



## VOICES OF INFORMAL SETTLEMENT RESIDENTS DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

# GOVERNMENT FOOD SECURITY INITIATIVES IN THE TIME OF THE CORONAVIRUS

by Debbie Budlender, June 2020



## INTRODUCTION

This document presents information collected during May 2020 about the food security initiatives and plans of government and the Solidarity Fund, particularly with regard to the provision of food parcels and food vouchers. What is documented here is only basic information and you can use it to carry out further research.

## South African Social Security Agency

The South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) reported that they distributed food parcels largely in accordance with the standard requirements in the Social Assistance Act of 2004. One deviation from standard practice was that telephonic applications were accepted instead of face-to-face interactions.

Between 27 March and 11 May 2020 SASSA received 147 000 applications, of which 106 149 were approved. By 5 June, 87 695 food parcels had been distributed to the 106 149 approved applicants. The parcels and distribution were funded from the annual allocation for social relief of distress. The allocation for the 2020/21 financial year was R407 million, and approximately R129 million of this was used for the food parcels distributed over this period. No other allocations were made for food parcels.

The provincial operation centres established to coordinate government's response to COVID ensured, as far as possible, that the SASSA parcels did not duplicate assistance provided by other government agencies.

SASSA stopped accepting applications for food parcels when the special relief grant of R350 per month was introduced, since the two measures were seen as targeting the same 'category of citizens'.

## Department of Social Development

The national Department of Social Development (DSD) reported that provincial DSDs had developed three-month plans 'to feed the nation especially those affected by COVID-19'. The plans included those targeted by DSD, namely:

- 912 000 households with severely inadequate access to food whose members are beneficiaries of DSD centre-based programmes such as drop-in centres, home- and community-based care, community nutrition and development centres, active aging and old age homes;
- 2,4 million other households with inadequate access to food; and
- 14 million people affected by COVID-19.





Provincial DSDs were using their social relief of distress and food security budgets to procure the food. DSD planned to continue with these initiatives until there was a policy decision as to whether the new R350 grant would continue after the initial three months. DSD noted that R350 was less than the food poverty line of R561 per month.

The table that follows shows the central community nutrition and development centre in each province, the implementing agent for the province, and (for some provinces) the DSD food coordinators. As seen below, these centres were used for the distribution of food parcels as part of the COVID-19 initiative.

## Community Nutrition and Development Centres by province

PROVINCE	IMPLEMENTING AGENT	CENTRES	BENEFICIARIES	CONTACT	DSD FOOD COORDINATORS
EAST LONDON EASTERN CAPE	ADRA	32	1 453	Ayanda Zono 082 794 1233	Mr Maleki 082 794 1233
QWAQWA FREE STATE	ADRA	46	7 046	Jumara Netshifulani 082 859 7395	Ms Lehasa 072 664 4448 066 647 6193
MIDRAND GAUTENG	Kagisano	12	2 613	Mr Pule 076 870 5501	Ms Mbali Ngwane 082 469 0583
PMB KWAZULU-NATAL	SAFSDA	52	10 559	Tiney Chikhunduru 078 6180966	
POLOKWANE LIMPOPO	Makotse Women's Club	19	4 708	Mrs Manana 076 628 9609	Mr Shipalana 0825095955
NELSPRUIT MPUMALANGA	Kago Ya Bana	11	6 710	Sandile Mokgope 082 044 7400	
HARTSWATER NORTHERN CAPE	Thabang or Motswedi wa Sechaba	22	4 634	Liza Lingerman 073 020 8398	
RUSTENBURG NORTH WEST	Motswedi wa Sechaba	27	1 922	Mrs Keitumetse 083 443 8855	
CAPE TOWN WESTERN CAPE	Ilithalabantu	20	5 808	Sikhulile Monakali 071 201 5641	
PRETORIA NATIONAL DSD	Food & Nutrition Security Coordination Directorate			Mondli Mbhele 082 302 2275 Mpho Putu 084 836 0966	

**Note 1:** One source indicates Thabang as the implementing agent for Northern Cape while another indicates Moswedi wa Sechaba.

**Note 2:** The source document reports a total of 235 centres, but the provincial numbers sum to 241.



DSD provided a 26-page Guideline for Food Parcels Distribution during Covid-19 Period and Beyond dated 19 April 2020. Among other things, the document:

- explains that social relief of distress can be granted for a maximum of three months, extended for a further three months in exceptional circumstances;
- recommends the standardisation of food parcels across and within provinces, at a value of R700 per parcel (which is expected to feed a household of four people for a month), excluding sourcing and handling and distribution costs, but notes that SASSA's food parcel had been revised upward to a value of R1 000; and
- suggests that, in addition to distribution to provincial food distribution centres in each province, parcels be delivered to community nutrition and development centres, centre-based feeding programmes, agri-hubs, local government infrastructure, 'tribal' authority offices, DSD service point offices and community centres such as churches and halls. From there they should be distributed to households.

Criteria for those receiving food parcels are listed below, without specifying how many of these criteria must be met by a single beneficiary. This is a problem as some of the criteria (such as citizenship, permanent residence or refugee status) are probably applicable to all households, while others (such as living in informal settlements) are probably not.

#### The criteria for those receiving food parcels are:

- South African citizens, permanent residents of South Africa and refugees
- Poor and vulnerable households with no income
- Households that have lost income due to COVID-19 lockdown or isolation
- Households on the municipal indigent register
- Households identified through profiling by recognised government agencies
- Beneficiaries identified by DSD officials (Social workers and/or Community Development Practitioners), SASSA and Community Development Workers
- Households in informal settlements as identified by the Department of Human Settlements
- Households affected by disaster as defined in the Disaster Management Act (1978)

Government employees may not receive parcels.

## Solidarity Fund

The Solidarity Fund approved R120m for food provision to households in mid-April. The Fund's initiative was rolled out through four 'pillars'.

**The first pillar** worked through DSD's provincial implementing agents for the nutrition centres (see table above). In normal times the centres provide daily hot meals to families. This was impossible during lockdown, which created the need to deliver food parcels. About 58 000 food parcels were delivered through the seven implementing agents, two of which worked across two provinces.

**The second pillar** commenced with a rapid due diligence exercise to identify four large non-profit organisations (NPOs) that could deliver larger numbers of parcels. The four selected were Food Forward South Africa, Lunch Box, Afrika Tik-kun and Islamic Relief. The Fund went through a mapping process with the organisations to ensure that they reached as many areas as possible in each province and avoided duplication. This pillar distributed 146 000 food parcels.

**The third pillar** involved collaboration with trusted partners – the Raith, Mott and Ford Foundations – to identify organisations with strong networks of community-based organisations (CBOs) working in remote areas. Through the CBOs identified by them, a further 66 000 food parcels were distributed. Unlike in the first two pillars, where the selected organisations procured the food themselves according to guidelines and with an approximate value of R400, in this third pillar the Solidarity Fund contracted two for-profit companies to procure, package and deliver the parcels to the CBOs.



## The guidelines for the food parcels were as follows:

### Key objective of parcel

- To provide a family of four with one quality meal a day over a period of three weeks

### Quality meal

- Balanced plate (starch, protein and vegetable)
- Quality products selected
  - Fortified maize meal and rice
  - Quality proteins (full cream milk, pilchards, legumes, baked beans)
  - Fresh vegetable (butternut)
- Appropriate dry/raw quantities per family member
  - Starch 83g
  - Protein 50g
  - Vegetable 120g
- Onions and oil to season the meal (oil also to provide some fat)
- Over and above the cooked meal, each family member would be able to enjoy a cup of full cream milk two to three times per week.

**The fourth pillar**, which was in process at the time the information was provided in early June, but very close to concluding, involved a partnership with the South African Council of Churches, which in turn worked with various organisations to pilot different types of food vouchers. In total, 23 000 food vouchers were to be distributed. The Solidarity Fund hopes that this exercise will identify how food relief to households might work best going forward.

In all pillars, those doing the distribution have to submit a daily report stating how many parcels were distributed, key challenges, photos and videos. Once they had completed all their deliveries, they were required to compile a list of all beneficiaries, with demographics and ID details if possible. The Solidarity Fund had an agreement with EBS, a management consulting firm, that they would use the lists to do spot checks on a pro bono basis.

Government was involved only in the first pillar of the Solidarity Fund's work in that government facilitated access to the nutrition centres and the Solidarity Fund shared the cost of the parcels for this pillar with DSD. Government involvement increased over time when DSD became concerned that people on their lists were not being reached. Coordination then increased. The Solidarity Fund's engagement with government on food distribution occurred primarily through DSD, although there was some engagement with the Department of Cooperative Government and Traditional Affairs in certain instances.

The Solidarity Fund has a humanitarian workstream which, at the time the information was provided, was exploring whether they would work on food vouchers or the food supply chain for their food focus going forward.

Tshikululu's provided information on the Solidarity Fund, including a close-out report (Solidarity Fund Food Relief Programme Summary Report June 2020) that was posted on the Solidarity Fund website. Tshikululu's role in the Solidarity Fund includes sourcing service providers to provide pro bono support, identifying partners, doing due diligence, receiving the daily reports and consolidating the different types of support.

Afrika Tikun reported that the organisation applied to be one of the distributing parties and was selected to distribute 20 000 food packs with products specified by the Solidarity Fund at an all-in cost of R400. The organisation used Pick 'n Pay to source the food and make up the boxes, and then brought in volunteers to pack at contract warehouses in Cape Town and Johannesburg. They then arranged for the transport of these packs to their own centres and approximately 20 different non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in predetermined areas. Afrika Tikun's own centres distributed parcels to their own beneficiaries and also distributed food through CBOs that agreed to comply with the detailed accountability and reporting systems.

Afrika Tikun understood the Solidarity Fund's involvement as an emergency stopgap rather than a long-term provision of food security. The way they organised the initiative left a legacy of a mapping of NGOs across the country and a partial database of people in need.



## Metro initiatives

The minutes of parliamentary committee meetings produced by the Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG), and the presentations attached to the minutes, include those relating to sessions of the Portfolio Committee on Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs in which representatives of metropolitan municipalities were asked to present their COVID-related activities and plans. The presentations did not focus only on food security, but all metros reported some activities in this area.

The **Buffalo City** mayor reported that the metro had provided food vouchers valued at R750 per household to 40 000 (or 4 000<sup>1</sup>) households, with 800 households targeted per ward. The City reported that the list identifying beneficiaries was developed by ward councillors in consultation with ward stakeholders. The lists were given to supermarkets and individuals could then decide what they would like to purchase there.

An EFF MP said that there was 'biased distribution of services and food' across councillors from different parties, with food parcels being kept in the councillor's homes and distributed to their family, friends and 'cabal'.

The **City of Cape Town** said that the mayor had prioritised food distribution to supplement what was provided by the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA), although this was outside the City's constitutional mandate. An MP said the majority of ward councillors in Khayelitsha, Philippi and Gugulethu had been given 30 food parcels, and asked for clarity on the mechanism used for distribution and whether all wards were covered. The City undertook to report back on this.

By 12 May, the **City of Johannesburg** had provided 45 291 food parcels to indigent families and to those who were referred because they had lost income due to COVID-19. The mayor reported that councillors were not permitted to deliver food parcels, but some had organised with NGOs to do so within their wards. He indicated further that the City was not comfortable with NGOs distributing 'on their own' as this could result in some households receiving from multiple sources and also start 'food riots'.

By 12 May, 59 organisations had donated food, medical equipment, clothing or use of buildings for quarantine. Joburg Market Agents donated 35 000 kg of vegetable parcels to the City's Food Bank.

For the peak COVID period, the City proposed entering into partnership with food manufacturing companies to provide a million households with a food pack valued at R350 per parcel, using an e-voucher system. They planned to approach the Consumer Goods Council of South Africa to assist with the negotiation of prices and security of supply, and to issue licenses to local shops in 'deprived' wards to pack and redeem vouchers.

In mid-April, the **Ekurhuleni** metro established a food bank at the fresh produce market in Springs to supplement food relief provided by the Department of Social Development (DSD). The food was donated by 118 diverse donors and the metro did not contribute financially. By the beginning of June 2020, 20 680 food parcels had been distributed benefiting 128 400 residents.

The metro reported that residents were required to apply through the call centre or by email, after which DSD fieldworkers assessed whether they were eligible. Both the officials collecting food parcels and beneficiaries were required to sign registers, and applicant's details were captured in a database to avoid double-dipping. The distribution was not limited to South Africans. The metro aimed to distribute 1 000 food parcels each day, and 5 000 on 'Siyaqhuba Fridays'. It said that it ensured that the nutritional value of the parcels was adequate.

There was conflicting evidence as to whether food parcels were provided to ward councillors to distribute, or whether councillors and ward committees worked with the DSD fieldworkers in identifying needy families with the parcels being distributed by churches and other organisations. There was also conflicting evidence as to whether councillors did or should wear party-political clothing while distributing the parcels, and whether councillors provided the parcels only to members of their own party. The mayor undertook to investigate and report back to the portfolio committee.

Delivery of food parcels within **eThekweni** metro targeted mainly rural wards. In addition, each of 87 wards received 1 000 food vouchers. An EFF MP said that party politics influenced the delivery of food parcels, and that the fact that the parcels were delivered at night hampered transparency. The mayor contested this. He said that each ward received the same number of parcels, that community mobilisers played a role in the process and that social workers were responsible for analysing progress. NGOs were also assisting with service delivery, including 'analysing' beneficiaries.

<sup>1</sup>The Parliamentary Monitoring Group minutes of the meeting have 4 000 at one point and 40 000 at another. If all 500 wards were each provided with 800 food parcels, the total would be 32 000. If only certain wards were provided with parcels, the 4 000 might be correct. The metro's presentations do not include information on food parcels.

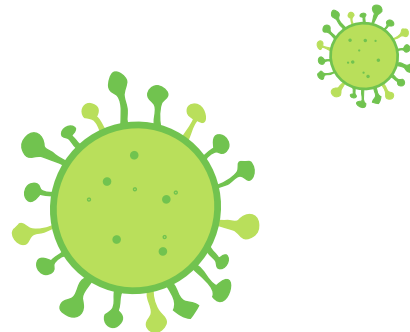


## Groundup article

An article by Jeremy Seekings published in Groundup early in June provides further information (*Feeding poor people: The national government has failed*<sup>2</sup>)

The article states that government officials promised that one million emergency food parcels would be distributed during the lockdown. The article cites the claim by DSD's Acting Director-General when appearing before the parliamentary portfolio committee on 21 May that 670,000 food parcels had been distributed reaching about 2,7 million people. A deputy director-general (DDG) said the updated figure was 720,000. About a week later, the same DDG put the number at 788 000. This number was made up of 73 000 food parcels distributed by SASSA, 218 000 distributed in partnership with the Solidarity Fund and 523 000 by national DSD across the nine provinces.

Seekings highlighted that some NGOs – including those that acted as channels for the Solidarity Fund initiative – also secured other sources of funding for food parcels. At least some of the provinces – as well as municipalities – also allocated some of their own funds for food parcels or other nutrition initiatives. Seekings provides some examples from the Western Cape and Gauteng.



## CONCLUSION

Social relief of distress has always been much less standardised than other components of government's social assistance instruments. In particular, much more discretion is given to the social workers or other officials tasked with determining who should receive social relief of distress, as well as what form the relief should take. The information above suggests that the lack of standardisation has been exacerbated with COVID-19. There are, for example, differences in the monetary value of the food parcels provided through different channels. There are also major differences across the metros. If non-metro municipalities were included, there would be even more diversity – and thus differential treatment of people in need in different locations.

The document also suggests that some of the major food initiatives will no longer be in place going forward. With the easing of the lockdown and the hoped-for improved implementation of the special COVID grant, some households might have other forms of support. However, many will not be eligible for the special COVID grant, and support even for those who access it will be limited in terms of the small sum of money and the limited duration. It is also not clear when the National School Nutrition Programme will be up and running in all provinces.

Food relief thus seems an important focus for further research and monitoring – both to determine what government agencies commit to providing, and to assess whether and how these commitments translate into nutrition for local communities.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-06-02-feeding-poor-people-the-national-government-has-failed>