

The Southern Africa Food Lab

Working Toward Sustainable Food Security in Southern Africa

THE PROJECT AT A GLANCE:

- Issue:** Sustainable Food
- Geography:** Southern Africa
- Duration:** 2009-present
- Co-Convenors:** University of Cape Town, GTZ, ActionAid, Development Bank of South Africa, South African Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Green Choice / World Wide Fund for Nature, International Food Policy Research Institute, and the Human Rights Commission (HRC)

Impacts: New viable, equitable and scalable approaches to private sector support for commercial smallholder farming; shifts in the national conversation on food; new approaches to urban agricultural production; shifts in the perception of farming work in South Africa.



HUMAN
CAPITAL



SOCIAL
CAPITAL



INTELLECTUAL
CAPITAL



PHYSICAL
CAPITAL



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The Context

South Africa is afflicted by widespread food insecurity and hunger in both urban and rural areas. While the country is food secure at a national level in terms of food availability, one out of two households (51.6 %) are at risk of hunger; 15.9% consume less than adequate energy; and about 22% of children under nine years of age are stunted, leaving South Africa in a situation of chronic malnutrition.¹ In response to this “silent” crisis, several agencies in the state, civil

society and private sectors have embarked on efforts to document and find solutions to the problem. Food insecurity was high on the agenda leading up to the national elections of 2008. This emphasis on food security in policy dialogue was further supported by initiatives at institutions such as the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), which focused explicitly on the challenges of measuring and monitoring food security.

The Process

Reos Johannesburg has been a partner and service provider since 2009 of the Southern Africa Food Lab (www.southernafricafoodlab.org), a multi-stakeholder initiative that brings together diverse role-players with passion and influence in the regional food system to identify and pilot innovative means to achieve long-term, sustainable food security. Participants from NGO's, the Department of Agriculture, food retailers and producers and donors were part of a multi-stakeholder meeting in

¹ Chopra, M., Witten, C. and Drimie, S. 2009. Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) Working Paper Number 1: *Combating Malnutrition in South Africa* Rose, D., Charlton, K.E. 2002. *Quantitative indicators from a food expenditure survey can be used to target the food insecure in South Africa*. Journal of Nutrition, 132: 3235-3242.

Labadarios, D., Swart, R., Maunder, E.M.W., Kruger, H.S., Gericke, G.J., Kuzwayo, P.M.N., et al. 2008. *Executive summary of the National Food consumption Survey Fortification Baseline (NFCS-FB-I) South Africa*. S Afr J Clin Nutr, 21(2):245-300



February 2009 where they agreed that better collaboration was essential within and between sectors on food security matters. This workshop led to the establishment of a steering group and a plan to implement a year-long “Change Lab” process, inspired by methodologies implemented in a range of similar initiatives, including the Sustainable Food Lab. Towards the end of 2009, funding was committed by GTZ (now GIZ), the German development aid agency, and Reos Partners were contracted to facilitate the process.

The convening phase took place in the first year in 2010, involving in-depth interviews with approximately 30 members from different sectors of the food chain (primarily within South Africa, but including neighbouring states) to develop a deep understanding of the issues as seen by the key stakeholders, and ultimately identified approximately 50 leaders who would become members of the Change Lab team.

In phase two later that year, participants moved into experiencing the system together through learning journeys and innovation workshops, coming to a shared understanding of where challenges lie and what is needed to address those challenges together.

Results

Phase three kicked off in earnest at the end of 2010 and into 2011, where participants worked jointly to implement innovative solutions. Currently, innovation teams are working on the following themes:

- Small Producers (and alternative supply chains)
- National Conversation on the Food System
- Integrating Food Security into Urban Planning
- Bottom of the Pyramid approaches (meeting the needs of the poorest)

In 2011, the Food Security Initiative at Stellenbosch University, which is now the convener of the SA Food Lab received funding from the National Research Foundation for a multi-year project on “Social Learning for Sustainable Food Systems.” The grant will cover some of the SA Food Lab’s operational costs and enable bursaries to PhD and Masters students who will study the impact of this type of work.

Since the SA Food Lab began, the issue of small farmer engagement in the South African food system has emerged repeatedly as a core theme. As a result of the work of one of the Lab innovation teams focused on this issue, the SAFL is joining forces with PLAAS (the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies at the University of the Western Cape) on an



action research and social dialogue project with the support of the Ford and Mellon Foundations, to identify viable, equitable and scalable approaches to private sector support for commercial smallholder farming in South Africa.

Another Innovation Team set out to create a “National Conversation on Food”, which is now being taken forward by the Lab in collaboration with the South African Human Rights Commission. The Commission is mandated to look the status of a range of human rights in the country and is piloting to use the methodology and approach of the Lab to help move its usual ‘hearing’ format to a more action-oriented approach in this instance. SAFL members are part of a ‘Section 5 committee’, which worked to plan and implement the National Conversation on Food in late 2012.

A third innovation team, committed to addressing the issue of Urban Agriculture, has been working on solutions to urban sustainability and food production. This team is figuring out how to feed South African cities sustainably by using public spaces more creatively, giving grants for people to cultivate unused urban land for food production, and working to destigmatize public perception of food production as a profession.

The SAFL is composed of an unprecedentedly diverse team of stakeholders from corporate, grassroots, NGO, and government sectors, all working together to transform agriculture and food from farm to table, across the country. In addition to activities outlined here, the SAFL will continue to host forums, Learning Journeys and workshops for all the innovation teams, and will convene annual meetings of the Change Lab as its work progresses.

For more information, please visit:
www.southernafricafoodlab.org