

Food security, nutrition and well-being: A South African perspective Thierry Regnier

Food insecurity, sustainable agriculture and food system to reduce hunger and malnutrition is one of the goals of the FAO. It is crucial to make sure that the food we eat is not contaminated with potentially dangerous bacteria, parasites, viruses, toxins and chemicals. The focus of the keynote is to give an overview of the South African landscape in term of food safety and security with an inside on the current challenges. The importance of the traditional crops and food products is also highlighted. Finally, the key role of applying science to solving issues related to sustainable food production and safety, while exploiting the health-promoting properties of foods to improve nutrition.

South Africa, along with many other low- and middle-income countries, is experiencing a rising burden of diet-related Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) while still struggling to address persisting household food insecurity and undernutritionFootnote1 Over the past 40 years, the prevalence of stunting among children in South Africa has remained at around 25%. In the 2012 South African National Health and Nutrition Examination Study (SANHANES) study, 54% of the South African population reported being food insecure, and 28% were at risk of hunger (Muzigaba et al. 2016). More recently, the prevalence of obesity has risen to 39% among women and 11% among men, and diabetes in the adult population to 10%.

Addressing this double burden of malnutrition will require a comprehensive policy approach, which supports both demand for healthy food and its supply (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and World Health Organization 2014). In this paper, we focus on supply side interventions - and particularly, the need for policy across sectors to support availability of affordable healthy food (Republic of South Africa Department of Health 2013; Government of South Africa 2014). Global evidence shows that government action to promote a healthy food supply can be in tension with government objectives to pursue economic growth, particularly through economic liberalization (Hawkes 2005; Mihalache-O'keef and Li 2011; Popkin et al. 2012; Margulis 2013; Baker et al. 2014; Thow et al. 2015a). This tension between policy objectives of different sectors can result in policy incoherence. In contrast, policy coherence refers to 'the systematic promotion of mutually reinforcing policies across government departments to create synergies towards achieving agreed objectives and to avoid or minimize negative spillovers in other policy areas.

Policy coherence is prioritized in Sustainable Development Goal 17.

There are three key facets of incoherence between economic policies and food security and nutrition policies that have been observed globally. First, economic policies focused on liberalization - particularly of trade and investment - can have negative impacts on nutrition and food security. For example, increased competition and economies of scale associated with trade and investment liberalization, particularly for corporate and multinational food processers, manufacturers and retailers, have helped to decrease the price and increase the availability of highly processed foods, contributing to dietrelated NCDs (Baker et al. 2014; Thow and McGrady 2014; Schram et al. 2015; Thow et al. 2015a; Thow et al. 2015b; Timmer 2016). In addition, poorer households mav experience increased food insecurity through volatility of global food prices and negative impacts on employment as a result of trade liberalization. For example, during the global food crisis of 2007-2009, shocks such as speculative behaviourin food commodity markets and the diversion of food crops to fuel production led to sudden increases in the prices of staple foods. Second, nutrition-related policies that aim to reduce the availability and affordability of unhealthy, highly processed (and often highly profitable) foods can be at odds with economic policies that aim to attract or incentivize trade and investment in food processing, service and retail. This can create tensions for governments due to the political power of investors with significant investments at multiple points in supply chains (Thow and McGrady 2014), because nutrition interventions may adversely affect the profitability of investments in food processing or agriculture. For example, initiatives such as a product tax or labeling measures to reduce highly processed food consumption. A potentially concerning result of this is the possibility for measures to be challenged investor protection clauses within Investment under Agreements. Third, policy incoherence can result from supply chain policies (including development, trade, finance, industrial and (some aspects of) agricultural production policies) that focus on objectives related to economic growth but consider nutrition and food security objectives related to increasing access to affordable healthy food. As a result, nutrition and food security policy objectives can be undermined by economic policy action.

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