

Is SA setting stage for hunger riots?

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As is normally the case in any economic crisis, the poor always suffer the most.

During this year, the price increases in basic foodstuffs, transport, fuel and paraffin have impacted negatively on the lives of the poor.

With the recent unemployment figures escalating to an unprecedented high of 34.4%, a massive 30.3-million of SA's 58-million people [60.14-million, according to Stats SA's 2021 mid-year population estimate] are poverty-stricken, with more than 11-million citizens living in extreme poverty.

The unemployment rate, according to news reports in SA, is the highest in the world.

A massive 12-million people, or about 45% of the estimated labour force of 27-million, are unemployed.

The country's wealthiest 10% possesses more than half the nation's income, while the poorest 40% shares just 7.2%.

About 55.5% (30.3-million people) of the population is living in poverty at the national upper poverty line.

The unemployment level in the Eastern Cape is much higher than the national level.

The provinces with the highest headcount of adult poverty are Limpopo (67.5%), Eastern Cape (67.3%), KwaZulu-Natal (60.7%) and North West (59.6%).

For these four provinces, significantly more than half of

their population are living in poverty.

Is it significant that these are the provinces with the largest rural populations?

In the Eastern Cape, excluding the two metros of Buffalo City and Nelson Mandela Bay, the unemployment rate is 53%.

It is expected that the unemployment levels in the vast townships will be considerably higher.

With almost half the population living below the Upper-Bound Poverty Line and jobless, do we expect SA to be a stable country?

We have seen a succession of "plans" by the ANC government, none of which could concretise economic reform that affects the employment rate or poverty levels significantly.

Millions have been spent on planning commissions and consultants, without significant results.

The increase in the price of paraffin has been described as an attack on the poor.

Paraffin is not regulated and already in some areas, particularly in the townships, illuminating paraffin is being sold at R19 a litre. At spaza shops, it might be more than the R19 a litre.

The pandemic has resulted in the economy being in a mess, with 2.2-million jobs being shed and a further

TABLE SHOWING FUEL PRICE INCREASES IN 2021

Product	Jan 2021	Aug 2021	Increase	% Increase
93 UPL	R14.69	R18.11	R3.42	23.28%
95 UPL	R14.86	R18.20	R3.34	22.47%
Diesel	R13.00	R15.66	R2.66	20.46%
Paraffin	R7.39	R9.63	R2.24	30.31%

201,000 citizens having stopped looking for work.

Most of these people depend on paraffin for cooking and heat.

How are they going to be able to afford these increases?

With the increase in fuel prices, every commodity will have a hike in prices. Already the price of bread, also not regulated, is skyrocketing.

In June 1976, students in Soweto protested against the compulsory imposition of Afrikaans as a language of instruction in schools.

This was the spark that led to the revolts that later engulfed the whole country.

However, let us examine the conditions in the country at the time ... "The fact is the economy is in a downward spiral, unemployment is mounting dangerously, inflation continues apace, the balance of payments is sick and, in terms of gold and foreign exchange reserves, the country is broke" (Financial Mail, October 1976).

Just before June 1976, the cost of paraffin and bread had been increased. What is the

significance of this?

While the youth led from the front, it was the parents, the workers, all of the oppressed that participated in what became known as the Soweto revolts.

Are we heading in the same direction? Was that the first salvo that were fired in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng?

The cost of electricity has soared. With an increase in rates, water and sanitation, even the middle class is going to feel the pinch.

Electricity costs have soared to R2.1732/kWh at the base level, with an increase up to R2.9041/kWh at the top end in the metro.

People who use paraffin for heating, lighting and cooking, the poor, are not in a financial position to absorb these price hikes.

The government-stipulated minimum wage of R3,500 a month is not an acceptable wage limit.

What workers are demanding is a living wage. This is a wage that allows people to live decent lives.

Minimum wages are mere-

ly meant to enable people to survive; these people earning minimum wages continue to live in poverty while a living wage, determined by adding the cost of bread, eggs and other food items, in addition to a little extra, is a living wage.

The ANC-led government is acutely aware that the people are starving in the townships.

Its propaganda machinery is already preparing the masses for what is most likely to happen — further hunger riots and eventually an insurrection.

The government could not contain the riots in July.

They are first of all going to suppress the hunger riots as did the previous apartheid regime by the twin violences of law and order.

Much is being written about acts of criminality — but the South African economy is fragile and with the Covid-19 pandemic, it has become unstable.

This includes rising unemployment, inequality, poor or non-existent service delivery and corruption.

With the above in mind, it is necessary to look at food security, the lack of access to sufficient quantities of food to satisfy minimum human needs.

Food security exists when all people, at all times have

physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets dietary needs and preferences for an active and healthy life.

This is where we are faced with serious challenges.

The current position is bleak and does not come close to the demands of what is expected of a country.

About 2.2-million black farmers are responsible for a mere 5% of the agricultural output of the country, while just 35,000 commercial farmers owning the most fertile land are responsible for 95% of agricultural produce.

However, even this is not as startling as the fact that three giant agribusinesses control more than 90% of maize, sorghum, wheat, sunflower and canola production in the country.

More than that, a few fertiliser companies and retail outlets completely dominate the agricultural economy.

These companies dominate food production and price foodstuffs out the normal range of the poor — in most cases the poor are the producers of the food they cannot afford.

Until these matters are addressed by the ruling party, and we strive for equality and justice for all, there will always be the rift between the haves and the have-nots.

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