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Plan to help stem hunger ignores poor people, say activists

ABOUT one in every four South Africans regularly goes hungry.

A new government plan aims to stem hunger, but risks failing without consulting those hardest hit – poor people, say activists.

In August, the government gazetted its latest plan to tackle hunger and food insecurity.

At the time, it noted policy-makers were in the advanced stages of drafting an accompanying implementation plan set to begin last month.

While they say no one is

disputing many of the plan's worthwhile aims – such as increasing food production and distribution – more than 20 civil society organisations and individuals have called on the government to stall the plan until public consultations that include poor people have been held.

“There was no consultations done while the drafting of this document was taking place,” said Nokutula Mhene, who works with Oxfam, an

international non-profit dedicated to poverty eradication.

“What’s worse is that this policy is gender blind... women are the guardians of food security within the country.”

Mhene added that civil society groups had been promised opportunities to consult with the government on the policy.

The latest promised consultation is scheduled for next week.

Oxfam is just one of the organisations calling for public

consultations. Others include Cosatu, UCT’s Children’s Institute and public interest organ-

‘Issue of power around food must be tackled’

isation Section27.

Busiso Moyo, a researcher with the Studies in Policy and Inequality Institute think-tank, reckons the policy was “devel-

oped under a veil of secrecy” and with glaring omissions.

“Not so long ago... we had the bread price-fixing scandal, which undoubtedly hit the poor the hardest,” said Moyo, speaking at a Joburg media conference yesterday.

“The most disheartening thing so far about this policy is that there is an absence (of discussion) about the role of big business and the private sector in terms of the realisation of the right to food.”

According to South African Human Rights Commissioner Pregs Govender, the right to food is just one of many constitutional rights many poor South Africans do not enjoy.

“The issue of meaningful consultation has come up in the commission’s work on a range of rights,” Govender said.

“People who are poor across our country are often not experiencing or enjoying those rights – and not just one right,

but a range of rights enshrined in our constitution.”

From control over land and water to seed types being grown and the markets that farmers can access, big business plays a large role in the food we eat, said Jacklyn Cock.

Cock is a professor emeritus in sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand and a member of the recently launched Food Sovereignty Campaign.

She added that just four

companies control the milling and baking of bread in the country.

Similarly, three companies dominate the dairy industry, which gives about R4 from every litre of milk purchased back to farmers, Cock said.

“There’s a real need to ensure that the issue of power around food is addressed so that people who go hungry are not treated simply as recipients of charity, but as bearers of human rights,” Govender said.

“As bearers of human rights, it is critical that they are consulted on the full policy.”

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