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Youth Voices in Development

SDG 2. End Hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

South Africa's relationship with food security is a fickle thing. With a fluctuating currency, an unstable government, and the worst drought to sweep the country in the past fifty-five years, any semblance of normalcy and consistency in regards to fresh crops and food production is uncharted territory.

Ending hunger is a complex labyrinth of intersecting factors, particularly in countries such as South Africa. Climate change, food availability, education, pay wages, and soil conditions, are only a fraction of what can define whether Sustainable Development Goal 2 will be attainable or not. In South Africa, the disparity between those who are hungry and those who are not is immense. While a good portion of the country's population is urbanized and living in city dwellings, those living in the rural areas are even more affected by food shortages and price inflations.

What is amazing about South Africa is the diversity in its landscapes and its climate. This is a country that can, and does, grow everything and anything. When looking at labels as to where food products are produced, it is incredibly encouraging to note that most of the time, one will find 'Produced in South Africa' on the label. While only approximately thirteen percent of the country's land is seen as being effective for growing conditions, the amount of consumption of in-country products is undeniable, making food generally more affordable for the population, taking away the need for taxation and price increases in cases of imported products. This availability of domestic products can definitely aid in feeding the country by providing more affordable food for its population.

For approximately ninety percent of the South African population, maize is a staple in their everyday diet. With the severe drought status of the country, this staple of maize has been largely threatened and has been decimated over the past few growing seasons. This, like with other produce grown in the country, has led to a shortage of this in-demand food source and is causing ever-inflating prices for South Africans' pockets. The effect of this inflation is terrible when you combine it with households that are trying to feed 10 people on one minimum wage income. Hunger ensues.

In the past year, genetically modified maize crops that are able to grow in drought conditions have been developed in order to feed the population of South Africa. These crops have now been planted and are slowly being spread throughout the country and have aided in providing sustenance to those in affected areas.

South Africa has a large cane sugar crop, and the effects of this can be felt throughout the poorer population. With such an excess of sugar, and its ability to grow this sweet crop effervescently in states like KwaZulu-Natal, sugar is fairly cheap and available. This availability trickles down the pockets of the population whereby a pack of sweets for 1 Rand can be seen as a good snack rather than spending more on something more substantial and healthy. A way to make hunger less of an issue regionally in South Africa, would be to review and recalculate the areas that are predominantly sugar cane growing regions, and plan to grow food that would be more beneficial for the people in those regions.

Where this issue of hunger is already targeted, but needs more attention, is within the government school system. The government currently provides funding for lunches for every child in non-fee paying government schools at the primary level. The meals that are made are generally carbohydrate heavy fillers: rice, beans, and pup. While this is good and filling the bellies of hungry children whose school meal might very well be the only meal they eat that day, these meals are lacking in nutrients provided from vegetables that are vital to young children's growth and development. Education about nutrition is vital for these children in learning how to live healthy lives, and innovative ideas such as the implementation of school gardens that could bring in more nutrients to the school lunches could be an effective starting point for targeting hunger within South African communities.

An obstacle in conjunction with these school meals, is that many children do not eat them because they find them unappealing, or do not get to the bucket of food in time before it is all eaten. Many of these children substitute this meal with a complex diet of sugary snacks that are sold by local entrepreneurial aunties who set up shop during the school's daily breaks, undercutting the more substantial meal with sugar coated bread, powdered sugar, sweets in packets at an incredibly cheap price. This is another avenue that needs to be targeted in overcoming hunger in a healthy way: if aunties need to sell food on school grounds, make it a rule that what is being sold are healthy options for snacks.

The most prominent recommendation that can be made for ending achieving Sustainable Development Goal 2, would be to start at the ground level. Build a foundation of education regarding healthy eating and subjects such as agriculture, and we can build a foundation for countries such as South Africa.