023, 40 % of the house-holds in the six study sites accessed community kitchens, with this figure rising to 52 % in 2024. In 2021, collab-orated with community kitchen heads to rethink community kitchens through action research and raised the critical research questions: What models could make these kitchens more economically sustainable? How could these alternative models reduce fatigue for those who manage them?

In 2023, a design workshop was held as part of the Urban Food Futures research programme to develop new community kitchen models with kitchen heads and volunteers from each kitchen. These models explored alternative ways of operating the kitchens both economically and socially by adjusting aspects of the current setup. The goal was to design a community kitchen model that is more economically sustainable and less socially demanding. The two-day participatory workshop with kitchen heads and volunteers was framed through the lens of Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Systems Thinking methodologies which emphasise collaboration, shared learning, and a better understanding of current systems with a view of developing enhanced models. Discussions were facilitated using a World Café approach to animate an iterative

design process to prototype, discuss, and refine interventions based on participant feedback, culminating in the development of the following models:

- Stokvel
- Food is not 4 free
- Early Childhood Development
- Gardens 4 change
- Partnership 4 change

Following the two-day workshop, participants started to documented challenges and successes through digital, bi-monthly surveys in 2023 and 2024. The results of the surveys were used as input for the monthly gatherings of the kitchen heads. These challenges and successes were discussed in regular feedback sessions led by Callas Foundation head Caroline Peters to allow ongoing reflection and refinement.

The following section describes the key findings of the first phase for each model:

6.5.1 Action research phase I: Testing community kitchen sustainability models

Stokvel

Stokvels, a communal savings and credit system, plays a vital role in South Africa, especially among communities of Black women. These groups, averaging 15 members, provide economic access to food and credit for members who are often excluded from traditional banking systems. Commonly stokvels are used to pool resources for various purposes, such as savings, grocery purchases, and burial costs (Bophela & Khumalo, 2019). Stokvels emerged as a response to systemic exclusion from formal financial services during Apartheid, particularly among Black rural-urban migrants working in mines. Despite their informal nature, stokvels have shown remarkable flexibility and resilience, offering financial support during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Efforts to formalise stokvels, including partnerships with banks, aim to strengthen management and provide access to subsidies and legal frameworks. However, the impact of such integration remains to be seen (Hutchison, 2020).

The Stokvel model, when integrated into community kitchens, provides a financial support system through the network. The model's theory of change posits that by leveraging collective financial contributions and resource-sharing practices, community kitchens can improve their financial stability and provide a back-up system during emergencies. Through monthly private savings, kitchens gradually accumulate funds for bulk purchases of essential supplies. Kitchens contribute according to their ability, ensuring equitable support across the network, and are guided by the target of 250R[22] monthly contributions. A stokvel coordinator seeks matching grants and coordinates monthly meetings. In this way, the model imparts financial literacy to its members. Despite challenges such as varied financial capacities across kitchens, the model encourages a culture of collaboration and solidarity.

The research questions guiding the co-research around stokvels were:

- **How much can the kitchens contribute to the stokvel over one year? Is it possible to increase capital by seeking matching grants?**
- **How can the integration of the Stokvel savings model within community kitchens enhance financial sustainability?**
- **What challenges does the stokvel lead face in gaining consensus on stokvel spending priorities?**

What was tested – The kitchen network agreed to contribute R250-300 per kitchen monthly to a stokvel fund. In the second trial phase, the stokvel sought matching grants and discussed loan procedures.

22 R250 – 13€ in February 2025

Key findings

The kitchen network contributed R13,269 to the stokvel between August 2023 and December 2024[23]. A matching grant of R13,042[24], secured in October 2023, increased the total capital to R25,443[25]. The stokvel retained funds in the account to build capital in its first year and started allocating funds at the end of year two to cover essential costs. This strategic use of funds reflects the stokvel's potential to grow capital and provide financial security for members, even when member contributions varied. After the first trial, the team decided not to pay out individually, current savings plus matching grants will be used to cover costs in January 2025.

Integrating the stokvel savings model within community kitchens has enhanced financial sustainability through collective resource management and resilience. The pooled savings and matching grant provided a critical safety net and enabled cost-efficient bulk purchasing of staples like cooking oil and maize meal. However, financial sustainability depends on addressing challenges such as inconsistent contributions, reliance on private capital, and differing levels of financial literacy among members.

Achieving consensus on stokvel spending remains a key challenge, as varying financial literacy and facilitation skills impact decision-making processes. Some members struggle to meet their monthly contributions, complicating financial planning. One kitchen head took on the role of facilitating the stokvel network and has played a crucial role in guiding discussions and fostering compromise such as to determine annual saving goals, but achieving consistent participation and agreement requires ongoing efforts. In early 2024, the network opened a joint bank account and formalised the stokvel.

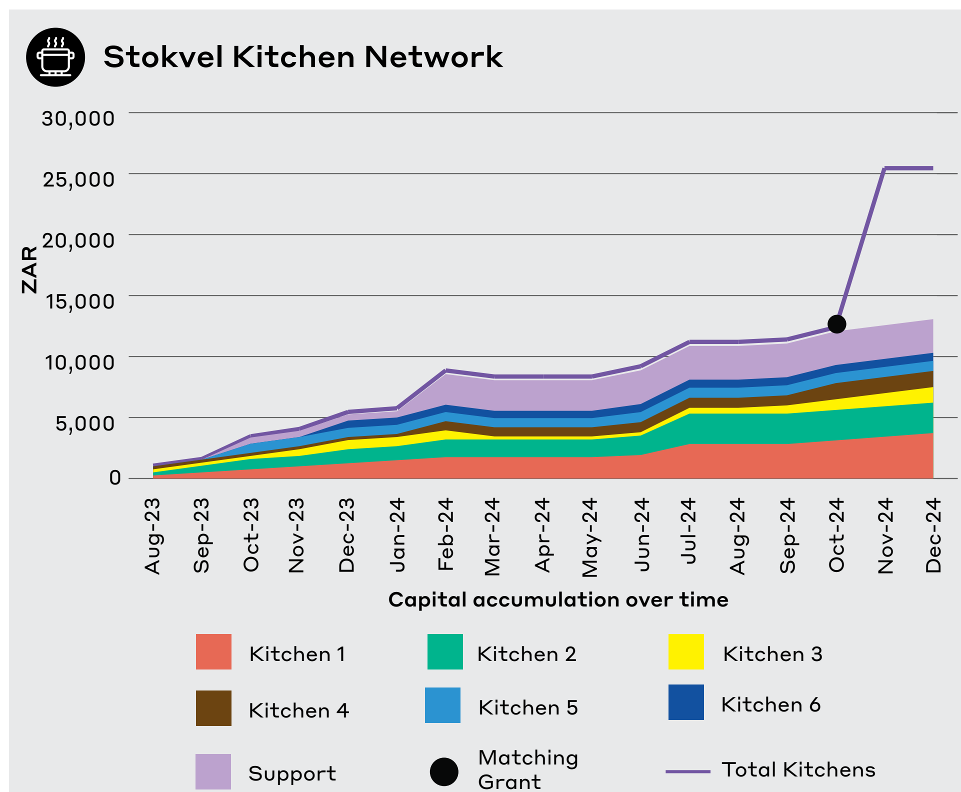


Figure 21 The diagram shows the accumulation of Stokvel capital over time. The individual funds were aggregated in one bank account. Kitchens contributed on a monthly basis with R250 in average. The red line indicates the volume of the group's capital, with a sharp increase due to the payment of a matching grant in October 2024.

23 R13.269 – 696€ in February 2025
24 R13.042 - 680€ in October 2024
25 R25.443 - 1.326€ in February 2025

Key impacts of the model identified by the kitchen heads:

Social impact

- Community kitchen heads gain agency and build vision.
- Stokvel money increases capital which fosters ownership and shared responsibility for the network.
- The stokvels provide emergency support in times of hardships.
- Stokvels speak to the spirit of Ubuntu and builds on trust and mutual goals for system resilience.
- Participation in a stokvel fosters discipline, improves financial literacy, and requires that the women communicate among each other and find compromises.

Economic impact

- Builds financial literacy for the kitchen heads.
- It helps the team to set goals and think beyond the own kitchen.
- The capital generated allows bulk buying (cooking oil, pap, sugar).
- Capital savings help with food purchases in January, when no other funding is available.
- Interest-free borrowing rates allow women who would be unable to afford bank loans (20 % interest) to borrow funds.

The stokvel has proven to be a vital element of the network, serving as both a source of microcredit and emergency support while demonstrating the collective's ability to manage funds and make joint decisions. This success strengthens trust with external partners, including the City, which will be useful as the stokvels look ahead to 2025 and shift their focus to sourcing matching grants to grow joint capital while maintaining private contributions, ensuring steady capital growth and reinforcing the stokvel's role in providing financial resilience and collective empowerment within the community.

Food is not 4 free

The "Food is not 4 free" model emerged as a community-driven response to the financial and operational challenges faced by a local community kitchen in Gugulethu. This model redefined the dynamics of food provision by shifting from a charity-based approach to one that encourages responsibility within the community. The kitchen had been struggling to sustain its operations amidst rising food costs and utility expenses, with traditional donor support proving insufficient. The kitchen encouraged community members to contribute to their meals' cost. This contribution was not solely monetary: beneficiaries could contribute by assisting with operations, such as cleaning, preparing meals, or gathering recyclable materials which were sold to local recycling plants. Funds generated from recycling directly supported kitchen expenses, including the procurement of gas and essential ingredients.

Central to the model was the introduction of a nominal meal fee, set at R3 per meal[26] during weekdays and R5 on Fridays. This tiered structure was developed following extensive engagement with the community to ensure affordability and willingness to pay while addressing nutritional needs. The higher fee on Fridays allowed for the purchase of a protein source, such as chicken, which is often unattainable for households in the area.

Community members expressed their willingness to contribute and helped guide the model's implementation, fostering a sense of shared ownership and responsibility.

The "Food is not 4 free" model aims to transform community kitchens from a charity-based approach to a sustainable, participatory system by encouraging beneficiaries to contribute financially or through labour, fostering shared ownership and responsibility. By implementing a small, tiered meal fee and integrating recycling as an income

26 R3 – 0,16€ and R5 – 0,26€ in February 2025

source, the model enhances food security, strengthens community resilience, and reduces dependency on external donors.

- How much are community members able and willing to pay for meals provided by the community kitchen?
- How many community members are willing and able to contribute financially to the kitchen's operations? What are their challenges?
- What impact does the nominal meal fee model have on the financial sustainability of the community kitchen?

What was tested – Nominal contribution of R2, R3 or R5 per meal by those accessing the kitchen were tested. The kitchen team documented willingness and ability to pay these fees. Additionally, community members were asked to bring recyclables that could be exchanged for cash.

Key findings

The following table summarises the income generated through community contributions. We calculated how much the community contribution accounts for as a percentage of the overall kitchen operation costs.

Table 12 Community contributions versus costs of meals in the Food is Not 4 Free programme in 2024

	April	May	June	July	August	September	October
Community contribution	5,200	5,600	7,200	11,200	8,800	12,000	12,000
Total operational cost of this kitchen		26,850	28,000	27,000	21,000	30,000	29,000
%		21 %	25 %	41 %	42 %	40 %	41 %

There is no standardised approach to securing contributions for community kitchens, and only one kitchen tested the model on a larger scale during the trial phase. Observations show that not everyone in the queue can contribute, and those who do, do so in varying amounts and frequencies: some contribute 50–200ZAR at the start of the month, while others give more frequently on Fridays when meat is available. However, only a minority make regular payments, and most are unable to contribute consistently.

The success of this model relies on the expertise of community kitchen heads, who must understand the financial capacities of their community members. For example, a WhatsApp group among some guests and neighbours allow for ad-hoc fundraising and emergency fund contributions when a kitchen runs out of funds. However, community kitchen heads need to take a firm approach when engaging with people in the queue, explaining that contributions are necessary for the kitchen's sustainability. While communities rely on these kitchens for support, kitchen leaders often face mistrust and jealousy and need to address community members' misconception that contributions benefit the kitchen heads personally, rather than covering meal costs. Some community members also voice their concerns that queues could increase crime in the area. This underscores the need for greater transparency in income and expenditure as well as intentions.

Communities in older townships, such as Gugulethu or Bridgetown show more willingness to support the initiative compared to areas like Mfuleni and Wesbank. Although contributions help supplement kitchen operations, they are insufficient as a sole funding source. Nonetheless, they make a significant difference for one kitchen. The goal for 2025 is for community contributions to cover 15% of operational costs across all kitchens.

Key impacts of the model identified by the kitchen heads:

Social impact

- Offers dignity and agency to community members
- Communities experience greater ownership of their kitchens.
- More responsibility from the community for the kitchen builds a safety net around the kitchen.

Financial impact

- Rapidly addresses rising food prices and reduced funding for kitchens.
- Kitchens form part of a township economy; money remains in the community.

Early Childhood Development (ECD)

Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres in South Africa provide care and learning opportunities for young children, typically from birth to age 6. They foster the cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development of children, laying a strong foundation for future learning and wellbeing. ECDs play a crucial role in addressing educational inequalities, particularly in disadvantaged communities, by ensuring that all children have access to quality early education. When registered through the Department of Social Development, ECDs are monitored to ensure compliance to regulations pertaining to health, safety, and educational standards. The registration process is lengthy and requires upfront investments in areas such as sanitation, water, safety, and adequate space. Meeting these requirements is challenging in low-income areas and informal settlements and, as a result, unregistered ECDs centres fill gaps in service provision despite the legal risks of doing so. These centres are ineligible for government funding and many other support programmes.

A registered ECD centre meets the government's standards for infrastructure, staffing, and curriculum, ensuring that children receive safe and structured early learning experiences. Registration requires substantial investment in training for caregivers, as well as infrastructure improvements such as toilets, running water, and sufficient space. While training is a relatively lower hurdle, infrastructure poses a significant challenge for many community initiatives, including kitchens that serve as informal gathering spaces. In contrast, unregistered ECDs often operate in improvised settings with minimal resources. While hundreds of these centres function effectively, their lack of formal registration means they are not systematically monitored, raising concerns about safety, sustainability, and access to resources. However, given the high demand for early learning services, they remain an essential part of the support system for many families in underprivileged areas.

The Theory of Change for this model is, that with additional investment to meet ECD registration standards – such as improved sanitation, safety measures, and learning spaces – these kitchens could evolve into multi-functional centres offering both nourishment and education. Institutional funding available through ECD registration could help ensure compliance with developmental, health, and safety standards while also strengthening the sustainability of the kitchens. While this model has potential, careful consideration must be given to how to integrate ECDs into these spaces safely and effectively, ensuring that the presence of young children does not compromise the primary function of these kitchens as food distribution centres.

ECD services hold a significant place within the Western Cape's Nourish to Flourish strategy. Recognising that access to nutritious food is critical during the early years of a child's life, the strategy uses ECD centres as vital platforms for providing one warm plate of food among young children. Some ECDs also offer nutrition programming like breastfeeding

promotion. The strategy's engagement with ECDs highlights the value of investing in early interventions to combat food insecurity and malnutrition. It connects the work of ECD centres to other areas of food system improvement, such as school food gardens and public awareness campaigns.

The research questions for this model were:

- What financial benefits could be achieved by low-income families and communities if community kitchens and ECD centres operate in partnership?
- What registration and funding barriers could affect successful partnership between ECD centres and community kitchens, and how can these challenges be addressed?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of ECDs operating in conjunction with community kitchens?

To answer the first research question, we present Tables 12 and 13 below. Table 12 compares the income generated through an unregistered ECD operations at a small community kitchen that cooks for 3,600 people per month with the kitchen's overall running costs. We can compare the data in this table with that in Table 13, which shows the income generated by a registered ECD in a community kitchen that cooks for 1,200 people per month. Lastly, Table 14 shows the income generated by a small, unregistered ECD in a large kitchen that cooks for 20,000 people per month.

Table 13 Income in ZAR generated by a small kitchen that runs an unregistered ECD

	April	May	June	July	August	September	October
Income generated by an unregistered ECD	2,000	1,800	2,400	1,800	2,000	2,600	2,000
Total kitchen running costs		10,360	12,360	10,560	17,960	9,360	12,360
% of running costs met by ECD income		17 %	19 %	17 %	11 %	27 %	16 %

Table 14 Overview of income in ZAR generated by a kitchen that runs a registered ECD

	April	May	June	July	August	September	October
Income generated by an unregistered ECD*	4,760	4,760	5,712	5,712	5,712	4,760	4,760
Total kitchen running costs**	6,600	6,600	6,600	6,600	6,600	6,600	6,600
% of running costs met by ECD income	72%	72%	87%	87%	87%	72%	72%

*R17 per child plus R6,80 nutrition fee Total R476 per month ** running costs include R3,000

Table 15 Overview of income generated in ZAR by a large kitchen that runs an unregistered ECD

	May	June	July	August	September	October
Income generated by an unregistered ECD*	4,200	4,200	4,200	4,200	4,200	4,200
Total kitchen running costs**	71,600	73,600	73,600	75,600	78,400	80,000
% of running costs met by ECD income	6%	6%	6%	6%	5%	5%

*monthly costs per child R600

Three ECD centres in community kitchens were piloted. One kitchen successfully registered as an ECD during the pilot, while the others await approval of their registration. Once registered, the ECD can apply for funding through the Western Cape's Nourish to Flourish programme. Contributions from parents tend to be irregular and vary between ECDs according to locality, size, and the range of services offered by the ECD. The funding that the ECD brings to the community kitchens (through subsidies, donations, and fees) increases the kitchens' budget, but not by enough to hire childcare staff. While the registered ECD was awarded sufficient subsidy to provide a stipend to a caregiver, the two unregistered ECDs relied on a volunteer with ECD training.

While ECD registration provides a stable revenue stream, it demands significant commitment from the kitchen and adds substantial workload. However, childcare is viewed as a vital service provided by these kitchens, enabling women – many of whom lead their households – to work and secure employment. This dual role of providing nutrition and childcare highlights the importance of ECDs in supporting community development and empowering women in vulnerable settings. While the model generates income for the kitchen, the greater economic benefit lies in enabling mothers to enter the workforce, boosting household incomes and contributing to broader economic growth in low-income communities.

Key impacts of the model identified by the kitchen heads:

Social impact

- Offers dignity and agency to community members
- Communities experience greater ownership of their kitchens.
- More responsibility from the community for the kitchen builds a safety net around the kitchen.

Economic impact

- Rapidly addresses rising food prices and reduced funding for kitchens.
- Kitchens form part of a township economy; money remains in the community.

Gardens4Change

Urban agriculture is a prominent activity in Cape Town. Urban agriculture projects are typically spearheaded by NGOs to encourage food production to supply vegetable box schemes marketed in affluent areas of Cape Town; the produce is not consumed by local growers or their families (Paganini & Lemke, 2020). Building on the historical success of gardening in neighbourhoods across Cape Town and leveraging the expertise of passionate urban farmers within the FACT initiative, the Gardens4Change project was initiated to increase local food supply for some community kitchens. Yet, urban farmers in peri-urban areas of Cape Town face numerous challenges, including strong winds, intense sunlight, cold winters, and poor soil quality, all of which necessitate significant investment in soil nutrition. Drawing upon lessons learned from the FACT team's earlier research as well as Urban Food Futures' Kenyan partner's (Miramar's) hydroponic unit in Mukuru, Nairobi (see Kabiru et al., 2022), a hydroponic unit was introduced to mitigate these challenges by increasing production, focusing exclusively on crops suitable for community kitchens, and enabling year-round cultivation within a controlled environment. The

Gardens4Change project assessed the scalability of hydroponic units in urban environments via a pilot hydroponic project at the Alcardo Andrews Foundation in Hanover Park.

The theory of change for this model is that with a technical innovation such as a hydroponic unit, along with a local production and distribution system, community kitchens can grow their own vegetables for meal preparation.

The research questions for this model were:

- How much food can be produced through kitchen gardens and hydroponic systems on a seasonal basis?
- What challenges exist in land access/acquisition?
- How much food can be produced through kitchen gardens and hydroponic systems?

A 2x6m hydroponic tunnel system was established at a local primary school in Hanover Park to encourage learning and knowledge exchange across the kitchen network, supply the kitchens with fresh produce (especially high-cost produce such as onions, spring onions, cabbage, and kale), and create green space within the community. It was anticipated that local engagement via volunteerism and collective learning could spark interest in farming practices and stimulate economic benefits through urban agriculture, such as employment creation under the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), and strengthened partnerships within the network.

Two hydroponic systems – a frame system and a flatbed system – were tested inside the tunnel. Regular planting was conducted, with seedlings for cabbage, spinach, and spring onions supplied by a partner kitchen. Weekly harvests yielded produce valued between 300 and 600ZAR[27]. The estimated annual production of the hydroponic unit is provided in Table 15.

Table 16 Winter hydroponic greenhouse production yields (July–November 2024)

Crop	Growing time	Growing time greenhouse	Greenhouse growing cycles per year	Optimised use of pots in hydroponic system	Annual yield estimate (best case scenario)	Actual annual yield (after loss due to pests)	Total market price for expected actual yield
Spinach	40–50 days	35 days	10	170 plants	1700 x 250 g bunches of spinach × 425 kg	400 kg	6000R
Spring onions	60 days	50 days	7	120 plants	840 x 200 g bunches × 168 kg	160 kg	2400R
Cabbage	80 days	70 days	4	79 plants	280 x 1 kg heads of cabbage	250 kg	10,000R

The expected annual yield from the hydroponic tunnel system yearly cost amounts to 18,400R[28]. However, it is crucial to note that this amount would not have been spent by the kitchen team, as the cash to buy leafy greens is not available in the kitchen budgets. Therefore, the generated monetary value cannot be considered a saving but an added value.

27 R300-600 – 16-31€ in February 2025
28 184.00R – 959€ in February 2025

The investment cost for the unit was 115,000ZAR[29] and annual maintenance including inputs and repairs is expected to cost 25,000–40,000ZAR[30]. The community provided seedlings and volunteers and Athwood Primary School provided electricity, water, and security during the pilot project. The EPWP programme could support costs during scale-up/out.

29 115.000R – 5.994€ in February 2025
30 25.000R-40.000R – 1.303€-2085€ in February 2025

Key impacts of the model identified by the kitchen heads:

Social impact

- Kitchen network is strengthened through internal training and a support-and-swap system to make production work.
- mproving nutrition of meals prepared by the kitchens.
- Farming is perceived as calming, therapeutic

Economic impact

- Hydroponic unit reduces costs for leafy vegetables and other high-value crops (onions, spring onions, cabbage, kale)

Textbox 4: Land access in Cape Town

Despite South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994, the legacy of colonial and apartheid-era spatial planning continues to shape Cape Town's demography.

At the end of Apartheid, the government introduced policies to promote inclusive land ownership. The Restitution of Land Rights Act (1994) aimed to restore historical land rights or provide financial compensation. Tenure reform sought to secure land rights for labour tenants and farm workers through the Land Titles Adjustment Act (1993), simplifying the process of transferring land ownership. Land redistribution, the third pillar, provided grants to buy land and redress racial disparities in ownership.

Land and housing laws are closely linked to spatial planning. The Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (2013) aims to create a uniform system for planning and land use. Local governments regulate land use through their Spatial Development Frameworks, Integrated Development Plans, and Human Settlements Plans, provided they align with provincial and national policies.

Cape Town residents access land in three ways: informal occupations, the private market, or government redistribution programmes. Informal land occupations, often labelled 'land invasions,' have been common since the 1800s, with a sharp rise since 2016. Although laws protect residents from unlawful eviction, many still live in precarious conditions without registered land rights. This insecurity makes it difficult for them to invest in their homes or sell their land legally, perpetuating cycles of poverty and exclusion (Ngwenya, 2022).

Residents in low-income areas can access public land for community projects through municipal land use applications and partnerships with local government initiatives. These projects, often focused on urban agriculture, social services, and housing cooperatives, aim to enhance community development and stability.

The process of applying for land use rights involves submitting a formal request to the local municipality, which then evaluates the proposal based on zoning laws and community needs. Each municipality is divided into wards, which are smaller administrative units represented by elected councillors. A ward councillor plays a key role in advocating for residents' interests and liaising with municipal authorities. Establishing a good relationship with the ward councillor is crucial, as their support can significantly influence the approval of land use applications. In many cases, access to public land depends on the goodwill of the local councillor, as they have discretionary power in prioritising community projects. Without their endorsement, applications can be delayed or denied, making political engagement an essential aspect of the land allocation process.

Partnership 4 Change

Partnerships are vital to the community kitchens' support, with most kitchen heads dedicating significant time to building and maintaining these connections. Grounded in trust, these relationships have been crucial to the kitchens' resilience, especially during the early weeks of lockdown when Community Action Networks (CANs) fostered exceptional collaboration across neighbourhoods.

The kitchens have established partnerships with organisations such as Kolisi Connect, IMAN Feeding, Food Forward, Mother City Soup, Ladles of Love, Coca-Cola, African Muslim Agency, Shoprite, Blue Ribbon, County Fair, Epping Market, Checkers, and Spar. These partners provide essential resources – food, funding, and in-kind donations – that sustain kitchen operations and ensure a steady supply of necessities.

The Callas Foundation coordinates many of these partnerships, redistributing food, sanitary products, nappies, and clothing to other kitchens in the network. The kitchens also collaborate with local businesses to secure donations and services, such as surplus or near-expiry products from food suppliers, which help reduce waste and maximise available resources.

Research questions for the first phase were:

- **Which partners within the network provide financial support to the kitchens?**
- **What roles do partnerships play for community kitchens?**
- **Are restaurants interested in supporting community kitchens through partnership and what would that look like?**

Ongoing discussions within the kitchen network have consistently highlighted that tasks such as fundraising, maintaining partnerships, and reporting require significant time, energy, and specialised skills. These responsibilities also demand individuals to effectively nurture and sustain relationships.

Our theory of change is that, to shift from charity and fundraising towards sustainable partnerships for change, it is essential to develop a partnership framework that relies less on personal connections and more on a scalable system.

The Partnerships4Change model fosters collaborations between restaurants and community kitchens, aiming to bridge socio-economic divides in Cape Town. Grounded in collective responsibility, it proposes a nominal, voluntary addition to diners' bills at participating restaurants, with the proceeds directly supporting the operation costs of community kitchens.

In an initial research phase, ten restaurants were approached to assess the feasibility of the bill-top-up model. While many expressed concerns about the potential impact on waitstaff tips, similar initiatives have proven successful. For instance, the KFC Add Hope programme enables customers to add a small donation – typically R2 – to their bills, supporting feeding initiatives and community projects, including those managed by the Kolisi Foundation. KFC matches customer donations during specific campaigns, doubling the impact. This collaboration has funded over 34 community kitchens, including those from this research network, providing meals for vulnerable groups such as women, children, and the elderly. The Kolisi Foundation also supports GBV survivors through grocery assistance and other services. An interview with a programme administrator at the Foundation highlighted the legal and logistical complexities of hosting such a model, emphasising the need for a robust fiscal and technical infrastructure which the emerging community kitchen network can't provide yet.

Key impacts of the model identified by the kitchen heads:

Social impact

- Partnerships could improve the kitchens' visibility and encourage expansion of programming to achieve broader goals.
- Building and maintaining partnerships leads to knowledge exchange (training), capacity building, and empowerment.
- Partnership builds credibility.
- Smaller and less vocal kitchens benefit from networking with larger kitchens.

Economic impact

- Partnerships could provide income for all kitchens
- Partnerships provide access to external resources and experts.
- Kitchens have to collaborate in order to access larger funding.

Beyond food partnerships, the kitchen network is deeply engaged in addressing GBV, recognising its intersection with food insecurity. Particularly in our work on gender-based violence, we have established partnerships to exchange knowledge, networks, and platforms. Notable collaborations include the Heinrich Böll Foundation's Cape Town office; the Saartjie Baartman Centre, where we also host workshops and support a safe house; and MOSAIC, a training centre focused on preventing and reducing abuse and domestic violence, especially for women and youth in disadvantaged communities.

To this end, Spar was specifically approached for their leadership in GBV advocacy, for example, their awareness campaigns, such as the "SPAR Unmasking GBV" workshop, featuring expert discussions and community interventions. Their GBV campaign aligns with the kitchens' mission, and their role support of Thuthuzela Care Centres[31] across South Africa demonstrates their commitment to survivors. However, Spar's substantial investment – over R7 million annually – into their own centres presents a challenge in securing further resources for the kitchens.

6.5.2 Assessment of Five Models

The 2023 trial of five models (Stokvel, *Food is not 4 free*, ECD, *Gardens4change*, and *Partnership4change*) revealed challenges and successes, as detailed in the previous chapter. These findings formed the basis for the 2024 implementation strategy, which combines elements from each model and focuses on testing scalability.

Stokvel

The Stokvel model proved valuable as a financial safety net within the network, allowing members to save funds for difficult months. This was particularly helpful for supporting individual kitchens facing unexpected challenges. While the team worked well together, contributions to a collective fund exposed significant barriers related to trust and socio-economic disparities. Kitchen heads with additional income, such as those in dual-income households, found it easier to commit financially than those with limited or no income, where contributions directly impacted their livelihood. The model also enabled interest-free loans, providing an alternative to the high-interest rates in traditional financial systems. The Stokvel's demonstration of responsibility, reliability, and resilience across the network evidences their capability to effectively collaborate with potential funders or the state.

31 Thuthuzela Care Centres (TCCs) are specialised facilities in South Africa that provide integrated, survivor-centred support for victims of sexual and gender-based violence, offering medical care, forensic services, counselling, and legal assistance in a single location to ensure dignity, reduce secondary trauma, and improve conviction rates.

However, this model remains heavily reliant on the financial contributions of women who are already co-funding most of the kitchen operations, placing an additional strain on their limited private resources. This highlights a systemic imbalance, with women disproportionately shouldering the financial burden. While the model fostered trust and financial literacy, its long-term sustainability requires reducing reliance on individual contributions. Expanding matching grants and actively securing third-party funding could alleviate financial strain and improve scalability. Overall, while Stokvel is a culturally rooted and practical model, its success hinges on addressing the inequitable burden placed on the women at its core.

Food is not 4 for free

The *food is not 4 for free* model stands out as a transformative approach to encourage community ownership and shift the focus from dependence on external aid to the idea of commons. By actively engaging communities to contribute resources to community kitchens, it challenges the notion of kitchens as charity-based initiatives and repositions them as political hubs advocating for systemic change. This approach has been especially effective in communities with stronger social cohesion; it requires considerable effort from kitchen leaders to build trust and communicate effectively within their communities when financial support is needed.

The model aligns with a broader critical perspective on the politics of provision, emphasising the need to progressively realise the right to food through systemic change rather than relying on handouts. While emergency aid may be necessary in times of crisis, long-term dependence on it perpetuates systemic failures and burdens those who cook with filling gaps left by state inaction.

Kitchens are positioned as strong advocates for systemic reform, demanding accountability from the state and other stakeholders to progressively realise the right to food, rather than shifting responsibility onto communities. This model represents a bold step forward, recognising the importance of community contributions while emphasising the need for political and structural change to end the decades-long reliance on feeding schemes.

Early Childhood Development (ECD)

Integrating ECD programmes with community kitchens was identified as a feasible model, given the availability of state funding and its potential to augment feeding programmes. Pilot tests demonstrated that kitchens with adequate space and trained staff were able to establish and run ECD facilities, benefiting both the children and the kitchens. However, the scalability of this model is limited by significant infrastructure, resource, and training requirements. Additionally, demand for ECD facilities varies by community; in areas where ECDs are established by women as income-generating ventures, introducing a new ECD is viable only if childcare needs remain unmet.

Formalising ECDs within state programmes proved to be a lengthy and administratively challenging process. While informal ECDs are easier to establish and more flexible, they raise concerns about child safety.

To date, the government's willingness to incorporate kitchens into their ECD strategy remains unclear. This gap requires community kitchens to further develop a proposal outlining the specific benefits they could bring to ECD facilities. While it has been documented that ECDs can enhance kitchen operations, the reciprocal benefit for ECDs remains underexplored. This lack of clarity highlights the need for collaboration with decision-makers to refine the model. A structured Learning Journey planned for March 2025 could help initiate discussions on simplifying the formalisation process and addressing existing barriers. Ultimately, successful integration of ECD centres with kitchens will require

a clear framework that aligns with government objectives, community needs, and the operational realities of kitchens.

Gardens4Change

The *Gardens4Change* model introduced hydroponic systems to communities, allowing community kitchens to increase food production in limited spaces and year-round production. The implementation was straight-forward, thanks to the research team's expertise in urban agriculture and strong supplier networks. Hydroponic systems offered significant advantages, including higher yields and shorter production cycles compared to conventional methods. However, the initial investment required remains a barrier for community kitchens without external funding.

The hydroponic model provided a diverse range of vegetables for meals, enhancing the meals served in the kitchens. However, it is important to note that the crops grown would likely have been too expensive for community kitchen to purchase outright, meaning the model should be viewed as a supplementary resource rather than a cost-saving measure. Collaboration within the community kitchen network, particularly in seedling production and food swaps, highlighted the strong cohesion in the network. While hydroponics is not a universal solution, it offers a scalable and replicable model for increasing nutritional diversity in kitchens.

Partnerships4Change

The *Partnerships4Change* model highlighted key limitations of traditional donor-driven relationships and the community kitchen network's reluctance to explore partnerships beyond conventional fundraising and donations. While some kitchens excelled at securing one-sided donations through events, sponsorships, and fundraising, these efforts often led to dependency and the risk of donor fatigue. Notably, the most active kitchens with the largest network generated the majority of donations. There is a particular dependency of the smaller kitchens on Callas community kitchens forwarding shares from their donations. Or in other words – without the success of Callas Foundation in fundraising, many of the other kitchens wouldn't be able to maintain their operations.

To address this, the model explored different approaches to partnerships with the private sector, recognising its role in tackling systemic issues within the food system. Though these partnerships were introduced later in the research, they generated enthusiasm within the kitchen network. For example, the idea of collaborating with restaurants opened new possibilities for mutual benefit, though it remains underdeveloped and lacks sufficient community-driven input. The long-term sustainability of this model depends on reframing partnerships as reciprocal relationships that promote shared goals, such as system change and community empowerment. Moving forward, there is significant potential to build on these early efforts and design partnerships that go beyond charity, holding private sector actors accountable for their role in the food system.

6.5.3 Action research phase II - Learning from the models and planning for scalability

At the beginning of 2024, the network revisited the first trial phase from 2023. One key takeaway from the review was that no standardised model had emerged, as each community and the kitchens that serving them are uniquely structured. These kitchens are tailored to meet the specific needs of their communities, shaped by factors such as the expertise and passion of the kitchen heads, as well as available resources such as volunteer availability, mobility, financial flexibility, and physical space. Socio-economic conditions within the communities also influence the effectiveness of each kitchen model.

For example, as discussed earlier, the *food is not 4 free* model works well in established communities (e. g., older townships) where the kitchen head has

a strong understanding of the neighbourhood's structure and is well-known. In contrast, an ECD kitchen is more effective in areas lacking services and with clear demand. If there are already multiple ECD facilities nearby, adding another would be impractical. Other factors, such as crime rates, transport infrastructure, and location, also affect a kitchen model's viability. For instance, Ubuntu kitchens serve vineyard worker communities in the hinterlands of Cape Town, while Intervisionary's kitchen, located on the Cape Peninsula, faces challenges due to the significant distances between locations, making the model less feasible compared to the Cape Flats.

The second trial phase started in 2024 continued to test these models while systematically documenting the economic structures underpinning the kitchens. A key goal was allowing cross-pollination of the models to enhance their collective functionality. Insights from the first trial were deepened through a structured cross-learning process. Each kitchen head partnered with another kitchen, exchanging observations, refining their own models, and evaluating the economic and social benefits of each model (as described in the previous chapters).

During an evaluation workshop in September 2024, it became clear that no single model could operate independently without integrating elements from other models.

As the network grew more cooperative, two strategic approaches emerged to further strengthen it: enhancing resource sharing and collaboration, and exploring avenues for accessing governmental funding. The following sections will describe these pathways and assess their scalability. Additionally, two separate Learning Journeys conducted in September and November 2024 helped identify future opportunities for collaboration, which are outlined in the subsequent chapter.

Scaling out: "Eat your greens" – local production for local consumption

Photo 12 Inside the hydroponic tunnel. Libuke 2024

"Eat Your Greens" is a collaborative next steps that combines models and actively builds partnerships bringing together the Alcardo Andrews Foundation and uPhakanini community kitchen. Over the course of a year, the community kitchen network piloted the Gardens4Change model at Athwood Primary School in Hanover Park, a challenging, gang-afflicted area. With support from the Alcardo Andrews Foundation, this initiative produced leafy vegetables using hydroponics. The produce benefited both the school and a nearby community kitchen managed by the Foundation.

The kitchen head of uPhakanini, a trained gardening expert, conducts weekly monitoring visits to support the hydroponic volunteers. Additionally, uPhakanini operates a seedling nursery for the Gardens4Change system. Beyond its primary role, the nursery addresses an important element of the circular economy: reducing food waste. Using simple, low-tech processes (dehydration and blending), the kitchen produces soup stock, which enriches meals across the network. Ingredients for the stock include surplus vegetables from the Philippi Horticultural Area, donated from a large-scale farm, and locally harvested seaweed for added flavour.

The two kitchens have established a swap system to enhance collaboration and resource sharing. The nursery supplies the hydroponic unit with cabbage and spring onion seedlings, while the vegetables is shared across the network and reaches five kitchens within the Cape Flats. This ensures kitchens have frequent access to leafy greens that would otherwise be unaffordable. Additionally, soup stock produced at uPhakanini is distributed among network members. This experiment pilot has demonstrated the feasibility of a coordinated sharing system: one kitchen grows produce for others, another provides seedlings, and others contribute transport logistics to facilitate food distribution. The community kitchen network manages these coordination efforts.

While these achievements are noteworthy, and there is a clear improvement in meal quality, with cabbage increasing nutritional density, spinach adding greens, and spring onions enhancing flavour, the financial savings realised are minimal.

Scaling to other communities would require investment which we proposed based on the model's costs outlined in the previous section to the City of Cape Town. Potential sites include Bridgeville (to supply Callas Foundation), Cavalleria in Kraaifontein (to supply Charmaine's Kitchen and Ubuntu Kitchen Network), Bonga Primary (to supply Gogo's Kitchen), Malibu High School (to supply uPhakanini Community Kitchen), and Masiphumelele Primary School (to supply Intervisionary). Hosting schools would need to provide free water, electricity, and security, while the kitchens, in return, would formalise agreements through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to ensure schools receive an equitable share of the produce.

Labour costs for planting, care, and harvesting amount to R4,000 per month per unit. Oversight of all hydroponic farms would require one dedicated coordinator within the network. Additionally, the Department of Agriculture offers funding and skills development programmes for individual operators, as demonstrated by the Greenlight Organic Garden system. The kitchen network has partnered with Greenlight to coordinate the scale-up of production. Monthly operational costs, including seedlings and production-related activities, are estimated at R1,000 per hydroponic unit, covering nursery expenses.

Scaling deep – Community kitchens and GBV services

A second next step was to increase our work on GBV and actively built it into the community kitchen work. Our study identifies a significant correlation between GBV and food insecurity, with individuals affected by GBV disproportionately experiencing challenges in

accessing food. Households grappling with both GBV and food insecurity represent some of the most vulnerable groups. Notably, among those reporting GBV experiences, 61 % lived in severely food-insecure households during the study's first phase, increasing to 69 % in the second. This alarming trend underscores the necessity of addressing GBV and food insecurity in tandem, as the absence of food stability exacerbates already precarious and often dangerous situations.

In 2021, the GBV First Responder Programme was launched as part of our research to provide critical support through community kitchens. Trained by the Callas Foundation in basic support skills, First Responders assist survivors by offering information on legal aid, shelters, medical care, and counselling. These First Responders, embedded within community kitchens often as cooks, are vital in addressing GBV, conducting monthly debriefing sessions and annual refresher courses to refine their first-response, counselling, and referral skills. They also spearhead awareness-raising programmes, recording GBV cases and linking survivors to necessary resources.

First Responders reported that hunger frequently precipitates violence, as food insecurity heightens household stress and tensions, often culminating in violence. Additionally, individuals facing food insecurity are at greater risk of GBV, particularly in areas marked by high unemployment, poverty, and socio-economic segregation. Social norms in these communities sometimes perpetuate abusive relationships, further entrenching the cycle of violence. Notably, some kitchens actively engage men and boys, using food provision as an entry point to challenge harmful behaviours and promote positive social norms. Observations frequently highlight the adage, "A hungry man is an angry man," reflecting hunger's role as a catalyst for violence. Thus, kitchens play a critical role in violence prevention through their food security initiatives.

In 2024, the network assisted 1,100 GBV cases as first responders. Many survivors turned to community kitchens for support due to a lack of awareness about government services, limited access to institutions, or proactive outreach by GBV First Responders in kitchen queues. Although state programmes such as the Victim Empowerment Programme (VEP), the Gender-Based Violence Command Centre (GBVCC), and the Thuthuzela Care Centres (TCCs) offer free and inclusive support, community kitchens remain crucial in bridging gaps in access and trust. Survivors often do not seek out these formal services simply because they are unaware of their existence. Community kitchens, however, are deeply embedded in local communities and are recognised as spaces where individuals can connect with people who understand and can guide them to available support systems.

The kitchen network benefits from expertise within its collaborators, including legal, medical, and shelter movements facilitated by the Callas Foundation and Intervisionary Kitchen. These organisations receive state grants to complement government efforts and fill gaps in service provision. By scaling the expertise of these organisations through the 20 trained GBV First Responders, the network has significantly extended its reach, providing vital support in communities. A further strategy to scale out the GBV First Responder programme was discussed in the *Learning Journey* (see the following chapter).

Financially, the kitchen network would need 500,000–1,500,000R[32] annual grant to be able to address the demand of GBV first responses in their immediate communities. This would finance project coordination and the training of 50 additional GBV First Responders and compensate the services provided by the kitchens (20 GBV First Responders in the existing kitchens plus 50 new GBV First Responders in more kitchens). The GBV First Responders estimate the costs of their service as first responders with 500R[33] per case.

32 R500.000 – R1.500.000 – 26.062€-78.186€
33 R500 is the equivalent of 26€

Photo 13 In the backyard of Callas community kitchen. Advocacy for the right to food and against GBV. Paganini, 2024

6.6 The creation of the community kitchen network

A key outcome of the Urban Food Futures programme is the creation of the community kitchen network. Figure 24 presents a timeline that charts the development and achievements of the Community Kitchen Network over several years. The timeline starts pre-2020 prior to the launch of Urban Food Futures with the establishment of key kitchens and concurrent food justice co-research collaboration. A pivotal event in 2021 was the first kitchen retreat at Goedgedacht, where the network met in person for the first time. Coming from a place of exhaustion, frustration, and mental health struggles (Nyaba et al., 2024), the retreat participants built the collaborative environment necessary to set the stage for the 2021 research/scoping phase (Battersby et al., 2022; Paganini & Weigelt, 2023). During this phase, research on community kitchens and food access was conducted across six research sites. During this time, kitchens began implementing public health initiatives, including vaccine distribution, while training kitchen heads and staff as GBV First Responders. This initiative empowered the team to support GBV survivors as first responders, with kitchens becoming crucial safer spaces providing counselling.

The subsequent years saw the publication of research and poetry and storytelling projects (Nyaba & Paganini, 2023). 2023 marked a critical phase in testing new models for food security, as the network increasingly aligned itself with social justice movements, particularly those addressing GBV. In 2023 and 2024, the network conducted a crowdsourcing data survey with strong support from the kitchen team. Notably, the Urban Food Futures programme began participating in high-level platforms such as the UNCSW and CSF, discussing and presenting together with community kitchen heads the key messages generated in the research. In 2024, the network further tested and refined its models, particularly in the areas of food access and GBV support, with a strong commitment to scalability.

The network convened monthly in Cape Town for internal learning meetings, which were facilitated by the network members themselves. These sessions provided a platform for debriefing, reflecting on interim findings, and coordinating activities such as food distribution and the stokvel. Twice a year, the consortium met for workshops that typically took place over several days outside of Cape Town, enabling joint work on action research. These workshops also offered valuable time for deep reflection, breathing, and debriefing.

The beauty of the network lies in its people, each of whom is a stalwart in their community. The group consists of women in their mid-20s to mid-60s from diverse ethnic, cultural, economic, and religious backgrounds. With multiple mother tongues in the group, English is commonly their second or third language. The sessions and meetings were not always easy: the work itself carries significant trauma and hardship, many of the women carried their own personal trauma, and collaboration sometimes became challenging and politically charged. Engaging with such human complexities was, in many ways, necessary for producing the type of rich, grounded research that could drive meaningful social change. Getting 'messy' – navigating interpersonal tensions, emotional struggles, and community dynamics – was an inherent part of the research and, ultimately, this messy, human approach was essential to addressing the real and multifaceted challenges that the network aimed to understand and transform.

Photo 14 The kitchen network during the design workshop for the models. Singlee 2023

Photo 15 Dance break during the kitchen retreat. Paganini 2021

Timeline Community Kitchen Network

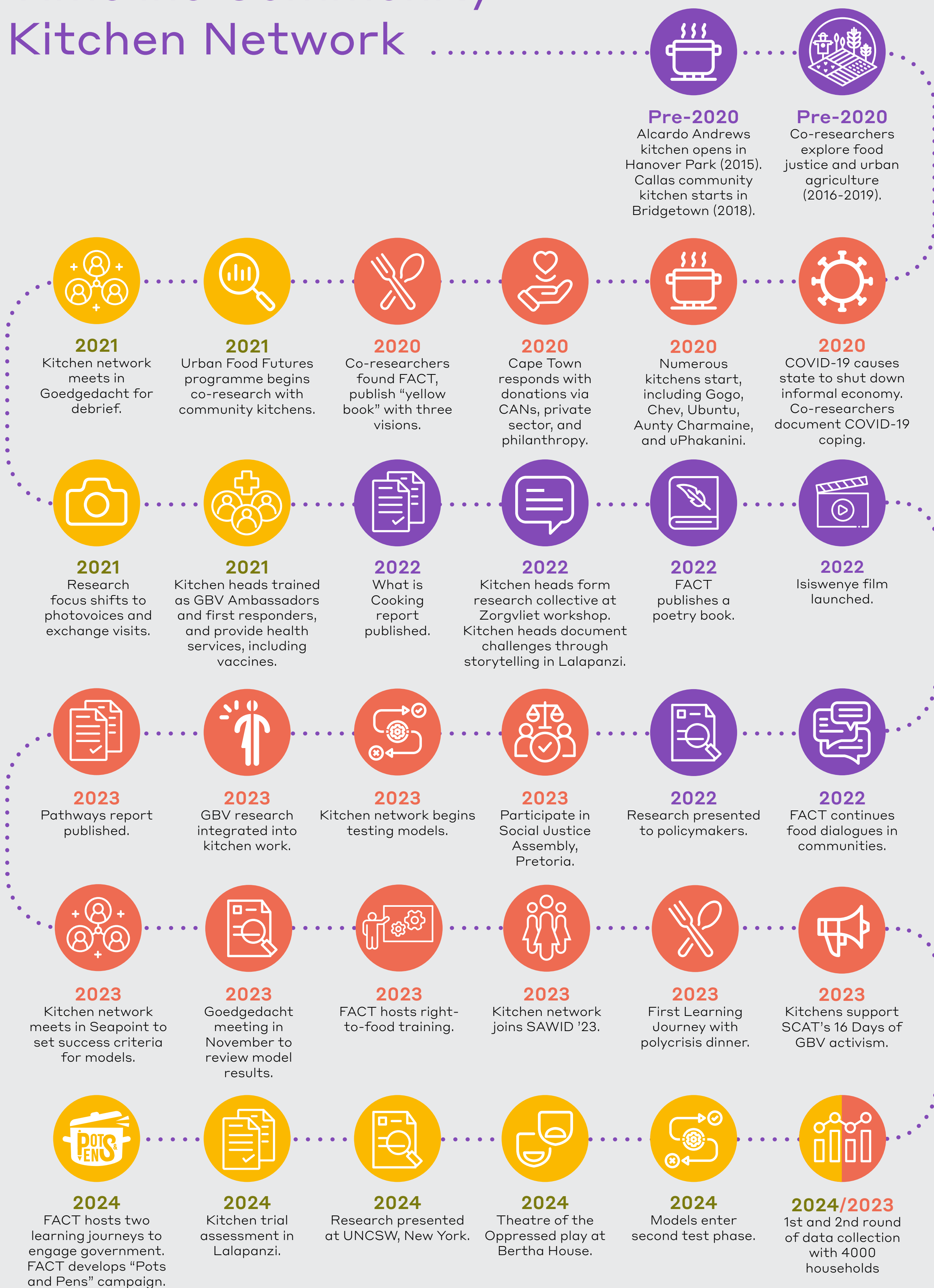


Figure 22 Time of the development of the community kitchen networkmodels. Singlee 2023

Textbox 5: Social Cohesion in the Kitchen Network

Social cohesion is crucial to the functioning and success of the kitchen network, which emerged not through research, but ultimately from the women's desire to embody the unity and collective support they experienced. Through research events, workshops, and retreats, team members came to understand each other's struggles and aspirations. The opportunity to share personal concerns and the pressures they face in their communities, such as "what keeps them awake at night," helped lay a foundation for trust.

The kitchens, often located in women's homes, are spaces where individuals face immense expectations from their communities. These kitchens are not merely places for food preparation; they serve as safe havens where the stress and trauma of daily life can be shared, processed, and healed collectively. They provide emotional and psychological care, requiring a platform for unloading the emotional weight of their work. The ability to step back, reflect, and support one another through difficult moments has been key to building trust within the network.

However, this cohesion is fragile and requires constant attention. Women running the kitchens bear the emotional labour necessary to sustain them, which limits their ability to invest in building organisations and social structures beyond their own kitchens. Strengthening the network and building long-lasting cooperation beyond the facilitated research retreats requires strong leadership and commitment to processes. Thus, the value of the network must be clear: it is an entity that can engage in partnerships with state and private actors and provide sisterhood to its members.

The bond within the sisterhood is not solely about shared struggles, but about recognising and uplifting each other. This solidarity empowers the women to face their work's challenges with renewed energy. While the network provides a sense of empowerment, it also nurtures a collective vision for a future where their efforts are recognised and supported. This sense of belonging and mutual care strengthens their resolve to keep moving forward, both individually and together.

7 Mutual accountability: Whose role is it to make the invisibility seen?

Accountability refers to the obligation of power-holders such as government officials, private corporations, international financial institutions, and civil society organisations to justify and take responsibility for their actions (Malena et al., 2004). In the Urban Food Futures programme, we focus on social accountability, particularly the relationship between duty-bearers and rights-holders, cautioning against conflating the two (Paganini & Weigelt, 2023).

Social accountability refers to mechanisms through which citizens and civil society organisations hold public officials and institutions accountable, either directly or indirectly (UNDP, 2006). It empowers communities, independent media, and civil society groups to challenge and influence government officials' actions (Malena et al., 2004). This process relies on generating knowledge collaboratively through transdisciplinary efforts, blending practical insights with moral and political judgment to foster a shared narrative rooted in common values (Adelle et al., 2019; Adelle 2019; Adelle et al., 2021; Pereira & Drimie, 2016). It is a bottom-up approach to governance that emphasises transparency, participation, and responsiveness in decision-making processes. Social accountability mechanisms are essential for improving governance, enhancing development effectiveness, and promoting empowerment (Malena et al., 2004). They emerge from a crisis of legitimacy in formal governance structures, which often suffer from unresponsiveness, power abuse, corruption, and nepotism. Accountability is particularly crucial for amplifying the voices of vulnerable groups, such as the urban food insecure, whose concerns are often invisible to decision-makers (Gaventa & McGee, 2013; Malena et al., 2004;).

A critical question arises: is it the responsibility of communities to make themselves visible and demand a seat at the decision-making table, or should governments take a more proactive role in understanding and addressing the challenges faced by these communities? The tension between visibility and invisibility is a key, as vulnerable populations often remain unseen in policy discussions unless they are empowered to assert their needs (Buthelezi & Metelerkamp, 2022; Haysom et al., 2022).

The pathway's theory of change posits that poverty and social and economic inequality are structural reasons for hunger and malnutrition, and that the exclusionary decision-making processes perpetuates these inequalities. To progressively realise the right to food, urban food system transformation must increase the accountability and transparency of government processes. Achieving this requires collaboration between grassroots actors and government authorities, rather than working in isolation (Paganini & Weigelt, 2023). Thus, our aim is to enhance social accountability by empowering grassroot actors to actively participate in food governance decision-making rather than remain passive recipients. On the other hand, this shift requires also to strengthening government's capacity to collaborate effectively with grassroots actors.

7.1 Cape Town's multi-actor platformism and the challenge for communities to find a seat at the table

The City of Cape Town addresses food-related issues through various municipal departments but lacks a dedicated food security mandate (Haysom et al. 2022). This fragmented approach, coupled with unclear responsibilities within the food system, creates significant barriers for communities trying to tackle food insecurity and access support. The

COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the inadequacies of existing food governance processes and emphasised the need for transformative change (Buthelezi & Metelerkamp, 2022; Paganini et al. 2021). The ongoing polycrisis underscores the urgency of addressing the pervasive, often-invisible violence of hunger and the structural inequalities that sustain it.

Communities in low-income areas are often excluded from decision-making processes related to food relief and broader food system issues. This lack of meaningful participation amplifies their struggles, exposing critical gaps in the existing food governance framework and further marginalising their needs (Buthelezi & Metelerkamp, 2022).

Improving food governance at the metropolitan level is widely regarded as a "wicked problem" – a complex issue that demands adaptive, flexible governance approaches (Pereira & Drimie, 2016). Effective solutions require improved interdepartmental coordination, collaboration among stakeholders, open dialogue, and a shift in institutional culture. While deliberative processes enable broader political participation, they are often criticised for prioritising consensus-building over addressing conflicts directly (Haysom et al., 2022). Additionally, the outcomes of multi-stakeholder dialogues on complex social issues are difficult to measure and can take years to achieve meaningful change.

Navigating complexity – the "horandogram"

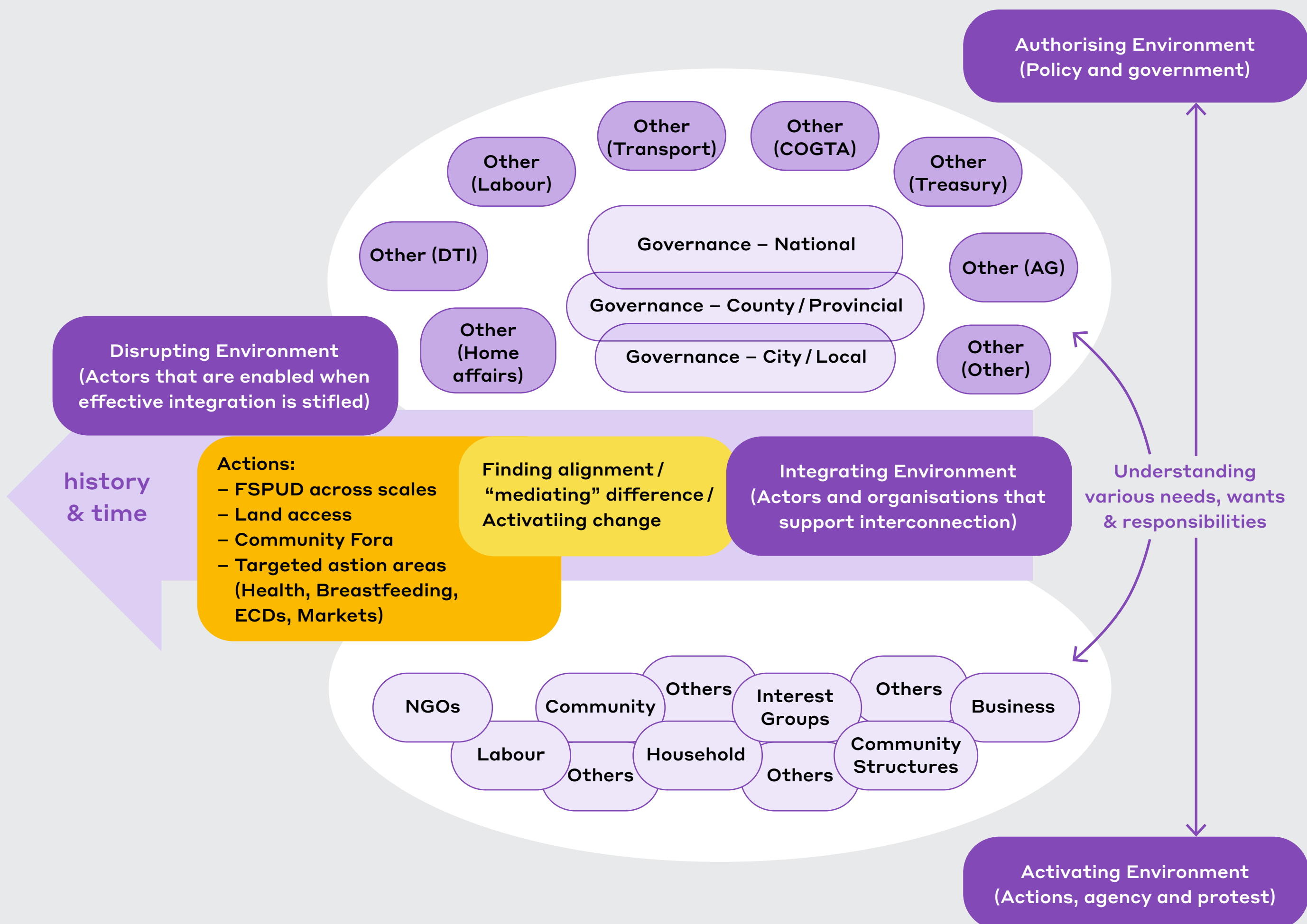


Figure 23 The "horandogram" was provided by our colleague and research partner, Gareth Haysom, who used it to help unpack the complex interplay in governance. While acknowledging these complexities, it also emphasises the need to identify change through clear pathways. Source: Adapted from Haysom, & Battersby, 2023, p. 301.

This framework, developed by our research partner Gareth Haysom from the African Centre for Cities (ACC) at the University of Cape Town (UCT), shows the complexity of governance systems. By highlighting the interplay between governance structures, social actors, and diverse environments, it reveals both the challenges and opportunities for transformative action. At its core lies the concept of "Finding alignment and mediating difference to activate change". This emphasises the importance of reconciling diverse interests and fostering collaboration to implement practical solutions, enabling pathways toward transformation without overburdening the system.

The framework depicts governance across national, provincial, and local levels, positioning these as key contributors to the "Authorising Environment". This environment represents the foundation of policies, regulations, and government mandates that set the structural parameters for collective action. Crucially, it integrates critical sectors such as health, labour, and transport, which contribute to systemic functionality and the governance architecture. Understanding these complexities allows us to focus on simplified, actionable pathways that may not alter the system holistically but can chart selected avenues toward impactful transformation.

The model distinguishes between two pivotal forces shaping governance: the disrupting environment and the integrating environment. The disrupting environment, influenced by historical legacies and temporal dynamics, represents factors that hinder integration and stifle collaboration among actors. In contrast, the integrating environment brings together organisations and entities that enable cooperation, such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), businesses, and community structures. These two environments interact with the grassroots "Activating Environment", where agency resides. Here, actors like households, labour groups, and community organisations play a critical role in driving bottom-up processes and implementing policies through collective effort.

"If there's no seat for us, we build a new table"

Photo 16 Discussion of research results with the kitchen network. Libuke, 2024

Communities often experience food governance as an exclusive, impenetrable structure – distant and inaccessible due to a lack of clear pathways for meaningful engagement. The phrase "having no seat at the table" aptly captures this exclusion, as communities struggle to find formal avenues to voice their concerns or influence decisions. In response, a transformative approach was developed: rethinking participation by encouraging communities to "build their own table" and inviting those in power to join. This shift empowered communities to take initiative, creating spaces for dialogue, accountability, and collaboration. By constructing their own platforms, they not only asserted their agency but also redefined the dynamics of participation, making the system more responsive to their needs.

Over three years, this action research process tested various methods to foster understanding and accountability, including training programmes, public campaigns, targeted *Learning Journeys*, and facilitated dialogues. These efforts aimed to bridge the gap between communities and decision-makers, creating shared spaces for mutual learning and collaboration. To conclude this initiative, a small online survey was conducted with both communities and decision-makers to evaluate the outcomes. The survey conducted in January 2025 explored what approaches were most effective, where understanding had been successfully generated, and how these achievements could serve as a foundation for improved collaboration.

7.2 FACT's story from finding agency to building partnerships for change

This chapter chronicles the evolution of FACT as a community-led organisation, illustrating its journey from research to action. FACT first emerged as an organisation in a co-produced study documenting the impact of COVID-19 on communities, culminating in the publication of the "yellow book" on agency in food systems (Paganini et al., 2021). This process, which took place during 2020 and 2021, prompting an exploration of the concept of agency – its definitions, interpretations, and applications in the context of food systems. A key development was the inclusion of agency as a critical dimension of food security in the High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) report (2020) "Food Security and Nutrition: Building a Global Narrative Towards 2030". This report recognised agency as an essential for enhancing individual and collective capacities to influence food systems, expanding beyond the traditional pillars of food security – availability, access, utilisation, and stability. Amartya Sen's work on agency provided the theoretical foundation, emphasising the importance of empowering individuals to make meaningful choices that shape their lives and influence broader societal structures (Sen, 1981).

Simultaneously, FACT undertook an internal process of deconstructing what agency means for a community-based organisation. This involved identifying how agency is embodied within FACT, with a key focus on fostering self-confidence for public engagement – speaking on panels, participating in meetings and webinars, and articulating visions for transformative change. These visions, as captured in the agency book, evolved into actionable pathways, implemented through co-research processes within the Urban Food Futures programme, as summarised in this report.

Central to this endeavour was the establishment and strengthening of strategic partnerships and collaborative networks in Cape Town. For FACT, partnerships went beyond mere collaboration to embrace co-creation and shared responsibility for achieving transformative goals. FACT recognised that meaningful partnerships are built on trust, mutual respect, and aligned values, providing opportunities for capacity building, knowledge exchange, and the amplification of community voices. These partnerships allowed FACT to navigate systemic challenges more

effectively by leveraging collective resources and expertise to implement sustainable changes in food systems.

Among the key partners, five stand out for their contributions. TMG Research, based in Berlin and Nairobi, played a pivotal role through its Urban Food Futures programme, which operated in Cape Town from June 2021 to March 2025. This partnership provided critical funding and research capacity through research associates and project coordinators who facilitated the action research processes, guided the co-analysis of findings, and contributed to the production of the reports, chapters, and academic papers that underpin FACT's advocacy initiatives. Additionally, TMG Research's relationship with FACT facilitated engagement with global strategic platforms, including the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW), the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), and regional exchanges involving partners from Sri Lanka, Egypt, Brazil, Ghana, and Kenya. These engagements raised FACT's visibility and enabled learning from established organisations such as Muungano Akiba Majini Trust in Nairobi.

The Social Change Assistance Trust (SCAT) also provided invaluable support as both a grant maker and capacity-building mentor. SCAT's contributions included financial literacy training, event co-organisation, and leadership development, strengthening FACT's organisational resilience. Similarly, the Heinrich Böll Foundation was a key content partner, especially in addressing gender-based violence (GBV). This partnership extended beyond initial funding to include co-hosting events and provision of critical resources. The African Centre for Cities (ACC) at the University of Cape Town (UCT) served as FACT's local research partner, contributing expertise on food governance and food system dynamics, providing feedback, brokering knowledge, facilitating networking, and ensuring that FACT's interventions were contextually relevant and research-informed.

Finally, Bertha House provided a physical and symbolic home for FACT's activities, offering a co-working space, connections with civil society organisations, learning exchanges, and practical resources such as desks, free Wi-Fi, meeting rooms, and catering for workshops. Collectively, these partnerships embedded FACT within a supportive ecosystem of local and global actors, enhancing its ability to drive systemic change in food systems, such as the food justice roundtable conversations.

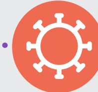
The partnerships established during the action research phase were vital to implement pathways.

One promising example for a new partnership development is FACT's engagement with the City of Cape Town. Representatives from the City of Cape Town participated in *Learning Journeys* and reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening the community kitchen network. A formal partnership is envisioned to support these kitchens through crisis funds, with further collaboration expand the GBV First Responder programme. At the provincial level, FACT is working to establish a partnership with the Western Cape Province through the Nourish to Flourish programme, which aims to integrate Early Childhood Development (ECD) services with community kitchens, using government childcare funding to subsidise these vital community resources. However, challenges remain at the ward level, where limited engagement and interest from ward councillors across research sites have hindered the establishment of robust local collaborations, highlighting the need for more targeted strategies.

The partnership-building experiences underscore the importance of sustained collaboration and the work required to maintain productive relationships. Communities must articulate clear visions, contribute tangibly to change, and define expectations from potential partners. Furthermore, internal clarity on which stakeholders to engage is essential as we consistently emphasised that change cannot occur in isolation.

Timeline Food Agency Cape Town FACT

Pre-2020
Research on food justice in urban agriculture (2016–2019)


2020
COVID 19 hit

2020
Co-researchers documented COVID-19 challenges

2020
Start to do agency study in the Cape Flats and St. Helena Bay

2021
Agency Study published

2021
Partnering with TMG Research's Urban Food Futures programme

2021
SCAT supports in financial literacy building

2021
Start to implement 3 FACT visions

2021
Communiy kitchen retreat in Goedgedacht

2021
Partnering with Nairobi

2021
Scoping with Urban Food Futures

2021
FACT starts with reading circles

2022
Policy event in Cape Town

2022
Joining the Bertha House community

2022
Nomonde and Mimi join to Nairobi

2022
African Book Festival in Berlin

2022
Attending Policy Event in Nairobi

2022
Pathway 1 – Coping with crises with community kitchens kicks off

2022
Pathway 2 – Mutual Accountability – Food Dialogues continue

2022
Isiswenye Film launched

2022
uPhakatoni podcast series launched

2022
Poetry Book – Fresh offerings

2022
Co-research continues

2022
Attending Social Justice Assembly

2022
FACT registers as NPC

2023/24
Pathway 5 – Crowdsourcing data starts in 6 communities

2023/24
Continuing food dialogues

2023/24
Theatre of the oppressed

2023/24
Hosting of learning journeys with Province and City of Cape Town

2023/24
Right to Food Training in Cape Town

2023/24
Hosting Food Imbizo's with UWC

2023/24
Participation at CFS Event in Rome

2023/24
Participation at UNCSW in New York

2023/24
Pots and pens campaign starts

2025
Launch of the community kitchen documentary

2025
Co-organise 1st Kitchen Summit in the Western Cape

2025
Closing Urban Food Futures

Figure 24 Timeline of FACT. Singlee 2023

7.3 Four years of community food dialogues – priorities from communities

Multi-stakeholder fora often fail to drive systemic change, as dialogue alone cannot address structural deficiencies. Even before the pandemic, Cape Town hosted numerous multi-stakeholder platforms, such as the Food Imbizo and the Food Dialogues. However, these initiatives were predominantly white-led and perceived by communities as tokenistic spaces for participation (Kroll et al., 2024). Barriers to meaningful community engagement included language differences, limited access to transport, and insufficient information about meetings (Paganini & Lemke, 2020).

In contrast, FACT conceptualises community food dialogues as a collaborative process centred on learning, relearning, and co-creating knowledge and solutions, with strong emphasis on inclusivity and genuine engagement (Buthelezi & Metelerkamp, 2022). FACT's community food dialogues, initiated in 2020, sought to address these systemic challenges and have highlighted the disconnect between constitutional rights and lived experiences (Paganini et al., 2021). During community dialogues, participants raised concerns about whether they were ever part of genuine conversations, as opposed to being drawn into debates structured to make them "fit in." In low-income urban areas, governance is often invisible, with many residents lacking the knowledge to address food-related challenges. Shame, culturally associated with hunger, further silences the issue. This underscores the need for a community-led strategy to dismantle stigma and tackle food insecurity (Nyaba & Paganini, 2023).

Community food dialogues

Over the past four years, as part of the Urban Food Futures programme, two rounds of food dialogues were held annually in all research communities. These half-day thematic sessions, often hosted in community kitchens and facilitated by the FACT team, focused on different aspects of food governance. In 2021, the dialogues centred on integrating local feedback into food governance. The 2022 sessions identified key systemic challenges, while those in 2023 focused on the right to food. The 2024 dialogues marked the culmination of these efforts, where survey findings were presented, and priorities for engaging government on Urban Food Futures themes were identified. This synthesis of the 2024 dialogues captures the critical reflections and insights gathered throughout these discussions and were compiled by Bonang Libuke.

Accountability emerged as a pivotal theme, with participants raising fundamental questions about its realisation in governance. While many viewed accountability as an ideal upheld by previous generations, they noted its absence in contemporary leadership. Some linked this decline to structural inequalities inherited from Apartheid, which have been exacerbated under current governance. Moreover, the lack of accessible frameworks for interpreting and enacting accountability was criticised, as judicial bodies investigating public sector misconduct lack binding authority. The dialogues highlighted South Africa's reactive rather than proactive governance, with crises like the COVID-19 relief measures reinforcing perceptions of delayed responses. Participants also expressed concern about their exclusion from processes, seeing themselves as recipients rather than contributors to accountability.

A participant asked a question, asking how accountability can be made understandable. Saying that is it a beautiful word because it perfectly describes the duty but how does one sit with the action of realizing it? Does accountability and being held to it mean owning it? It was well evident amongst the circle that a fair amount of the participants could agree that they believe previous generations of governance consisted of accountable individuals. Saying "back then, our leaders did the things they said they would do!" Arguing that currently we sit led by a government that does not have accounting to actions as a part of their official order. This a flawed observation as the previous government of South Africa had its primary caterings to the white minority. This suggests that many resources were directed to a minority that they could in fact cater to as the population was not too big. The introduction of a new government meant catering to all citizens. The current government is struggling, if not failing at this task. The country finds itself still experiencing structural inequalities that reflect the missteps of the previous one. In fact, the inequality gap has gotten greater under the current government. (Libuke, 2025)

The dialogues revealed community members's isolation from information and systemic processes. Participants viewed governance as a distant and intangible force, often failing to see themselves as active role-players in the food system. This detachment was compounded by low literacy rates and historical betrayals of trust, which undermined their agency. In all food dialogues, the groups cited broken trust and the absence of participatory processes as barriers to addressing systemic food insecurity and economic inequities. The overarching sentiment of **mistrust** underscored many discussions, reflecting a deep-seated scepticism about the state's capacity to implement fair and transparent governance. This mistrust is perceived to undermine the potential for mutual accountability. Participants advocated for moral principles to underpin economic systems, ensuring equitable resource distribution and sustainable food systems. Proposals such as community-led initiatives, participatory budgeting, and the establishment of food policy councils were suggested as pathways to bridging the trust gap. These strategies aim to foster collaboration between citizens and the state, ensuring that policies align with lived realities and promote inclusive development.

Mistrust is a cliché of the time we are living in. Community members have immense doubt that any processes that includes the state fairing to abide by duty will indeed be seen through. Attaining mutual accountability and collective agency is a process rooted deeply in both role players trusting not only the process but themselves to be accountable to the process. Not only does trust dictate a portion of the resulting outcome, but it also guides the process from beginning to end. Processes conducted without trust can see a lack of transparency in communication and produce a lack of responsiveness to changing conditions. The question is how to remedy trust, so processes do not suffer non-participation due to the lack of trust. Looking at trust as social capital means looking at how legislation can not only state policy but state how to trust policy. What surfaced is that community members do not trust the state because they believe the state lacks empathy, aside a positive action-based response that follows established rules and norms (Libuke, 2025).

Another critical topic that emerged is **education and awareness** (building knowledge for empowerment). Participants highlighted the need for greater education around food literacy and rights awareness, such as the rights to access food relief and social services. Many community members expressed a lack of understanding about how to exercise their rights or engage with governance structures, which often left them feeling disempowered. Low literacy levels were also identified as a significant barrier, with suggestions for adult education programmes and accessible communication formats to bridge these gaps. By fostering agency through knowledge, education initiatives can enable individuals to engage meaningfully in decision-making and advocate for their needs within the food system. The dialogues also revealed generational differences in perspectives, underscoring the importance of tailored approaches – such as youth-focused entrepreneurship programmes and efforts to reframe the roles of older individuals in societal and food systems. Ultimately, education was recognised as a powerful tool to move communities from passive reliance on external systems to active participation and self-advocacy.

Unlearning and relearning, however, cannot be fully realised through conventional dialogue platforms, as participants often feel uneasy engaging in uncomfortable discussions. FACT's innovative approaches, including art-based and storytelling methods, aim to foster genuine engagement and understanding. These processes are essential for addressing food insecurity, promoting social accountability, and shifting power dynamics between researchers and communities. By positioning community members as active participants and co-researchers, these dialogues enhance empowerment, enabling participants to advocate for food justice and influence policymaking.

Photo 17 Food dialogue at the Alcardo Andrews Foundation. A deep dive into the findings of crowdsourcing data. Libuke, 2024

Text box 6: Theatre of the Oppressed

The Theatre of the Oppressed transcends statistics to uncover the human experiences, systemic inequalities, and embodied struggles underlying food insecurity. Productions such as The Pot of Pap at the End of the Rainbow Nation transform the stage into a space for exploring the trauma, survival, and resilience of those grappling with hunger. The play's opening quote – "Hunger burns the last fats of my being... I scream. There are flames in my belly" – captures the visceral realities of food insecurity, contrasting sharply with the detached tones of public discourse.

A central theme of the theatre is its examination of power within food systems, asking who controls resources, who has access, and how individuals navigate these inequities. The performance reveals the hidden structures of inequality and exclusion that perpetuate food insecurity while also exposing the tension between diplomatic discussions of hunger and the raw, undiplomatic realities faced by those experiencing it. As a result, the theatre serves as a platform for speaking truth to power, articulating the frustrations, anger, and resilience of marginalised communities.

The importance of community and collective coping mechanisms is also highlighted, particularly in settings such as the Cape Flats. The culture of sharing – through neighbourhood kitchens and community centres – illustrates grassroots resilience, demonstrating how social cohesion is vital for survival. These efforts are linked to calls for government intervention, job creation, and equitable resource distribution to support and sustain such initiatives.

Speculative elements of the play, such as imagined food banks and hunger-solving capsules, challenge audiences to think beyond immediate crises. The physical performances embody the struggles of hunger and violence, highlighting the profound physical and psychological toll these issues take. Triangulation sessions with data collectors further illuminated the systemic nature of these challenges, emphasising shared traumas and fostering collaborative research.

Ultimately, the Theatre of the Oppressed reveals the emotional, communal, and systemic dimensions of food insecurity, urging audiences to actively engage in reshaping equitable food systems.

7.4 Campaign – With Pots and Pens to Parliament

The *Pots and Pens* Campaign is an initiative aimed at raising awareness on the silent epidemic of food insecurity and hunger in Cape Town. It brings together Urban Food Futures' research findings from TMG, FACT, and other partners on the interconnected challenges of hunger, inequality, and violence, exacerbated by COVID-19, rising food prices, and load-shedding. At its core, the campaign seeks to make the indispensable role of under-resourced community kitchens visible, showcasing their contributions to feeding vulnerable populations and acting as hubs for social support, community-building, and tackling issues like gender-based violence. It advocates for the progressive realisation of the right to food, urging government and municipal stakeholders to recognise and act on hunger as a human rights issue affecting dignity, early childhood development, and community resilience.

The campaign is structured around key objectives, including mobilising government and awareness raising for municipal support, amplifying the visibility of community kitchens, and building partnerships. Through events like Learning Journeys, a march to parliament on World Food Day in October 2024 and Human Right Day in March 2025, a community kitchen film documentary, and ongoing public engagement via media and social platforms, the campaign aims to raise awareness for systemic change beyond band-aid support and place the right to nutritious food firmly on Cape Town's public agenda.

While this sounds ambitious, the campaign outcomes thus far also show that FACT's work in isolation will not achieve the visibility we had envisioned for the campaign. A crucial lesson learnt was how long it takes to break down a four-year research project into tangible key messages and calls to action. Whilst the FACT campaign team has been effective in bringing the message to the streets, a deeper, more strategic approach to social media, along with partnerships with other organisations working on similar topics, would have undoubtedly enhanced the campaign's visibility.

None of the core members of FACT had campaign experience, so from August 2024 to March 2025, an experienced campaigner provided consultation to a small team of FACT members. The goal was to building skills in public speaking, messaging, and social media management. Together with our communication partner, Design for Development, the team developed communication tools, a logo, and social media graphics. The team met regularly on Wednesdays for training, discussion and workshop sessions.

Photo 18 A march to parliament on World Food Day. Libuke 2024

Photo 18 With pots and pens to parliament. Libuke 2024

7.5 Learning Journeys as a lever for change

A Learning Journey with government is a collaborative process where officials, policymakers, and stakeholders come together to exchange knowledge, build understanding, and co-create solutions. The aim is to foster trust, transparency, and cooperation in policy development and implementation. Given the complexity of Cape Town's political landscape, we designed a *Learning Journeys* that leveraged the relationships between the research team and decision-makers. Previous research mainly by the Southern African Food Lab and the Centre of Excellence for Food Security has shown that *Learning Journeys* in Cape Town effectively bring communities and decision-makers into shared spaces to address challenges like food security (Drimie et al., 2018).

Traditional top-down policymaking often fails to address community challenges in meaningful ways. In contrast, the Learning Journey uses a participatory action research methodology, allowing grassroots communities and decision-makers to engage in dialogue that identifies locally specific issues and solutions. This bottom-up approach challenges one-size-fits-all solutions and advocates for systemic change.

In this project, the *Learning Journeys* focused on strengthening the kitchen network by exploring ways to create an enabling environment through targeted partnerships. Models developed as part of the crisis-response pathway were presented to invited decision-makers, yielding two key outcomes. First, government actors provided feedback on potential support structures in existing programmes, offering insights on aligning them with the needs of community kitchens. Simultaneously, kitchen representatives gave valuable input on how these structures could be better implemented or adapted to local contexts. Secondly, while only successful and scalable models were presented, the kitchen network participated to show solidarity and support with the women who presented their work on the day. Women from diverse neighbourhoods, religions, and generations illustrated the strength of their collaboration. A key argument made during the process was that this kitchen network, built on mutual support and sisterhood, represents a credible and cohesive partner for future government collaboration.

The mutual exchange during the *Learning Journey* highlighted the importance of fostering trust and accountability, showing how grassroots and institutional efforts can converge to strengthen partnerships, if they jointly develop an action plan.

7.5.1 Gardens 4 Change – Discussing a multi-partnership agreement with the City of Cape Town and the Department of Agriculture

The first *Learning Journey* aimed showcase the potential of the *Gardens4Change* model. The objective was to provide participants with insights into the challenges and opportunities of community-driven urban agriculture in Cape Town, specifically focusing on high-production hydroponic systems and agroecological kitchen gardens. These systems aim to address issues such as circular economies and the production of green leafy vegetables for meals provided at community kitchens.

Urban agriculture in Cape Town has a long history, with many NGOs active in the sector. However, a common critique is that these organisations often implement production gardens designed for marketing, primarily targeting up-market consumers outside low-income communities. Previous research indicates that urban farmers generally do not generate sufficient income for a livelihood, and urban agriculture has not significantly contributed to food security (Paganini & Lemke, 2021). The *Gardens4Change* model is inspired by the work of Miramar, a social enterprise in Kenya that focuses on hydroponic systems to produce food year-round, maximising space and optimising water usage (Kabiru et al., 2023).

Photo 20 *Learning journey* to better understand the circular economy of the Gardens4change model. Paganini, 2024

Central to the *Gardens4Change* model is hydroponic unit, using a tunnel-based system to grow vegetables in small pots nourished by water enriched with organic nutrients. The system is housed in a climate-controlled tunnel that protects crops from extreme temperatures and wind, enabling year-round production. Compared to conventional methods, hydroponics accelerates crop growth, ensuring a consistent and reliable supply of produce. The model prioritises crops essential for kitchen operations, such as spring onions, cabbage, and spinach, alongside herbs for culinary use. Lettuce is also grown as a supplementary crop, with a portion sold within the community to generate income. The production unit is resource-efficient, requiring less water and space than traditional urban agriculture, and helps address the limited agricultural land available in Cape Town's low-income settlements.

A key feature of the *Gardens4Change* model is its emphasis on circularity, which fosters collaboration and interdependence among participating kitchens. The system operates on a rotation model, with different kitchens taking responsibility for various stages of the production cycle. One kitchen propagates seedlings to ensure a continuous supply, another manages the hydroponic unit to optimise crop yield, and a third kitchen coordinates the distribution of harvested crops, ensuring all kitchens benefit equally.

This circular economy model enhances collaboration by embedding resource-sharing practices within the network. Currently, the hydroponic unit is supported by research funding, but its financial sustainability depends on securing backing from City of Cape Town programmes or the provincial Department of Agriculture to ensure long-term viability.

The proposal presented during the *Learning Journey* outlined a structured approach to expanding the *Gardens4Change* model. Key elements of the proposal included:

- Land Tenure: Through the City of Cape Town, securing access to school properties in six locations (e. g., Athlone North Primary School, Bonga Primary, Athlone North Primary, Bridgeville, Cavalleria in Kraaifontein, and Malibu High School in Mfuleni) to establish hydroponic systems for producing vegetables for schools and kitchen networks. Land agreements should include free water, electricity, and security provided by schools.
- Investment and crises prevention support: Initial investment costs for production are estimated at R115,000[34] for a 2x6m production system to produce vegetables for kitchens and host schools (produce is split evenly between them).

34 R115.000 – 5.999€ in February 2025

- **Operational support:** To run the unit, R4,000[35] per month is required for labour costs and R1,000 for seedlings and maintenance. The Agricultural School of Elsenberg provides stipends for agricultural support and the Department of Agriculture provides material support, such as shade nets, tunnel systems, and agricultural tools.

7.5.2 Kitchens as GBV First Responders – Partnership with Social Development

The network of community kitchens addresses the intersecting challenges of food insecurity, gender-based violence (GBV), and marginalisation – issues central to societal well-being but often tackled in isolation. Data from over 4,000 households surveyed in 2023 and 2024 reveals a significant correlation: individuals experiencing GBV are more likely to be food moderately or severely food insecure. Food insecurity rates in the study areas are alarmingly high as described in detail in chapter 4. Notably, woman-headed households, larger families, and those unemployed or employed in informal or low-wage sectors, such as the food industry, are disproportionately affected. This highlights the growing role of community kitchens, which have become essential since the COVID-19 pandemic. By the second survey round in 2024, 52 % of households relied on these kitchens, up from 40 % in the first round in 2023. People who have experienced gender-based violence (GBV) are much more likely to struggle with food insecurity than those who have not. In the first round, they were 280% more likely to face moderate or severe food insecurity, and in the second round, 222 % more likely – meaning they were more than three times as likely as people who haven't experience GBV to struggle with food insecurity, confirming a strong and significant link.

During the second Learning Journey, we advocated for systemic funding support for the GBV First Responder programme, which provides legal advice, counselling, and referrals to shelters. Established in 2021 as part of an action research initiative, the programme involved twenty women who were active as cooks and kitchen heads within the community kitchen network. A key element of the programme was training these kitchen teams to serve as GBV First Responders. At the start of the research phase, a week-long GBV First Responder training course was conducted, equipping 24 women with the skills to recognise survivors of GBV in settings like kitchen queues and offer appropriate support, including legal advice, referrals to legal aid, medical care, emergency assistance, shelter information, and counselling. The training also raised awareness of the intersection between food insecurity and GBV.

The GBV First Responders meet monthly to debrief, reflect on cases, receive further training, and exchange experiences to strengthen their support network. In most kitchens, First Responders facilitate referrals to legal and medical services, while some also provide direct counselling. Annually, the First Responders document and assist an average of 1,100 GBV cases. In 2024, they contributed 62,400 volunteer hours to GBV services.

First Responders have observed that food insecurity often fuels GBV, as hunger exacerbates domestic tensions, while survivors of GBV frequently remain trapped in abusive situations due to economic dependence on perpetrators. These findings highlight the urgent need for integrated interventions that simultaneously address food insecurity and GBV, recognising their interdependence and prioritising holistic, community-driven solutions to break cycles of violence and deprivation.

35 R4.000 – 208€ and R1.000 – 52€

Systemic funding for the GBV First Responder programme will enable the network to expand its reach and services. In collaboration with like-minded organisations, such as the Mosaic Centre and Heinrich Böll Foundation, the Learning Journey aimed to identify governmental support channels to provide sustainable funding.

1 **Scaling out the First Responders programme:** The First Responders training, monitoring, and joint learning initiative has yielded two significant insights. Firstly, it has illuminated the immense challenge of providing adequate initial support to survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) in an increasingly violent environment. Secondly, it has demonstrated the pivotal dual function of community kitchens. Many of these kitchens operate on the premise of an old adage, "a hungry man is an angry man", thus providing sustenance to communities as a means of supporting society as a whole. Concurrently, these kitchens serve as safer spaces for victims and locations where both emergency and long-term support are provided. This support is currently offered gratis, in addition to food provision. These women are stepping into roles where Social Development ought to play a more substantial part. Therefore, building upon the successful initiation of the GBV First Responders programme and scaling it with governmental support has the potential to effect significant change. By addressing hunger and ensuring access to nutritious meals, these kitchens act as a preventative tool, potentially mitigating the risk of violence. To further develop this initiative, it is crucial to involve survivors in the design of interventions. In conclusion, the expansion of the GBV First Responders programme, coupled with the dual functionality of community kitchens, presents a promising approach to addressing GBV in escalating violent environments. This strategy not only provides immediate support but also contributes to long-term community resilience and social change.

2 **Volunteer and staff funding for kitchens:** At the core of the kitchen network are 30 volunteers and 12 staff members who dedicate themselves year-round to operations in Bridgetown, Gugulethu, Hanover Park, Mfuleni, and Wesbank. These individuals are vital to the delivery of essential services, from meal preparation to GBV counselling and community outreach. Reliable funding is needed to provide them with a living wage, safeguarding their well-being and ensuring continuity of service while reducing the risk of burnout. To cover their costs, we seek strategic support through the states' EPWP programme to finance volunteers, and the Department of Social Development (DSD) to fund the programme.

Photo 21 Community participants during the Learning Journey. Libuke 2024

7.5.3 Restaurant partnerships - the role of the private sector in the accountability debate

The private sector could play a crucial role in driving transformative change in food systems. Restaurants, as key stakeholders in the food economy, are uniquely positioned to promote ethical practices that extend beyond their own operations. Partnerships between restaurants in affluent areas and low-income food providers, such as community kitchens, can create mutually beneficial relationships that rethink the flow of resources and values in our food systems.

The ethics of food system change require a shift from isolated acts of charity to sustained collaboration and shared responsibility. Initially, a concept was discussed with restaurant owners to ask customers to voluntarily top up their bills. However, feedback suggested that this model would not work in the Cape Town context, as most waiters rely on tips. A top-up system, would make the client to choose – either the good cause and a donation towards community kitchens, or the tip for the waiter. Additionally, many restaurants had already played a key role during the pandemic by providing donations and food, and there was a sense of 'charity fatigue' from simply sending money. By forming connections with community kitchens, restaurants hope they can contribute meaningfully while gaining deeper insights into the challenges faced by marginalised communities. Community kitchens hope they would benefit from resources, expertise in value chains and solidarity. This exchange builds on the moral responsibility of those in privileged positions to leverage their resources for the broader social good. These partnerships also show that ethical commitments can align with business goals, reinforcing the idea that a more equitable food system benefits everyone.

As part of the conclusion of our action research phase in 2025, five community kitchens were paired with five restaurants. This programme aims to bridge the gap between the restaurant economy and community kitchens through structured mentorship and collaboration.

Currently, a plate costs R6.80, but it would cost R11.30 if the kitchen team's costs were covered. At this price, one doesn't even receive a glass of sparkling water in the CBD. We posit that if the kitchens curated a meal for dinner at a rate of R50-75[36], which would be a superior dish to those of the feeding scheme, and sold these in a restaurant ambience to their neighbours, there would likely be a clientele for such offerings within the own communities. As our research on the 'food is not for free' model has shown, there is a willingness within communities to contribute. The restaurant-kitchen partnership aims to explore what could be cooked, how this price point could be met, and how the kitchen can still generate revenue. Therefore, the expertise of restaurants is required for guidance, as is the expertise from the kitchens to establish regular restaurant days outside of the feeding scheme operation, but in conjunction with the kitchen programmes.

The third *Learning Journey* looks into the role of private sector restaurants in building meaningful partnerships with grassroots organisations such as community kitchens. We tested an innovative model inspired by Brazil's *restaurantes populares*. These affordable dining places in Brazil's low income areas serve as hubs of dignity, combating hunger while offering a restaurant experience that upholds human dignity.

36 R6,80 – 0,35€; R11,30 – 0,60€; R50-75 – 2,60€-3,90€ in February 2025

7.6 Lessons-learnt – Feedback on two *Learning Journeys*

To better understand the impact of the two *Learning Journeys* in September and November, we asked participants for feedback. This feedback will help design the third Learning Journey and will be important shaping the community kitchen engagement strategy with the government.

Survey for Experts and Decision-Makers

This section provides an analysis of feedback from decision-makers who participated in the *Learning Journeys*. A total of 11 decision-makers engaged across both *Learning Journeys*, with eight providing responses. As not all participants answered every question, the findings reflect a range of perspectives on the effectiveness, impact, and potential improvements for future engagements.

Participants reported they gained a deeper understanding of the intersections between food insecurity and violence, particularly how food circulates within a highly unequal and often violent urban environment. Several respondents highlighted the vulnerability of men to food insecurity in the context of gang violence, suggesting that food deprivation may contribute to cycles of violence. These respondents proposed that the research should also have examined the intersection of food insecurity and its impact on men. The role of community kitchens, particularly those established during the COVID-19 pandemic, was recognised as critical to ongoing food security efforts.

Additionally, the *Learning Journeys* illuminated the structural inequities in access to nutritious food, reinforcing the importance of food gardens linked directly to community kitchens. For some participants, witnessing the scale of food insecurity firsthand – through visits to community kitchens – was a pivotal moment that reinforced the urgency of continued dialogue.

Decision-makers expressed that their presence and participation contributed to a sense of solidarity with community-led food security initiatives. Many highlighted that simply attending the Learning Journey and engaging in dialogue was a meaningful form of recognition and support. Others noted that their participation provided them with valuable insights into on-the-ground realities, which could inform institutional decision-making and potential partnership agreements with FACT and the community kitchen network based on the proposals provided. Some respondents actively shared their experiences in food security work, particularly regarding community food gardens, which they believed added value to the discussions.

There was also interest in creating a structured mechanism for maintaining connections established during the Learning Journeys, particularly to enable continued knowledge exchange and potential policy interventions. A strong emphasis was placed on the need for structured follow-up engagements between communities and decision-makers. Many respondents advocated for more Learning Journeys to sustain momentum and strengthen emerging collaborations. The importance of punctuality, time management, and respecting participants' availability was also highlighted as an area for improvement.

Participants suggested the implementation of practical follow-ups, including summary reports or briefing documents outlining key takeaways, would be important. However, it was also noted that not all community members were up to date on the key takeaways and spoke from different perspectives. While the Learning Journeys were recognised as a valuable platform for discussion and awareness-raising, some participants noted that community members had varying understandings of what "change" entails, which sometimes led to inconsistencies in argumentation. However, the initiative was widely regarded as having fostered a spirit of collaboration and collective responsibility.

Decision-makers identified roles in supporting next steps, ranging from continued participation in Learning Journeys to exploring funding or training opportunities for hydroponics. Some respondents noted the need to align support with institutional resources and formal application processes and actively requested follow-ups by the communities. Others saw themselves as advocates, offering knowledge-sharing and public engagement to amplify the initiative's impact. The importance of producing stronger advocacy materials and written outputs to support policy engagement was also highlighted.

Overall, decision-makers affirmed the value of *Learning Journeys* as a platform for engaging experts and policymakers. Many noted that these engagements allow for the sharing of experiences and insights that might not be visible in formal policy discussions. However, there was consensus on the need for structured follow-up sessions where discussions could be translated into concrete recommendations.

Feedback from Community Participants

This section presents a synthesis of qualitative feedback from 20 community members who participated in FACT dialogues, training sessions, and Learning Journeys. While not all respondents answered every question, the data provides insights into the perceived impact of these initiatives at both the individual and community levels.

Participants reported heightened awareness of systemic issues such as food insecurity, unemployment, and gender-based violence (GBV). Notably, the Learning Journeys facilitated the recognition of hunger as a pervasive yet often overlooked crisis that transcends socio-economic boundaries. The dialogues also contributed to an increased understanding of GBV, with some individuals encountering discussions on this issue for the first time through their participation.

Respondents identified personal growth as a key outcome of their participation in the action-research process. Many developed essential skills such as public speaking, networking, and advocacy. Additionally, the importance of continuous learning through workshops and training was emphasised as a means to foster empowerment.

The *Learning Journey* was perceived as a critical platform for knowledge exchange between communities and government stakeholders. Participants noted that their active engagement through dialogues, reading circles, and reflections played a crucial role in shaping the success of the Learning Journey. While some respondents entered the process with limited expectations, many found the discussions highly relevant, particularly those exploring the intersection of GBV and food security. The presence of key stakeholders was highlighted as a factor that enhanced the perceived legitimacy and impact of the initiative.

However, perceptions of the *Learning Journey's* effectiveness varied. While some participants viewed the process as exceeding expectations, others emphasised the need for further clarity on its role and objectives. The successful participation of invited guests was identified as a key strength, particularly in facilitating interdepartmental engagement and fostering a collaborative approach to addressing community challenges.

A central theme that emerged was the value of diverse voices in shaping discussions and action plans. Participants appreciated the opportunity to share lived experiences and explore the broader implications of their work within their communities. Of particular significance was the recognition of community kitchens as an essential intervention, prompting discussions on their long-term sustainability and potential scale-up. The expansion of the GBV First Responder Programme was also cited as a strategic next step in addressing the intersectionality of food insecurity and gender-based violence.

Looking forward, respondents expressed differing perspectives on the need for continued support. While some felt satisfied with the current trajectory, others emphasised the necessity of structured follow-up actions to ensure the momentum generated by the *Learning Journeys* translates into tangible community outcomes. This underscores the broader call for sustained engagement through internal food dialogues and reading circles, which serve as critical mechanisms for mobilisation, advocacy, and the iterative reinforcement of key messages emerging from the research.

The feedback collected from participants underscores the *Learning Journey's* role in fostering awareness, capacity-building, and multi-stakeholder engagement. However, it also highlights the need for ongoing dialogue to clarify its function and sustain its impact. The iterative nature of mobilisation and advocacy within communities necessitates a more structured approach to follow-up interventions, ensuring that the insights gained through these initiatives contribute meaningfully to long-term social change.

8 From local to global – A feminist call for urban food systems transformation

The approach of moving from local to global and from global to local has been deeply embedded in the character of the Urban Food Futures programme and is inspired by TMG's Gegenstromprinzip. We examined global trends (Haysom & Paganini, 2023) and discussed their implications for local change (Paganini & Weigelt, 2023). Additionally, we utilised the platform provided by TMG's Urban Food Futures programme to present our action research and pathways at global events. In 2024, we carefully designed a series of dialogues and platforms to advocate for a feminist call for urban food systems transformation. The three events also served to explore feminist development policy examples, such as the "BMZ Feminist Development Policy" published in 2023, and to provide a practical learning from the ground for what we conceptualise as feminist research in real-life settings.

In these global events, we emphasised that adopting gender-transformative approaches can fundamentally reshape harmful gender norms, roles, and power imbalances. Such approaches extend beyond merely accommodating gender differences, instead actively interrogating and transforming the root causes of inequality embedded within social structures and food systems. The intersection of gender, poverty, and violence creates complex challenges that resist simplistic solutions. Traditional policies often reinforce patriarchal divisions and fail to recognise the vital roles women play in addressing these challenges.

By embracing gender-transformative approaches, we can expose the connections between gender, poverty, and violence. This framework allows for advocacy that not only addresses immediate needs but also works towards long-term, sustainable change. Importantly, it ensures the inclusion of groups that are frequently excluded from policy processes, thereby fostering more equitable and representative decision-making.

8.1 Regional Dialogue in Cape Town

Urban Food Futures' Regional Dialogue in Cape Town in March 2024 brought together voices from Sri Lanka (Colombo UrbanLab), Brazil (Instituto Comida da Amanha), South Africa (African Centre for Cities at UCT, Callas Foundation, FACT, and SCAT), Kenya (Shibuye, Slum Dwellers International), Ghana (ACE LEGAL), and Egypt (CSIPM) to explore these dynamics and propose solutions for more equitable and sustainable food futures. The three-day discussions focused on gender, informality, and the lived experiences of communities, shedding light on the vital yet often overlooked role of women in addressing food insecurity amid the polycrises.

At the core of the dialogue was a feminist analysis on the case studies presented by the participants to highlighted how women, particularly in marginalised urban areas, bear the dual burden of caregiving and participation in informal food economies. These women are not only central to food production and distribution but also to community resilience, often stepping in when formal systems fail. As UN Habitat (2020) notes, over 90 % of women globally live in areas with low or medium empowerment levels, with many residing in informal settlements. These settlements are not only sites of food insecurity but also of compounded gender-based vulnerabilities. Studies from UN Women (2021) and Oxfam (2023) demonstrate

that food insecurity often correlates with increased gender-based violence and femicide. A feminist perspective makes these hidden intersections visible, urging scholars and policymakers to reconsider how food systems can address inequality.

Participants at the dialogue also emphasised the importance of informal networks, particularly those led by women, in mitigating food insecurity and maintaining community cohesion. Women's collective actions – whether through savings groups, food-sharing initiatives, or mutual caregiving – are key drivers of resilience. Although these contributions have well-documented economic and social impacts, they remain largely invisible in formal governance systems. Without recognition and support, grassroots efforts risk stagnating under systemic barriers. The dialogue stressed the need for governance structures that value and amplify women's contributions, ensuring they are no longer marginalised in food system planning.

The findings of the dialogue call for a shift from reactive crisis management to proactive, feminist-informed governance. Food insecurity cannot be addressed in isolation from broader systemic inequities. This approach not only improves food security but also strengthens social capital, a fragile yet critical resource for communities. By recognising women's invisible contributions and creating pathways for their inclusion in decision-making, future urban food systems can move beyond survival towards dignity, equity, and sustainability.

As outcome of the Regional Dialogue, we co-developed with participants presentations and key messages for the upcoming UNCSW and UNCFS negotiations.

Photo 22 Gallery walk during the Regional Dialogue. Paganini, 2024

Photo 23 UNCSW panel session with Heinrich Böll Foundation, Callas Foundation and UN Woman. Weigelt, 2024

8.2 UNCSW in New York

The 68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68) took place in New York City from 11 to 22 March 2024, gathering global participants to accelerate progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. This year's dialogue focused on reforming institutions that perpetuate exclusion and addressing entrenched poverty. A key aspect of our contribution was the inclusion of a gender-just perspective – one that critically examines disparities in power, status, and systemic discrimination to inform more meaningful and inclusive policymaking.

The urgency of these issues was underscored by stark statistics and real-world examples. Women are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence and food insecurity, especially during crises. For example, conflict heightens the risks of forced displacement and violence against women, with an estimated 736 million women globally experiencing physical or sexual violence as of 2023 (UN Women & UN Habitat, 2020). Despite producing 50–80 % of the world's food, women are more vulnerable to climate shocks that undermine food security and income generation. By 2030, it is projected that one in four women and girls will face moderate to severe food insecurity (UN, 2020).

We contributed to these discussions through a series of events at UNCSW in partnership with FACT, SCAT, the Callas Foundation, and Shibuye, as well as key representatives from organisations like UN Women, the Heinrich Böll Foundation, the Clooney Foundation for Justice, and the Global Alliance for Care. Together, we explored gender-just pathways to address intersecting challenges, including food insecurity, gender-based violence, and social protection. These sessions reinforced the urgent need for systemic change, grounded in feminist principles, to dismantle inequalities within food systems and governance.

In South Africa, community kitchens – primarily led by women – have become crucial in addressing these intersecting crises. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these kitchens provided a lifeline to those in informal and low-income urban areas, distributing thousands of meals weekly. Beyond food provision, they also served as safe havens for individuals escaping rising gang violence and gender-based violence. Through TMG's research and collaboration, community kitchens have evolved into transformative spaces that tackle both food insecurity and gender-based violence. Innovations such as greenhouses, bulk food purchasing, and accessing government funding have enhanced their resilience. TMG and FACT are currently piloting community-driven data collection initiatives in Cape Town to address knowledge gaps and provide evidence for informed advocacy and policy design.

CSW68 unfolded against a backdrop of growing hostility towards women's rights advocates globally. Feminists and women's rights defenders continue to challenge the agendas of conservative and fascist actors, which often target activists, marginalised communities, and individuals who defy traditional gender norms in identity, expression, or sexual orientation. Many discussions at CSW68 highlighted how these oppressive structures not only undermine equality but also actively endanger those advocating for it. Despite these challenges, the event provided a platform for dynamic grassroots initiatives, research presentations, and civil society dialogues. Although the member states' final text was criticised for its lack of ambition – especially on issues such as gender-based violence, economic justice in care work, and the oppression of BiPOC communities – the event facilitated vital opportunities for networking, collaboration, and knowledge exchange.

8.3 CFS in Rome

The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) serves as a crucial international platform, bringing together governments, civil society, and private sector actors to coordinate global efforts to combat hunger and malnutrition. Its significance lies in its ability to influence policy frameworks and facilitate shared governance, with the goal of addressing complex food security challenges. The 52nd Plenary Session of the CFS in October 2024 provided a critical opportunity to advocate for transformative approaches to urban food systems, particularly through a feminist lens.

Further, the CFS offers a unique international platform for coordinating efforts against hunger and malnutrition. The recent report by the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE, 2024) acknowledged some gender-related issues but fell short in offering robust strategies to tackle structural injustices or incorporate care work as a central element in urban food systems. The report highlights the crucial roles women play in urban food systems – particularly in production, distribution, and vending – but notes that these contributions are often undervalued, with women receiving fewer benefits and opportunities than their male counterparts. In traditional value chains and street food vending, women are largely excluded from decision-making, receive lower wages, and are more vulnerable to harassment and violence (HLPE, 2024).

In partnership with organisations such as the Global Alliance for the Future of Food, Instituto Comida do Amanhã, Brazil's government representatives, and the Philanthropic Mechanism, we launched a series of opinion briefs ahead of CFS to highlight critical gaps in the intersectional and feminist lens, offering actionable recommendations for policy discussions at the CFS.

Central to our intervention was the call for integrating feminist perspectives into the transformation of urban food systems. This approach emphasises the essential role that women – particularly those from marginalised communities – play in securing food for urban populations. Despite their contributions to food production, distribution, and care work, women often face systemic barriers, including exclusion from governance processes, the undervaluation of their labour, and exposure to gender-based violence.

We argued that feminist approaches to food governance must move beyond recognising disparities and instead address the root causes of inequality, such as the devaluation of care work, the unequal distribution of caregiving responsibilities, and the lack of supportive governance structures. A feminist framework calls for the inclusion of caregivers in policymaking processes and the creation of physical spaces for care work within urban food system design. This framework should also centre grassroots initiatives.

Lastly, we emphasised the need to create synergies between existing CFS policy recommendations such as the one on gender and inequality. Such integration can establish more inclusive urban governance structures and ensure the voices and needs of women are prioritised. Ultimately, our discussions culminated in a shared vision for change: urban food systems must be reimagined as spaces of equity and resilience, where food security is not merely a goal but a fundamental right.

9 From global to local: Three visions for feminist urban food futures in Cape Town – Roadmap to 2030

The transformative potential of action research and community-driven initiatives lies in their capacity to envision a future shaped by collective aspirations and shared goals. Our 2021 study, often referred to as the "yellow book," introduced three foundational visions co-created through early collaborations with research teams and initial community dialogues. These visions provided a guiding framework for the Urban Food Futures programme, shaping the pathways developed since.

Building on this foundation, this chapter presents three new visions co-created with community kitchen heads and partner organisations in Cape Town in November 2024. These visions aim to serve as a roadmap for transformation, guiding partners toward meaningful change by 2030.

Vision 1: Strengthening Community Kitchens – From Band-Aids to Commons

We envision community kitchens not as mere temporary solutions to hunger but as enduring hubs of solidarity, dialogue, and resistance. These kitchens should serve as transformative hubs for food justice, fostering community cohesion, skill-building, and sustainable local food systems that challenge inequities at their root.

In Cape Town, community kitchens have primarily operated as voluntary emergency relief spaces since the pandemic, relying heavily on the unpaid labour and sacrifices of women. These women have opened their homes, dedicated their time, subsidised food relief with their own money, and provided counseling and care to those in need. While their efforts have been nothing short of dedication and care for the community, this model is unsustainable and risks perpetuating the systemic inequities it seeks to alleviate.

Charity-based food provision, such as community kitchens, operates within a deeply political framework. Food charities distribute food to individuals who lack the income to secure it, filling critical gaps left by the neoliberal restructuring of welfare states. This has redefined the state's responsibilities to citizens, shifting the burden of care onto communities and individuals. While these efforts are crucial in addressing immediate needs, they play a complex role in reinforcing capitalist structures.

Volunteers, many of whom face economic precarity themselves, are caught in this paradoxical system: their labour offers them a sense of belonging in a society that devalues care work, even as they contribute to sustaining an exploitative status quo. These kitchens operate as disciplinary spaces, responding to the symptoms of systemic violence rather than its root causes.

Our research explored alternative approaches to reimagine these kitchens as economically viable, socially empowering, and politically transformative. In doing so, we co-designed and tested pilot models with community kitchen heads, tested sustainable frameworks that align with a gender-transformative lens and hosted the *Learning Journeys* to discuss with government. Because only if we institutionalise community kitchens, we will ensure longevity and expand their reach. In doing so, the research had established the community kitchen network, as governments partner for change.

Promising complementary income-generation mechanisms have also been identified, such as community savings groups (Stokvels), partnerships with restaurants are tested and scaled, and

contributions from community members granted financial support. These initiatives can help sustain the kitchens while reinforcing community ownership and participation. While vital, these initiatives alone are not enough. The existence of community kitchens should not be a band-aid that allows a broken food system-rooted in patriarchal, capitalist, and racist structures-to persist unchallenged. These kitchens must evolve into spaces of resistance, advocacy, and systemic change.

Transforming community kitchens into commons of resistance disrupts this dynamic. Instead of sustaining the "politics of provision," we aim to reimagine these spaces as collective acts of care, challenging the structures that necessitate food charity in the first place. By linking immediate food access to broader struggles for systemic change-land justice, gender equity, and the dismantling of exploitative food systems-we position community kitchens as sites of solidarity and transformation.

Vision 2: From pots and pens to parliament – Advocating for the Right to Food

We envision a future where the Right to Food is not merely a constitutional mandate but a lived reality for every individual. This vision bridges the gap between grassroots innovation and policymaking, using political education, dialogue, and creative expression to empower communities, amplify their voices, and hold the state accountable for its obligations.

The right to food is enshrined in Section 27 of the South African Constitution, which obliges the state to take reasonable legislative and other measures to ensure that everyone has access to sufficient food. This right is further supported by international agreements, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which South Africa is a signatory. However, while the framework exists, implementation has been inconsistent and inadequate.

National programmes like school feeding schemes, breastfeeding support initiatives, and Early Childhood Development (ECD) support have proven effective in alleviating hunger, particularly among children. Despite these successes, these interventions remain limited in scale and scope. Food insecurity continues to plague areas like the Cape Flats, where many are unable to access adequate nutrition. This is exacerbated by structural inequalities, poor policy coordination, and insufficient funding for community-led, informal protection systems. The gap between constitutional promises and lived realities underscores the urgency of transforming political commitment into tangible action.

The struggle for food justice is inherently linked to broader systemic inequalities, including the right to the city. Urban environments in South Africa, in particular, are marked by the coexistence of formal and informal systems, creating complex dynamics that shape access to food and resources. Informal networks, such as street vendors and community kitchens, often fill the void left by failing state systems, acting as critical safety nets for vulnerable populations.

Yet, informal systems are frequently undervalued or actively undermined by formal governance structures, despite their vital role in sustaining livelihoods. This dissonance perpetuates exclusion and inequality, marginalising the very systems that communities rely on for survival. Recognising and integrating these informal systems into broader urban policies is essential for realising both the right to food and the right to the city.

Furthermore, making the invisible visible is crucial. Food insecurity often remains hidden within households, particularly among women who disproportionately bear the burden of care and sacrifice. By amplifying these

narratives and bringing them into public discourse, we can challenge the structural forces that perpetuate food insecurity and inequality.

Awareness as Catalysts for Change

Organisations such as FACT and community hubs like Bertha House are crucial in addressing this gap. They act as knowledge brokers, fostering political literacy and creating spaces for collective learning and action. Through workshops, storytelling, art-based reflection and dialogue, these organisations empower communities to understand and assert their right to food. Their work is essential in bridging the educational divide that often hinders meaningful participation in governance.

Creative methodologies, such as the Theatre of the Oppressed, podcasts and films, have proven effective in making complex issues more accessible and engaging. These approaches not only stimulate thought but also provide platforms for marginalised voices, transforming the hidden struggles of food insecurity into visible, collective demands for justice.

Knowledge as a Prerequisite for Participation

Many communities lack the information and resources needed to navigate complex state systems or understand how to claim their rights. The educational divide deepens inequalities, creating barriers to meaningful engagement in governance. Community organisations must play a central role as knowledge brokers, translating technical policy language into accessible information and facilitating dialogue between communities and the state.

Here, FACT's experience could be a game-changer. A combination of reading circles, food dialogues, and right to food training as multipliers could provide a strategic approach. The vision is that activities, which have so far been run by a handful of FACT facilitators, will expand and multiply over the years.

By equipping individuals with the tools to understand their rights and the mechanisms for enforcement, these organisations lay the foundation for sustained advocacy and systemic change. Dialogues, creative reflection, and political education must remain at the heart of this effort, ensuring that communities are not merely beneficiaries of food security programmes but active participants in shaping their design and implementation.

This vision calls for a paradigm shift: from reactive measures to proactive accountability; from temporary solutions to structural change; and from invisibility to recognition. Food is not a privilege but a fundamental right. Realising this right requires the collective effort of communities, civil society, and the state. Those who have made the invisible visible and created a platform for engagement must also rely on those in power to listen, recognise, and take action.

Vision 3: Healing hunger and violence – a call to action

In embarking on our research, we did not initially prioritise violence as a central theme. While the Cape Flats is undeniably a violent space, this reality was often seen as a "normal" backdrop to daily life. However, our findings revealed the profound and interconnected links between violence and food insecurity. It is not only the immediate physical dangers of a violent environment that undermine safety and security but also the broader, systemic impacts on food access, economic stability, and mental health.

Our research uncovered a significant intersection: individuals facing food insecurity are more likely to have experienced gender-based violence (GBV). This highlighted the urgent need to address the cyclical nature of hunger and violence. Through initiatives such as the GBV First Responder programme, launched as part of this

action research, we have seen tangible impacts. This programme, which combines counselling, advocacy, and network-building, has demonstrated the potential for community-driven approaches to foster resilience, raise awareness, and drive systemic change.

The recommendations arising from this research and the *Learning Journeys* emphasise that tackling food insecurity must also involve addressing the structural and interpersonal violence that exacerbates it. We envision a future grounded in collaboration, challenging the oppressive, systemic, and cultural forces of violence enshrined in patriarchal norms. Furthermore, we call for an integrated healing journey – one that encompasses the individual, society, and the land itself.

Three Dimensions of Healing: Individual, Societal, and Environmental

1. Individual Healing

At the individual level, participants in our research consistently stressed the importance of mental health support for survivors of GBV. Creating safer spaces for survivors to rebuild their lives and regain agency was identified as a critical need.

One example shared was the integration of GBV survivors into community kitchens, where they could access employment opportunities within a supportive environment. This not only provided a pathway to economic empowerment but also served as a space for healing, where survivors found safety, routine, and solidarity. These kitchens, therefore, function as dual-purpose hubs – offering nourishment while fostering personal recovery and empowerment.

2. Societal Healing

Societal transformation requires dismantling entrenched patriarchal norms and addressing the toxic masculinity that perpetuates cycles of violence. Educational initiatives and community engagement were identified as essential strategies for challenging these cultural dynamics. For instance, community kitchens have hosted programmes for boys and facilitated talking circles for men, recognising the importance of involving men and boys in GBV prevention.

The role of male role models in fostering healthier masculinities, especially among younger men, was identified as a key component of prevention efforts. At the same time, empowering women and girls by strengthening their knowledge of rights, legal frameworks, and holding perpetrators accountable was seen as critical for achieving gender justice.

Achieving societal cohesion also requires addressing systemic inequalities that have their roots in apartheid, as argued by Bam (2023). Inequities in healthcare, housing, education, and employment disproportionately affect women. Tackling these inequities is fundamental to building societal resilience and reducing the structural violence that underpins food insecurity and GBV.

3. Environmental Healing

The third dimension of healing focuses on the land itself, which holds both symbolic and material significance for the Cape Flats communities. Many community kitchens are situated on lands scarred by forced removals under apartheid – spaces once deemed of low value, often repurposed from military bases or dumping sites. These landscapes carry the weight of historical trauma, embedding the legacies of systemic violence into the lived experiences of these communities (Mellet, 2022).

For these communities, healing the land is a deeply spiritual and cultural act. It involves reclaiming spaces tainted by the 'bad spirits' of white supremacy, apartheid, and patriarchy. Restoring the dignity and fertility of the land represents not just a practical step toward food security but a symbolic reclamation of identity, agency, and equity. This process highlights the interconnectedness of personal, societal, and environmental healing in addressing the root causes of violence and hunger.

Healing hunger and violence is not merely about addressing immediate needs; it is about creating systemic change through collective action. By exploring the intersections of food insecurity and violence through art, activism, and dialogue, we aim to inspire reflection and mobilise meaningful action. Programmes like the Theatre of the Oppressed, visual storytelling, and community-based dialogues have proven effective in transforming the invisible into the visible, amplifying silenced voices, and igniting new pathways of resistance. This vision calls for an integrated approach to healing: restoring the dignity and agency of individuals, fostering societal cohesion, and repairing the scars of environmental degradation and displacement. Echoing the *pots and pens* campaign call for an intersectional perspective on social justice, we seek to build a future where hunger and violence are no longer accepted as norms but confronted as urgent injustices demanding collective, systemic solutions.

Photo 24 Community kitchens are places of healing. It is often said that these spaces are needed not only for individual healing but also for the healing of society and the land on which they are built. Source: Singlee, 2022

10 Conclusion – The Politics of Food: Bridging Informal Social Protection and Formal Governance

Food is never just about sustenance – it is deeply political, reflecting and reinforcing power structures, economic inequalities, and social hierarchies. Access to food, the conditions of its production and distribution, and the policies governing these systems are shaped by political decisions. In many urban contexts, food insecurity arises not from scarcity but systemic exclusion, where marginalised communities suffer due to flawed policies and uneven resource allocation. The control of food – its production, distribution, and consumption – determines who eats, what they eat, and who thrives. This report examines how community kitchens, operating on the margins of formal governance, have become sites of both resilience and resistance, underscoring the need for systemic change in food governance in Cape Town and beyond.

The Urban Food Futures programme conducted this research during a critical period when communities were grappling with the far-reaching impacts of COVID-19. Initially, the study sought to understand how communities coped with crises, focusing on economic hardships induced by pandemic measures, later revealing deeper structural issues.

A data-driven assessment of food environments in six low-income communities in Cape Town and the Cape Winelands found a marked increase in food insecurity. Notably, there was a significant correlation between food insecurity and gender-based violence, highlighting community fragility and the limitations of individual coping mechanisms. Households adapted by reducing meal sizes, skipping meals, or borrowing food, with such short-term strategies becoming more frequent. A long-term livelihood coping indicator showed declining household resilience, as families resorted to selling goods, accumulating debt, relocating to lower-income areas, or withdrawing children from school. These findings emphasised the crucial role of community kitchens in mitigating food insecurity.

Community kitchens, predominantly run by women – many of whom are pensioners – operate in Cape Town's low-income areas. Heavily reliant on donations, their financial sustainability varies, with some kitchens funding between 2 % and 30 % of their operational costs privately (larger kitchens rely less on their own funds). Recognising their significance, efforts were made to strengthen their networks, fostering trust and cooperation over three years. Monthly learning meetings and bi-annual retreats identified persistent struggles, including fundraising challenges, growing demand, and resource shortages such as gas, dry foods, fresh produce, petrol, and mobile data. These operational difficulties also impact the mental and physical well-being of those running the kitchens.

As informal social protection systems, community kitchens expose the inadequacies of state-led food security initiatives. However, bridging the gap between these informal networks and formal governance remains a challenge. Throughout the research, community kitchens formed a dynamic network advocating for solidarity, resource-sharing, and integration into formal governance dialogues through initiatives such as *Learning Journeys*.

This emerging process, initiated during the first community kitchen retreat in 2021, represents the beginning of a long-term effort to secure greater visibility and influence within Cape Town's urban food system. Our findings align with Nancy Fraser's social justice framework, emphasising the need for both resource redistribution and the recognition of marginalised voices. The evidence presented underscores that community kitchens – sustained predominantly by women – highlight the shortcomings of state-led food security frameworks.

Far from being mere food providers, these kitchens have evolved into hubs for advocacy and community cohesion, offering initiatives such as health clubs, gardening training, and counselling services. The action research phase, conducted in collaboration with kitchen heads, examined existing operational models and explored new approaches to enhance their effectiveness. Findings demonstrated that kitchens operating within networks became more economically resilient. For instance, the circular economy model, gardens4change, enables one kitchen to produce leafy vegetables in a hydroponic unit while another cultivates seedlings. Similarly, collective financial strategies, such as pooling savings and seeking top-up grants, strengthened the network's emergency fund. Social resilience also improved through regular debriefing sessions, where challenges, frustrations, and grief were shared, alongside skill-building initiatives in counselling, mental health support, and administrative training.

By documenting these experiences, this report highlights the critical role of community kitchens in addressing food insecurity and promoting social justice. Their work challenges existing governance structures and underscores the urgent need for policy interventions that recognise and support these vital community-led initiatives.

Bridging the gap: Recognising community kitchens as social protection systems

A strengthened kitchen network has shown its potential as a social protection system. Yet, to this day, community kitchens operating as informal systems and remain largely invisible in formal policy discourse. This invisibility underscores the need for an overhaul of existing frameworks to ensure that resource allocation is both equitable and inclusive.

The research highlights how the heavy reliance on emergency food aid within low-income communities has allowed the state to offload its responsibilities, perpetuating a cycle of dependency. While emergency responses, such as community kitchens, have been invaluable during times of crisis, they must not become the default solution. There is an urgent need to move beyond temporary fixes. However, it is critical to acknowledge that the state's responsibilities cannot be fully assumed by communities alone. Social innovations emerging from communities require systemic support and long-term funding to scale and sustain their impact. This support must come not only through state programmes but also through carefully crafted partnerships with the private sector.

Photo 25 Towards the progressive realisation of the Right to Food. Libuke, 2024

We have been testing *Learning Journeys* as a platform for dialogue and initiating a social accountability process to bridge the gap between social innovation and state's responsibilities. While promising, this process will not lead to quick changes, as trust-building requires time. Furthermore, it will require constant follow-ups, targeted exchanges, and engagement by the communities. Ultimately, it necessitates political will, a mandate, and the power within government to implement necessary changes to policy programmes. Although the *Pots and Pens* campaign has been beneficial in building communication skills and language within the community, a campaign alone will not be sufficient to bring about change. Learning Journeys, which require time, knowledge, and capacity in the community kitchen network – resources that are scarce – must be seen as a long-term process. Both approaches – campaigning and partnership-building – have their respective advantages and disadvantages. Ultimately, both call for strengthening the kitchen network as a lever for change, which requires political recognition, financial support, and internal leadership.

In conclusion, it is imperative to highlight, that the action research with the community kitchens underlined a call for systemic change that transcends the reliance on emergency responses. In cities, particularly in Cape Town – a complex and multifaceted example – poverty is often by design. Rethinking how we collaborate in cities, especially in rapidly growing urban areas and low-income regions, must be a fundamental question for the next decade. Reaffirming our vision for a feminist urban food future, we advocate for a system in which the right to food is unequivocally recognised as a human right and embedded within urban policies that prioritise equity, sustainability, and resilience, ensuring the creation of an urban food system that truly works for everyone.

11 Epilog

A question posed to me in the final stages of writing this report struck me – it was simple yet complex: after four years of research, more than forty community dialogues, a right to food training, three *Learning Journeys*, and eight community kitchen retreats, can we observe a change in agency compared to the time around the first lockdown?

Increasing agency was not an intentional outcome for the programme; however, the concept has accompanied us throughout – not only because it is the name of Urban Food Futures' community partner FACT – Food Agency Cape Town, but also because some of the directions this research took emerged even before the programme itself, during our early reflections on what agency could mean. At that time of the first lockdown, with a small group of food activists who later formed FACT, we collectively agreed that to have or exercise agency, one needs both knowledge and a clear starting point for action. Our survey results in 2023 and 2024 show that a significant number of respondents indicated they know where to go if they want to influence their food system. This was a positive and perhaps unexpected finding. However, as our research revealed, knowing and doing are two very different things. Voicing concerns and wishes for change is easier said than done. We spent considerable time in actor mapping, understanding mandates, and learning how government works – often restarting our efforts after each research phase as new co-researchers joined. Building political awareness within communities and cultivating an understanding of the right to food takes time. While there is now more structured engagement and a more confident call for action – exemplified by the *Pots and Pens* campaign – meaningful transformation demands a sustained and consistent process of deepening and expanding political awareness, alongside mechanisms that ensure community voices are not only heard but acted upon. We began that process through the Learning Journey methodology.

These Learning Journeys require a mindset shift within activist organisations themselves – to recognise who should be part of the conversation, what the topic is, and what message we want to convey. Often, we faced the challenge that simply involving anyone from a government body does not guarantee they are the right person to effect change. Not everyone from local or provincial government can immediately solve the problems that have been identified. Bringing the right people into these spaces has been difficult because it requires a higher level of political awareness than the community food dialogues have been able to cultivate so far. Crafting an agenda and explicitly articulating the requests and reasons behind them has proven to be a challenging yet meaningful consensus-building process in this research programme. This highlights the need for ongoing capacity building for and by FACT to ensure that engagements between communities and government actors are strategic and informed – rather than based on assumptions about who holds decision-making power. Communities must develop strategies that integrate their knowledge into the process and allow them to navigate the political sphere with confidence and awareness, rather than relying on external actors, such as researchers, facilitators, or other activists, to bridge these gaps.

One resistance I have observed over the years – which remains unanswered to me – is the reluctance of community members to build partnerships or engage with their local ward councillors. Despite multiple prompts to consider their participation as beneficial, they have not been invited or included in activities. This hesitation reflects deep-rooted community dynamics: who speaks to whom and who speaks on behalf of whom? In response, our partner continually asked themselves: on whose behalf is FACT hosting dialogues, and on whose behalf would FACT engage with the government?

The deep sense of democratic consciousness within the communities has been both inspiring and critical. On one hand, it has prompted careful reflection on representation and legitimacy; on the other, it has sometimes led to missed opportunities to bring key concerns to the fore, stemming from a reluctance to speak on behalf of the community in an unelected capacity. These dynamics, shaped by trust and responsibility, continue to challenge and influence our collective efforts.

These dynamics varied across communities. In Bridgetown and Hanover Park, for instance, the two kitchen heads are highly regarded local leaders, which has meant their lines of communication with government and councillors have always been relatively open. In contrast, in other areas, FACT is only now beginning to establish itself as a food activist organisation. This variation underscores the importance of context-specific strategies and the ongoing need for reflection on representation and partnership-building within each community.

A key lesson from this process has been the realisation that transformation is rarely linear. We tend to imagine change as a series of incremental improvements, where knowledge and engagement directly lead to shifts in policy and practice. However, in reality, transformation often unfolds unpredictably – through setbacks, moments of disillusionment, and unexpected breakthroughs. Some changes occur quietly at the interpersonal or household level, while others require years of mobilisation before they are reflected in institutional policies. In this sense, transformation is not a singular event, but an ongoing process, shaped by both deliberate action and entrenched structural constraints.

People's lives are shaped by crises, politics, and ongoing challenges – whether personal, communal, or systemic. Poverty, experiences of violence, ongoing hardships, and family dynamics are paramount and place continuous mental strain on individuals. These realities have frequently slowed or disrupted our work, revealing just how crucial it is to allow time for personal growth, collective trust-building, and the complex, often messy, nature of long-term change processes. While research agendas often prioritise efficiency, community transformation cannot be rushed. It requires flexibility, patience, and an appreciation for the emotional and social dimensions of change – dimensions that are often overlooked in policy discussions but are central to the lived realities of those experiencing food insecurity. Incorporating crises into our work and allowing frustrations to surface has been crucial. It has enabled us to embrace components such as violence and gender-based violence in our research. It has also allowed us to see the humans behind the numbers and the people behind the reports. This, in turn, has led to better contextualisation – we cannot assume that communities living in violent environments, running kitchens, and navigating multiple crises will always respond according to deadlines, frameworks, or protocols designed by more privileged researchers.

This also underscores the role of communities in living agency. Much of the discourse on agency treats it as an abstract, individualised concept – something a person either has or does not have. Yet, as our findings suggest, agency is not simply about individual decision-making; it is deeply relational. It is co-created through social interactions, shared struggles, and collective action. Community kitchens, for example, are not just sites of food distribution; they are spaces where agency is negotiated daily – through organising, mutual aid, and informal governance. The very act of sustaining these kitchens despite systemic neglect is a form of resistance and a powerful demonstration of lived agency.

Photo 26 Protest signs in community kitchens highlight their role as hubs for advocacy, activism, and dialogue aimed at raising awareness. Source: Paganini, 2024

Social justice movements in South Africa have long grappled with these tensions. Movements such as Abahlali baseMjondolo, the Treatment Action Campaign, and the Right2Know Campaign have successfully mobilised for policy shifts in land rights, access to healthcare, and freedom of information. These campaigns have demonstrated the power of sustained mobilisation in forcing accountability and securing legislative change. Over the past four years, we have seen glimpses of this potential within FACT and the broader network of community kitchens – perhaps the greatest success of this work is the formation of a cohesive activist network. Moreover, the successful start of the *Learning Journeys* has been equally significant. It is also the role of the communities to ensure their government representatives are not only invited but also held accountable, regularly following up on *Learning Journey* outputs and agreements. This requires much more effort by FACT, than they were able to put into the preparation without the support of external researchers, mentors and campaign professionals.

The challenge ahead is ensuring that these processes do not remain dependent on short-term research projects but are instead embedded within long-term, sustainable structures capable of continually evolving and strengthening community agency beyond the life cycle of any single initiative. As for whether agency has increased, the answer remains contingent on the eventual self-sustainability of the support structure that this research has helped to build around FACT and the community kitchen network. This structure – encompassing the co-creation of knowledge, the funding of artists and writers to render the research accessible, the facilitation of policy events and *Learning Journeys*, and the provision of funds for community coordinators, design, campaigning, administration, and workshop costs – must eventually operate independently, with the work continuing because it is perceived as a genuine pathway to transformation. Only when such a system is in place can we confidently assert that community agency has indeed increased.

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enkosi kakhulu and baie dankie Cape Town

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Partners

African Centre for Cities (ACC) – University of Cape Town. ACC is an interdisciplinary hub at the University of Cape Town conducting research on how to understand, recast and address pressing urban crises. Since most urban challenges – for example, food security, climate change adaptation, economic inclusion, cultural vitality, and tolerance – are inherently interdisciplinary and spatially layered, ACC nurtures the co-production of knowledge between academia and other social sectors.

Centre of Excellence for Food Security – University of the Western Cape. The DSI-NRF Centre of Excellence in Food Security (CoE-FS) – hosted by the University of the Western Cape and co-hosted by the University of Pretoria – is a virtual organisation that brings together the expertise of numerous South African and international institutions and over 100 researchers across various disciplines. It is the first CoE to be hosted at a historically black university.

Food Agency Cape Town (FACT) is a community-led organisation using food to unpack social injustices in Cape Town. FACT are consumers, farmers, fisherfolk, activists, poets, podcasters, mothers and fathers, and researchers. Since 2016, FACT has engaged in co-research in projects on food justice, urban agriculture, food agency, food security, power, and politics.

Heinrich Boell Foundation (HBF) is the German Green Political Foundation. Affiliated to the "Alliance'90 / The Greens" political party represented in Germany's federal parliament and based in Berlin, HBF conducts and supports civic educational activities worldwide. The Foundations' office in South Africa is based in Cape Town and works on four programmes: Democracy & Social Justice, Human Rights & Gender Justice, Sustainable Development, and International Politics & Dialogue.

Social Change Assistance Trust (SCAT) is a veteran human rights and social justice, philanthropy (re-granting) organisation which has been in existence for 40 years. It has pioneered and developed a model of development that has been acknowledged as empowering and sustainable with tangible impact at the local level. As a grantmaker SCAT provides grants to organisations to promote community-based control which was seen as a critical component of transformative development and the creation of a strong civil society and good governance.

Glossary

Accountability (in the context of the right to food) refers to the obligation of governments, institutions, and other stakeholders to ensure that people have access to adequate and nutritious food, as recognised under human rights frameworks. It involves mechanisms to monitor, evaluate, and address failures in food systems, ensuring that policies and actions align with the principles of justice, equity, and sustainability. In this research, we consider social accountability particularly relevant. This emphasises the role of communities, civil society, and grassroots movements in holding authorities accountable through participation, advocacy, and mechanisms such as public monitoring, citizen feedback, and policy engagement.

Agency (in the context of food security, as defined by the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition – HLPE) refers to the capacity of individuals and communities to make informed choices and take actions regarding their food systems. It encompasses the ability to influence policies, governance, and food environments in ways that align with their values, needs, and rights. Agency is a critical dimension of food security, recognising that people are not just passive recipients of food but active participants in shaping their food systems. This includes decision-making power over food production, access, consumption, and governance

Crowdsourcing Data (in the context of participatory action research with communities) refers to the process of collectively gathering, sharing, and analysing information through the active participation of community members. This approach values lived experiences and local knowledge, ensuring that data collection is not only extractive but also empowering and co-owned by those involved. By leveraging diverse community contributions – such as surveys, storytelling, citizen monitoring, and digital platforms – crowdsourcing data strengthens research relevance, enhances transparency, and supports locally driven solutions. In this research, it is a key tool for amplifying voices, fostering social accountability, and informing more just and responsive food systems.

Data Digest (in the context of participatory action research) are community workshops where research findings are unpacked, contextualised, and translated into accessible language. These sessions create spaces for collective reflection, enabling communities to engage with data in meaningful ways, validate insights, and contribute their perspectives. By simplifying complex information and linking it to lived experiences, data digests help bridge the gap between research and action. They foster shared understanding, support informed decision-making, and empower communities to use evidence for advocacy, policy engagement, and local solutions.

Food environment (in the context of food systems) refers to the physical, economic, political, and socio-cultural conditions that shape people's access to, availability of, and choices around food. It encompasses factors such as the affordability of nutritious foods, the presence of food retailers, market dynamics, food advertising, and local food cultures. Food environments influence dietary patterns, health outcomes, and food security. They are shaped by policies, infrastructure, and social norms, and can either enable or restrict equitable access to healthy, sustainable, and culturally appropriate food. Understanding and transforming food environments is essential for building just and resilient food systems.

Food Security (as defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations – FAO) 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."*

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) refers to harmful acts directed at individuals

based on their gender, rooted in unequal power relations and systemic oppression. Feminist definitions of GBV highlight that it is not just about individual acts of violence but is embedded in broader social, political, and economic structures that sustain gendered injustices. GBV includes physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence, and disproportionately affects women, girls, and gender-diverse people. It is reinforced by patriarchal norms, intersecting inequalities, and the failure of institutions to ensure justice and protection. From a feminist perspective, addressing GBV requires not only responding to immediate harms but also dismantling oppressive systems, amplifying survivor-led movements, and advocating for transformative justice.

A **Learning Journey** with government is a collaborative process where officials, policymakers, and stakeholders come together to exchange knowledge, build understanding, and co-create solutions. The goal is to foster trust, transparency, and cooperation in policy development and implementation. The 'Learning Journey' is a participatory action research method that unites decision-makers with grassroots communities to tackle issues like food security. It challenges the notion of one-size-fits-all solutions by prioritising locally specific challenges and remedies, enabling bottom-up system changes tailored to local needs and experiences.

Pathway (as conceptualised by Melissa Leach and colleagues) refers to the different routes through which change happens in socio-ecological and technological systems. In participatory action research, pathways emerge as communities, researchers, and stakeholders collectively identify problems, explore solutions, and take action. These pathways are shaped by power, knowledge, and values, influencing which voices are heard and which futures are pursued. By actively co-creating pathways and ensuring diverse voices shape decision-making, participatory research helps surface and support alternative, more just and sustainable pathways.

Polycrisis refers to the interconnected and compounding nature of multiple crises that unfold simultaneously, reinforcing and amplifying each other in ways that make them more complex and difficult to address. Unlike isolated crises, a polycrisis arises when different systemic shocks – such as climate change, food insecurity, economic instability, and political conflict – interact in unpredictable ways, deepening vulnerabilities and limiting conventional solutions. From a feminist perspective, a polycrisis is not just a convergence of multiple crises but a reflection of deeply entrenched systems of oppression – such as patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism, and racism – that interact and reinforce each other.

Reading Circles are guided sessions where communities come together to engage with research materials and develop deeper understanding of the texts. These sessions primarily focus on own research outputs; however, research from other studies are discussed to broaden the community's perspective on the research topic and context.

Right to Food refers to the fundamental human right of every person to have access to sufficient, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food, which is produced and distributed in an environmentally sustainable and socially just manner. Recognised under international human rights law, particularly in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the right to food ensures that food is available, accessible, and adequate, allowing individuals to live a life of dignity. The principle of progressive realisation holds that while the right to food should be pursued immediately, its full achievement may take time, depending on available resources. However, governments are obligated to take steps towards its realisation without delay, ensuring that any regression in this right is avoided.

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TMG Research

TMG – Think Tank for Sustainability
TMG Research gGmbH
EUREF-Campus 6–9
10829 Berlin, Germany
Phone: +49 30 92 10 74 07 00
Email: info@tmg-thinktank.com
Website: www.tmg-thinktank.com

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(TMG) ThinkTankforSustainability Töpfer Müller Gaßner