

# RESULTS FROM THE SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIAL ATTITUDES SURVEY (SASAS)

## The stomach is crying: Patterns of food insecurity and the role of social grants in South Africa



HSRC Mandela Day 2016 at Pikkieland Crèche in Cape Town.  
Credit: HSRC Communication and Stakeholder Relations

Ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition is one of the core UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and features in the National Development Plan, both as a national objective, and as a core element in the strategy to uplift rural areas. Yet, ensuring that all South Africans have sufficient food to meet the needs of their households remains an enduring challenge, especially given food price inflation, climatic vulnerability, and crop diseases and pests. In this article, **Benjamin Roberts, Samela Mtyingizane, Steven Gordon and Jarè Struwig** present SASAS trends in self-reported food insecurity between 2007 and 2015, examine geographic differences in such patterns, and report on the results of a micro-study from rural KwaZulu-Natal that examines the role of social grants in assisting families to cope with food insecurity.

The South Africa Social Attitudes Survey series consists of nationally representative samples of adults aged 16 years and older living in private households. In each survey round, a random sample of between 2500 and 3200 participants are asked a range of questions on themes of national relevance. Questions on food security have been a common feature of the series since its inception in 2003.

### Changes in reported food insecurity over the last decade

Since 2007, one particular question that has been included asks respondents the following: ‘To what extent was the amount of food your household had over the past month less than adequate, just adequate or more than adequate for your household’s needs?’. This question forms part of a broader set of items addressing the adequacy of specific types of consumption in households as the basis for determining poverty levels based on subjective evaluations, rather than expert opinion. This is seen as a more democratic approach to examining phenomena such as poverty and deprivation.

In Figure 1, the national trend in self-reported adequacy of food consumption is provided for each of the nine rounds of evaluation conducted between 2007 and the end of 2015. Due to the nature of the survey design, the figures refer to the percentage of adults stating that their households have inadequate, barely adequate or more than adequate food to meet the needs of all members, rather than the share of households that are food insecure or not.

The bar chart suggests that the percentage of adults saying that the amount of food consumed in the month prior to interviewing in their household was inadequate has varied between 26% and 35% over the period. A larger share (47-

57%) state that the food available for consumption purposes is just enough to get by on, while less than a fifth (14-16%) in any given year say they have more food in their households than is required. These figures admittedly do not address seasonality, intra-household food allocation, or the quality and diversity of the food being consumed. Since the individual weights applied to the data mean that the results tell us about the extent of food insecurity about adults, they also underrepresent food insecurity among children, which, as the recent Demographic and Health Survey has shown, remains a critical challenge facing the country. The figures do nonetheless starkly convey the fact that a significant proportion of South Africans remain in a food insecure living environment.

problem was more acute in 2007, when a third (35%) of respondents mentioned food inadequacy within their households. The corresponding figures in 2008 and 2009 were slightly lower, at 31% and 30% respectively. Between 2010 and 2012, the proportion of respondents reporting inadequacy of food consumption was lower than during the 2007 to 2009 period, progressively decreasing to 26% in 2012. In 2013, there was an increase in self-reported food inadequacy for the first time in seven years, though in 2014 and 2015 the figures have remained virtually unchanged.

### The geography of hunger

Is there a distinct spatial patterning to reported food insecurity? To find out, we focus in on the results of the 2015 SASAS round. From the

Fig 1 Trends in self-reported adequacy of food consumption, 2007-2015 (% of adults)



Source: HSRC SASAS 2007-2015

Note: The percentages in the graph refer to the extent to which South African adults, aged 16 years and older, believe their household has inadequate, barely adequate, or more than adequate food to meet the needs of all members.

There are some observable fluctuations in food security that have occurred over the decade. Given the food price inflation crisis on 2007 to mid-2009, it is unsurprising to see that reported food inadequacy is moderately higher over this interval than in subsequent years. The food security

provincial analysis presented in Figure 2, the results for KwaZulu-Natal stand out immediately. In this instance, 45% of respondents reported that there was insufficient food in their households, which is 17 percentage points higher than the national average, and appreciably higher than in all other

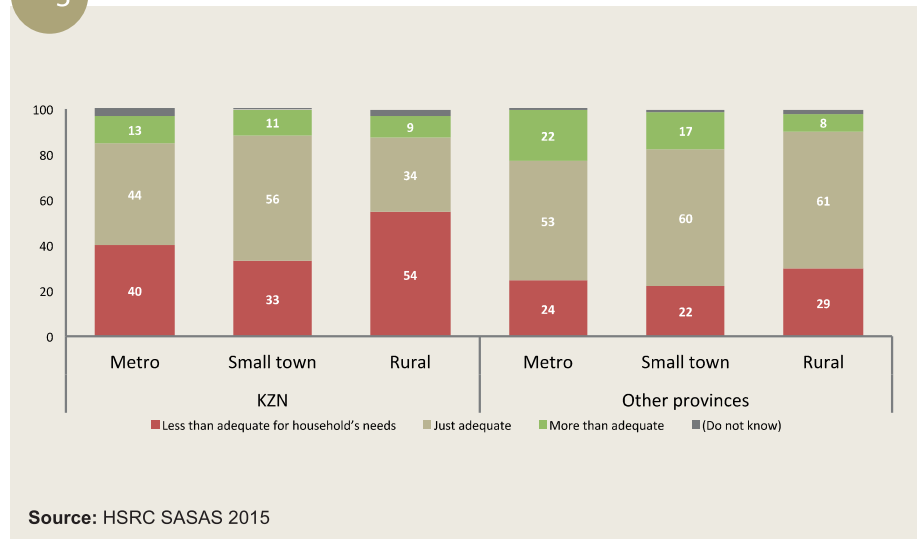
provinces. In the Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga, the share reporting food inadequacy (31-32%) is also above average. The figures hover around the national average in Limpopo and the Northern Cape, they are slightly lower but still worryingly high in North West and Gauteng (24%), and are lowest in the Free State (20%) and the Western Cape (14%).

To provide more context as to why food insecurity stands out in KwaZulu-Natal, we disaggregated the results in this province by geographic type, using three categories: metropolitan area, small towns and rural areas. We did the same for the other eight provinces combined and compared the results (Figure 3). The results are quite revealing in that they show that in all three types of area, food inadequacy is substantially higher than in the other eight provinces. Two-fifths (40%) of respondents in eThekweni municipality reported that they experienced food insecurity, compared to 24% in other provinces. Food insecurity was reported by a third of small town residents in KwaZulu-Natal versus 22% elsewhere, while in rural areas the figures were 54% in KwaZulu-Natal in contrast with 29% in other regions.

These are important findings that suggest that food insecurity, while highest in rural areas, is most certainly a challenge in towns and large city areas. This is particularly true in eThekweni, and is likely to be a source of real concern for municipal planners.

one wonder about the role of current policy and programmatic interventions in helping families cope. One important example is the role of social grants in providing support in the face of food inadequacy. To provide some insight, we provide a summary of

Fig 3 Self-reported adequacy of food consumption by geographic location, 2015 (% of adults)



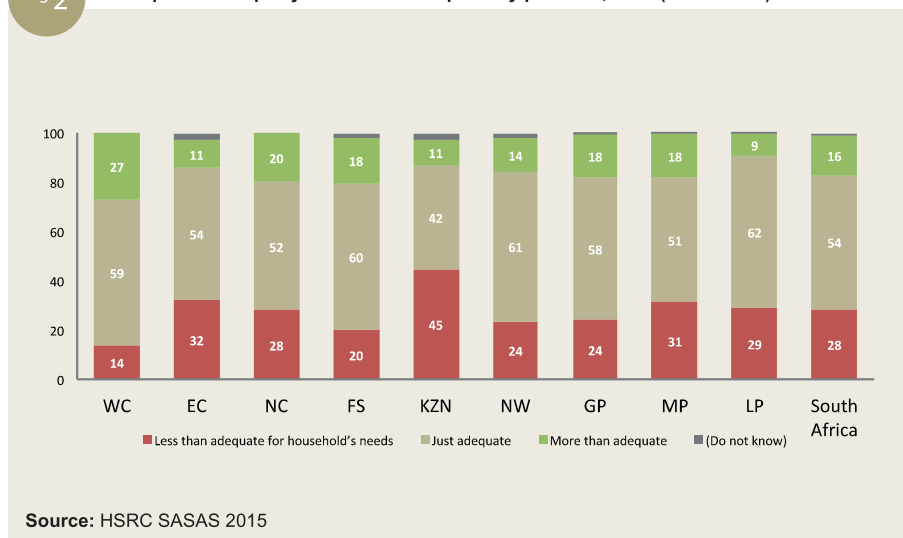
### Food security and social grants in rural KwaZulu-Natal

Findings such as those reported above inevitably lead to questions about the actions needed to be taken to eliminate hunger and food insecurity. They also make

some of the notable findings that emerge from a micro-study that was conducted by a co-author of this article (Ms. Mtyingizane) as part of her Master's thesis.

Examining the effectiveness of social grants in promoting household food security in four traditional authority areas in uMhlatuze Municipality, in north-eastern KwaZulu-Natal, the study concluded that for many households, the possession of grants represents the difference between being food insecure, and completely destitute. Most grant beneficiary households interviewed reported running out of food at some stage during the month despite the presence of grant income, while nearly two-thirds reported they would not survive if the grants were taken away, as a sizeable share of grant expenditure is devoted to food. As a form of social protection, grants assist in reducing poverty and provide a means of

Fig 2 Self-reported adequacy of food consumption by province, 2015 (% of adults)



maintaining food consumption. Yet, this is clearly not enough to stave off hunger, and its potentially far-reaching effects.

### Ending hunger

There is no quick fix to ending hunger and ensuring food security in South Africa. The results of the analysis presented here and in other studies confirm that millions of citizens continue to be affected by inadequate food consumption and hunger, even taking into account the range of state interventions, including social grants. Food insecurity also cannot be seen in isolation from broader socio-economic and environmental developments, including unemployment, wage levels, altering food prices, and climatic and

agricultural shocks such as drought, flooding and crop disease and pests.

The data examined cover a period that includes the food price crisis between 2007 and 2009, and the subsequent global economic crisis. It however predates the worst effects of the 2016 drought, and the emerging challenge of armyworm in three of the country's maize-producing provinces. The effect on food availability and prices has the potential to exacerbate some of the food inadequacy trends discussed, and further tests the resilience of households.

Forging sustained progress towards eliminating hunger and improved nutrition despite such set-backs is instrumental in ensuring personal

and national wellbeing in the country. It will require a monitoring and evaluation system focused on food and nutrition security that provides rapid and effective support to vulnerable households, and helps address the effects of livelihood, food and climatic shocks. Identifying and experimenting with mechanisms to stabilise food prices will also need to be a factor in national and municipal food security policies.

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HSRC staff preparing for Mandela Day 2016.  
Credit: HSRC Communication and Stakeholder Relations

