

**Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC) /
Western Cape Government (WCG)**

JOINT RESEARCH PROGRAMME

Final Report – 9 September 2021

Title of the project:

Engaging civil society organisations in food security governance in the Western Cape

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Provincial Strategic Goals (2014-2019) to which this project is aligned

PSG 1- Creating opportunities for growth and jobs (achieving a 'fit for purpose' workforce) PSG 2- Improve education outcomes and opportunities for youth development (children must be in a suitable condition to learn). PSG 3 – Increase wellness, safety and tackle social ills (food is fundamental to our health and well-being). PSG 4- Enable a resilient, sustainable, quality and inclusive living environment (preserving agricultural land and adapting to climate change, wider spatial planning issues). PSG 5- Embed good governance and integrated service delivery through partnerships and spatial alignment (helping to understand transversal partnerships). Food security is also one of four cross-cutting themes in the Strategic Framework for the Provincial Strategic Plan 2019-2024, while food assistance is one of the specific interventions of the Western Cape Recovery Plan (2021

ABSTRACT

Even before the Covid lockdown, many households across the province struggled to access enough nutritious food for a healthy life. This leads to high levels of childhood stunting, adult and child obesity and a prevalence of Non-Communicable Diseases such as heart disease and diabetes. The Western Cape Strategic Framework for the Provincial Strategic Plan (PSP) (2019-2024) identifies food security as one of four cross-cutting themes, while food assistance is one of the specific interventions of the Western Cape Recovery Plan (2021). Furthermore, The Western Cape Government has recognised that improving food and nutrition outcomes calls for a Whole of Society Approach and has acknowledged its appreciation of new partnerships formed with civil society in the wake of the negative impacts of Covid-19. However, partnering between different parts of society is not always straightforward, requiring reflection and adjustment over time. The Covid-19 lockdown and resulting economic and social shock both heightened the food security crisis in the province and, at the same time, led to a massive mobilisation of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) involved in emergency food relief. This presented an ideal window to assess the changing CSO landscape in relation to food, the evolving relationships between CSOs and government as well as the potential implications both for ongoing food relief provision and for food governance more widely after the Covid crisis.

To date, the project has achieved important milestones:

- **A stakeholder meeting was held (via Zoom) on 23rd June 2020.** A record of the meeting can be read [here](#). One hundred seven participants took part via Zoom and another 100+ watched on youtube. The stakeholder meeting took the form of a meeting of the Food Governance Community of Practice (COP), which are regular meetings organised by the research team and related to another CHEC/WCG project 'Co-producing knowledge for resilient food systems in the Western Cape'. The meeting was, however, expanded to include CSO representatives who are generally not part of these meetings.
- **Desk-based documentary analysis of over 250 media articles, working papers, research reports, and webinars** relating to the impacts of the lockdown on the food system in South Africa have been collated and analysed. These documents touch on subjects such as food relief, informal food trade, community gardens, digital food etc.
- **A member of the research team participated in all of the regular meetings of the Western Cape NGO-Government Food Relief Coordination Forum since 28th May 2020.** These meetings have been facilitated by the Western Cape Economic Development Partnership (WCEDP) and were refocused as the Food Forum in October 2020. The reports of the meetings and participant lists have fed into this research both directly as data and also as a resource to help identify potential interviewees.
- **Over 50 in depth one hour interviews have been conducted** with CSO representatives and government officials. These have been transcribed and then analysed according to emerging themes using qualitative data analysis software (Atlas.ti).
- **A second, smaller, stakeholder meeting was held (via zoom) on 11 May 2021** to feedback and refine the results of the research before finalising the working

paper. Forty four participants took part in this meeting. A summary of the main points from this meeting can be found [here](#).

- **A Centre of Excellence Working Paper has been published** on the CoE website reflecting the main findings of the research. This 68 page report is available [here](#).
- **A 15 minutes podcast has been posted** on the CoE website to summarise the research results in an assessable manner. The podcast is available [here](#).
- **Presentations of the research findings** have been made at various fora including the Food Governance Community of Practice (11 May 2021); the Food Forum (20 May 2021); the City of Cape Town Food Systems Working Group (8 July 2021); and the Mensch Food Affinity Group (5 August 2021).
- **Further dissemination material** not specified in the original proposal is also in the pipeline, including a 5 minute film and a short media article.

This research is part of the ongoing research initiated in part from the discussions of the Food Governance Community of Practice. The findings contribute to long standing questions about how to broaden and deepen the input of civil society stakeholders in food governance in the province.

INTRODUCTION AND AIMS / QUESTIONS

The initial project was awarded in mid-February 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face research at the University of the Western Cape came to an end around mid-March and lockdown started nationwide on 27 March 2020. There followed an acute food security emergency as well as a rapid mobilisation of CSO in response to this. At the grass roots level individuals and street committees spontaneously mobilised to raise resources and set up food distribution sites and community kitchens. Individual volunteers came together to form self-organising Community Action Networks (CANs). An 'emergency feeling' underpinned these activities, creating a unifying purpose and helping to foster profound cooperativeness that strengthened partnerships and promoted volunteerism. As a result, CSOs provided at least half of the food relief in the Western Cape in the first few months of lockdown. In order to take into account this drastically altered research context, in early June 2020, the research team submitted a request to the CHEC/WCG Joint Research Programme to amend the original proposal. It was requested to shift the geographical focus of the original study, which was on the Witzenberg Municipality, to Cape Town to make use of the research teams existing contacts and also the concentration of CSOs based in this area. In reality, we have found that many of these organisations are operating across the province and so the geographical scope of the research is much broader than first hoped for. While the geographic focus of the research has shifted, the research aims and objectives of the project remain very similar to the original proposal.

The research seeks to understand how CSOs have mobilised during the COVID-19 crisis to provide emergency food relief and how emerging relationships and networks could be harnessed to drive policy and advocacy in future to 'build back better'. We have explored, not only the relationships formed between CSOs themselves, but also between CSOs and government, as well as other stakeholders. The project pursued this broad research aim through answering the following specific questions:

- Which CSOs have mobilised?

- What networks/ collaborations have formed (between CSOs themselves, with communities, with the government)? How (well) have these functioned? What have the barriers/facilitators been?
- What values and principles about the food system/ right to food underly the work of the CSOs?
- What is the legacy of this CSO mobilisation likely to be?
- How can these CSOs be supported to enhance food governance after the crisis (and in potential future crises)?

This research aims to help better-targeted support for CSOs as an important stakeholder group in food governance in the province, including in the implementation of the Western Cape Government Household Western Cape Household Food and Nutrition Security Strategic Framework.

The project aimed to produce the following outputs:

- A COE working paper setting out CSO landscape and their role in food security during and (potential) after the Covid -crisis.
- Summary of research for CSOs and government officials – in a podcast and short policy brief type publication.
- Presentation of findings to the Community of Practice in Cape Town (including Provincial government officials).

RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODS

Data for this research were collected through three qualitative research methods:

- *Literature review and documentary analysis:* Media articles were collected, as well as online commentary and reports detailing and reflecting on the activities of CSOs involved in food aid during the covid crisis. In addition, records and minutes of relevant meetings and seminars were also collected including the minutes of the Western Cape NGO-Government Food Relief Coordination Forum (later renamed the Food Forum).
- *Two online stakeholder meetings* were conducted including a Food Governance Community of Practice meeting held on 23rd June 2020 on 'Civil Society Organisations and Emergency Food Aid: Learning lessons for an ongoing crisis?' A second Food Governance Community of Practice meeting seeking feedback on the preliminary research findings was held on 11th May 2021. Written records of these meetings fed into the research process.
- *52 Semi-structured interviews* were conducted online or on the telephone between July 2020 and April 2021. 37 interviews were held with CSOs representatives involved in emergency food aid; 9 interviews with CSOs whose main activity is advocacy and 6 interviews with government officials and a collaborative intermediary organisation working closely with government working and CSOs in relation to emergency food aid during the crisis. Potential interviewees were identified through their participation in the Western Cape NGO-Government Food Aid Coordination Forum and also a snow-balling technique whereby interviewees were asked to identify further potential interviewees. Care was taken to include interviewees from different groupings of CSOs, including: large Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs); CBOs; and Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) and social networks such as Community

Action Networks. CSOs working from various thematic perspectives were also interviewed, including: agricultural/ urban farming CSOs, health orientated CSOs, social development, homeless charities and education orientated CSOs. Interviews took around 60 minutes and were recorded and then transcribed.

Through these three research methods a large amount of data were collected, which were organised and analysed with the aid of a software programme: 'ATLAS-ti'. The data were coded according to a number of themes and sub-themes that emerged iteratively from the initial readings of the data, and also guided by the research questions.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOLLOW-UP ACTION

Partnerships, Networks and Strategies

The research project found that CSOs relied heavily on activating their existing networks and relationships with communities to operationalise their activities at a grassroots level. These networks and relationships were instrumental in particular in helping to identify vulnerable people as beneficiaries and in the 'last mile' of food distribution. Partnership between larger CSOs to provide complementary services was another important strategy, while the model of 'intermediary' CSOs also helped channel resources through (more formal) Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to smaller (often more informal) Community Based Organisations (CBOs). Another innovative strategy during the crisis was the development of digital food vouchers to be spent in local food businesses. These vouchers both provided short-term food aid and helped to strengthen local food economies more long-term.

Key Challenges

Some of the challenges facing CSOs, especially the CBOs on the ground, were relatively simple but nevertheless important daily struggles. These included: the high cost of data; lack of funds for transport or equipment; rising prices of food; and the heavy logistics involved in food parcel delivery. Many of the CSOs also reported substantial economic, physical and mental cost to their volunteers/staff and organisations during the crisis. This was compounded by a lack of communication between government and CSOs at the beginning of lockdown. Crucially, there was a dearth of information on who was providing food on the ground, how much and how often. This risked duplication or gaps in coverage. The overriding challenge for CSOs, however, (whether large or small, professional or informal) continues to be the decrease of donations and resources over time versus ongoing needs of vulnerable people. This leaves CSOs with difficult decisions about who to feed and how often.

Relationships with Government

Weak and problematic relationships with government were seen as another significant constraint for CSOs, many of which felt that they had little or no contact with government and even less direct financial assistance. An apparently historically poor relationship between parts of government and CSOs in the Western Cape is perhaps not helped by some crude stereotypes on both sides. In general, CSOs found working with government difficult due to the mis-match between the government's regulatory and auditing requirements and the realities of the CSOs on the ground. The relationship

between CSOs and government is, however, not uniform. Larger 'professional' NGOs tended to have a closer relationship with parts of government than smaller informal CBOs. There were also many valuable relationships between CSOs and individuals within government. These usually pre-dated the Covid crisis. The multi-stakeholder platform, the Food Forum, established by the Western Economic Development Partnership (EDP) in lockdown is a positive example of how government-CSO relationships could be facilitated and strengthened.

Engaging in Long Term Change?

The Covid crisis put 'the food problem' on the agenda of some CSOs for the first time and for others the problem became further highlighted. There was almost unanimous agreement that emergency food relief is not a sustainable solution. Establishing household and community vegetable gardens was widely seen by CSOs as more sustainable, at least in terms of keeping their own organisation's activities going in the face of dwindling donations. Advocacy or campaign work to change the food system and solve 'the food problem' more long-term, however, is not central to the objectives of the food relief CSOs. Some CSOs fear that engaging in advocacy work could even endanger their funding. Many CSOs also lack the capacity in terms of social and human capital to engage with this type of 'bigger picture' work in addition to the organisation's committed focus on short-term needs. Neither is there a wide spread understanding of the food system and its weaknesses beyond the specific part of the system that each particular CSO is engaged in. This is a major hurdle to the active contribution of these CSOs to system change. There are some CSOs engaged in advocacy around the right to food at the national level but these are few, mostly in the public health sector, and under-resourced.

Recommendations

CSOs are a vital but missing voice in food governance in the Western Cape. The CSO landscape is mainly dominated by CSOs working on meeting acute short-term needs. CSOs must be facilitated and supported to play an active role in food governance that goes beyond delivering emergency food aid to patch up a broken food system. This recommends the following approaches to do this. The first set of recommendations focus on how the government functions and the second set on how Civil Society (Organisations) function.

How Government Functions

- The important role that CSOs play in providing emergency feeding (and other services) needs to be acknowledged by all levels of government.
- Provincial and local government need to create an enabling environment for CSOs (including informal ones), which may mean critically examining an institutional culture that prioritises compliance over service delivery.
- Relations between provincial and local government and CSOs need to shift from 'participation' to 'partnering' so that decisions are taken together and policies, programmes and services are co-designed.

How Civil Society (Organisations) Functions

- Investment should be made to strengthen collaborative relationships between government and CSOs, as well as between CSOs within communities, in

between times of crisis so that these networks and relationships can be called upon when needed.

- Short-term solutions need to be connected to long-term change of the food system. For example, community kitchens and gardens could become 'sites of struggle' where the narratives on the food system can be debated and contested in bottom up 'mobilising environments'.
- Rather than work in silos, CSOs must be supported to engage and shape inter-sectoral stakeholder forums to connect to wider debates on the food system as well as government officials.

BUDGET

Budget spent (Bold) against proposed budget		
	Description of budget line item	Amount
a.	Data and incidentals (to enable some participants to join zoom meetings and interview)	R5 464,40 (R5 000,00)*
b.	Podcast to disseminate results (10 -12 minutes)	R6 535,60 (R7,000,00)*
c.	Research Assistance from a student researcher (100 hours *R100/hr) Added to assist with transcription of interviews (20* interviews yet to be transcribed)	R10 000,00 (R10,000,00)*
d.	Non-tenured researchers' assistance (34*R2000 per day) This has been increased by 9 days in light of the need to conduct additional in-depth interviews due to the larger number of CSOs operating in the food space compared to prior to the Covid crisis.	(R68 000,00) (R68 000,00)*
e.		
f.		
TOTAL		90,000

- Budgeted for amount in the Memo of 10 February 2021, which took into account the continued Covid situation preventing a face to face stakeholder meeting In April 2021 (budgeted in the 3 June 2020 amended proposal as R11,200 for catering and venue hire).