

**Higher Education Colloquium on Student Hunger & Food Insecurity: University  
of the Free State**

**Investigating Perceptions of food insecurity complexities in South African Higher Learning  
Institutions: A Review**

by

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## Household food insecurity in South Africa

- Household food insecurity and socio-economic burdens affect students in higher learning institutions especially those who come from low income households (Hughes, et al. 2011).
- 20% of households in South Africa are food insecure (Statistics South Africa, 2012).
- E.g 53% of the students from UKZN, come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Veldman & Kassier, 2013).
- Food insecurity threatens South Africa's economic advancement and transformation as students' academic performance, degree completion are compromised thus reducing ones ability to enter the labour market.



## Food insecurity in South African Institutions of Higher Learning

- Government recognises the importance of food security in South Africa
- Government introduced school feeding scheme in 2002 through the Integrated Food Security Strategy (IFSS) but limited to the school-going age (*Department of Basic Education, 2009: p.1*).
- This strategy has overlooked the need for such an intervention at Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL).



## Food insecurity in South African higher learning institutions

- Food insecurity and financial burdens of students seems to be addressed through a student loan/bursary- NSFAS.
- Research has revealed that poverty significantly impacts on the students' academic performance leading to delay in completion rate, high failure and drop-out rates (Lesteka, 2009) and jeopardizes the country's economic prospects.



## The paradox of food insecurity perceptions and perspectives

- Different *perspectives* on household food insecurity have been presented by various researchers:
- **1. Inadequate and health**
- **2. Marginalised stigma**
- **3. Self-actualisation and well-being**



## ***Perception and Perspective 1: Inadequate nutrition and health***

- Food insecurity is a determinant of lack of access to food and poor dietary quality, which affects one's wellbeing, mental retardation and mental ability to make proper decisions) to live and maintain a standard life.
- Anxiety about availability of food may affect a person's social or mental well-being by creating feelings of aggravation, depression and worry, concerning their food supplies Dixon et al. (2001).
- Poor diet intake caused by lack of resources can lead to illness, which can negatively affect one's social behaviour such as academic performance, attendance to class and other academic commitments (Hughes et al. 2011).
- Studies conducted in South Africa revealed that tertiary students who are food insecure tend to experience poor nutrition due to inadequate diet, which is of poor quality and lack dietary diversity and hence underperform academically (Kassier & Veldman, 2013; Gwacela et al. 2013).

## ***Perception and Perspective 2: Marginalised stigma***

- The effect of poverty on food security is directly linked to social behaviors such as marginalized stigma Herek (1999).
- Individuals who are in most need of help from communities' support systems ironically disintegrate due to stigma, while discrimination encourages community members to marginalize those who need help.
- Marginalised stigma is evident among students who are food insecure (Fekisi & Jaffer, 2015).



## ...Marginalised stigma

- Most students do not want to be labelled as 'hungry students' who cannot afford to feed themselves.
- On the contrary, research shows that food hand-outs/ community food banks helps recipients to reduce their stress related problems such as anxiety about where their next meals would come from.





### ***Perception and Perspective 3: Self-actualisation and well-being***

- Abraham Maslow (1954) observed that human beings have specific needs such as food, water and security if they are to be high achievers or self-actualisers in their life time.
- Maslow presented a five stage model containing a hierarchy of needs, namely biological and physiological needs
- The hierarchy is premised on the notion that individuals must satisfy their lower level basic needs such as food and water before progressing onto the higher needs.
- Hence, there is a potential correlation between food insecurity and academic performance.



## Institutionalisation of food security interventions

- There is an absence of policy to guide IHL to address the challenge food insecurity despite the wake of this problem and its impact on the national economy.
- Students in Universities survive on insufficient and less nutritious food as most of them come from low socio-economic backgrounds (Shreeves, 2010).
- Some institutions-UKZN provides food assistance to students in need. It aims to provide both counselling and food support in form of food hampers or meal vouchers to students.
- There is no formal policy to guide this programme.



## Institutionalisation of food security interventions

- The University of the Free State, has a ‘No hungry student campaign’.
- The University of Zululand and Durban University of Technology (DUT) have institutionalised meal plans.
- The NSFAS-funded students receive meal vouchers of a certain amount per day, which is used for swiping or purchasing meals from the dining halls.
- At DUT, students who qualified to receive the meal vouchers- tended to swipe for their friends who were excluded from the system (Gwacela et al. 2013, p.91).



## Conclusion

- Perhaps increased studies exploring the perceptions of Institutions of Higher Learning about food insecurity and its potential threat to academic progression should be conducted.
- The food and nutrition policy implementation actions should be extended higher learning institutions.



**Thank you**

