



## Roundtable Sets Priorities for Tackling Food and Nutrition Insecurity in South Africa

A roundtable on food and nutrition security was held at the University of the Western Cape on 26 August 2025. Convened by the [National Planning Commission](#) (NPC), [Centre of Excellence in Food Security](#) (CoE-FS), the [Southern Africa – Towards Inclusive Economic Development](#) (SA-TIED) programme, the Trilateral Research Chair at the University of Johannesburg, and the [Centre for Sustainability Transitions](#) (CST) at Stellenbosch University, the roundtable was attended by researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. The purpose of the colloquium was to discuss the latest research data and consider the most recent trends, challenges, and opportunities in order to ensure that all South African households are food and nutrition secure.

The participants and presenters recognised that, for a country with such high levels of poverty, inequality and unemployment, food and nutrition security is connected to the availability of water and energy. South Africa produces enough food nationally; however, many households still lack access, resulting in desperate situations at both the household and individual levels. It was also noted that this lack of access to food leads to hunger, malnutrition, and starvation. The general approach tended to focus on food production, food affordability, availability, accessibility and sustainability in the context of climate change.

In addition to a lack of access in the context of availability, a further paradox in the food system is the imperative to deliver specific nutrition and health outcomes mandated by our Constitution. Of particular concern for participants was the effect [that food insecurity and the lack of nutrition have on children](#), particularly those under the age of five and mothers. Despite the increases in [social protection](#) aimed at children implemented within the democratic period in South Africa, child stunting has increased from 22% in 1994 to [nearly 29%](#), thirty years later. Stunting at such an early stage of an individual's life (i.e., the first 1000 days) has an overall multiplier negative effect on the future prospects of those affected, including their performance at school, ability to develop skills, and health, among others. The long-term effect for society is a perpetuation of a large sector remaining dependent on social protection. Addressing the deficiencies at this early stage must be seen as an investment in the future of those individuals and, consequently, in the future of South African society.

The collaboration among the convening organisations reflects both the complexity of food and nutrition security and the need for joint, innovative approaches. The discussions addressed the interconnected long-term challenges of ensuring food and nutrition security, including managing climate change and variability effects and changes in population, infrastructure investment requirements and the way in which the private and public sector roles and responsibilities may need to be adapted.

In keeping with the NPC's research-led advisory role on critical matters affecting the long-term development of South Africa, the NPC will continue to forge such structured and multifaceted conversations among key stakeholders as this food and nutrition security roundtable, which will be broadened to include additional stakeholders.

As an independent advisory body appointed by the President to advise government, Parliament, and society on the implementation of the [National Development Plan](#) (NDP), the NPC has the responsibility to mobilise the whole of society around the objectives of the NDP, which remains the country's cross-cutting long-term plan for national development.

The SA-TIED is a partnership between South Africa's National Treasury, the South African Revenue Service (SARS), and the United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER). The programme connects research with policy to support inclusive growth, drawing on unique administrative data through the National Treasury Secure Data Facility (NT-SDF). Since its launch, more than 280 research projects have informed national debates and contributed to reforms on tax policy, employment, inequality, and climate change.

The Centre of Excellence in Food Security (CoE-FS), launched on 15 April 2014 by the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation and the National Research Foundation, conducts innovative research to address South Africa's food and nutrition security challenges. It ranks among the world's 150 leading food security think tanks.

The Centre for Sustainability Transitions is a world-class sustainability transitions teaching, learning and research institution that conducts innovative, impactful, collaborative, and transdisciplinary research.

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