

REPORT ON THE SYNTHESIS EVALUATION OF THE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT SECTOR'S RESPONSE TO FOOD-RELIEF MECHANISMS DURING COVID-19

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ACRONYMS

CSG	Child Support Grant
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
HF&NSP	Household Food and Nutrition Security Programme
PFMA	Public Finance Management Act
ADRA-SA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency South Africa
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CNDC	Community nNutrition and dDevelopment Centres
CSG	Child support grant
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DSD	Department of Social Development
GFBN	Global Foodbank Network
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
KFY	Kyk Kago ya Bana Foundation
NDA	National Development Agency
NGO	Non-gGovernmental oOrganisation
NIDS-CRAM	National Income Dynamics Study - Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Surveyurvey
NPO	Non-profit Organisation
NSP	Nutrition Security Programme
PAYE	Pay as You Earn
PFDCs	Provincial Food Distribution Centres
PIA	Provincial Implementing Agents
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency
SRDG	Social Relief of Distress Grant
UN	United Nations

1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

South Africa has developed a Household Food and Nutrition Strategy to cater for incidences of chronic food insecurity caused by various factors including climate-related shocks that negatively affect food production; poverty; income inequalities; food prices; population growth; and other structural inequalities. Statistics South Africa (Stats SA 2019)¹ posits that 21.3% of South African households experience inadequate or severely inadequate access to food, especially during disaster events. In 2019, approximately 1.7 million households experienced hunger with more than 60% of these households resident in urban areas. Additionally, 611 000 households with children aged five years or younger experienced hunger, constituting 13.1% of all such households. The food insecurity situation is argued to have significantly worsened during the COVID-19 lockdown measures². COVID-19 undermines food security directly, by disrupting food systems, and indirectly, through the impact of lockdowns on household income and physical access to food.

The Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (CRAMS), published in July 2020, found that 47% of adults surveyed reported that their households had run out of money to buy food in April 2020. Between May and June 2020, 21% of adults confirmed that someone in the household had gone hungry in the previous 7 days and 15% reported that a child had gone hungry in the previous week. A study by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)³ indicates that, in the initial phases of the hard lockdown, in April 2020, 28% of people reported going to bed hungry. By July, this had grown to 40%, and between August and September, it increased slightly to 43%. The pandemic is argued to have exposed the pre-existing weaknesses in the country's social protection and national food systems. The latter includes extreme and growing inequalities, hunger at crisis levels, diet-related ill-health, and corporate-dominated food systems with little resemblance of democratic control, where the poor are facing unrelenting pressure. In South Africa, corporatisation of food systems is evident from the seed supply level for staple food to marketing of food produce with small-scale producers on the margins of food systems. Thus, various responses have been put in place to address household-level food and nutrition insecurity. The Department of Social Development (DSD) has been mandated to address the issues.

¹Stats SA (Statistics South Africa) 2019. Towards measuring food security in South Africa: An examination of hunger and food inadequacy. Report No. 03-00-14. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa. <http://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=12135> (Accessed 30 November 2020)

²<https://bhekisisa.org/article/2020-10-05-covid-19-has-increased-hunger-in-sa-so-what-works-best-to-improve-access-to-food/> (Accessed 30 November 2020)

³Derek Davids, Benjamin Roberts, Narnia Bohler-Muller, Ngqapheli Mchunu, Samela Mtyingizane and Carin Runciman (2020). Survey confirms hunger in South Africa is escalating in the wake of the COVID-19 lockdown. <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-10-15-survey-confirms-hunger-in-south-africa-is-escalating-in-the-wake-of-the-covid-19-lockdown/> (Accessed 30 November 2020)

1.1 Overview of the legislative and institutional framework for the DSD's food-relief programme

The South African Constitution espouses specific values, which include social solidarity and pro-poor policies. The problem of hunger experienced by an increasing number of citizens because of the COVID-19 pandemic is linked mostly to high poverty rates in the country. The Constitution offers rights to services for citizens through the Bill of Rights. For example, Section 27 provides that every citizen has the right to access sufficient food and water, and social assistance should be provided to those unable to support themselves. In addition, the bill of rights further upholds and ensures the rights of children to appropriate care (basic nutrition, shelter, healthcare services and social services), which also pertains to circumstances when they are under detention (Section 28(1)) as well as general societal welfare, population development and disaster management (Schedule 4 of the Constitution).

Within this framework, the National Development Agency (NDA) was established through the National Development Agency Act No. 108 of 1998. It is classified as a Schedule 3A public entity under the Public Finance Management Act No. 1 of 1999 with a board and directly reports to the Minister of Social Development. It is also assigned part of its mandate through the Non-profit Organisations (NPOs) Act No.71 of 1997, Section 2 relating to strengthening institutional capacity of NPOs. The mandate of the NDA is to contribute towards poverty eradication by responding to the causes of poverty. It pursues this purpose by strengthening the capacity of NPOs through providing grants to community-based organisations (CBOs) because they are important partners in the fight against poverty and for the provision of service delivery. This is done through funds from the government and donors to support poor communities in realising their socioeconomic rights (National Development Agency Strategic Plan, 2016-2021). The NDA aligns its activities to the broad national development priorities of poverty eradication, employment creation and reducing inequalities. This mandate requires the agency to be prudent about resources, to follow legislative and policy guidelines and to work with CBOs that can transform their communities.

The DSD's mandate is to take reasonable legislative and other measures within its available resources to achieve these rights as expected and promised. The Social Assistance Act intends to promote the provision of social assistance to citizens and provides mechanisms for rendering such assistance as stipulated in the Constitution (Social Assistance Act 13 of 2004). Therefore, the DSD draws its mandate from this Act.

At the international level, the South African government has committed to achieve UN 2030 Agenda (Sustainable Development Goals) – Goal 2, which states: 'End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture'. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and persisting poverty and inequalities, it was imperative for the government to take swift action towards protecting the lives of the most vulnerable and poor in society. The DSD designed the Household Food and Nutrition Security Programme in 2014 to respond to the problem of household food and nutrition insecurity among poor and vulnerable households.

The programme has the following objectives:

- Increase food distribution to poor and vulnerable households,
- Procure food from local food producers,
- Support households to attain self-reliance and self-sustenance, and
- Improve nutrition security of citizens.

With the onset of COVID-19 and its health, social and economic impact, it became imperative for the government to provide timely and inclusive social protection responses that addressed the needs of the most vulnerable members of society. The government invoked the Disaster Management Act (Act 57 of 2002), which provides a legal framework for disaster risk reduction. The implementation of the food relief programme is envisaged by the National Food and Nutrition Security Policy (2014) to address short-term food shortages among poor South Africans through a network of institutions and collaborators in all of the country's nine provinces.

1.2 The DSD's mandate in the context of food-relief mechanisms

The DSD is mandated by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa to provide social assistance to those who cannot support themselves and their dependents (Section 27(1) (c)); uphold and ensure the rights of children to appropriate care (basic nutrition, shelter, healthcare services and social services), which also pertains when they are under detention [Section 28(1)]; and general societal welfare, population development and disaster management (Schedule 4 of the Constitution)⁴. This mandate is further governed by several legislative Acts and laws in South Africa. Under these legislative Acts and laws, the DSD implements its mandate through several programmes, projects, and policy interventions in line with the need for achievement of South Africa's developmental objectives⁵.

The DSD's programmes include among others, the implementation of social policy, a comprehensive social security programme, integrated development, and welfare services for the aged in South Africa. Social policy interventions relate to research, measurement, and initiatives to address poverty and other types of social exclusion. The DSD facilitates and ensures effective implementation of a comprehensive social protection scheme that seeks to alleviate poverty, inequality and vulnerability in South African society.

Integrated development involves sustainable development initiatives that empower the young, old and disabled while welfare services address the needs of the aged through policies, legislation, care and support programmes that uphold the rights and wellbeing of the aged⁶. By no means exhaustive, the mandate of the DSD, as governed by the respective legislative Acts and the programmes through which their mandate is implemented, puts the DSD right at the centre of the responsibility to initiate interventions to mitigate the harsh economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the South African society.

In line with the DSD's mandate of fighting poverty and hunger, a key programme underpinning the broader social protection agenda was initiated to provide food and ensuring high levels of nutrition. The DSD undertook the food distribution programme in collaboration with other state and civil society formations and institutions. The key measures implemented included an increase in social grants, direct food provision through feeding schemes, food parcel distribution, staple food fortification, support for gardening and other forms of subsistence production, and strategies to moderate food prices. Research identified children living in poor households and those living in households with adults who work in the informal sector to be at most risk of hunger because of COVID-19 lockdowns.

The Child Support Grant (CSG) was one of the quickest and easiest ways to reach poor households directly on a massive scale through already existing grant management and disbursement infrastructure. As early as April 2000, children's rights researchers, civil society organisations and international development partners observed that, considering the lockdown restrictions that were expected to disrupt households' livelihoods, it would be even more difficult for low-income families to meet children's basic needs and to access adequate food. These concerns culminated in a campaign and a call for the government to increase the CSG from R440 by R500 per month.

⁴Republic of South Africa 2020. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.

⁵<https://www.dsd.gov.za/index.php/programme/welfare-services>

⁶Ibid

Although the government did not accede to the demand, it allocated R50 billion of the R500 billion COVID-19 Rescue Package for social grants and announced an increase of the CSG to R740 from May to October 2020⁷⁻⁸.

The lockdown also meant interruptions to the government's programmes for school nutrition and feeding and prevention of child stunting, which also had to be quickly addressed through the distribution of food parcels to deprived households and communities. In its expenditure estimation for the Department of Basic Education (DBE), the National Treasury estimated that the school feeding programmes covered 9 million school children in quintiles 1 to 3 schools⁹. Research by StatsSA also indicated that approximately 40 percent of homes that received CSG had one household member that worked in the informal sector¹⁰. This highlighted the reality that the CSG intervention alone was not enough to address the challenge of lost income by poor households, or informal and vulnerable employed workers. To address this cohort, another intervention was initiated, which is the Special R350 COVID-19 social relief of distress (SRD) grant. The special SRD grant targeted both the unemployed and informal employed and vulnerable workers. Both categories of people did not receive any social grants and were not registered with the government's Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) nor with the South African Revenue Service as pay-as-you-earn workers¹¹. The above interventions provided a mitigation measure for food and nutrition insecurity that would have remained unacceptably high.

1.3 Implementation of the food-relief initiative

The food relief initiative was implemented through the existing network of Provincial Food Distribution Centres (PFDCs) in all the provinces in collaboration with 235 Community Nutrition and Development Centres (CNDCs) that operated in various local communities. As stated by Njenga, Jacob, Wegerif & Njenga (2019), the role of the PFDCs included the bulk procurement and distribution of nutritious food to CNDCs whilst the CNDCs were responsible for the provision of cooked nutritious meals to vulnerable and food-insecure households. Food was served in a shared space with empowerment programmes for beneficiaries to help them become self-reliant in the long run. The design of the programme further envisaged the establishment of community food depots that would replicate PFDCs with respect to the distribution of food and procurement, thus offsetting transport and storage costs for communities (Njenga et al, 2019). The PFDCs were funded by the DSD within the framework of a Service Delivery Agreement and provisions of the Public Finance Management Act 1 of 1999.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent national measures for suppressing the transmission of infections coincided with the completion of an evaluation of the design and implementation of the DSD Household Food and Nutrition Security Programme, which had been launched in 2014. Therefore, the findings of the evaluation of the framework for food distribution among the poor and vulnerable provided a proxy for understanding how well the mechanism for food relief during COVID-19 could effectively and efficiently address the challenges of this era. The findings would be augmented by emerging data from government agencies and academic research and take into consideration the reduced capacity of the DSD to deliver food through the centre-based feeding programmes, which had been closed due to COVID-19.

⁷<http://www.news.uct.ac.za/article/-2020-05-06-child-support-grants-and-covid-19>

⁸<https://awethu.amandla.mobi/petitions/tell-government-we-urgently-need-a-child-support-grant-increase-of-r500-for-the-next-6-months>

⁹National Treasury (2020). Estimates of National Expenditure: Department of Basic Education, page 224.

¹⁰<http://www.treasury.gov.za/documents/national%20budget/2020/ene/FullENE.pdf>, accessed on 25 March 2020.

1.3.1 Provincial food-relief programmes – the realist approach

Provincial programmes for food relief during the COVID-19 pandemic took different forms depending on the context, which was often determined by organisational and resource capacity. The food poverty experienced soon after the advent of the pandemic and lockdowns was preceded by a situation whereby in six of the provinces except Free State, Northern Cape and North West provinces, the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) had not delivered food parcels for four months. This was because SASSA had encountered a problem of its service providers who could not distribute food parcels to the poor after their service level agreements with the agency had expired in November 2019 (Ritchie, 2020)¹². This situation would have contributed to the high prevalence of households experiencing severe hunger in 2019. Evidence from the provinces highlighted some key aspects of the organisational arrangements for the food-relief response. These elements also provide clues for how different provinces may succeed in implementing recovery plans for improved long-term food security for their vulnerable communities.

In April 2020, the Western Cape Province DSD implemented a once-off food parcel distribution and it ended in May when the SASSA replaced food parcels with the payment of the SRD grant. The province subsequently initiated the Food Relief Forum comprising representatives from the provincial government, local municipalities and the City of Cape Town, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and faith-based organisations. The government implemented emergency food-relief programmes to provide food parcels and cooked meals for poor and vulnerable communities and groups.

The government provided R2 million funding for these activities, which were coordinated by the Economic Development Partnership¹³ and involved online meetings to discuss food-relief efforts. These efforts provided forum participants with an opportunity to make inputs to the government's recovery strategy. To this end, a survey was conducted to assess the participants' views about the impact of the forum and the majority found the forum to have been effective in building bridges between organisations. There was emphasis on the need for the government to recognise the work done by community actors such as NGOs to improve food security. Recommendations included working with urban farming communities and networks to empower communities to ensure own food security while considering the lack of arable land in the severely affected communities. It was also suggested that providing grants instead of food parcels and meals could be more appropriate. This view is consistent with policy recommendations on the continuation on a permanent basis of the R350 SRD grant that was introduced in April 2020 (Black Sash, 2020; Pienaar, Davids, Roberts, Makoae, Hart, 2021)¹⁴. Finally, concerns existed that government bureaucratic delays hampered food distribution, suggesting that the government should trust the implementing partners to account for allocated funds. The food-insecurity crisis provided an opportunity for the City of Cape Town food systems stakeholders to examine barriers to food accessibility and the following issues were considered relevant for implementing the recovery programme:

- Relationships between CSOs and the government
- Government policies on urban agriculture, as well as a more enabling environment
- Accessing City infrastructure, support systems and resources
- Alternative economic models.

¹²Ritchie, G. 2020 "What happened to the SASSA food parcels?" <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-07-09-what-happened-to-the-sassa-food-parcels/>

¹³Economic Development Partnership. "Co-ordinating food relief during the COVID-19 crisis" <https://wcedp.co.za/co-ordinating-food-relief-during-the-covid-19-crisis/>

¹⁴Black Sash (2020) Basic income support: A case for South Africa. <http://www.blacksash.org.za/images/campaigns/basicincomesupport/BasicIncomeSupport2020.pdf> Accessed 26 August 2020; Pienaar, GD., Davids, YD., Roberts, BJ., Makoae, MG, Hart, TGB (2021) The BIG question: COVID-19 and policy support for a basic income grant. Policy Brief, Human Sciences Research Council.

In Gauteng province, the DSD led the food relief activities, which also started at the beginning of April 2020. The provincial department formed partnerships with the private sector, major NPOs, NGOs – e.g., Operations SA and the South Africa National Zakah Fund and they initially raised about R1.3 million for food and necessities such as toiletries. By May 2020, through food parcels, the SRD grant and pilot electronic vouchers, the food-relief programme was reported to have reached about 684 400 residents who earned a combined income of less than R3 600 per month or who lived in households with 100% unemployment, with 42.2% of the beneficiaries in the Tshwane region. The Premier expressed concern that the Department was facing a shortage of food and encouraged corporates, foundations and civil society to support provincial initiatives. Table 1 shows the number of households and population reached through food parcels and the SRD grant in the province by May 2020¹⁵. During the same time, it was reported that 3167 homeless people in shelters were reached with three meals a day. By December, the total number of people who received food parcels from the government increased to 3.2 million while 1 million received support from NPOs and business.

Table 1: Food security and social relief in Gauteng province – 20 May 2020

Food Bank	Number of parcels distributed to households	Number of persons supported
Johannesburg	18 410	92 050
Tshwane	57 792	288 960
Ekhurhuleni	16 953	84 765
Sedibeng	15 491	77 455
West Rand	16 962	84 810
Sub-Total	125 608	628 040
SASSA SRD	11 272	56 360
TOTAL	136 880	684 400

(Source: Gauteng Provincial Government, Twitter account)

For most part of the implementation period, various civil society organisations continued to source food donations and funds to procure and distribute food parcels and vouchers to the poor under their poverty alleviation initiatives. Once-off and ad hoc initiatives were provided by local government authorities, local businesses and other actors, including communities of immigrants (African diaspora, Bangladesh) in the province, which did not involve the government. The MEC for Social Development announced the effort to coordinate provincial initiatives with the establishment of a Central Warehouse in Merafong City Local Municipality. This development led to the centralisation and coordination of logistics for food-relief interventions administered by the provincial DSD.

The residents of the impoverished Eastern Cape province faced serious food access challenges, which were exacerbated by inefficient government bureaucracy and indifferent employers. The entrenched socioeconomic challenges faced by poor and unemployed people including the young, became more widespread due to the lockdown regulations pushing families into hunger. Delayed payments of UIF benefits following the President’s lockdown announcement caused uncertainty and distress among the unemployed.

¹⁵ Gauteng Provincial Government. Food security, social relief, water, sanitation and resettlement. Twitter 21 May 2020. <https://twitter.com/GautengProvince/status/1263427187362971648/photo/2>

Regarding distribution of food parcels, little has been published by the Eastern Cape government and its partners about food-relief interventions implemented during the lockdown. The DSD expected social workers to do business as usual – “conduct family assessments and intervene using immediate and long-term interventions”¹⁶. The key NPOs namely ADRA-SA, Lunch Box Foundation and Food Forward SA that facilitated food distribution in the province under the initiative driven by the Solidarity Fund and the Gift of Givers played a major role in ensuring that poor families accessed food. The government needs to partner with communities in identifying and implementing sustainable hunger eradication programmes, which can be used to incrementally wean residents off social relief.

1.4 Specific strategies and approaches for food parcel distribution

Pillar 1

A total of 59 811 parcels were distributed through the DSD’s 235 CNDCs. The Disaster Management Fund through the DSD contributed R20 million and the Solidarity Fund contributed R23.5 million to reaching these households. Agreements were drawn up with provincial implementing agents (PIAs). Each province had an existing PIA, which the DSD already had contracts with, so there was no need for an application process to determine distribution partners for this Pillar (Table 1 provides details of PIAs that were part of the intervention). Despite this, the Fund also conducted upfront capacity assessments of each PIA to see what resources, facilities or staff they had available, and provided added support, as needed. The parcel contents were agreed upon with the DSD.

The DSD working together with CNDCs, NPOs and community- and faith-based organisations distributed a total of 59 433 vouchers to households through 235 CNDC sites across nine provinces. A total of 154 276 households across nine provinces were reached through NPOs. Another 66 398 households were reached through community- and faith-based organisations. In addition, 23 500 households across the country were reached through different voucher / cash transfer solutions.

Table 2: Names of provincial implementing agents

Province	Implementing Agent
Eastern Cape and Free State	ADRA-SA
Gauteng	Kagisano
KwaZulu-Natal	Action Development Agency
Limpopo	Makotse Women’s Club
Mpumalanga	Kago Yabana
Northern Cape and North West	Motswedi wa Sechaba
Western Cape	Ilitha Labantu

Pillar 2

A total of 151 276 parcels (worth close to R56 million) were distributed through four national food distribution non-profit organisations (NPOs) that have expansive reach across the country (see Table 1). These NPOs were shortlisted from an initial long list of 200 NPOs due to their capacity to deliver, track record in disaster relief, geographic footprint and networks, low intermediation and overhead costs, and ability to meet compliance requirements.

¹⁶Mhlekuze, F “COVID-19 lockdown exasperating the situation of the poor in Eastern Cape” <https://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/covid-19-lockdown-exasperating-the-situation-for-poor-in-eastern-cape/> 14 May 2020

Table 3: NPO food distribution by province

Province	Distributing NPO
Gauteng and Western Cape	Afrika Tikkun
Eastern Cape, Gauten, KwaZulu-Natal, North West and Western Cape	Food Forward South Africa
Mpumalanga and Northern Cape	Islamic Relief Limpopo
Eastern Cape, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo	Lunchbox Fund

(Source: Authors' compilation)

Pillar 3

A total of 69 000 parcels (worth close to R27.5 million) were distributed through 17 community- and faith-based organisations at a provincial and local level. These organisations were specifically selected based on their ability to fill certain geographic gaps that were not reached through Pillars 1 and 2. These NPOs delivered food to vulnerable communities through a network of over 400 community-based organisations (that included churches, early childhood development centres, and feeding programmes) within their networks.

Pillar 4

A total of 23 500 vouchers were distributed in partnership with the South African Council of Churches. Through this partnership, the Fund sought to achieve the following goals:

- To provide food relief to households.
- To help build a scalable model for reaching households digitally that could be used by other relief organisations in the future.

The vouchers were distributed across all nine provinces and focused on beneficiaries who had not been reached by other relief efforts (mentioned in Pillars 1–3). The implementation of the food-relief programme is envisaged by the National Food and Nutrition Security Policy (2014) to address short-term food shortages among poor South Africans through a network of institutions and collaborators in all the nine provinces.

1.5 Purpose of the evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the relevance and fulfilment of project objectives, developmental efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability, coherence, and documentation of lessons learnt. The evaluation also aimed at providing credible information useful in the decision-making process through case studies and lessons learnt. The following key questions specified in the terms of reference guided the synthesis evaluation:

1. How has the social development sector responded to hunger and unemployment during COVID-19?
2. What food distribution processes and mechanisms were put in place in response to COVID-19?
3. How effective were the food distribution processes and mechanisms implemented in responses to COVID-19?
4. How effective is the coordination of food distribution mechanisms and how could it be improved?
5. What are the lessons learnt from the implementation of various response mechanisms to hunger that can be used to respond to future disasters?

Table 4: Guiding evaluation questions lined to DAC criteria.

DAC Criteria	Key Evaluation Question
Relevance	How has the social development sector responded to hunger and unemployment during COVID-19? What food distribution processes and mechanisms were put in place in response to COVID-19?
Efficiency	None
Effectiveness	How effective were the food distribution processes and mechanisms implemented in responses to COVID-19? How effective is the coordination of food distribution mechanisms and how could it be improved?
Impact and Sustainability	None
Coherence	None
Documentation of lessons learnt	What are the lessons learnt from the implementation of various response mechanisms to hunger that can be used to respond to future disasters?

(Source: Authors' compilation)

Although the questions did not cover all the components of the DAC, they were further unpacked to develop the analytical framework presented in Table 3 to cover all six components.

2 METHODOLOGY

The synthesis evaluation utilised a mixed-methods approach that blended qualitative and quantitative tools to enhance the validity of the findings, guided by the questions outlined in the Terms of Reference. This guided the development of an analytical framework (see Table 3), which developed specific variables that guided the evaluation. Data was collected using both secondary and primary data collection tools as outlined in the proceeding sections.

Quantitative data was collected through reviews of secondary data sources from relevant stakeholders and other relevant documentation.

2.1 Secondary data review and synthesis

Relevant programme documents were reviewed before and during the research. The documents that were reviewed included the following provided by the DSD: a report on proposed implementation of the Solidarity Fund's R14 million worth of vouchers; a list of provincial food distribution centres; a memo to roll out food parcels for PIAs; the DSD food distribution model; the programme's 2020 close-out report; the progress report on the State of the Nation Address; the Quarter Three Programme Report; and the Food and Nutrition Security Reflections on the COVID-19 pandemic compiled in October 2020. These documents contained evidence of processes, outputs and outcomes. Other secondary sources included databases (described in the preceding sections). Qualitative data from secondary reviews were analysed using thematic analysis.

2.2 Databases consulted and search terms

The data bases used to search for the relevant documents were Scopus, Ebsco and SA ePublications. The Literature search and data extraction process used the following search terms:

- 'social development' and 'food relief' and 'COVID-19'
- 'social development' and 'food security' and 'COVID-19'
- 'DSD' and 'food relief' and 'COVID-19'
- 'DSD' and 'food security' and 'COVID-19'
- 'social development' and 'food programmes' and 'COVID-19'
- 'DSD' and 'food programmes' and 'COVID-19'
- 'social development' and 'food programme activities' and 'COVID-19'
- 'DSD' and 'food programme activities' and 'COVID-19'
- 'South Africa' and 'food relief' and 'human rights' and 'COVID-19'
- 'DSD' and 'food relief' and 'human rights' and 'COVID-19'
- 'partners/stakeholders of DSD/Social Development in food relief mechanisms during COVID-19'
- 'effectiveness of the partnership in food delivery model response to COVID-19 affected households'
- 'effectiveness of social development sectors in food delivery model response to COVID-19-affected households'

- ‘monitoring and evaluation of food relief mechanisms’
- ‘impact of food delivery models in African regions and South Africa’
- ‘food relief and realist approach’

The results from a thorough search showed that most databases did not have government reports, especially for the DSD. The inclusion criterion was for articles that had the keywords in the title and abstracts. This was then narrowed down to 2019–2021. Unpublished reports were sought from the DSD. Google Scholar was linked to the HSRC library’s VPN to show database information. This helped ensure that accredited or trustworthy articles were identified since not all Google results are accredited.

The results showed the following:

- Ebsco – 6
- SA ePublications – 1
- Scopus- 2
- DSD Website – 1 (COVID-19 Rapid Needs Assessment Report)
- Google Scholar – 15

Further searches were made for DSD stakeholders and partners on this project. The literature was guided by the overall project objectives and aims, which were: to ‘systematically distil and integrate data from a number of sources of evidence to draw more informed conclusions on the extent to which the social development sector responded to hunger and unemployment affecting individuals and households during the COVID-19 lockdown’. The analytical framework complemented all of the above processes.

2.3 Case study approach

The rationale for case study selection was guided by a continental approach (where it was possible to pull out experiences and lessons learnt on food distribution during disaster situations on all continents). The following countries were selected: United States of America; Argentina; Haiti; Indonesia; and Democratic Republic of the Congo. A realist approach focusing on context- generative mechanisms – outcomes was applied in analysing the case studies.

2.4 Key Informant Interviews (KIs)

KIs were done to understand context, generative mechanisms, and outcomes; triangulate findings; and for the validation of data/findings from consulted literature and official documents. The sample for KIs consisted of the government, private sector, academia, and NPOs, who provided inputs to conceptualise how the response mechanisms could be strengthened as outlined in the scope of work. Based on a list supplied by the DSD, 14 organisations were approached to participate in interviews (see Annex 2).

Consent forms were shared and only five participants agreed to be interviewed virtually using the Zoom platform. The recordings were transcribed and analysed thematically. The participants’ views were highlighted in the report to validate findings from the secondary synthesis.

2.5 Limitations of the synthesis evaluation

The data collection process for the synthesis evaluation had the following limitations:

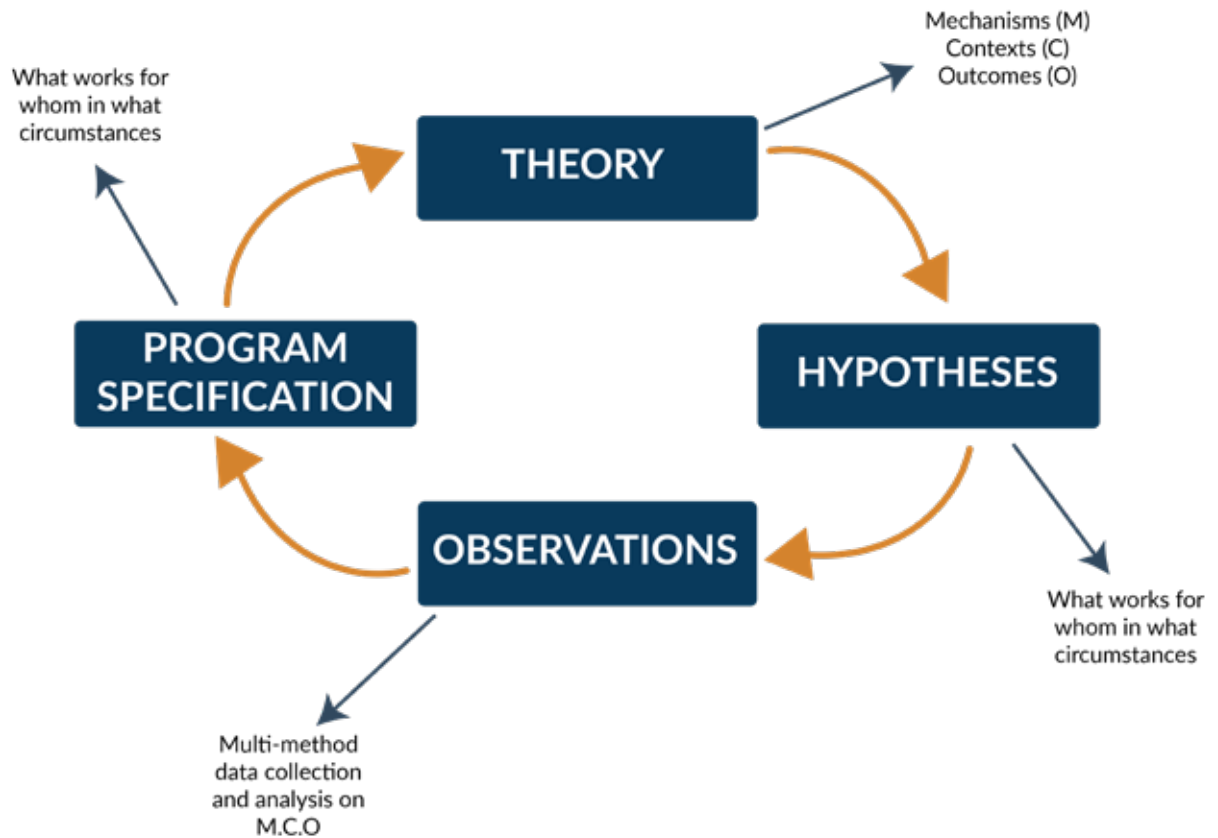
- Low response rate for KIIs – Guided by a list supplied by the DSD, the study targeted 14 institutions, the government departments working on food security, academia, NPOs, CBOs and NGOs. However only 5 KIIs signed the consent forms shared with them. This may have implications on the validations of findings from the secondary data synthesis since data saturation may not have been reached.
- Inherent data limitations in the rapid synthesis evaluation – Rapid synthesis evaluations, by the nature of their design, have inherent data limitations or are based primarily on available data. This may lead to inadequate coverage of the various components of the data criteria. An example is the lack of coverage of some components of the efficiency criteria like timeliness of implementation and cost effectiveness, which could not be covered due to lack of information in the secondary literature.
- Limitations in the terms of reference – The terms of reference did not cover all the six Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criterion components (see Table 4). However, the missing components were addressed by developing a comprehensive analytical framework in Annexure 1.
- Balancing KIIs and secondary data synthesis – KIIs produced some interesting observations, which could not be incorporated in validating secondary data since the study was a synthesis evaluation based on secondary data. This compromised the objectivity of the study.

3 EVALUATION DESIGN AND EVALUATION QUESTIONS

3.1 The realist perspective

The synthesis evaluation applied a realist synthesis approach, which assumes the existence of a 'generative' model of causality, where causal links are a result of events linking cause and effect to outcomes. It drew from conceptual and theoretical constructs of Pawson (2013)¹⁷, which provide a basis to help describe how and why a social intervention did or did not work. It provides logic through a theory-driven inquiry that explains what works, for whom, in what circumstances and in what respects (Rycroft-Malone et al., 2012)¹⁸. In this regard, a realist perspective was integrated throughout the evaluation cycle. Figure 1 illustrates the realist- evaluation approach that provided a conceptual lens for the synthesis evaluation. Deliberate efforts were made throughout this report to explicitly highlight the Context-Mechanism-Outcome configurations.

Figure 1: The realist evaluation cycle



Source: Pawson and Tilley (1997:85)¹⁹

¹⁷Pawson, R. (2013). *The science of evaluation: a realist manifesto*. London, SAGE.

¹⁸Rycroft-Malone, J., McCormack, B., Hutchinson, A.M., DeCorby, K., Bucknall, T.K., Kent, B., Schultz, A., Snelgrove-Clarke, E., Stetler, C.B., Tither, M., Wallin, I. and Wilson, V. (2012). *Realist Synthesis: Illustrating the method for implementation research*. *Implementation Science*, 7:1-10.

¹⁹Pawson, R. and Tilley, N. (1997). *Realistic Evaluation*. London, SAGE.

3.2 Human rights-based approach

A rights-based approach to evaluation includes considering the standards, principles and approaches of human rights, social activism and of development to tackle the power issues that lie at the root of poverty and exploitation, in order to promote justice, equality and freedom (Theis, 2003). The relationship between rights holders and duty bearers is central to the idea of human rights. In the context of this evaluation, duty bearers (including the DSD, other governments, institutions, and individuals) are obligated to respect, protect, and fulfil human rights. Rights holders are entitled to demand their own rights from duty bearers, but they also must respect the rights of others (see Figure 2).

Human rights perspectives are engraved in the South African Constitution. Section 27(1)(b) of the Constitution states that, ‘everyone has the right to have access to sufficient food and water’. This obligation is extended in section 27(2), according to which ‘the state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of each of these rights’. According to the Section 35(2)(e) of the Constitution, prisoners and detainees also have a right to sufficient food, and section 28(1)(c) states that every child has the right to basic nutrition, shelter, basic healthcare services and social services. Based on these provisions, it became important to infuse a human rights-based approach lens to the evaluation to ensure the relevance of evaluation findings and recommendations to policy making.

Figure 2: Human rights-based approach



Source: Adopted from Theis (2003)

3.3 The DAC criteria

The need for assessing the effectiveness and impact of the social sector's response to food relief provision during COVID-19 made it necessary to apply the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) evaluation criteria. The six DAC evaluation criteria are based on the conception that evaluation is an assessment 'to determine the relevance and fulfilment of objectives, developmental efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability' of efforts supported by aid agencies (OECD, 1992, p. 132)²⁰ as well as assessing the coherence of interventions²¹. Key issues addressed by the six DAC criteria were looked at through an analytical framework described in Table 4 above.

4 EVALUATION FINDINGS

4.1 Evaluation of DSD interventions in South Africa during COVID-19

Relevance

The relevance component determined the extent to which the DSD intervention objectives and design responded to the needs of beneficiaries, national policies, and priorities. Our review of the Terms of Reference brought out the issues, which define the underlining objectives of the DSD food relief intervention. These issues were as follows:

- The SA government needs to continually address the root causes of poverty, hunger and unemployment through policy initiatives and safety nets such as social grants to economically disempowered persons. The country also is addressing livelihoods challenges that affect the majority of South Africans, which include the triple challenge of poverty, inequality, and unemployment.
- The lack of an integrated strategy to assist vulnerable people during crisis periods explains the haphazard nature of the government's response to hunger and unemployment. A systematic and consolidated approach is needed.
- The DSD needs to ensure that relevant government programmes continue to be effectively implemented across the provinces for targeted beneficiaries during declared national disasters.

The evaluation findings revealed that the relevance of the DSD's food relief mechanism was rooted in the deterioration of South Africa's food security situation, which significantly worsened during lockdown when the government implemented measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The country experienced one of the strictest lockdowns in the world between March and July 2020 – the year the SARS-COV-2 disease was first officially identified in South Africa. Most of the economy was forced to shut down as non-essential services were mandated to close during the period. It soon became apparent that the lockdown and subsequent consequences of this response measure exacerbated the impact of the pandemic on livelihoods. As noted by the Minister of Social Development in the SASSA 2019/2020 annual report:

● ● "Prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, the country was already battling high levels of unemployment occasioned by a steady economic decline. With more people expected to lose their sources of income and livelihoods, the pandemic has brought to the fore the need for a coordinated national response and to strengthen our social protection system, with focus on the most vulnerable population groups." (SASSA Annual Report, 2020, p.7).

²⁰Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). (1992). Development assistance manual: DAC principles for effective aid. Paris: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

²¹Coherence is a criterion incorporated into this evaluation based in the National Evaluation Policy Framework -2019. Coherence refers to the compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector or institution. The extent to which other interventions (particularly policies) support or undermine the intervention, and vice versa

Unemployment has been a widespread socioeconomic problem in South Africa with young people and women the most affected by chronic joblessness. For example, in Quarter 1 of 2020, StatSA reported that 20.4 million young people (15–34 years) comprised 63.3% of the country's total unemployed population. The unemployment rate within this age group was 43.2%. The youngest were most vulnerable in the job market. Of the 10.4 million young people aged 15–24 years old, the unemployment rate was 59%. The response was inclusive of young people aged 18 to 34 years.

Unemployment and loss of income

The economic and financial fallout of the pandemic, particularly due to the State of Disaster and the lockdown, has wreaked havoc on employment and household income in the country (as it has globally). In the fourth quarter of 2019, South Africa had already recorded high levels of unemployment due to declining economic growth and challenges in job creation, reaching 29.1%. Unemployment has a direct impact on the national social protection programme as shown by the increased number of applications to SASSA processed, which exceeded 1.7 million in the 2019/20 financial year (SASSA Annual Report, 2020). In addition, 344 482 applications for SRD grants were awarded at a cost of R440 million for the same period.

Cognisant of the crisis facing the nation, the government introduced a new category of beneficiaries comprising South Africans, permanent residents and refugees aged 18–59 years who were unemployed, had no income and were registered with the Department of Home Affairs. They were supported through the Special COVID-19 SRD grant, a temporary provision of R350 paid per month by SASSA to beneficiaries assisting them to meet their basic needs. The expansion of the social assistance programme, including payment of social grant top-ups during the COVID-19 pandemic, was a clear indication of the extent of economic and financial vulnerabilities exacerbated by the measures taken to prevent SARS-COV-2 transmission.

It provided indications of the downward trend in many South Africans' welfare. Analysis of NIDS-CRAM Wave 1 reported more than 3 million people who lost employment between February and April 2020. In addition, about 1.4 million of the working age population (4.6% of those between 15 and 64 years) reported that they were not working and were not receiving an income even though they were still maintaining an employment relationship.

Some levels of recovery from being unemployed or furloughed in April 2020 to being in employment were reported in June 2020, however, most people who had been unemployed in April (81%) were still unemployed in June compared to those who were previously furloughed (39%) and 15% of those who were previously employed or on paid leave (Spaull, Oyenubi, Kerr, Maughan-Brown et al, 2020). The high uptake of the special COVID-19 SRD grant, as reported in the SASSA 2019/2020 annual report, was an indication of the magnitude of the problem: more than 9 million South Africans had applied for the grant and two-thirds (6 million) were immediately approved while most of the declined applications were referred to the appeal process.

Dwindling employment and loss of income led to an increased number of South Africans who experienced hunger on a regular basis and acute food shortages at household level. This necessitated interventions consisting of food parcel distribution to vulnerable individuals. Spaull, Oyenubi, Kerr, Maughan-Brown et al (2020) indicated that the majority of those who were severely affected by lockdown-related unemployment – as indicated by their slow return to a pre-COVID employment status – were black Africans, those without a matric qualification and residents of areas under traditional authority.

The NIDS-CRAMS Wave 2 study specifically identified poor workers, female workers, unskilled and low-education workers as the groups that experienced the largest declines in employment between February and June 2020. Going forward, these findings should be considered when planning food parcel delivery to vulnerable households during similar disasters.

Lack of access to food

The COVID-19 pandemic's economic and financial impact included reduced or lost household incomes, which directly affected household food security. Food availability in households is a manifestation of food choices influenced by several factors including the socioeconomic status of the household members and the cost of food at any given time (Smit, Kassier, Nel & Koen, 2017). Frequent experiences of hunger by household members, including children, have been attributed to unaffordability of food by low-income households. The food parcel distribution plan, which the DSD implemented in partnership with the Solidarity Fund, was based on the understanding that household food security in South Africa had been declining at the time and that those who relied on CNDCs for food access would be at risk of hunger and malnutrition.

The COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund is a global fund for supporting the work of the World Health Organization in containing the COVID-19 pandemic. The Solidarity Fund focused on the implementation of the food relief programme, augmenting existing civil society and government food relief efforts. The distribution of the parcels was done through a range of partners to optimise national coverage and impact. The DSD continued its support, mainly in a form of grants to implement additional food availability to vulnerable communities. The government's social grant programmes has about six million beneficiaries monthly. DSD spent over R17 billion and anticipated spending over R22 billion in 2021/22. The DSD was paying the beneficiaries through bank accounts, however, the majority, 4.2 million (70%) of the beneficiaries were using the South African Post Office (SAPO), which resulted in long queues, overcrowding and the contravening of social distancing regulations.

To manage the challenge, the DSD explored and implemented several measures, including: (i) The deployment of volunteers to manage queues/ social distancing and assist beneficiaries in the queues (ii) Scheduling appointments for beneficiaries to present themselves (iii) Using alternative public facilities such as municipal halls for payments and (iv) SAPO has also introduced a system for staggered payment dates, based on the last 3 digits of people's ID numbers. Thus, the above is in line with the need to for addressing inequality at national level to promote the goal of justice envisioned in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Cohesion

The cohesion component discussed the compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in the country, with reference to policies related to food relief distribution. The synthesis evaluation touched on whether the DSD food intervention supported or undermined the other interventions.

The evaluation results showed that the major partner for the DSD food relief mechanism was the Solidarity Fund. The Fund's first humanitarian disbursement, announced on 18 April 2020, took the form of a R120 million funding commitment to provide emergency food relief to over 250 000 distressed households across South Africa. The relief effort was targeted at reaching the vulnerable families, experiencing severe food insecurity during the lockdown period. This short-term, immediate relief intervention was designed to be a stopgap measure to allow time for the more systemic government grant solutions to come on stream, and the resumption of government feeding programmes at schools and DSD centres.

The food parcels provided basic food relief for a household for two to three weeks (depending on household size). Each parcel included a mix of starch, proteins and vegetables, and the cost incurred by the Fund, per parcel, ranged from R350–430, including cost of delivery. Distribution solutions were needed to reach the most marginalised and remote communities across South Africa, in the shortest possible time, while observing the rules of the national lockdown. The Solidarity Fund used various strategies and frameworks to deliver its food relief programme, guided by several principles related to speed, geographic reach, inclusion and traceability. With regards to the principle of speed, the Fund's driving principle was to reach households as soon as possible, so a wide range of high-capacity partners were identified that could deliver quickly and at scale through a targeted application process.

Effectiveness

The effectiveness criterion determined the extent to which the DSD food intervention achieved, or was expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results. In addition, it looked at how operational principles (generative mechanisms) facilitated effectiveness for the objectives to be achieved. The evaluation looked at the principle of geographic reach and how it allowed the food relief intervention to reach all nine provinces and ensure both rural and urban coverage across the most deprived municipalities in South Africa. Effectiveness was also reviewed in relation to the partnerships and the responsiveness of the social development sector's food delivery model.

The department was able to reach the most deserving vulnerable people through its partnership with SASSA. The DSD and SASSA worked on a digital method for people to apply for grants as well as for the R350 SRD grant. This digital method applied to both smart and non-smart mobile phones to allow for others to apply on behalf of people who did not have a mobile phone or were not comfortable using one. Further to this, the NDA allocated R1.8 million to partner with 52 civil society organisations that provided ten volunteers each, amounting to 520 volunteers. The volunteers were deployed to distribute food parcels and other necessities to the elderly and disabled in communities. Table 1 below shows key stakeholders and their responsibility that ensured effectiveness of the intervention.

Table 5: Examples of key stakeholders' contribution to effective implementation of food distribution

Stakeholder	Contribution to effective role out of food relief programme
Department of Social Development	<p>Coordination of food distribution to support the poor and vulnerable</p> <p>Assessment of beneficiaries to determine their eligibility</p> <p>Coordination of food donations through the food distribution centre</p>
SASSA	<p>Provide comprehensive social relief of distress</p> <p>Payment of the grants to deserving beneficiaries</p>
COGTA/municipalities	<p>Collaboration in identification of beneficiaries and distribution of food</p> <p>Provision of storage facilities</p> <p>Mobilisation of volunteers</p>
Civil society organisations & FBO	<p>Collaborate with the DSD to reach communities</p> <p>Mobilisation of volunteers, food donations & service communities</p>
Business community	<p>Mobilisation of the resources (donations) to support food distribution</p>
SAPS & Security force	<p>Provision of security, public order and compliance with lockdown regulations</p>
NDA	<p>Mobilisation of volunteers for food distribution applications & deliveries</p> <p>Conduct advocacy & education - distribution of brochures supplied by the Department of Health</p> <p>Assist SASSA at pay points as queue marshalls to enforce social distancing.</p>

Source: (Compiled by authors)

Various stakeholders worked together at national and provincial levels to coordinate all food distribution activities. One NPO had this to say:

● ● “It achieved its objectives, especially when the food reached the hands of those who needed the food. We (XX) went into the community and looked at those who needed food the most, got them and we were able to distribute food to them and we got immediate feedback from them. Many of them giving feedback on how without the food distribution – their children would have gone to bed without food. Also people being able to identify those in need within their communities and coming back to us and say “that there is this person in this house and they do not have food at all and they don’t know about the organisation, can you support?”. We also work through our social workers who check if people/households really need the food parcels, they were not just given to anyone they were given to people who needed it. So yes, it actually achieved its purpose” (virtual key informant interview conducted on 21 May 2021).

The DSD discontinued cooked meals to avoid the sitting down during mealtimes, hence the food parcels were given as an alternative to allow social distancing. The food parcels strategy was changed into a hybrid approach that incorporated food vouchers rolled out at SASSA through the SRD grant. The use of the vouchers enhanced easier access to food compared with laborious handling of food parcels.

The establishment of CNDCs increased the capacity to provide access to food to more people and supporting centre-based programmes outside the coverage of the network of CNDCs and other DSD centres. Other avenues adopted were the provision of food parcels to households not serviced by the network of DSD centres through home community-based care centres, luncheon clubs and drop-in centres. The approach to food parcel distribution involved innovations and provided the agility required in emergency situations.

Effectiveness was also considered in terms of the ease of handling food relief during distribution, and social acceptability. Food that had a longer shelf life and was easy to keep was preferred, including non-essential non-food items like soap, sanitary packs and candles. COVID-19 information leaflets were also included in the food packs for hygiene purposes.

The principle of geographic reach was adopted not to leave anyone behind. Vulnerable households were reached by a wide variety of partners across civil society, private sector and the government that joined forces. The DSD urgently coordinated the private sector and civil society organisations to assist in addressing the COVID-19-induced food challenges. To avoid duplication and competition, a protocol for coordinating donations, which included promulgation regulations, was developed to ensure synergy in serving communities. This was important in assisting the donors in their commitment towards feeding the hungry and protecting the poor and vulnerable people. The considerable donor support assisted the DSD to reach vulnerable people in areas that had not been serviced, or under-serviced due to the lack of resources.

While the preceding section talks to positive attributes of effectiveness, there are reports indicating that the food parcels and social grants were not adequate. Additionally, the food relief programme was mired by allegations of corruption, irregular payments, and capture by public service officials, as documented in the preliminary report of the Auditor General (See Auditor General, 2020). The Special Investigating Unit (SIU) has been mandated to investigate corruption issues. Similar challenges of fraud and corruption have been encountered in payment of the temporary employee/employer relief scheme (TERS), also documented in the Auditor General's report. The result has been the stalling of TERS payments with negative impacts on access to much needed material assistance by those who qualified. Other systemic challenges of an administrative and technological nature also hampered the efficient roll out of the COVID-19 SRD grant at scale (Bridgman, van der Berg, and Patel, 2020). The other issues related to lack of uniformity in the provision of food parcels across the country. Box 1 provides challenges and lessons from the Solidarity Fund DSD parliamentary committee

BOX 1: CHALLENGES AND LESSONS

Safety and security during deliveries in the context of need far surpassed existing allocations for the South African Police Service (SAPS) provided support.

Supply chain stock-outs – particularly of maize meal and lentils – caused delays in deliveries and substitutions in food parcel items

Reaching beneficiaries

There were reports that some food parcels were not reaching the intended beneficiaries (Hamadziripi and Chitimira, 2021).

Challenges in keeping a wide variety of stakeholders continuously informed

Given the pace and scale of the effort in a short time frame (4 weeks). Coordination with the government at district level could have been undertaken sooner.

There were challenges with transporting vegetables (butternut), even if purchased locally. This is due to the lag from sourcing to final delivery to households in rural areas.

CBOs and NGOs have a critical role to play in both identifying beneficiaries and reaching them with their capacity for last-mile distribution. While there is a risk of duplication with many NGOs doing food distribution, they are critical to the reach and scale of any humanitarian effort.

The above affected the effectiveness of the food relief intervention in ensuring that the dignity of those receiving food parcels was maintained. This was either by ensuring that the food was not diverted to corrupt officials' homes, by addressing congestion and by ensuring that food in the parcels had not expired.

Efficiency

The criterion of efficiency looked at the extent to which the DSD food relief intervention had delivered or was likely to deliver results in an economic and timely way. In this evaluation, "economic" is understood as the conversion of inputs (funds, expertise, natural resources, time, etc.) into outputs and outcomes, in the most cost-effective way possible, as compared to feasible alternatives in the context. "Timely" delivery is within the intended timeframe, or a timeframe reasonably adjusted to the demands of the evolving context.

The synthesis evaluation found out that there was resource efficiency given that most of the Fund's disbursement went directly to beneficiaries, with very limited funding covering intermediary distribution costs. On average, the distribution costs were 6% of the total disbursement, with remote areas incurring higher distribution charges. Through the partnerships, efficiencies were built, which facilitated the Solidarity Fund to exceed the original set targets. Emergency relief was delivered to approximately over 300 000 households rather than the 250 000 originally targeted, using the same funding envelope. The Fund confirmed distribution of 280 000 parcels to households and targeted to reach a further 23 500 households with food vouchers by mid-June 2021. One NPO had this to say:

●● “Our programme is working with the DSD as an operating agent, we work with more than 100 community-based kitchens. By doing this we are typically trying to make food to be accessible by everyone and to be reached by everyone” (Virtual interview conducted on 10 May 2021”).

The DSD provided expertise through the establishment of work streams, for example one that focused on monitoring, evaluation, research and learning. The work streams provided technical support in specific areas of work and a supervisory role on all food relief activities.

Sustainability

The sustainability criterion determined the extent to which the net benefits, institutional arrangements, DSD internal systems and implementation modalities would inform future food relief interventions. In this regard, the evaluation examined institutional capacities and systems, including the building of partnership networks, which were critical for physical food distribution; the digital vouchers; and cash transfer mechanisms. The partnership networks will likely save as distribution platforms for future humanitarian and public health programmes. One NPO had this to say:

●● “If we document, keep data and keep communication well after handling this crisis (we are still leaning though as the crisis is not over yet) what this means is that if we are faced by another crisis like this we equally know the human resources available, which is always very important before we get to the financial and other kind of resources needed. When we put the heads together we move faster than having to start from the beginning what can we do. If we can learn from the Ebola crisis in other countries, is that what I hear is that they could handle this COVID-19 crisis easily because they have already handled other crisis. So the structures that were there when they were working to prevent or eliminate the problem helped them to handle this one” (Virtual key informant interview conducted on 21 May, 2021).

Preliminary analysis shows that the DSD implemented its mandate during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic by utilising existing policy and institutional frameworks and by partnering with newly formed structures such as the Solidarity Fund to respond to the ensuing disaster. Vulnerable groups that received support included poor children, young people who were not in education, employment and training, and informal workers. The potential capability of the state to expand its social protection programme in an inclusive and efficient way was one of the key policy debates during the pandemic. The DSD’s ability to coordinate the deliver timely food relief under varying lockdown levels remains critical for long-term human development goals and the protection of human rights in a country that continues to record deterioration in household food security.

Collaboration between state and non-state actors in providing food relief proved the potential of effective intergovernmental relations in responding to the needs of the poor. In future, a multi-stakeholder approach to food distribution will provide a working model for implementing food relief during disasters. The evaluations commissioned and the lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic have also informed capacity development of DSD internal systems aimed at disaster mitigation planning. Furthermore, the inclusion of provincial and local institutions as food distribution partners enhanced capacity and ownership at those levels. This will enhance the capacity of local-level institutions in supporting local, social and economic investments in communities as a catalyst for development. Additionally, these institutions can act as funding conduits for future investments/donations by funding agencies/donors that are willing to provide funding directly to the communities.

5 REVIEW AND SYNTHESIS OF RELEVANT CASE STUDIES ON FOOD RELIEF MECHANISMS: LESSONS LEARNT FROM OTHER REGIONS AND SOUTH AFRICA

5.1 Experiences from the United States of America

Etienne and Toussaint (2021) describe the context of cities in the United States of America. They state that disparities in food access and the resulting inequities in food security are persistent problems. Washington DC, the nation's capital experience disparities in food access. The geography of food security in the District of Columbia reveals a history of uneven food access, which has been amplified by the vulnerability of food supply chains during the COVID-19 pandemic. The generative mechanisms in this context were new innovations and opportunities that presented advances in urban agriculture to assist addressing the challenges of food access during COVID-19 disaster. Following the inability to order, they innovated by green infrastructure. The innovations brought several outcomes to the fore that exposed persistent socio-political barriers for rights holders into greater focus and the broader goal of community empowerment.

5.2 Experiences from Southwestern Haiti

The Republic of Haiti, home to approximately 10.4 million people, has been plagued by a history of political and economic challenges, as well as the hurricanes Gustav, Hanna, and Ike, which caused extensive flooding. The economic impact of the Haiti Revolution of 1791-1804, which resulted in significant foreign debt, has placed Haiti in a state of chronic poverty for an extended period. With such a devastating history of political instability, poverty, and frequent disasters, the citizens of Haiti continue to face development challenges. Disasters are known to cause increased stress, mental-health complications, scarcity of basic provisions, and the destruction of social networks. The 2010 Haiti earthquake and the subsequent cholera outbreak caused significant morbidity associated with an increased level of vulnerability to child abuse in the household. Thus, the generative mechanisms in this context have been interventions where beneficiaries after a disaster situation are required to work to qualify for assistance (conditional social protection). Food-for-work programmes and cash-for-work programmes in Haiti require beneficiaries to perform demanding manual labour with aid agencies to qualify for disbursements of food or cash. Rossi (2017) states that food and cash is not free for vulnerable groups affected by disasters. The Ministry of Agriculture (2014) report for Haiti posits that food-for work and cash-for-work projects are designed to assist households in need but also to ensure that recipients do not become "dependent" on free handouts. Requiring beneficiaries to participate in aid projects, represents an effort on the part of development agencies to train and engage people in economically productive and potentially empowering activities (Hickey and Mohan, 2004, Mosse, 2005). The outcomes of work-for-aid interventions produce only modest improvements to households' subsequent income and nutritional status and do little to redress the larger social and economic structures that cause people's continuing poverty and vulnerability to crisis (Debela et al., 2015; WFP, 2018).

5.3 Experiences from Indonesia

Large scale disasters occur in both developed and developing countries. According to Chhandasi (2006), the context of developing countries like Indonesia does not allow them to deal with large-scale disasters independently. Major catastrophes trigger the requirement for external organisations to come in and help the survivors. The involvement of hundreds to thousands of nonstate and non-governmental actors after big catastrophes in these countries create more complex realities putting pressure on the capacity of the respective coordinating actors such as governments and the local disaster response authorities. The 2004 tsunami that hit Indonesia resulted in high involvement by international organisations, including nongovernmental ones. The tsunami represented a turning point in the engagement of the private sector in humanitarian operations targeted at assisting vulnerable communities (Thomas and Lynn, 2006; Cozzolino, 2012). The degenerative mechanism resulting from the tsunami disaster was the donation of non-monetary offers of in-kind goods, as well as the provision of logistical support and information, and communications technology equipment.

The outcomes of engagement of the private sector in humanitarian operations targeted at assisting vulnerable communities included scheduling of the type of aid needed and by whom. This included guidelines on critical and useful goods to be procured and the recruitment of specialised personnel who could support the evaluation, acceptance and management of the goods received. One of the challenges was that too many unsolicited and inappropriate items had arrived that took up space in airports and warehouses. The above scenario shows that coordination and logistics are critical issues in providing support to vulnerable communities. The coordination of humanitarian aid is complex and involves very different actors. They may have various logistic skills and competences, but also different cultures, purposes, interests and mandates. Also, in any humanitarian action logistics makes the difference between successful or failed operation (Burcu, et al, 2010). In most cases, logistics represents the costly part of any disaster relief. It needs to consider the people, resources, knowledge and activities involved in the planning, implementing and controlling of an efficient and effective flow and storage of materials (with their corresponding information and financial flows), from the points of origin to the disaster destination. Another important aspect is negotiating sensitive relationships among the different actors. Ansell and Cash (2018) suggest that a platform with different actors as a way to pioneer a partnership model for disaster response.

5.4 Experiences from Argentina

The development of the state's capacity in Argentina is associated with historical processes (Luna, 2020, Mahoney, 2010), as well as with socioeconomic inequalities and lack of trust in institutions (Grassi and Memoli, 2016). State capacity relates to the idea of infrastructural power, which in turn is associated with the control exercised by a state, the ability to implement public policies and to enforce the established norms (Soifer, 2015). The country has the lowest inequality with a Gini Coefficient of 0.39 and central government social spending is higher than average in the region, including offering unemployment benefits to some people who lose work (ECLAC, 2018). The government expenditure on health as a proportion of GDP is higher in Argentina (9.12%), compared to some of its regional counterparts, like Mexico (5.52%) or Peru (5%) (World Bank, 2017). It is within this context that, Argentina's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been included in "The Best Global Responses to COVID-19 Pandemic" report (World Bank, 2017).

The capital of Argentina, Buenos Aires the co-ordination between the three levels of the government has been strong on public health as well as economic and social protection measures despite political differences. Mitigation of the effects of COVID-19 in Argentina made the government to initiate an intervention that embraced a coordinated approach to managing the crisis between all levels of the government (national, provincial, and local) with a focus on vulnerable groups. Working groups on sectoral issues operated between government departments and at various levels, involving the mayor, governor and president as well as representatives from the health and economics departments. The leadership's clear messaging bolstered public trust and compliance. Instead of a top-down approach by the government, the bottom-up work of social organisations was also vital. For example, women ran organisations in informal settlements that lacked public services, cooked meals for people in need, made masks, sourced medications, spread public information and fixed broken houses.

5.5 Experiences from the Democratic Republic of Congo

Historically, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has struggled with a high burden of disease, political instability, and low health system use. Decades of violent conflict and instability have taken a devastating toll on the country's economy, human resources and infrastructure. The country also has a largely rural population. The above factors present several challenges to providing equitable access to resources meant for vulnerability reduction. Most of the workforce who assist in the form of health and food provision are concentrated in the capital Kinshasa and provincial urban areas (WHO, 2010). The uneven distribution of the country's civil service workforce continues to challenge achievement of universal health coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Improving access to health and food in any country is essential to achievement of the SDGs, particularly SDGs 2 (end hunger), 3 (good health and wellbeing) and 10 (reduced inequalities).

The generative mechanisms in the DRC's food security programme, provided short-term answers to urgent food needs while building long-term resilience to recurrent shocks with a focus on women and children. The food programme, implemented in conflict- and Ebola-affected provinces in the east, employed a combination of strategies, including capacity building for smallholder farmers, post-harvest management, and the processing and marketing of agricultural products. The programme also successfully linked to other existing programmes, including a school feeding programme. The outcomes of linking local producers to the school feeding programme proved particularly positive in terms of strengthening food security for children, while improving market access for local producers.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Redressing poverty, unemployment and inequality has been on South Africa's agenda for decades. Even though the COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing, it has already provided some generalisable lessons on how pandemics can affect the food and nutrition security. This synthesis evaluation established that households require adaptation related to food processing, consumption of basic foods and adjustments to packaging during disaster as coping mechanisms to enhance the capacity to minimise transmission of COVID-19.

The food relief intervention put in place provided social assistance to those normally excluded from social protection measures even during crisis periods. It also has the potential to promote healthy human relationships through enhancing social cohesion among community members and service providers. The evidence gleaned from the synthesis evaluation showed how social protection measures that used food parcels, vouchers and other grants had strengthened human relationships through partnerships with businesses, NPOs, CBOs and interaction that emerged among government institutions. Using vouchers, vulnerable people were able to access food and financial resources to buy food. The major challenges, however, were delays in implementing approved interventions or, in some cases, the provincial government's invisibility and lack of innovative interventions that can quickly be adapted to realise recovery from a disaster situation. There is a need for approaches that focus on youth development and to recognise young people as part of the solution. For example, availability of reliable databases linked to GPS information of vulnerable communities, households and CBOs can enhance emergency service delivery and young people have invaluable skills relevant to such initiatives.

The introduction of a monthly SRD grant was a huge milestone in that it assisted South Africans during the COVID-19 pandemic and national lockdown. In a way though very small, the grants provided to millions of unemployed South Africans, may be perceived to mitigate the impact of disasters in future. The findings highlighted some challenges of corruption, inadequate food parcels and social grants and other systemic administrative (closure of feeding centres, use of councillors in food distribution, lack of supervisory plans) and technological challenges, which hampered the programme. While grants are short term and are not considered to be a long-term solution, their use will likely assist the DSD to implement future initiatives related to alleviate food security challenges.

There are several takeaways and policy responses to better manage disasters in the future. Some key lessons that can be derived from the synthesis evaluation are as follows:

6.1 Lessons from other countries

1. Disasters within the context of existing structural inequalities exacerbate disparities in food access in urban areas. Promoting urban agricultural production systems can be a viable strategy for providing alternative options to food access that simultaneously address local food security.
2. Contexts with recurring disasters and consistent food aid may lead to dependency in communities. In such instances, free food handouts may be minimised and replaced with conditional food assistance including food-for-work and cash-for-work programmes. Such interventions train and engage people in economically productive and potentially empowering activities.
3. Improving state capacity to intervene during disasters provides a sustainable mechanism to reducing the impacts of disasters on food systems. This includes a coordinated approach to managing the crisis between all levels of the government (national, provincial, and local) and bolsters public trust.
4. Preparedness is key and moving forward. Preparation should take place in the absence of a disaster. Then, when a disaster strikes again, multi-sectoral coordination can be executed successfully with all parties knowing what action to take.
5. Allowing decentralised decision-making is key for it reduces bureaucratic processes and entrusts a group of staff with greater power to lead interventions. This means that teams should be close to the frontlines with the autonomy to provide agile responses in a rapidly changing environment.
6. Learning new skills imply staying relevant in a fast-changing world. Government departments tasked with food relief distribution are developing new skills to build in a culture of curiosity about new contexts and domains, the ability to anticipate emerging gaps, keep teams on a positive and upward learning trajectory.

6.2 Recommendations

The following are recommendations based on various components of the DAC criteria.

6.2.1 Effectiveness

Although the synthesis evaluation found that the DSD food relief intervention was largely commendable, there is a need for tailor-made strategies that focus on vulnerable groups such as children, especially those who receive meals at school. The contents of food parcels need to be evaluated to see if they meet the daily nutritional guidelines.

6.2.2 Efficiency

Efficiency can be improved using social service workers with skills that would be useful in addressing household needs during pandemics. Household challenges may relate to gender-based violence and psychosocial support related to food security. Social service workers should be at the front line (with due regard for safety) to provide public education and awareness on the prevention of transmission, assist in ensuring food insecurity and give psychosocial support.

Efficiency can also be enhanced by the establishment of a coordination mechanism such as joint operations committees, or a national command task force, which should be centralised. This will enable the DSD to improve their response time to disasters, and lower administration costs.

Community-based targeting can be another strategy to improve efficiency. It involves contracting with community agents to identify recipients for food relief, vouchers, or in-kind benefits, as well as to monitor and deliver these benefits. Community agents can be community groups, such as social groups, or intermediary agents like NGOs, CBOs or locally-elected officials. Such engagement results in empowerment and transfer of knowledge, and not just the reception of food parcels so that people do not feel that decisions are simply being made for them.

The fourth industrial revolution is an emerging imperative likely to disrupt food systems. Therefore, the DSD should consider the use of technology, particularly with the expansion of delivery services that may remain a major segment of the food supply chain. Innovation and technological improvements driven by disasters may increase the sustainability of food relief interventions. Partners that are developing technologies to integrate relevant technological innovations for food relief interventions need to be incorporated.

6.2.3 Coherence and sustainability

The current architecture employed by the DSD in food relief interventions needs to be sustained to cope with future disasters in a dynamic environment. It is critical for the architecture to remain relevant within a continuously changing policy environment with shifting government priorities. This requires an efficient coordination mechanism to allow coherence and capacity to adapt for future needs of relief interventions. Some challenges that emerged from this synthesis evaluation, including corruption, capture and fraud, may negatively affect the existing institutional arrangements between the DSD and some partners. For example, some development agencies/partners may pull out to protect their organisational integrity.

Lastly, public trust is an issue. Beneficiaries may lose trust in the DSD when interventions are implemented without transparency. The recovery from pandemics requires financial and economic relief efforts to allow affected parties to re-establish themselves. Food relief programmes are also subject to resource constraints. For them to be sustainable, they require robust emergency intervention programmes for mitigating economic and public health consequences.

Short-term coping should allow actors and institutions to carry adaptive responses forward and engage in a process of learning and building robustness to prevent future shocks.

Maintaining and building diversity and connectivity at the community level, and country level are ways to build resilience and guard against bad outcomes.

There is an urgent need for the DSD and development organisations to plan common food relief policy for better management of disasters in the future and to continue learning from the current pandemic.

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LIST OF DSD DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

1. The Household Food and Nutrition Security Strategy for South Africa
2. Programme 5: Social Policy and Integrated Service Delivery
3. The Household Food and Nutrition Security Programme Project Close-Out Report 2013–2020
4. Solidarity Fund Unit in Action (PowerPoint presentation, May 2020)
5. Terms of Reference document, tender number RFQ 33/2020
6. 6. Household food and nutrition security through a network of food distribution centres (Brochure)
7. Proposed implementation of the Solidarity Fund's R14 million worth of vouchers (PowerPoint presentation, 18 November 2020)
8. Food and Nutrition Reflection on COVID-19 Pandemic (PowerPoint presentation, October 2020)

ANNEX 1: SYNTHESIS EVALUATION CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Components	Key questions	Benchmarks	Data sources
Document mandate of DSD, programmes and activities	<p>What is the DSD's mandate, what programmes and activities they do? Under what circumstances do they implement such programmes and activities? Are the activities and outputs of the programme consistent with the overall goal and the attainment of country's objectives?</p> <p>Was there any focus in addressing needs & priorities of vulnerable groups?</p> <p>What evidence suggests respect of human rights?</p>	Mapping programmes, goals and aims of such programmes	Policy documents, meeting minutes, constitution, etc.
<p>Document stakeholders DSD work with; Why working with identified stakeholders?</p> <p>Document any established governance structures of the stakeholders related to the response to food relief mechanism during COVID-19 partnership to leverage DSD interventions</p>	<p>Who are the partners/stakeholders?</p> <p>What is the partnership's goals and objectives? What is the long-term strategy?</p> <p>What was the total value of monetary and in-kind resources that each partner contributed?</p> <p>What are the roles and responsibilities of partners?</p> <p>To what extent have the partners/stakeholders delivered against agreed set of responsibilities?</p> <p>How does the partnership coordinate, collaborate and plan partners' activities?</p> <p>What is the process of reporting partnership progress?</p> <p>Who is responsible for reporting results?</p> <p>What type of documentation is used by the partnership to plan, conduct and report partnership interventions?</p> <p>What enabled partnerships to work/not work?</p>		
Document the effectiveness of the partnership and social development sectors of the food delivery model responsive to COVID-19 affected households and at individual level?	What worked, in what context, what did not work and why?	Number of provinces/districts in distribution happened and the frequency of distribution	<p>Distribution reports/maps</p> <p>Distribution logs (frequency and distribution points)</p> <p>Feasibility studies</p>
Document the DSD's effectiveness in designed framework to track and report beneficiaries	<p>To what extent has the social sector coordinated food distribution during the COVID-19 pandemic?</p> <p>In what context did the coordination mechanisms work and how?</p> <p>What was planned (delivery, systems set up, internal checks and balances, HR deployment</p>	<p>Key identification metrics to track beneficiaries</p> <p>Key indicators to monitor uptake of food delivery model</p> <p>Key indicators to monitor food distribution</p>	<p>Reporting systems of distributions sites</p> <p>Literature review</p> <p>M&E plans</p>
Document efficiency and impact of food delivery models in the region and zero in on South Africa	<p>To what extent has the implementation of food delivery model contributed to vulnerable communities / households?</p> <p>What are the policy implications of the food delivery model?</p> <p>Is the food delivery model changing to incorporate innovation?</p>		Case studies, logical frameworks, minutes of meetings, monitoring and progress reports and interviews
Document sustainability and lessons from other regions and South Africa in particular	<p>What are the lessons learnt or to be learned in responding to future disasters?</p> <p>Which mechanism is best suited to respond to future disasters?</p>		Case studies, implementation reports, M&E reports and interviews

ANNEXURE 2: LIST OF POTENTIAL KII PARTICIPANTS

PROVINCE	DISTRIBUTING NPO	CONTACT PERSON	CONTACT DETAILS
Gauteng and Western Cape	Afrika Tikkun		011 325 5914
Eastern Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, North West and Western Cape	Food Forward South Africa	Andy Du Plessis	021 531 5670
Mpumalanga and Northern Cape	Islamic Relief South Africa	Abubaker Sebeela	011 486 0378
Eastern Cape, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo	Lunchbox Fund		
National	Meals on Wheels	Mpho Rantsoane	076 021 6218
National	Mahlasedi Foundation	Jan Pretorius	082 3786163

PROVINCE	IMPLEMENTING AGENT	CONTACT PERSON	CONTACT DETAILS
Eastern Cape and Free State	ADRA-SA	Jumara Netshifulani	0828597395
Gauteng	Foodbank	Victor	0631639354
KwaZulu-Natal	Action Development Agency	Tiney	078618096
Limpopo	Makotse Women's Club	Mokgadi Legodi	079 228 8007
Mpumalanga	Kago Yabana	Khumo Masilela	072 9266492
Northern Cape and North West	Motswedi wa Sechaba	Dr Kebalepile Mokgethi	0843062177
Western Cape	Ilitha Labantu	Ella Monakali	0763310641



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