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**Engaging Civil Society Organisations in
Food Security Governance in the
Western Cape: Reflections from
emergency food relief during Covid**

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Engaging Civil Society Organisations in Food Governance in the Western Cape: Reflections from emergency food relief during Covid

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ACRONYMS

CBOs	Community Based Organisations
CoE-FS	Centre of Excellence in Food Security
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CTICC	Cape Town International Convention Centre
DSD	Department of Social Development
ECDs	Early Childhood Development Centres
EDP	Economic Development Partnership
FBOs	Faith Based Organisations
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
PEDI	Philippi Economic Development Initiative
SAPS	South African Police Service
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency
VPUU	Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading

SUMMARY

The Impact of Lockdown on Food Security

Even before the Covid crisis South Africa was experiencing a food crisis but this was deepened and made more visceral by the Covid-19 lockdown. Low income households bore the brunt of this economic and social shock: Three million jobs were lost; two in every five adults reported that their household lost its main source of income; existing government funded feeding schemes (including the National School Nutrition Programme) closed; and government support in the form of extended social grants was slow to be paid out.

These manifestations of lockdown had a grave effect on food security: 47 per cent of adults reported that their household ran out of money to buy food in April 2020 and, while these figures declined in May and June, they were still well above the pre-Covid levels. As the crisis progressed through the winter of 2020, the hope was that government could move from food parcels to providing assistance through grants and then economic recovery in a 'relief to recovery' pathway. What transpired in reality was something far more unsettling: food insecurity was in danger of being seen as part of the 'new normal' as Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) struggled to fill the gap in an ongoing humanitarian crisis.

The CSO Response to Lockdown

The CSOs reacted swiftly to the lockdown by collectively shifting their focus to emergency food relief in order to address what they saw as an acute need. At the grass roots level individuals and street committees spontaneously mobilised to raise resources and set up food distribution sites and community kitchens. Individual volunteers came together to form self-organising Community Action Networks (CANs). An 'emergency feeling' underpinned these activities, creating a unifying purpose and helping to foster profound cooperativeness that strengthened partnerships and promote volunteerism. As a result, CSOs provided at least half of the food relief in the Western Cape in the first few months of lockdown and continued to provide food relief more than eighteen months on.

Partnerships, Networks and Strategies

CSOs relied heavily on activating their existing networks and relationships with communities to operationalise their activities at a grassroots level. These networks and relationships were instrumental in particular in helping to identify vulnerable people as beneficiaries and in the 'last mile' of food distribution. Partnership between larger CSOs to provide complementary services was another important strategy during the crisis, while the model of 'intermediary' CSOs also helped channel resources through (more formal) Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to smaller (often more informal) Community Based Organisations (CBOs). Another innovative strategy during the crisis was the development

of digital food vouchers to be spent in local food businesses. These vouchers both provided short-term food aid and helped to strengthen local food economies more long-term.

Key Challenges

Some of the challenges facing CSOs, especially the CBOs on the ground, were relatively simple but nevertheless important daily struggles. These included: the high cost of data; lack of funds for transport or equipment; rising prices of food; and the heavy logistics involved in food parcel delivery. Many of the CSOs also reported substantial economic, physical and mental cost to their volunteers/staff and organisations during the crisis. This was compounded by a lack of communication between government and CSOs at the beginning of lockdown. Crucially, there was a dearth of information on who was providing food on the ground, how much and how often. This risked duplication or gaps in coverage. The overriding challenge for CSOs, however, (whether large or small, professional or informal) continues to be the decrease of donations and resources over time versus ongoing needs of vulnerable people. This leaves CSOs with difficult decisions about who to feed and how often.

Relationships with Government

Weak and problematic relationships with government were seen as another significant constraint for CSOs, many of which felt that they had little or no contact with government and even less direct financial assistance. An apparently historically poor relationship between parts of government and CSOs in the Western Cape is perhaps not helped by some crude stereotypes on both sides. In general, CSOs found working with government difficult due to the mis-match between the government's regulatory and auditing requirements and the realities of the CSOs on the ground. The relationship between CSOs and government is, however, not uniform. Larger 'professional' NGOs tended to have a closer relationship with parts of government than smaller informal CBOs. There were also many valuable relationships between CSOs and individuals within government. These usually pre-dated the Covid crisis. The multi-stakeholder platform, the Food Forum, established by the Western Economic Development Partnership (EDP) in lockdown is a positive example of how government-CSO relationships could be facilitated and strengthened.

Engaging in Long Term Change?

The Covid crisis put 'the food problem' on the agenda of some CSOs for the first time and for others the problem became further highlighted. There was almost unanimous agreement that emergency food relief is not a sustainable solution. Establishing household and community vegetable gardens was widely seen by CSOs as more sustainable, at least in terms of keeping their own organisation's activities going in the face of dwindling donations. Advocacy or campaign work to change the food system and solve 'the food problem' more long-term, however, is not central to the objectives of the food relief CSOs. Some CSOs fear

that engaging in advocacy work could even endanger their funding. Many CSOs also lack the capacity in terms of social and human capital to engage with this type of 'bigger picture' work in addition to the organisation's committed focus on short-term needs. Neither is there a wide spread understanding of the food system and its weaknesses beyond the specific part of the system that each particular CSO is engaged in. This is a major hurdle to the active contribution of these CSOs to system change. There are some CSOs engaged in advocacy around the right to food at the national level but these are few, mostly in the public health sector, and under-resourced.

Recommendations

CSOs are a vital but missing voice in food governance in the Western Cape. The CSO landscape is mainly dominated by CSOs working on meeting acute short-term needs. CSOs must be facilitated and supported to play an active role in food governance that goes beyond delivering emergency food aid to patch up a broken food system. This report recommends the following approaches to do this. The first set of recommendations focus on how the government functions and the second set on how Civil Society (Organisations) function.

How Government Functions

- The important role that CSOs play in providing emergency feeding (and other services) needs to be acknowledged by all levels of government.
- Provincial and local government needs to create an enabling environment for CSOs (including informal ones), which may mean critically examining an institutional culture that prioritises compliance over service delivery.
- Relations between provincial and local government and CSOs need to shift from 'participation' to 'partnering' so that decisions are taken together and policies, programmes and services are co-designed.

How Civil Society (Organisations) Functions

- Investment should be made to strengthen collaborative relationships between government and CSOs, as well as between CSOs and within communities, in between times of crisis so that these networks and relationships can be called upon when needed.
- Short-term solutions need to be connected to long-term change of the food system. For example, community kitchens and gardens could become 'sites of struggle' where the narratives on the food system can be debated and contested in bottom up 'mobilising environments'.
- Rather than work in silos, CSOs must be supported to engage and shape inter-sectoral stakeholder forums to connect to wider debates on the food system as well as government officials.

Key words: food governance; civil society organisations; non-governmental organisations; food security; food aid; food relief; community kitchens; food gardens

Word count: 26162 words

INTRODUCTION

In response to the coronavirus pandemic the government of South Africa declared a national state of disaster on 15 March 2020, which was followed by a national lockdown on 27 March. This response was quick, robust and comprehensive and at first enjoyed broad-based public support. However, it soon became apparent that the restrictions put in place would have a serious impact on the lives of South Africa's poorest people, especially the large proportion of the population who were already food insecure. This mobilisation of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)¹ in the face of an acute humanitarian crisis was not only a tremendous human response to a desperate situation but is also a potentially significant opportunity for improved food governance in the province.

Prior to the lockdown, local academics and commentators questioned why, with a high proportion of South Africa unable to access adequate food, there has not been more direct civil protest and mobilisation calling for the constitutional right to food to be realised (Crush et al. 2018; Haysom 2018). Rather there is a pervasive normalization of food insecurity in low-income communities (Crush et al. 2018). This is not to say that communities are not aware of what nutritious food is, but that historical processes have desensitised poor consumers of their right to nutritious food. This normalisation is arguably one of the reasons why South African citizens and politicians only see food rights when acute hunger emerges, as was seen during the 2008 food crisis and more recently during the COVID-19 lockdowns (Even-Zahav et al. 2020). Also as a result of this normalisation of food insecurity, food is not much politicised in the country. Access to housing, land and decent sanitation have much higher political currency than food (ibid). The normalisation of food insecurity, therefore, both denies agency as the poor find no issue with the system of "food apartheid" in which they live and also lets politicians off the hook (Crush et al. 2018).

Cherry (2016, p5-6), coming from a food sovereignty perspective, argues that if we perceive hunger and food insecurity as a form of powerlessness which is caused "not by a scarcity of land or food, but rather a scarcity of democracy... then solutions would not (only) involve a certain number of relief packages (in the short term), but could instead be framed as approaches that increase the power of the hungry and marginalised" (ibid, p.6). Many CSOs are key "on the ground" community organisations fighting food insecurity on a daily basis and have day-to-day knowledge of the realities of food insecure people (Warshawsky 2014).

¹ In this paper we define Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) as non-State, not-for-profit, voluntary entities formed by people in the social sphere that are separate from the State and the market. CSOs include a wide range of types of organisations including Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) which are not necessarily registered or formal, more formal Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) as well as social networks such as Community Action Networks. In one or two cases we have included the charitable fund of (for profit) companies that were set up during the Covid crisis.

Community Based Organisations (CBOs) in particular are ideally placed to help better connect food insecure South Africans to decision making about the food system and so improve food democracy. However, CSOs are often conspicuously absent in policy discussions and strategic planning about food security (Durrant 2014). A weak civil society that fails to be an effective watchdog of the state or to mobilise a mass food movement in the country has also been posited as a reason why the right to food, enshrined in the South African Constitution, has not (yet) been effectively addressed by government (Greenberg 2006; Warshawsky 2014).

Civil society, however, is not usually perceived as weak in South Africa. Rather CSOs are thought to “represent a national resource” (Meintjies 2015). They are as much a part of South African fabric as the democratic government, and their work and existence precede the government (ibid). CSOs, and especially those focused on advocacy have been widely recognized as a key factor in the demise of the apartheid regime (Habib 2005). In the newly democratic South Africa, however, the philosophy of ‘the developmental state’, gradually resulted in a more ambivalent stance toward civil society who were increasingly viewed as instruments to implement government policies rather than critique them (Fioramonti and Fiori 2010). Successive governments post-apartheid have been seen as “somewhat ill-disposed toward civil society” seeing it as more of a competitor than a collaborator (Asuelime 2017).

As state–civil society relations continue to evolve in South Africa, it is essential that we to continue to critically analyse the role of CSOs in bringing about short- and long-term solutions to complex societal issues such as food insecurity. The Covid-19 crisis and the mass mobilisation of CSOs involved in emergency food relief presents an ideal window to assess the changing (food) CSO landscape and the potential implications for food governance.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

Aims and Research Questions

This research seeks to understand the new CSO landscape in relation to food security in response to the Covid-19 crisis, including the interface between CSOs and government, and to identify ways to support these CSOs to enhance food governance in the long-term, post Covid. The project seeks to achieve this aim through answering the following research questions:

- Which CSOs have mobilized around the ‘food problem’ in the Western Cape?
- How have these CSOs worked together to achieve their objectives?

- What have been their challenges and how have they overcome these?
- How do these CSOs frame the ‘food problem’?
- What is the legacy of this CSO mobilisation likely to be?
- How can these CSOs be supported to enhance food governance?

Methods

Data Collection

Data was collected through three qualitative research methods.

Literature review and documentary analysis: Media articles as well as online commentary and reports detailing and reflecting on the activities of CSOs involved in food aid during the covid crisis were collected. In addition, records and minutes of relevant meetings and seminars were also collected including the minutes of the Western Cape NGO-Government Food Relief Coordination Forum (later renamed the Food Forum).

Two online *stakeholder meetings* were conducted including a Food Governance Community of Practice meeting held on 23rd June 2020 on ‘Civil Society Organisations and Emergency Food Aid: Learning lessons for an ongoing crisis?’ A second Food Governance Community of Practice meeting seeking feedback on the preliminary research findings was held on 11th May 2021. Written records of these meetings fed into the research process.

52 *Semi-structured interviews* were conducted online or on the telephone between July 2020 and April 2021. 37 interviews were held with CSOs representatives involved in emergency food aid; 9 interviews with CSOs whose main activity is advocacy and 6 interviews with government officials and a collaborative intermediary organisation working closely with government working closely with CSOs in relation to emergency food aid during the crisis. Potential interviewees were identified through their participation in the Western Cape NGO-Government Food Aid Coordination Forum and also a snow-balling technique whereby interviewees were asked to identify further potential interviewees. Care was taken to include interviewees from different groupings of CSOs, including: large Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs); CBOs; and Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) and social networks such as Community Action Networks. CSOs working from various thematic perspectives were also interviewed, including: agricultural/urban farming CSOs, health orientated CSOs, social development, homeless charities and education orientated CSOs. Interviews took around 60 minutes and were recorded and then transcribed.

Analysis

Through these three research methods a large amount of data were collected, which was organised and synthesised with the aid of a software programme: ‘ATLAS-ti’. The data were coded according to a number of themes and sub-themes that emerged iteratively from the

initial readings of the data, and also guided by the research questions. These themes and sub-themes make up the structure of this report.

This working paper is not intended to be either a highly analytical or theoretical account of the activities of CSOs and their relationships. Rather it is an attempt to organise and synthesise some of the most common experiences and perspectives of the CSOs which acted to avert a humanitarian crisis. The working paper, therefore, deliberately attempts to put forward the voices of the CSOs that were interviewed and/or took part in meetings associated with this research. The paper also attempts to briefly touch on a wide range of issues and topics that were important to CSOs during the Covid crisis, each one of which could be the focus of research in its own right. It is therefore not possible within the constraints of this paper to go into depth on any one of these issues. The paper is rather intended to give an overview of the CSO activities, challenges and their potential implications in wider food governance dynamics. Finally, the paper focuses on the Western Cape only and misses some of the dynamics taking place in other provinces as well as at a national level.

THE IMPACTS OF LOCKDOWN ON FOOD SECURITY

South Africa was experiencing a food crisis before the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Statistics South Africa (2019), one quarter of South African households were food insecure before lockdown. In the Western Cape, as a result of the high level of urbanization, two-thirds of households vulnerable to hunger live in urban areas (ibid). Cape Town concentrates 64 per cent of the population of the province and its residents experience particularly high levels of food insecurity (Crush et al. 2018). Food insecurity is compounded by a rapid nutrition transition, exacerbating the double burden of malnutrition (the coexistence of under nutrition alongside overweight and obesity) (Steyn and Mchiza 2014). This is reflected by stunting in 23 per cent of children under five and simultaneously high levels of overweight and obesity affecting 44 per cent of men and 74 per cent of women in the province (National Department of Health et al. 2017).

Job Losses

The impacts of lockdown worsened this already high level of food insecurity as the economy suffered its largest shock in a lifetime. Economic activities were heavily curtailed with the livelihoods of the 'existing poor' (i.e. street traders, spaza shops, small-scale fishers and farmers, and seasonal farm workers) significantly affected (EDP 2020a). This created a significant number of the 'newly poor', through job losses and small business closures. Three

million people lost their jobs between February and April 2020 with two in every five adults reporting that their household had lost its main source of income (Wills et al. 2020). Low income households bore the brunt of the economic crisis, being the subject of job losses and lacking the safety net provided by personal savings.

Price Increases

At the same time a 25 per cent depreciation of the Rand in March 2020 and some initial panic buying fuelled an increase of food prices during the first stages of the crisis (Competition Commission 2020). The price of a basic basket of core staple foods for families living on low incomes increased by R250 (7.8 per cent) in two months taking the total cost in May 2020 to R3 470,92 (from R3 221,00 in March 2020) (Smith 2020). This was more than the National Minimum Wage of a worker who still had a job and was allowed to work (ibid).

Informal Trade Excluded

Informal food traders, from whom about 70 per cent of poor households source at least some of their food, were also initially closed down making access to food even more difficult and contributing to further elevating prices (PLAAS 2020). The closure of informal food traders also led to a reduction in consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables; as well as meat and dairy, longer queues at supermarkets; and a loss of income for a wider range of important local food producers and retailers (ibid). Furthermore, it wasn't easy for these businesses to start operating again once they were classified as 'essential services', in part because they still needed written permission from a municipal authority, but also due to the depletion of their capital (Wegerif 2020).

Closure of Public Feeding Schemes

Another immediate effect of lockdown was the closure of existing public feeding schemes nationally 'without any plausible plan to set up compensatory emergency systems' (Seekings 2020). The closure of schools meant that 9.6 million children across South Africa no longer received daily school meals under the National School Nutrition Programme. The smaller public Social Relief of Distress, Community Nutrition Development Centres and Early Childhood Development centre (ECD) programmes were also disrupted. As Professor Jeremy Seekings (2020) put it "just as the need for food escalated, the state locked the doors of its food cupboard and walked away".

This poor performance by national government meant that in the first three months of the lockdown the food aid distributed was a small fraction of what would ordinarily have been distributed without a lockdown (ibid). The situation, however, was better in the Western Cape than elsewhere in the country as the provincial government quickly released funding to reopen school feeding as well as issued guidelines that any learners who presented for food at any school should receive it (EDP 2020b). The suspension of national school feeding was criticized sharply by CSOs such as Equal Education who (together with the rights based

organisation Section 27 and two governing bodies in Limpopo) in July filed a Constitutional Court Case against the Department of Basic Education in order to get the National School Feeding Programme restarted.

Provincial and Local Government Funding

Provincial and some local governments stepped in to fill part of the gap left by the suspension of national programmes in the Western Cape. Early in the lockdown the Western Cape Government announced that it had allocated an additional R30 million for food parcels, R23 million for cooked meal schemes and R16 million to support municipal initiatives (Seekings 2020). Municipalities contributed additional funding of their own. The City of Cape Town initially argued that food relief was not part of its mandate, but it did after a while release R12 million from the Mayor's Relief Fund, redirecting unspent ward funds to community kitchen and protective equipment, as well as (after some delays) food parcels. Other municipalities in the province contributed another R7 million. In total, therefore, provincial and local government seem to have committed about R88 million for emergency food aid, dwarfing the modest sums spent on emergency programmes by national government in the province (Seekings 2020). However commendable, this was still a relatively small amount of funds compared to the needs on the ground, which some commentators were estimating could extend to three million people within the Western Cape (McGuire 2020).

National Government Efforts

The national government hoped that the Solidarity Fund, set up with R150 million of national government seed money, would lead to short-term immediate food relief designed as a stop gap measure to allow for more systematic grant solutions to come on stream (Solidarity Fund 2020a). Food parcels were delivered initially through large CSOs and the Department of Social Development (DSD). The National DSD contributed R20 million and the Solidarity Fund contributed R23.5 million to reaching these households. According to Seekings (2020), officials from DSD, in their public statements and presentations to the parliamentary Portfolio Committee, claimed that the total number of food parcels distributed was 1,047,000 by the 25 of June 2020. The Government's ability to provide food parcels, however, was thought by some commentators to fall short of the actual need on the ground by at least a factor of 20 (Hall 2020).

Payments of Grants and Insurance

During the first four months of lockdown citizens waited for national government to release emergency aid in the form of extended social grants but these were slow in coming and felt to be inadequate to lift many people out of food insecurity (Wills et al. 2020). There was: an increase in the Child Support Grant of R300 per child for May 2020 only; a R500 Social Relief of Distress Caregiver Allowance paid to the primary caregivers of Child Support Grant beneficiary children (from June to end of October 2020); a top-up of R250 for all other

existing social grants; and a new COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress grant of R350 per month for unemployed persons who did not have access to other social grants.

Payment to eligible beneficiaries was initially to be paid for three months starting in May 2020. However, in June 2020 a total of nearly 6.5 million individuals eligible for the COVID-19 grant were reported not to have received it, and half of these individuals (3.1 million) lived in the poorest third of households (Spaull et al. 2020). The process also left large numbers of people with dashed expectations (EDP 2020c). The Social Relief of Distress grant was extended until 30 April 2021 (Banda 2021). The state run Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) and also the Temporary Employment/ Employees Relief Scheme (TERS) ran into administrative constraints due to the need to build strong systems to prevent corruption (Bridgman et al. 2020).

While the social grant increases and extensions were thought to have played a vital role in boosting the income of millions of households across the country, these came only after advocacy by CSOs and teams of researchers (Hall 2020). There was also a significant shortfall between the value of social grants and the amount of money a household needed to feed itself (Gould and Hatang 2020). The national departments of Social Development and Basic Education and the UIF were all criticized for massively under-performing, and failing to accept responsibility (Seekings 2020b).

Rising Food Insecurity

These unintended impacts of lockdown, as well as governance failures, had a grave effect on food security: 47 per cent of adults nationally reported that their household ran out of money to buy food in April and between May and June 2020, 21 per cent reported that someone in the household went hungry in the last 7 days (Wills et al. 2020). While these figures declined in the following months (37 per cent of households reported running out of money for food in June and 16 per cent of households in July/August reported that someone in their household had gone hungry), the situation was still deeply concerning (Bridgman et al. 2020). This was not surprising considering employment levels remained far lower than February levels and the lowest levels and slowest recoveries were experienced by disadvantaged groups (Spaull et al. 2020).

Crisis to Recovery

As the crisis progressed into June and July of 2020 and the total lockdown shifted into partial lockdown, there was a shift in the approach and language from government from 'crisis' to 'recovery' mode (EDP 2020c). There was a focus on opening the economy, the return to schools and universities, people going back to work, the stimulation of incomes and livelihoods, and on community economic recovery. This was to some extent accompanied by a psychological and emotional shift, beyond the initial solidarity shown during the lockdown, to getting on with the 'new normal'.

At the same time there was a public sector shift from emergency food relief to focused health and fatalities management in ‘hot spots’ (ibid) as well as the provision of social relief grants rather than food parcels. The next step was envisaged to be a ‘recovery phase’ in a ‘relief to recovery’ pathway (EDP 2020a). The draft Western Cape Recovery Plan under discussion in June 2020 contained three focus areas: jobs, safety, and nutrition² (EDP 2020d) and made room for budget cuts enforced by national government.

However, while the transition from crisis to recovery was the hope, and rhetoric, as the depths of winter of 2020 were felt, what transpired in reality was something far more unsettling: where food security was in danger of being seen as part of the ‘new normal’ as CSOs struggled to fill the gap left by the weaknesses of the government response to an ongoing humanitarian crisis.

THE CSO RESPONSE TO LOCKDOWN

Shifting Focus

CSOs reacted swiftly to the crisis by collectively shifting their focus to emergency food aid to address what they saw as an acute need: “We very suddenly saw there was a real problem here...and people were really getting desperate. And we quickly realized that this was going to get quite volatile very quickly if we didn't sort of band together and figure out how to get food to these spaces that we don't usually operate in” (Interview 13/08/2020 15.00). A number of CSOs argued that the crisis had pushed them into food distribution, when it was not their normal area of operation (EDP 2020b). For other organisations it meant placing more emphasis on food aid when previously it had just been a small part of their activities (Interview 13/08/20 15.00).

For the organisations that did not previously focus on food, there was a stark realisation that providing food to people was the immediate need “and we have to be able to meet the immediate need in order to be able to continue with projects” (Interview 28/07/2020 09.30). In this way some charities supporting ECDs started by providing food aid to the children they normally fed on a daily basis, expanded to the families of these children and eventually wider in the communities of the ECD centres and, in some cases, beyond (Interviews 28/07/2020 14.00; 29/07/2020; 12/10/2020). For other organisations that were already operating food aid schemes, the start of the Covid crisis meant stepping up their ongoing

² The final version of the Western Cape Recovery Plan published in March 2021 contained four focus areas: Covid Recovery; Jobs; Safety and Wellbeing (Western Cape Government 2021).

food relief efforts to unforeseen levels by taking on new beneficiaries and vastly altering the way they operated (Interviews 28/07/2020 09.30; 30/07/2020).

Community Mobilisation

At the grass roots level individuals and street committees spontaneously mobilised in the first weeks of the crisis to raise resources (sometimes from their own pocket) to set up impromptu food distribution and community kitchens to meet the needs of the vulnerable in their communities (CoE-FS 2020). Their motivations were rooted in religious beliefs and humanitarian principles: “And then and there I decided, listen I need to do something, and I being unemployed myself...I came home and prayed and I said what can I do? And what I did, I went out to social media and I said to my friends on the group and said listen here I need help there is a lot of people here going hungry, can you help me? And the response was there for me, and the next day I made a 100 litre pot of food...and that night I served about 200 people” (Interview 14/08/2020). Another volunteer explained: “What made me start trying to actively feed people more during Covid was just really realizing how deeply it was affecting people, and especially homeless people, and I was just noticing more and more homeless people just you know seconds from my front door and it just seemed like they weren't really getting the help that I thought that they needed and I was in a place where I could do so” (Interview 10/03/2021).

These spontaneously mobilising volunteers were often not formal (i.e. registered) CSOs themselves but worked with local CSOs and existing food aid schemes as well as liaised with local businesses and private donors inside and outside of their communities to raise resources (EDP 2020a; Interviews 12/08/2020 14.00; 29/07/2020 14.00; 14/08/2020; 01/10/2020). Some of these individual volunteers came together to form self-organising Community Action Networks (CANs) that acted locally to share information and resources in order to take care of the vulnerable residents. About 170 CAN groups formed across Cape Town loosely coordinated through a grouping called Cape Town Together (CAN and Cape Town Together 2020; Parnell and Classen 2020). The CANs were established in relatively prosperous as well as relatively poor neighbourhoods. In more prosperous areas, volunteers collected food or money that was either used to protect vulnerable local residents or sent to volunteers in poorer neighbourhoods for distribution as meals or food parcels (Seeking 2020a).

Other community networks also sprang up in what has been described by Andrew Borraine, the CEO of the Economic Development Partnership (EDP), as “probably the biggest rallying of civic activism seen in the country since the 1980s” (Food Dialogues 2020). These community networks include: the Delft Action Network set up at the end of April 2020 to support and coordinate 27 community kitchens (EDP 2020e); Vryground United for Change, which supported 15 community kitchens and was linked to the Muizenberg CAN; and the Bonteheuvel Development Forum, which organised soup kitchens in each of the 17 residential blocks servicing 120,000 people (CoE-FS 2020).

A Unifying Purpose

An 'emergency feeling' underpinned this work, creating a unifying purpose and helping to foster profound cooperativeness that strengthened partnerships and promote volunteerism (Hamann et al 2020). As one interviewee explained: "it was a sign of Covid as well. I think a lot of organisations were kind of OK, I've got this, you've got that, let's not duplicate this, let's work together" (Interview 11/11/2020). Another CSO representative describe the situation in their community as "the biggest blessing in disguise, if you want to call it, with the coronavirus, was the way communities brought people together, and I mean I've been working on the Cape Flats for 30 years and I've never seen this level of cooperation, where people across political boundaries class, race, all of the traditional or South African fault lines, people willing to work across those fault lines and to do it selflessly and finding a consensus" (Interview 05/08/2020).

The sense of common purpose was also evident in large organisations which, while they had a core team, managed to expand their activities to almost unrecognisable levels from the help of thousands of volunteers that connected with the mission of the organisation (Interview 30/07/20). "Then we started innocently the sandwich drive. We thought there's people out there they stuck at home, let's get them to make sandwiches, let's get them to make soup it will add to our drive. People just started making sandwiches and again it just touched everyone's heart that they were able to be stuck at home and do something about it to be part of this change. So, the sandwich drive went from a few hundred sandwiches a week to tens and tens of thousands of sandwiches within weeks, within days" (Interview 30/07/20). For social enterprises whose business was booming under lock down, this feeling of unifying purpose was evident in their sense of responsibility not to benefit from the crisis and to channel the extra profits back into the community through building on their partnerships to also support emergency food relief (11/11/2020 11.00).

Raising Resources

To carryout these activities the CSOs had to raise huge levels of resources. The images on TV and in the media helped alert the general public to the need for food aid (Interview 12/10/20). Letters were sent out to existing donors and emergency appeals set up on websites and social media. Individual donations rather than corporate donations were the norm: "Its about 20 per cent corporate funding, but a lot of it has been individuals that have just been incredibly generous... we've had individuals that are giving up to 30, 40,000 Rand. They've seen the situation and then they've just been amazing responding" (Interview 29/07/2020 14.00). Another CSO recounted how "the donations ...started trickling in and [then] it was like a dam wall ripping apart and the donations started pouring in" (Interview 30/07/20).

Overseas donors were also important especially for international networks and for high profile CSOs that were able to attract donations from expats and visitors of Cape Town (Interview 30/07/20). Other CSOs were able to use their connections in business and wealthy individuals to secure donations (Interviews 28/07/20 14.00; 12/10/2020; 09/03/2021

11.00). However, resources raised from within vulnerable communities themselves were also extremely important. Many of the smaller food relief schemes were heavily reliant on donations from neighbourhood businesses: “we didn’t have anything to hand but people were hungry...so we went to our local stores and they supported us. Some would give rice ...and others oil and we started cooking” (Interview 14/08/2020). Larger NGOs raised considerable resources from the Muslim community, especially in terms of the regular donation of fresh vegetables and meat (Interview 12/08/2020 12.00).

CSOS Distributed Half the Food Aid

As a result of all these resources and collaboration, CSOs provided a huge amount of food relief in the first few months of lock down. A report commissioned by EDP shows that CSOs provided at least 50 per cent of the overall food relief effort in the Western Cape from March to June 2020 amounting to 2 235 385 people days of food or 42 177 ‘people per day’ for a 53 day period (EDP 2020f).³ This figure is based on the total recommended daily nutritional input of 2100 kilojoules per day as recommended by the World Food Programme. According to EDP “[t]he figures reveal that CSOs played a massive role in addressing hunger during the two-month period” (ibid).

The increase of food relief efforts can be seen in the figures of single organisations: For example, prior to Covid-19, the large food recovery NGO, Food Forward, was supplying food to over 600 organisations who were supporting 250 000 individuals. After lock down began they were reaching over 1000 organisations reaching over 500 000 people directly through cooked food and 1.5 million people through food parcels (CoE-FS 2020). The Peninsula School Feeding Association had distributed over 9000 parcels by 8th April and by the end of June it had distributed 53,000 parcels. (It was also funding up to 30,000 cooked meals daily, funded in large part by the provincial government (Seekings 2020a). Prior to lockdown, Breadline Africa paid for 14,000 meals at 27 sites mostly in Cape Town. Under lockdown the operation expanded to 59,000 meals per week (ibid). In March 2020 Ladles of Love was serving 14,000 meals a month but soon into lockdown Ladles was distributing at least 45 tons of food or about 400,000 meals a week (Hendricks 2020).

This food aid took various forms, including food parcels, community kitchens providing hot meals or sandwiches; digital food vouchers (initially to individual households, then increasingly to support communal efforts such as community kitchens) and school nutrition programmes. In the first phase of the crisis, this consisted of 48 per cent of all food relief via food parcels, meals 42 per cent and vouchers 8 per cent while bulk deliveries were 2 per cent of overall food relief (Ikapadata 2020). However, over the course of the crisis less reliance was put on food parcels and more emphasis placed on kitchens and food vouchers (usually in combination).

³ This figure was updated in a report published by EDP on 10 September which showed that in the first four months of the crisis CSO had provided 5 212 402 people days of food (EDP 2020a).

The spontaneous response to lockdown by the CSOs was therefore fast, substantial and inspired by an acute need of the people they served. This response was not without its challenges.

KEY CHALLENGES

Some of the challenges facing CSOs while carrying out emergency food relief activities, especially the CBOs, were relatively simple but nevertheless important daily struggles for these organisations.

Lack of Data

Early on in lockdown volunteers in CBOs had difficulties communicating with each other because of a lack of access to data (Interviews 01/10/2020; 29/07/2020 11.30; CoE-FS, 2020). Some of these organisations would normally have relied on free wi-fi from the public libraries and other facilities that were now closed. Data and air time is expensive in South Africa and the coverage is still uneven in many areas (especially in townships and rural areas). As one interviewee from a larger CSO explained “we take access to data so lightly until we wanted to share information...through WhatsApp groups” (Interview 12/10/2020). Zoom also became an important platform for communication but is data heavy: “There’s a lot of people who don't attend [a zoom meeting]. They will save up money to get data to watch the recording... I haven't found a way of getting past that technology barrier yet, to be able to include everybody”.

Access to Equipment

Another day to day challenge for groups and volunteers on the ground was getting hold of the equipment and gas necessary for cooking the meals for large volumes of people. While food was donated and or funds provided for ingredients, access to large (100 litres) pots, burners, gas and electricity was a common challenge for many of the community kitchens (EDP 2020g; Interviews 29/07/2020; 14/08/2020; 1/10/2020; 23/02/2021). One informal community kitchen had originally been providing food aid for hundreds of people with only a 16 litre pot on an open wood fire (Interview 29/07/2020 14.00). Some of the kitchens did eventually get donations of large pots and burners but it was common for community kitchen volunteers to buy gas from their own (limited) funds (Interviews 1/10/2020; 23/02/2021). A few lucky kitchens got donations of a full suite of equipment necessary to efficiently and safely run a community kitchen, such as ladles, cutting boards, fire extinguishers, and tables etc) (Interview 30/07/20).

Transport

Transport for donations, other supplies and volunteers was also a regular headache for the smaller CSOs. While some larger organisations regularly delivered ingredients or food to the CBOs (Interview 17/12/2020), others required these to be picked up from their locations (Interview 30/07/2020). Many *ad hoc* donations from CANs or elsewhere often also needed to be collected but this required cash to pay the drivers: “[T]here were times when people called and said I must come fetch stuff but I didn’t have transport which was a problem...I was running around and asking people and I don’t have money because you know when you ask someone to go fetch something you must give them petrol money” (Interview 01/10/2020).

Transport for delivering food packages was also a challenge for some of the larger CSOs mainly because of the lack of funds provided by funders for this element of their activities and also the sheer logistics involved. Several intermediary organisations rather opted to use the services of Yebo Fresh – a new company delivering groceries to the townships (Interviews 12/10/2020; 16/02/2021 16.00).

Increased Food Prices

Increased food pricing and supply chain shortages were an unwelcome challenge to some CSOs in the first few months of the lock down with community leaders such as Henriette Abrahams (chairperson of the Bonteheuwel Community Forum) arguing that price increases were hitting their organisation hard (Reddy 2020). While price increases did not stop food relief, they were yet another challenge to navigate: “the price increase of food gave us a huge knock and we had to make choices and changes” (CoE-FS 2020). Similarly, another large CSO explained “I was giving away lentils and ... split peas and that type of stuff. But it all became stupidly expensive so I then had to limit it to soup mix, barley and samp, and we also give porridge (Interview 30/07/2020).

Permitting

There was a lack of clarity at first on whether CSOs needed permits to operate and move around. Permits were needed by workers in essential services in levels four and five of lockdown but could be issued by the head of the organisation (EDP 2020h). However, there was a wide spread perception at the start of lock down by CSOs, and also apparently by the South African Police service (SAPs), that community kitchens were not allowed to operate (Interviews 28/07/2020 15.30; 10/02/2021). It was reported in the first few weeks of the lock down that the police had tried to close down some CSOs without permits (EDP 2020b; Interview 10/02/2021). One CSO explained that “the community kitchens cooked meals up until we went into a hard lockdown and then they could no longer do that. [But] some of them were able to get a permit from the nearest police station to continue doing some food preparation” (Interview 28/07/2020 15.30). Informal CSOs struggled the most to get permits

in the first few weeks, especially if they were not registered and so had no formal status (Interview 07/12/2020).

Food Clearance Certificates were also a concern for CSOs. These certificates were normally a requirement for any kitchen producing food for public consumption but as one interviewee argues: “it was humanitarian emergency relief, it was not something that was on our priority list”. While there appears to have been some leniency by the authorities in recognition of the circumstances of the crisis and the nature of the work of these organisations (Interview 30/07/2020), other CSOs chose to work round this by partnering with accredited kitchens to do their food provisioning for them (Interview 7/12/2020).

Security

Security of transportation of food relief to vulnerable communities was a shared concern, especially in the early weeks of the lockdown (EDP 2020b). Some trucks were attacked on the N2, attracting high media profile (Interview 28/07/202 09.30). Police assistance was received in some instances but not universally and army support was sporadic and unreliable (EDP 2020b). There were also concerns about the safety of food while it was in warehouses (ibid). Security around the food aid programmes for volunteers, staff and beneficiaries was also a worry because they are situated in volatile areas (Interview 29/07/2020 14.00). There were some stories of gangsters pushing their way to the front of the lines and beneficiaries having ‘to dodge the bullets on their way’ to the community kitchens (Interviews 29/07/2020 14.00; 30/07/2020; CoE-FS 2020). Increased levels of hunger, desperation and perceived uneven (and unfair) coverage of relief were seen as important factors leading to the heightened levels of tension occasionally erupting into violence disrupting food distribution and looting of shops and lorries (Davis, 2020; Interviews 01/10/2020; 27/10/2020).

Other challenges faced by the CSOs were more complex and derived from the combination of several underlying factors.

Economic, Physical and Psychological Costs

Partly as a result of these day to day challenges many of the CSOs reported economic, physical and mental cost to themselves and/or their organisations during the crisis. Several CSOs pointed out that the funding for food parcels usually covered the cost of the components of food parcels but not the volunteers or the transport, which had to be covered by the organisations themselves (Interviews 19/02/21: 18/11/2020; 12/08/2020 12.00). Similarly, some large CSOs saw their administrative costs rising enormously under the novel constraints of lockdown (Interview 28/07/2020 15.30). Other smaller organisations had to fund raise huge amounts to keep their doors open. One CSO representative reported to the Western Cape NGO-Government Food Relief Coordination Forum in July 2020 “we have to raise R17 800 per week and it’s not enough. The donations are by the seat of your pants

and after four months we are all exhausted. There are only a few volunteers and I have used all the pages in my play book” (EDP 2020i).

A similar story came from the community kitchens themselves: “each of these kitchens had been working non-stop during the lock down and now found themselves with volunteers getting sick, burnout” (ibid). Many of these kitchens, and even quite large high profile food relief programmes, operated on a surprisingly small volunteer or staff base. For example, a kitchen in the centre of Cape Town that fed 500 people a day during the first phase of lock down operated on a staff of five women: three in the kitchen, a driver and a manager/fundraiser (Interview 3/12/2020). Many of the CSOs had to maintain the food relief activities on top of their normal tasks (Interviews 29/07/2020 14.00; 05/08/2020). As the lockdown progressed down through the levels in 2020, volunteers particularly in the CANs and community kitchens, also had to return to their normal work while others could not continue indefinitely to work for free (Interview 15/02/2021). By the second Covid wave towards the end of 2020 there was a perception that “civil society has been holding the line up to now – and it’s tired and tapped out” (EDP, 2021s).

Lack of Communication

One of the frustrations reported by many CSOs was a lack of communication between the various stakeholders (including with between parts of government and civil society) (EDP 2020b). CSOs sometimes bore the brunt of this as more often than not their staff and volunteers were the interface between the communities and any available assistance: “I think the frustration was that... people are also wanting to know...[and] the more you engage with community members they begin to trust you as people who are out there working with them and finding answers and solutions with them. And so, it became quite difficult” (Interview 10/02/2021). The lack of communication between government and citizens manifested itself most viscerally in tension between community members and CSO volunteers or staff on the ground, as one CSO interviewee recounted: “And as he was dropping [food] off people were running to us and telling us we did put our names on the list. Where’s our stuff? And like very aggressive. He was so torn, because he had to see his people who is in need that gave their information to people that they trusted, but who never came” (Interview 12/08/2020 14.00).

There was a similar frustration from CSOs that their own questions for the government were not being answered: “we just had so many questions for the government that we weren’t getting answers to at all because there was no one picking up the phone. No one showing up who should normally have showed up. If we asked for anything in writing through various mechanisms, we were just told well, it’s coming” (Interview 16/02/2021). Some CSOs also complained that there appeared to be a lack of communication even within government departments and that a lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities made it difficult for NGOs to know where to source information and help (EDP 2020b; Interview 12/08/2020 12.00).

Identification of Beneficiaries

Determining who requires assistance, avoiding duplication, and reaching all those requiring help, including the newly-poor, as well as the historically vulnerable was a challenge (EDP 2020b). Many larger CSOs reported using a fairly *ad hoc* system of referral to bring on board new (CSO) beneficiaries: “initially I started working with the guys that I knew and then asked them to send out the word. This is what we do, we need to find beneficiaries, we need to start getting food out into the community, and so people were just joining in. I didn’t have a vetting process then because we were in a crisis and I just went on word of mouth and reference” (Interview, 30/07/20).

The community networks like the CANs were extremely useful in recommending beneficiaries and also the Western Cape NGO-Government Food Relief Coordination Forum was a channel by which nominations for beneficiary CSOs could be called for and proposed. On the ground in communities, individual beneficiaries were commonly identified by grass root structures rather than using the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) beneficiary list (Interview 05/08/2020). While the difficulty in distinguishing want versus need was raised as a concern, particularly as the economy began to reopen, the on the ground community work of consistent re-evaluation of the needs of individuals and households for food relief by CBOs on a regular basis was seen as very effective (EDP 2020g).

This did have a cost though as one interviewee in a community explained: “it was really tough having to decide, am I going to feed the house that has no income, or a house that has been receiving a grant?” (Interview 12/08/2020 12.00). Another interviewee from a larger CSO outlined similar dilemmas: “I think the challenge that I felt the most was like a moral and an ethical challenge actually, was just really about who's going to get this money... I mean, we had so many people at that point, saying to us we want to partner with you, and at the end of the day it was my judgment call to decide who we had to partner with. It's just that feeling of like someone phones you and they've got an amazing story and their organization’s doing amazing things. And you're like, I want to help all of you” (11/11/2020 11.00).

More widely the Covid crisis created a large group of people in need outside the DSD’s grant recipient lists. A lack of register of needs (of poor and unemployed) was seen as a major barrier to effective targeting of aid (Wills et al. 2020). While countries (like India) that invested in setting up registers of this kind appeared to have been able to reach vulnerable populations in a short space of time (ibid).

Lack of Information and Mapping of Food Aid Distribution

Coupled with this lack of information on beneficiaries, there was a lack of information on who is providing food, how much, the calorific content, where, and how often. According

to EDP, this has hampered ongoing food relief efforts, giving rise to duplication of efforts, and potentially leading to areas of need being overlooked. It has also meant that planning to address future areas of need has been extremely challenging (EDP 2020k). There was an initial focus within the City of Cape Town and Western Cape Government to get a consolidated list of around 6000 NGOs in the province. This took time and not all NGOs on the list were involved in food relief and there was no reliable source of information on where they were located, what they do and whether or not they were still functioning (EDP 2020j).

Cullinan and Ely (2020) comment that the historically unequal nature of South African society has led to some community initiatives being better resourced than others due to the networks they have access to. Lots of community kitchens spontaneously popped up overnight with no assessment of the areas in which they were situated (Interview 19/02/21). “Some groups might have been getting food from five organisations while another one down the road (without a Face Book page, for example) isn’t getting anything” (Interview 17/12/2020). One interviewee argued that there is a need for transparency on where and to whom resources are going (ibid).

The imperative to record, collate and map civil society food relief efforts was an ongoing theme in meetings of the Western Cape NGO-Government Food Relief Coordination Forum during 2020. Not only did this lack of data impact on the effective delivery of food aid, but it also meant that CSO efforts were not properly documented and therefore largely unrecognised and unacknowledged. It was only after considerable efforts in June 2020 (see Page 33) that the extent of civil society contribution to preventing widespread acute food insecurity during the crisis was able to be seen (EDP 2020k).

Uneven Distribution of Food Aid

A general and related concern held by many of the CSOs was that rural areas were far less catered for in terms of emergency food aid than the metros (Interviews 29/07/2020 14.00; 4/08/20; 28/07/2020 15.30; 19/02/21). According to the NIDS-CRAM national survey (wave 2) published in September 2020, rural areas were more affected by job losses than urban area and hunger was highest in rural areas (Spaull et al. 2020).

There was a concern amongst the CSOs in the Western Cape that organisations and coordination platforms mainly focused in Cape Town were not hearing enough from the rural areas and did not fully understand the situation on the ground there, and, most importantly, the extent of the needs (CoE-FS 2020). One interviewee explained “in the metropolises in the urban area, you find that there are support structures. There is enough help. There is enough money to help people in need. But once you get the peri-urban areas, which is largely ignored by many South Africans, these people are essentially invisible to the rest of us” (Interview 4/08/2020).

Decreasing Resources versus Increasing Needs

The overriding challenge for CSOs that eclipses all others, however, has been the dwindling resources compared to increasing needs over time. In the early weeks and months of the crisis there was a huge outpouring of donations from the public, especially in level five and level four of lockdown when people were not able to go to work and so everybody understood the need and were also more available to read about the situations of other people. But as many people returned to work, the need was still there but it was less visible as many people assume that everyone is back at work (Interview 18/11/2020). Many households in reality remained food insecure and there was a danger in mid 2020 that this was treated as part of the ‘new normal’ and not as a crisis (EDP 2020c).

In June 2020 provincial and local government were shifting to managing ‘hot spots’ and looking towards the recovery phase (EDP 2020l) and at the same time there was a sense that government and donor resources were depleted (EDP 2020c). However, a survey of the Western Cape NGO-Government Food Relief Coordination Forum members by EDP in June 2020 revealed that food needs and requirements, with one or two exceptions, had increased but that resources available to these organisations had generally decreased (EDP 2020i). This was (and continues to be) a huge challenge for CSOs. The general feeling amongst CSOs was that the lines in community kitchens were actually getting longer (and containing more adults rather than just children) as more people were losing their jobs, exhausting their savings and as other community kitchens closed down (EDP 2020i).

By mid 2020 some of the most prolific providers of food relief during the early phase of the lockdown such as PEDI, Afrika Tikken and Community Chest had significantly reduced their food relief efforts (Ikapadata 2020). For other large organisations hard decisions had to be made about how many organisations they could partner with going forward. As one CSO argued: “providing the amount of food we are currently buying and producing is not sustainable going forward. The situation is no longer an immediate crisis but a long term economic disaster” (Ikapadata 2020). CSOs in the communities had little choice but to downscale and reduce the number of kitchens cooking and/or reduce the number of sittings or days that they cooked (Interview 12/10/2020). While many organisations had hoped that they would only be providing food aid for the original three weeks of lock down, as 2020 drew to a close some CSOs were worried that the situation was actually getting worse (Interview 16/02/2021 16.00). Then the second Covid wave hit.

As the country emerged from another lockdown in March 2021 the need for food aid continued. EDP put out an appeal for nomination of 60 community kitchens to be part of a voucher scheme and received 500 nominations, which they saw as “an indication of the level of need and crisis” (EDP 2021a). Multiple CSOs said that there was now an almost complete collapse of donors but persistent high levels of need leading to tensions in the lines and the closure of kitchens (ibid).

PARTNERSHIPS AND STRATEGIES

The CSOs put in place a number of strategies to overcome these challenges.

Adaptation and Agility

The CSOs interviewed in this study exhibited a high level of agility which helped them to adapt to the constraints and challenges of lockdown and unfolding needs of the people. The hard lock down automatically brought many of the normal programmes of CSOs to a halt. However, seeing the need for food aid, many CSO staff and volunteers quickly reconsidered their priorities and ways of operating. For example, one interviewee recounted: “All of a sudden, from my dining room table, together with the rest of our senior management team, we had to work at a new plan of action in terms of how we were going to serve the people. The big concern was that people were going to go hungry” (Interview 12/10/2020). Another CSO representative explained: “From an organizational point of view, we just jumped into this, it wasn't planned at all. And we just sort of said, you know we need to be agile and help” (Interview 29/07/2020 14.00).

This high level of agility often meant branching out in whole new directions quickly and finding alternative ways to operate, whether it be researching food vouchers, redeploying administrative staff to pack food parcels (Interview: 28/07/2020 15.30) or transitioning from running a restaurant to a large-scale warehouse (Interview: 30/07/2020). The agility of other CSOs can also be seen in the rapidly increasing the scale of their operations (commensurate to the increased needs of the people and an inpouring of donations). One high profile CSO expanded their operations so fast that they had to move to the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC): “Literally within one Sunday, I didn't know where I was, we were losing it. By the following Sunday we were at the CTICC” (Interview 30/07/20). Another new organisation was conceived in the weeks preceding lockdown and developed into multi-million Rand organisation almost in a weekend (Interview 26/02/2021).

In contrast, there was a suggestion that the more historic CSOs, whose usual practice was based on distributing food parcels, were very active at first but failed to fully adapt to the shift to digital food vouchers which some of the newer more agile organisations were quick to run with (Interview 6/04/2021). There was also a strong feeling that CSOs in general were far more agile than government in the crisis and this was quickly recognised even by parts of government so that donations of food would be redirected to CSOs so that it could be quickly distributed without getting caught in public sector red tape and delays (Interview 6/04/2021). As one interviewee argued: CANS were so quick to respond to the crisis that

“they were feeding people before government officials even really knew the scale of the problem” (Interview 1/04/2021 09.30).

Creative Use of Social-Media and Technology

CSOs found creative ways during the lockdown to connect with each other and with potential volunteers and donors through their use of social media and other online technology such as WhatsApp, Zoom, Facebook, Twitter. Most notably the CANs used Facebook and WhatsApp to communicate with each other, exchange offers of assistance with needs and recruit members (Interviews 10/02/2021; 16/02/2021 16.00; 15/02/2021). Numerous informal WhatsApp groups also sprang up such as ‘Food 4 Children WCape’ (with 40+ members) which connected community food aid schemes mainly focused on child nutrition.

These WhatsApp groups and Facebook pages etc helped groups share information and build capacity. Some groups, such as the Cape Town Together Growers Initiative, specialised in information exchange, while other groups also became places for community kitchens to connect with donors. As one member of a the ‘Food4 Children WCape’ group explained: “she connected me and said that she did hear me and had a private funder and would I be able to give information and send photos to say what I have done with the funds that they gave? And within an hour of me speaking with X the gentleman gave me R2000 transfer to e-wallet” (Interview 12/08/2020 14.00). Another small community kitchen described how they used these online communication channels to be accountable and build relationships with their donors “when I do cooking, I do a write up on social media. I thank the donors and invite people to come and have a meal, so that I can show people who did something and that their products...That is how I tried to build the relationship with people” (Interview 14/08/2020).

Social media was also used extensively by the larger CSOs to fund raise by sending posts to their supporters of their activities and appealing for donations (Interviews 29/07/2020 14.00; 30/07/20; 27/11/2020; 11/11/2020). One organisation explained “we’ve always had a very strong social media presence, our Facebook page, our Instagram page, were very active all the time. [During covid] ... I literally started doing live posts and talking to our followers saying this is what's happening, this is what we need to do. So, I think I connected with our followers. They were seeing a human being” (Interview 30/07/2020). Online payment methods such as QR codes, Paypal, SnapScan, Give and Get were also used by numerous organisations, including to collect donations from abroad (Interviews 27/11/2020; 11/11/2020).

These larger CSOs also noted the practical utility of social media and technology for enhancing coordination and communication between groups: “social technology has been quite important because it allowed us to do multiple online conversations. When you busy actually implementing programs and going into the office, you don't really have time to

attend lots of meetings but in lockdown we had nothing else to do but attend meetings online, and we had more time to start pushing our materials onto Facebook and you know emailing and inviting people to webinars and online dialogues and conferences” (Interview 18/11/2020).

Existing Networks with Communities

CSOs relied heavily on activating their existing networks and relationships with communities to operationalise their activities at a grassroots level. Locally embedded actors and institutions built on local knowledge and relationships developed prior to the crisis. These community networks and institutions included CBOs such as community kitchens, street committees, ward development forums, neighbourhood watches, community policing forums, schools, ECDs, religious networks and in fact “anywhere that the residents actually mobilized themselves” (Interview 05/8/2020). Most CSOs used existing networks and institutions, one CSO encouraged new ‘Covid relief teams’ to form which comprised of individuals from all of the available community networks and institutions (Interview 5/08/2020).

These community networks and groups were instrumental in both identifying vulnerable people as beneficiaries and in the ‘last mile’ of food and resource distribution. There was a strong agreement amongst CSOs that the only reliable way to have an up-to-date assessment of individual needs “is through on-the-ground community work, and consistent, community-level re-evaluation of the need for food relief on a regular basis” (EDP 2020g). This point was recognised again and again by CSOs as being critical to their successful operations. As one interviewee explained: “[N]ot a single day at X, have we dictated where the vouchers must go and to whom the vouchers must be received. It is always the people on the ground, the leaders ...and the church leaders... So while we are leading we have valued being led by those who are on the ground” (Interview 27/07/2020 09.30).

Community knowledge of what was happening in situ was particularly valuable because it was very fine grained. This was especially the case where the community structures were organised on street or block levels, as one interviewee explained: “And because you gave each group quite a small part of the community, it was relatively easy to get on top of the understanding” (Interview 16/02/2021 16.00).

These networks within communities were longstanding and predated the crisis. “I think there was maybe a bit of lack of understanding of how organic process it is, and you can't just suddenly set it up and help another area where you haven't been operational” (Interview 16/02/2021 16.00). Even if, as was often the case, new networks were forged during the crisis, these were built on existing relationships that helped identify and connect to new partners (Interviews 12/08/2020 12.00; 28/07/2020 15.30; 28/07/2020 09.30).

Self-Organisation and Agency

Relationships within the communities themselves were also important in the food relief effort. Many interviewees talked about Covid bringing people and communities together (Interviews 5/08/2020; 14/08/2020; 13/08/2020; 01/03/2021). One interviewee described a “civil shifting” towards more social consciousness and a sense of ownership (Interview 13/08/2020) “[B]eforehand if I had this conversation with groups, they would get very angry with City...And what I've noticed with Covid 19, and I think it's as developments CAN networks, is a sudden realization of agency, that actually this is our neighbourhood and a sense of ownership, and what are we going to do about it?” (Interview 13/08/2020). Another interviewee talked about the crisis providing an “opportunity to begin to self-organise again”. They continued: “it was a very good breeding ground to start talking to the community to say, listen, we are in this together.....we are going to make pots of food together. Because if you don't then you might not be able to feed your children” (Interview 01/03/2021).

Often the self-organising that went on during Covid was building on existing networks and initiatives within communities that predated the Covid crisis. For example, the Delft Action Network was set up in April 2020 to link 27 existing community kitchens to provide food relief adding up to about 15000 meals a day (EDP 2020e). The network has grouped its kitchens into nine groups of three to ensure each kitchen benefits from reciprocal support, advice and increasing efficiency. The Delft Action Network has a WhatsApp group which includes local councillors. They also have a Facebook page for the larger community of CANs and the public (ibid). Similarly, Bonteheuwel Joint Peace Forum built on multiple existing groups such as the Scouts, two hiking clubs, rates payers and tenants' associations, food kitchens. The Peace Forum came into offer coordination as a sort of umbrella body to offer some coordination and get people out of their silos to respond together (Interview 14/08/2020 10.00).

Partnering with other CSOs

One way of working more effectively during lock down has been for CSOs to partner with others organisations that provide complementary services. For example, several larger CSOs partnered with a social enterprise, YEBO Fresh, a new grocery delivery company based in Epping, to deliver food throughout the townships. According to one CSO “they enabled us to achieve what we have achieved in the sense that they've got the person power to source food in bulk, to package it, sanitize it, and delivered it. So, they were doing the main deliveries...the partnership with them actually made what we did possible” (Interview 12/10/2020). Other mutually benefiting partnerships could be seen between ECDs that have partnered with CSOs to provide food parcels for their client children and their families (Interview 29/07/2020 14.00).

Further partnerships have arisen between organisations with funding and those that have the capacity to produce vouchers: “if an organization has got a funding...but they don't have the capacity to do their own vouchers, then they can approach X and say we've got R100,000 and we wanted to distribute vouchers and then we'll have an MOU with them and then it becomes sponsoring organizations and then we'll distribute their vouchers, on the basis of where they want these vouchers to go and what value of the vouchers and will it be and for how long etc.” (Interview 27/07/2020 09.30).

Collaboration to enable emergency food provision could also be seen amongst the homeless charities (many of whom met via Zoom once a day during the hard lock down to coordinate and collaborate): “So we helped X reopen their kitchen, by giving them manpower, and in exchange they helped us, because they've got an industrial sized kitchen and they helped to do food prepared food packs for us, and we got a one ton truck, and every day we would go drive into the CBD [Central Business District] pick up and I think it was up to 400 to 500 meals, pop them into the back of the van and then our driver would drive” (Interview 13/08/2020 15.00).

Another interesting partnership that evolved during the crisis was between four intermediary CSOs, who rather than buying the vegetables from one of these organisations (as would be normal business pre-Covid), sponsored the urban farming produce to be distributed to local communities (Interviews 05/08/2020; 11/11/2020). One CSO managed the fresh produce, another the dried goods and two others provided the funding (Interview 11/11/2020).

Channelling Funds through Intermediaries

The most common type of partnership, however, was between larger NGOs, raising funds, ordering in bulk and acting as food hubs or ‘intermediaries’ and distributing food or financial resources to smaller CBOs on the ground. These intermediary organisations have been an *ad hoc* strategy for organically dealing with the gap between the formal and the informal sectors of the food relief institutional landscape: “the majority of community-led initiatives – food kitchens, community gardens, ECDs ..., are informal and unregistered, and therefore often ‘unseen’ in the eyes of the authorising environment” (EDP 2020d). The intermediary organisations this provided “a channel for public resources to where they are needed” (EDP 2020d).

In July 2020, Ladles of Love was working with 135 beneficiaries. Typically Ladles of Love and other intermediaries provide food in bulk for community kitchens who cook and distribute this. Other organisations worked with smaller groups of community kitchens. For example in February 2021, the Red Cross was working with 36 community based kitchens under its ‘network of care’. Breadline Africa in July 2020 was working with about 23/24 organisations. Some of these organisations themselves may further distribute the food to other CSOs (Interview 17/12/2020). Other intermediary organisations include: Community

Chest, Extreem Kwizeen/Supathon, Gift of the Givers, DG Murray Trust, EDP, Ladles of Love, Mustafadin Foundation, PEDI, Service Dining Rooms, Stellenbosch Unite, Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading, The Warehouse, Breadline Africa, Africa Tikkun, Brewers' soup collective, Ikamva Labantu, Rotary, U-Cook (EDP 2020n).

Development of Digital Food Vouchers

One of the innovative solutions to some of the logistical challenges of food parcel distribution during lock down was the development of food vouchers schemes. Compared to food parcels, digital voucher schemes sent directly to beneficiaries' cell phones have many advantages including: safety- they cannot be stolen; choice- within the parameters of the scheme, the beneficiary is able to decide how to spend it; cost – the full amount is received by the beneficiary and there is no cost for delivery or logistics; unit- the value of the voucher is pre-determined according to the purpose and budget of the aid programme (EDP 2020o).

Various voucher schemes were piloted and rolled out during the lockdown including several in partnership between the DG Murray Trust and EDP and some involving the community development organisation Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading and also Western Cape Government Department of Economic Development and Tourism. The core concept of these programmes was for the vouchers to be redeemable at local food suppliers and spazas, rather than formal retail. This allows the programmes both to meet social need and food requirements and at the same time to stimulate economic activity and local food markets (EDP 2020p).

Online Data Collection and Mapping

The collection of data and mapping of food relief efforts was a major success of the Western Cape NGO-Government Food Relief Coordination Forum, particularly in the first six months of the crisis. Initially there were several initiatives underway attempting to map food relief efforts (EDP 2020j) and eventually two of these were combined in order to avoid duplication and competition. There was a great deal of discussion, mainly centred around the Forum, as well as trial and error involved in getting the databases useable and useful. Eventually a team of volunteers engaged directly with the approximately 18 larger intermediary NGOs involved in channelling donations to micro food distribution points run by grassroots CBOs and CANs (EDP 2020a). This was to overcome the limitations to CSOs self-loading their data and registering themselves – often community kitchens were not resourced to do this (EDP 2020k). The technical side of the database was coordinated by a small company, IKapadata.

While this process did not necessarily produce comprehensive data, it nevertheless produced 'good enough' data to demonstrate the massive role in food relief being played by civil society. A food data report published on 19 June 2020, showed that CSOs had collectively distributed a total of 3,080,998 'people days' (EDP 2020a). The data were,

however, backward-looking and could not provide insight into future needs (ibid). Regular systematic data collection is costly and the Forum identified a need to find funding to continue this task (EDP 2021b).

In addition to these extensive data collecting exercises several of the CBOs and local networks also mapped community kitchens and food systems in their locality capturing local knowledge resources. For example, activists, academics, and company managers established a collaboration platform in Stellenbosch (a town near Cape Town) to map the local food system in that area, with the aim of finding ways different resources and competencies can come together to make the system fairer and more resilient (Hamann et al. 2020).

RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOVERNMENT

Despite these strategies and partnerships, which allowed the CSOs to play such a significant role in the provision of emergency food in the Western Cape during the Covid crisis, an underlying challenge that the CSOs perceived in carrying out their activities was their often troubled relationships with government.

Limited Contact with Government

There was a frustration amongst some CSOs, especially the ones based in communities, that they had little contact with government and even less direct assistance: “I approached one of the guys that I know. He is an MP or something for the government. I never got any response. I phoned the Ward Councillor...and I asked him just to make a round to see what I’m doing and he made a turn while I was dishing out food. But unfortunately, there was nothing he could do. He didn’t even give me a spoon” (Interview 23/02/2021). Other organisations reported having had a site visit to a kitchen in their network from a politician with perhaps the donation of a stove and/or pot (Interviews 01/03/2021; 12/11/2020; 29/07/2020 14.00). Another CSO reported: “[T]o be honest there has been minimum engagement with any official or government structure, not SASSA, not the City. We simply informed the political structures in the sub-council, because we work within the sub-council boundaries” (Interview 05/08/2020).

Another organisation reported difficulties in what was perceived as political grandstanding “I was pretty much just going to do what almost everybody else does, just put my head down and find the food to feed the communities. Until a situation occurred with some government workers. I still don't know what to believe. But I was told they were part of some political party. And they came into the community to distribute food parcels to a tiny bit of the community in a time where everybody was hungry. So that day was a day of hell... (Interview 01/03/2021).

It is interesting to note, however, that at least one organisation that reported to have had little assistance from government, at the same time stated that an intermediary food relief CSO (which has received significant levels of funding from both the City of Cape Town and provincial government), had provided it with resources (Interview 01/03/2021). So it is possible that perceptions of assistance from parts of government are somewhat skewed because of the intermediary model of food distribution.

Government does not Listen

Amongst some CSOs there is a perception that parts of government do not listen to them. Several organisations reported difficulties getting meetings with the City of Cape Town (Interviews 07/12/2020; 29/07/2020 12.30; 12/11/2020) while there was a perception by some CSOs that there should have been more organised stakeholder meetings at the start of the crisis with various parts of government (including DSD) similar to the type of meetings that took place in the NGO-Government Food Relief Coordination Forum meetings (Interviews 04/08/2020; 07/12/2020; 5/11/2020 11.00) (see below). One interviewee complained: “they don't listen to NGOs, we are never consulted... I don't think that NGOs are taken seriously in terms of policy. I don't think NGOs are taken seriously in terms of what they do. You get the odd thank you, and I know there are people who really mean it. But it's only now when the wheels have fallen off that I think you and I come to the realization how important the local mosque or the local church or the local temple, or the local CBO has been to the South African community for a very, very long time now” (Interview 4/08/20).

That is not to say that parts of government do not work well with parts of civil society but at times some CSOs feel excluded while others are prioritised. Several of the homeless charities in particular felt left out of the tight knit group of three CSOs that partnered with government to provide solutions while their alternative suggestions were ignored and little information given to them (Interview 13/08/2020 15.00). “[A]fter this whole experience, we are so reticent to go into conversation with City, it really doesn't bear fruit. You spend a lot of time and it doesn't seem to go anywhere” (Interview 13/08/2020).

Another area where CSOs did not feel that government listened early enough was that of the merits of food parcels versus providing cooked meals: “So the government was hell bent on sending out food parcels, which is a disaster. It's expensive, it feeds a few people. We got a donation of 560 300 Rand from the City of Cape Town, they insisted on food parcels, it lasted one month. And out of that we've given 1400 food parcels, that's with 560 300 rand you know how many people, how many meals could be served out of a soup kitchen? We're talking tens of thousands” (Interview 30/07/2020).

Weak Pre-existing Relationships with CSOs

A lack of pre-existing relationships between government and organised civil society was seen as a serious flaw in the government's crisis response (Cullinan and Ely, 2020). CSOs also found the government system complex and opaque and so difficult to engage with (CoE-FS, 2021). Beyond the registration of NGOs on its data base, the government has no way of communicating with CBOs to enable joint problem solving (Cullinan and Ely 2020).

One interviewee complained "there are no imbizos to bring all of those people together and have a dialogue in terms of how we see it. It is always just people from a particular party to build their agenda. I'm a big believer in dialogue and resolving issues through talk" (Interview 14/08/2020). Another interviewee argued that government needed to "engage with us on this because there are a lot of people on the ground who know a lot of good stuff and there's a lot of good solutions, but then there's a lot of help needed, and there are a lot of issues, but we can help ...as well to understand what is needed" (Interview 05/11/2020 16.00).

Mixed Experiences with Ward Councillors

The CSOs experiences with Ward Councillors was particularly mixed. While some CSOs had had good relationships with their Ward Councillors, many other CSOs reported unsatisfactory relationships. The role of Ward Councillors was made clear by local government at the beginning of the crisis. This was to provide on the ground information on potential beneficiaries to government but not to be involved in the distribution of assistance (EDP 2020b). Ward Councillors sometimes act as gateways to communities and to the use of infrastructure within these communities and so, nevertheless, are important points of contact for many citizens and CSOs to the government. There were several frustrated reports of Ward Counsellors not acting in what was perceived as the interests of all of their constituents (Interviews 05/08/2020; 14/08/2020; 10/02/2021; 09/02/2021). There were even reports in the media of conflict and protests as well as improper distribution of food parcels (Payne 2020). Political tensions were evident in some perceptions that you needed to be a member of a political party or at least willing for your initiative to be linked to the political party, if you were to access limited resources (Interview 10/02/2020).

Stereotypes on Both Sides

The apparently historically poor relationship between parts of government and CSOs in the Western Cape is perhaps not helped by some crude stereotypes on both sides (Interview 06/04/2021). There is a lot of mistrust of government amongst CSOs: "So what I've heard in government, is that NGOs or CSOs are self-appointed gatekeepers that undermine the legitimate elected programme of government. So that they are underminers of democracy. That's, that's how they would be characterized by some, particularly politicians" (Interview 06/04/2021). On the other side "NGOs feel government rides roughshod, or wastes resources

by duplication. The left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing. There's a lot of cynicism in civil society, about government" (Interview 06/04/2021). These stereotypes are coupled with the situation where CSOs don't always easily distinguish between local, provincial and national government.

Other interviewees voiced a belief that parts of (national) government "actually hate the fact that the NGOs can get out there fast and deliver" (Interview 28/07/2020 09.30). Several CSOs voiced a view that government had side-lined the CBOs, FBOs and other organisations (Interview 4/08/2020) and were reluctant to engage in partnership with progressive civil society to address the hunger crisis (SAFSC 2020). Although it has been noted that the situation was better in the Western Cape than in other provinces (Davis 2020). Another common view amongst CSOs is that the "standard requested relationship between the government and CSOs is for requests from government for CSOs to do things for them, often for free" (Interview 10/02/2021).

At the same time, there was a hope that the huge role of CSOs in this crisis "will ... be enough to change attitudes within government" (CoE-FS 2020). There are already examples of part of government (such as the Department of Health in Western Cape Government with stronger traditions of working well with CSOs and other stakeholders) but it does vary from department to department (Interviews 06/04/2021; 01/04/2021 12.30).

Limited Support from Government

Overall, there was a feeling of disappointment with government by many CSOs, who felt that they were left 'holding the line' with little if any support from government (Interviews 29/07/2020 14.00; 13/08/2020; Eastern CANS, 2020). Government was seen by some as leaving a vacuum (Interview: 13/08/2020 15.00) as citizens waited for national government to release aid in the form of extended social grants and for provincial and local governments to get food aid on the ground (Food Dialogues 2020). "Government really failed us. They are supposed to take care of us" (Payne, 2020).

Without the efforts of CSO there is wide agreement that there would have been an even bigger humanitarian crisis; "the only reason we haven't had this huge crisis is because of all these non-profits and all these guys ... out there that have sort of kept that crisis at bay. There's still a crisis, no doubt, but it's not that crazy desperate crisis, and it's because of the non-profit sector" (Interview 30/07/2020).

To some extent the Solidarity Fund was intended to be an early aid provider⁴ but half of the first phase of food aid funds was allocated to only four large non-profit organisations: Food Forward, Afrika Tikkun, Islamic Relief and the Lunchbox Fund for food parcel distribution

⁴ By 30 September 2020 the Solidarity Fund had distributed R117m on food aid around the country and had allocated another R120million. It was also poised to release R100m for food vouchers and R100m on farm input vouchers for small-scale farmers (Solidarity Fund 2020b).

nationally. According to one interviewee: “So the first six weeks, or probably eight weeks, was all about the Solidarity Fund stepping in, ...and the big NGOs that were delivering their food parcels were the kind of mainstream. That was where all the action was. Completely overshadowing CANs and micro...more grass root structures” (Interview: 06/04/2021).

According to another CSO, the creation of the Solidarity Fund put other [smaller] CSOs under pressure as corporates and private individuals donated to this more visible fund (Interview 04/08/2020). Another interviewee claimed that once that significant source of funding had dried up and there were no more food parcels in the system from the Department of Social Development (DSD) or from the Solidarity Fund, the CSO landscape shifted away from these larger organisations towards the smaller scale and micro level CSOs (Interview 06/04/2021).

Positive Relationships

The relationship between CSOs and government was, however, not uniform on either side and certain departments, officials and CSOs had much closer and more constructive relationship than others. One CSO was part of quarterly stakeholder meetings with the DSD who they stated were “very open...to hearing NGOs’ input” (Interview 12/10/2020). The provincial Department of Health also historically has good relationships with stakeholders, including CSOs (Interview 01/04/2021 12.30). Another CSO, reported that they “definitely have an open door to reach City” with whom they had large projects with (Interview 05/08/2020).

Many of the larger, NGOs like Red Cross, Community Chest, PEDI and Peninsula School Feeding Association also had strong relationships with government (Interviews 06/04/2021; 05/08/2020). But this was mainly a client contractor relationship based on service delivery, not partnership, while the more grass-roots CSOs that sprang up in the crisis like the CANs and through the community kitchens had much more distant (and sometimes negative) experiences (see above). These grassroots CBOs were much more likely to have relationships with the intermediary NGOs.

Certain homeless charities also had close contractual relationships with the City of Cape Town but this was felt to leave other charities on the outside. There was feeling by these CSOs that did not have pre-existing close (service provider) relationships with government that it was more convenient for parts of government to stick to these few pre-existing (vendor) relationships during the crisis. The CSOs saw this approach as having shortcomings (Interview 13/08/2020).

Some smaller CSOs argued that the lower echelons of local government were more cooperative: “The higher you go in terms of strategic levels, there's political agendas. So what we've done is we partnered with the district offices and that's how we have beautiful,

wonderful relationship with the field workers and the district office” (Interview 07/12/2020).

Valuable relationships with individual members of the government at all levels and across departments and agencies were mentioned by numerous of the larger or intermediary CSOs. These were often at a personal level when the CSOs would have particular people that they could pick up the phone and make requests to or ask questions and also keep updated on progress (Interviews 28/07/2020 09.30; 07/12/2020). “What we found in this whole pandemic was that in the end it was down to your relationships that made stuff happen, not necessarily rules and regulations or standing operating procedures” (Interview: 07/12/2020). Crucially many of these valuable relationships were formed before the crisis: “so we kept all of those doors open. But again, we were able to do that because the doors were already open. We weren’t opening new doors” (Interview 28/07/2020 09.30).

Strong historic cross-cutting relationships between CSOs, stakeholders and various parts of government were particularly evident in long standing place-based projects and programmes. For example, one CSO felt that they had good relationships in one project area, which included the provincial Departments of Health, Social Development as well as the City of Cape Town who on a monthly basis “sit around the table planning together” (Interview 28/07/2020 09.30). The interviewee contrasted this with the situation vis-à-vis national government who they claim they operate “despite of” (ibid).

Regulatory Control and Compliance Culture

The CSOs that did work with government during lockdown often found that the government’s bureaucratic, hierarchical and (overly) regulated nature made working with government difficult. As one interviewee explained: “we continued to provide a service...which has been exceptionally frustrating for us...They did not understand how our systems worked...and they didn’t always understand what their part was in making this happen...” (Interview 28/07/2020 15.30). The same organisation pleaded that during the crisis, work could not be continued in the same way as before, as business as usual, so they needed flexibility in terms of what the requirements would be but that this was not usually forthcoming (Interview 28/07/2020 15.30).

One of the biggest areas of concern here from across the majority of the CSOs (large and small) was the reporting requirements on beneficiaries. Names, ID numbers, age, date of birth, all need to be collected and the form signed by each person coming to a community kitchen but this was argued to be cumbersome at best and infeasible at worst (Interview 01/04/2021 09.30). As one interviewee recounted: “Now I was wondering how the three year old that's being led by the five year old with the two little bowls to get the sandwich from the soup kitchen is going to even know their surname, let alone have identities number or a signature or whatever, because that's what's going on, you don't have people with ID books rocking up like in a bank and then getting food” (Interview 15/02/2021). There are also

serious issues with intermediary organisations being able to collect these forms from the community kitchens (which often don't have the capacity to scan and email (Interview 15/02/2021)).

Another CSO complained that government funding was always very specific without considering what was happening at the grassroots (Interview 27/11/2020). This level of control was felt particularly with the funding early on for food parcels, which had very specific content requirements and beneficiary lists, that were unfortunately not always well communicated (Interview 05/08/2020). One CSO recounted how they had been told that they were getting funding from the Mayor's relief fund for food parcels and had then gone away to organise this: "So for about three weeks ..[we] worked on what would be best to go into food parcel to feed a family of six for a week. And I contacted X, ...[and they said].. that they would actually make up the food parcels. So that was all organised... We had also found ... 147 families and we had a whole thing. We've gone into carbohydrates, nutrition, 4 eggs a day that kind of thing. Anyway, then they came back to us. They had chosen the families. They had chosen what goes into food parcel and it got so complicated that the board...decided that it would be better to send the money back" (Interview 3/12/2020). The same CSO pointed out that the funds from private donors and business did not have 'strings attached'.

There was a feeling that the "government was just being very rigid around, some of those things, were I feel that if they had the engagement with us beforehand, we could have said... Let's look at your requirements in order to pass things through your auditor and what we can realistically get done" (Interview 28/07/2020 15.30). This rigid relationship between government and CSOs was characterised by commentators at EDP as a symptom of a compliance culture within government where service delivery is seen as secondary to obtaining a clean audit (CoE-FS 2021).

A mis-match between government's onerous regulatory and auditing requirements and the realities of CSOs working on the ground also had a profound impact on the prospects of CSOs applying for public funds. Here the "onerous public sector environment makes it seemingly impossible for government to channel resources to... CSOs that are not 'formalised' and, registered (EDP, 2020a). As one interviewee from a CAN explained, the CSOs on the ground are "very localized and very informal. And sometimes it's very difficult for those people to then be able to approach governments, or bigger donors, who have stricter requirements. Most of them are also not registered, because a lot of them simply don't have the administrative capacity to keep up with the statutory requirements (Interview 10/02/2021).

Even some of the larger NGOs report significant barriers to successful application. The (16) criteria for qualifying for the City's grant and aid policy are seen as too numerous and include everything from rates clearance, if you own your own property to due diligence on all the directors on your board and Certificate of Acceptability (or at least proof that the

CSO had applied for one). For example, Breadline Africa reported that although they had managed to apply for the City of Cape Town's food relief programme by the deadline of 3rd September 2020, it took over 100 hours to collect the data and compile the 20 attachments (EDP 2020f). Another intermediary organisation reported that they had decided to withdraw from the application process because the administrative burdens were too high (ibid). Other intermediary organisations have had similar experiences: "We tried to apply through the City. They just sent us in circles. Eventually, we just laughed and said, 'You know what? To hell with it!' They were making absolute fools of us, so we just walked away" (Interview 30/07/2020).

Of the 129 CSOs that applied for the first of two tranches of the City of Cape Town funding in September 2020 only 14 qualified and they had to wait until February 2021 until they got any funds (Interviews 06/04/2021; 16/02/2021 16.00). These organisations also had to cover wards that they were not currently operating in so that each ward in the metro could receive funds (Interview 16/02/2021 16.00). Both operating in new neighbourhoods and the delay in receiving funds does not reflect the organisations' needs on the ground and does not reflect the need for partnership, acknowledgement or respect (Interview 01/04/2021 09.30). If kitchens don't get funding or the voucher that they were expecting then they close (ibid).

The proposal to centralise food distribution by the national DSD in April 2020 was a topic of concern and discussion amongst CSOs in the Western Cape until the matter was withdrawn in May 2020. The draft regulations on the distribution of food parcels would have seen civil society prohibited from distributing cooked food and only to be able to deliver food parcels after applying for permits 48 hours before. Jeremy Seekings argued that this attempt to control the distribution of food was one of many examples of "the commandist instincts of sections of the ANC and national government" (Seekings 2020). In response, a number of the CSOs in the Western Cape expressed their opposition to this proposal, as did the Democratic Alliance (DA) and Western Cape Government (EDP 2020m).

While many of the CSOs found the Minister's proposal worrying, there was a general belief that it would not come to pass. Perhaps this was partly because of the deep rooted and institutional opposition to the proposal in the Western Cape and also partly because of the conviction that, while no-one wanted to break the law, "I thought I was doing something right" (Interview 28/07/2020 09.30).

Dealing with Informality

One of the themes that emerged over the crisis, although it is not new, is the apparent inability of much of government to deal with informality. The struggle experienced by a number of CSOs in applying for the City of Cape Town food relief funding is an example of the result of the very formalised regulatory framework of government not being set up to deal with informality (EDP 2020f). 'Yet the majority of community-led initiatives – food

kitchens, community gardens, ECD centres, as well as the traders and spazas in the local food system, are informal and unregistered, and therefore often ‘unseen’ in the eyes of the authorising environment” (EDP 2020d).

There is a massive gap between the needs of informal sector stakeholders and government programmes, which simply fail to translate into ground-level actions because of the over-regulated and inflexible public sector operating environment (EDP 2020a). CSOs argued that what is needed is a more realistic integration of the two (ibid). As it stands, one interviewee explained, “it was very difficult for government to understand how CANs operate. For an example, there was a lot of criticism around the fact that you weren't registered...[but] they mainly operated informally” (Interview 10/02/2021). Although it might not be clear from this research how these two operating environments of the public sector and the informal sector might be brought closer together, one interviewee suggested that a good way to start would be to sit down together to begin to understand each other’s requirements and see where the areas of possible common ground are (Interview 28/07/2020 15.30).

The Food Forum

An area where there is exceptionally good interactions between CSOs and local and provincial government was the Western Cape NGO-Government Food Relief Forum, relaunched as the Western Cape Food Forum in October 2020. From the start of the lockdown, this forum aimed to build relationships within civil society and between civil society and government to better coordinate food humanitarian efforts in vulnerable populations. The forum’s slogan was ‘Connect, Communicate, Collaborate’. The inaugural Food Relief Forum meeting was held via Zoom on 23 April 2020. The initial membership of the Forum was drawn mainly from the larger food NGOs together with officials from the Western Cape Government and the City of Cape Town. However, over time, civil society membership diversified to include grassroots organisations (EDP 2020a).

Established in a time of crisis, the forum was able to operate without many of the traditional constraints which can hamper such collaborative efforts and attempted to take an approach of neutrality, collaboration and rapid response (EDP 2020a). The impact of the forum was enhanced through its access, via the facilitators at EDP, to the Western Cape Government’s bi-weekly (later weekly) Humanitarian Cluster Committee, which incorporated seven provincial government departments, SASSA, the City of Cape Town and five District Municipalities. This meant that public sector officials participating in the forum were able to represent and act on an integrated government approach, and not just the views of individual departments (EDP 2020a). In September 2020, 85 per cent of forum members said that the forum had helped them connect with organisations that they hadn’t before. 66 per cent said it helped them connected with government in a new way. While 85 per cent got a better understanding of government plans, processes and responses (EDP 2020d).

FRAMING THE FOOD PROBLEM

An important step towards changing this system is to first understand the food system (in parts and as a whole) in order to then reframe the system. This section of the report reflects on the CSOs understanding and perception of the food system its weaknesses (‘the food problem’) and their place in bringing about a transition to a more just, equitable and sustainable food system.

Placing Food on the Agenda

For some CSOs, the Covid crisis put ‘the food problem’ on their agenda for the first time and for others it became further highlighted: “it has opened our eyes in terms of the importance of the right to food and more and more organisations have started a conversation around food security and what it means” (Interview 27/10/2020). As a representative from a CSO engaged in advocacy explained: “that’s the thing about food, it’s a slow burn, people don’t fall over dead of hunger in the streets. So it takes a quite a concerted thoughtful approach to keep it in the headlines and you know pandemic is very helpful for that” (Interview 5/11/2020 16.00).

Most notably, several high profile national CSOs have become active in food issues during lockdown: Equal Education became active on food issues after learners, or ‘equalisers’, raised it as their most important issue at the start of lockdown (before even access to data and equipment to continue with learning) (Heywood 2020). They partnered with the rights based organisation Section 27 (and two governing bodies in Limpopo) to take the Department of Basic Education to court to demand the immediate resumption of the National School Feeding Programme (ibid). Another veteran campaigning organisation, Black Sash also took an active role, not in food distribution *per se*, but securing grants for disadvantaged citizens so that they were able to purchase food (CoE-FS 2020). The annual Child Gauge published by the Children’s Institute at UCT was also dedicated to Food and Nutrition Security in 2020 (May et al. 2020). Another national advocacy CSO, the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign, also increased its media and online profile during the Covid crisis but mainly has a presence on the ground in Gauteng.

Food Aid is not a Sustainable Solution

Despite the huge efforts put into food aid provision by the CSOs interviewed, there was an almost unanimous agreement that food aid is not a sustainable solution. One common reason given for this position was that ‘handouts’ create dependency: “if we continue to just feed out of government coffers, the dependency will continue, and we have to get back to self-respect, we have to get back to doing things for yourself” (Interview 28/07/2020 09.30).

There was a fear that “when we are doing food relief and we're giving people food for free, it can actually create a bigger problem” (Interview 07/12/2020). Another interviewee explained: “the charity model doesn't sit comfortably with me. I think it's a completely flawed model... where one has to rely on donations to survive. ...I was getting increasingly frustrated with the amount of food that we were giving out to all of these different communities in the form of cooked meals and food parcels” (Interview 28/07/2020 14.00). “For me, just handing over a food parcel is just not enough but maybe resourcing people with skills that they can use in future for them to be able to sustain themselves” (Interview 27/10/2020).

Community Gardens as a More Sustainable Option

In contrast, establishing household and community gardens was widely seen by CSOs as a potentially more sustainable way forward: “A month of running by the seat of my pants, trying to get funding and sitting in on the food aid forum, it struck me really deeply that I don't want to see South Africa become another African begging bowl. And how do we get out of this...and the only thing that made any sense to me, that could be done by everybody right here and right now, is to start growing their own food” (Interview 29/07/2020 11.30).

By June 2020 the concept of food gardening as a potential solution received broad based support from CSOs in a survey by the Western Cape NGO-Government Food Relief Coordination Forum (EDP 2020g). In many cases the intention was to link community gardens to ECDs and community kitchens (Interview 05/11/2020 16.00; 29/07/2020 11.30; 19/02/21). This provided not only an apparent solution to the sustainability of the community kitchens but would also ensure the nutrients grown in the community stayed in the community (Interview 11/11/2020 11.00). A presentation by the Eastern CAN groups put out a neat slogan “A way out - grow what you CAN!” (Eastern CAN, 2020) and several of the CANs were able to link their community kitchens to local food gardens (Muizenberg-CAN 2020; Interview 5/11/2020 16.00). The Cape Town Together Food Growers Initiative was also set up early on in lockdown as an online group to help share resources and knowledge.

The concept of growing food within communities connected some of the CSOs focusing on food relief with pre-existing agriculture organisations and opportunities within the Western Cape. For example, the Western Cape Department of Agriculture has a ‘One home One Garden’ campaign (WCG 2020). Similarly, a long-standing NGO that engages in training and nurturing small-scale farmers, reported an increase in interest and uptake of their training in the latter part of 2020 as well as a sky-rocketing of seedling sales (Interview 05/11/2020 16.00). CSOs on the ground started organising groups of residents to learn gardening skills from groups like Abalimi Bezekhaya, SEED and Soil for Life: “I have just posted on the group that...they have offered to come teach us how to grow our own vegetables. All we need to do is have 20 people in one area, and we need to pay R20 per person and they will give us the soil that we need, the seeds that we need. They will teach

us how to do recycling properly and how to grow our own vegetables. If each one of us starts our own garden you can get there” (Interview 12/08/2020 14.00).

Access to Land and Water

For a number of the CSOs, food gardening was also closely connected to the issue of access to land (and water): For the Cape Town Together Food Growers Initiative the land and water issue was a practical one of how to access the land available for community gardens. A land liaison group was set up in an attempt to understand how best to deal with the difficulties of working with government on this issue, who they saw as fragmented (Interview 29/07/2020 11.30). For other groups, the land issue was more deep rooted in matters of equity and justice: “We would want a food system that is centred on the land and justice. That is, it responds to land dispossessions of the past” (Interview 27/07/2020 09.30). “Food is not something that should be scarce. Food is abundant everywhere. You know fruit trees could be growing everywhere. There could be lots of land given out that people could be creating food and jobs... There's just so much opportunity in a country where we've got sun, we've got rain, we've got land, you know food should not be scarce” (Interview 09/03/2021 10.00).

Food Sovereignty and Food Justice

Although seldom mentioned explicitly, much of the discussions by food relief CSOs about growing and bartering food and supplying community kitchens touches on aspects of food sovereignty, which envisages “every community, village, town and city feeding themselves through sharing, democratically managing and protecting the commons” (SAFSC, 2020, p.3).

Only a very few CSOs involved in emergency food aid ever mentioned other conceptualisations of the food problem such as food justice and the right to food. One exception was a FBO, who see part of their spiritual and pastoral duty as seeing the bigger problem and offering thought leadership on these issues (Interview 27/07/2020). For example the FBO argued against the “constant language of ‘feeding’” which they argued “captures the unequal power relations between the feeders and the fed” and that we need to start shifting the power (CoE-FS 2021).

Nutrition

There was an understanding from many of the CSOs that ‘the food problem’ was more than just being hungry and filling people up, it is also about nutrition. Several CSOs talked about the need for balanced nutritious diets: “people don't generally eat balanced diets, because it's very starchy, because starch is cheaper. And starch, will temporarily come across to be more fulfilling than having higher levels of protein. But of course, if we're going to have more protein and your whole mixed, your balanced diet., it costs more money. So, people

starting to go very much for rice and maize meal because, it's easy to come by” (Interview 12/10/2020).

Several large intermediary organisations argued that food insecurity is not only about people not getting food, it's about people not getting the right food (Interviews 30/07/2020; 17/12/2020; 26/02/2021). There seems to have been a progressive realisation that nutrition is important as the crisis evolved: “And we suddenly realized...this whole relief effort is maybe feeding people and that's fine. But it's not necessarily nourishing people...and how do we get to where we are now around ‘Nourish to Flourish’,⁵ and nutritional outcomes, and the Child Gauge report and all that sort of stuff. But six months ago, we knew nothing of that” (Interview 06/04/2021).

Poverty and Inequality

The food problem was mostly conceived by CSOs on the ground as being closely related to wider interlinked issues of poverty and inequality: “Food security will only happen when more people have an income and they also make food a priority. This will avoid food relief to a large extent” (EDP 2020q). Several of the interviewees linked food insecurity to the many other issues that were seen to be plaguing their communities such as crime, unemployment, drug and alcohol dependence and gangsterism (Interviews 4/08/2020; 14/08/2020; 1/10/2020; 27/11/2020).

The solutions, it is acknowledged, are not simple: “we cannot look at food security in isolation. We cannot look at urban poverty or urban access to food in isolation. We need to bring other problems around it, control those problems and the political, the legal and the law enforcement roles have to be played. It needs to be various entities and stakeholders to come in and make sure that these societies are safe” (Interview 04/08/2020). The same CSO representative explained that if the wider societal problems were not addressed there would not be a favourable outcome for food security either (Interview 04/08/2020).

What is mainly apparently missing in the framing of the ‘food problem’ by food relief CSOs in the Western Cape is an understanding and analysis of the underlying structural causes of food insecurity in South Africa and the unequal power relations this entails (Ledger 2016).

⁵ Nourish to Flourish is the short name given to the [Western Cape Government’s Strategic Framework for Household Food and Nutrition Security](#).

ENGAGING IN LONG TERM CHANGE

CSOs are not a Homogenous Group

It is important to differentiate between different types of CSOs and to understand their various ideologies, capabilities, and relationships. The food relief CSOs are just a part of the CSO landscape around food. These CSOs sit alongside CSOs in other interlinked sectors within the food system, including: health and nutrition, social and economic rights, informal traders, agriculture and urban farming, social and economic development, farm and food workers, as well as academics and think tanks.

There is no one consolidated South African food movement and the food problem is conceived of differently by all these groups (Interview 19/11/2020). However, in the Western Cape there is at least a network that is visible where the CSOs and other food system stakeholders have “found each other as a province” and can at least locate each other (ibid). But it’s difficult to speak with one voice because “ideologically they’re just so many differences around food. Are we talking about food security? Are we talking about food sovereignty? People will claim their turf and fight their turf on those particular issues and unfortunately the work suffers as a result” (Interview 19/11/2020). According to another CSO based in the Western Cape, “maybe there is a common vision, but I think that there’s so many different ways to get there, and everybody’s, sort of, trying to find their niche way, also just so that they can stay in the play” (Interview 05/11/2020 16.00). While some CSO representatives argued that Covid had helped people come out of their silos and work more collaboratively (Interviews 28/10/2020; 29/10/ 2020), another representative of a CSO (that increased its foot print massively during lock down) claimed that there is still competition between the CSOs “then they’re just like, no, we’ve got our thing and you got yours...[but] it’s not about brands.” (Interview 17/12/2020).

Campaigning is not a Central Objective

Advocacy or campaign work is not central to the objectives of the food relief CSOs. “It’s out of what we normally do. That’s not something that we become involved with at all” (Interview 29/07/2020 14.00). So what we find is that “there’s a whole bunch of organizations that are very committed to their short term work, they want to make a difference, call it charity, call it humanitarian relief, whatever it is, that’s all they want to do. You know, and it’s often volunteers who are not interested in what they see as politics or systems change, or changing policies and government and things like that. They want to

feed people. They want to grow a garden, they want to give a donation, they want to solicit donations” (Interview 06/04/2021).

Only a very few of the CSOs worked to both deliver a service to citizens and push for systemic change. For example, one CSO working stated that “we're not a lobbying entity, we're not a pressure group, none of those kinds of things, but we found ourselves turned to for input on a number of things, and the fact that that's persisted over the years, makes us think that we have something valuable to contribute. So we're happy to play that role ...” (Interview 5/11/2020 11.00).

The Western Cape Food Forum has recently attempted to bring together the different types of CSOs and other stakeholders but they have noted some challenges: “So you find majority of people are mobilized and active around short termism. And a small a bunch of people are more on your kind of future change, and they're not well connected. And so I've been very conscious, and I think we all have in the Food Forum, how do we keep the attention of the short term people, but by bringing in some of these longer term concepts of where does the food system go? We've got to start thinking of nutritional outcomes and challenging retail, you know, and issues of access and poverty and affordability and everything like that. So it's been a very conscious strategy to link short term means and long term ends, and keep the majority of organizations interested in some of the longer term conversations” (Interview 06/04/2021).

It is not always easy to square these different groups because, as one interviewee explained: “I think it's complicated for them. It's too technical...and part of the struggles is too academic. It's different to talk about someone needs a house, and the right to food and [food security] pillars and what is the content of the rights of food and obligation of the state. How do you explain that to a common [person] in the streets” (Interview 19/11/2020). Added to which, most of the food relief CSOs are not particularly interested in anything they see as “theory, or academics or research or you know, unless it helps them deliver to their constituencies better” (Interview 06/04/2021).

Potentially Negative Repercussions

There are other practical reasons why food relief CSOs can stay away from advocacy or campaigning. For example, some CSOs fear that engaging in advocacy could lose them funding. As one intermediary CSO set out: “as an organization we tend to stay very clear, we've got huge number of trustees on our board that are involved in very high profile positions in many different countries that we stay completely neutral. We don't get involved, because very quickly lobbying can become political and could be detrimental. So, we stay completely neutral on anything to do with government. We don't express an opinion publicly about government failings or not, we avoid signing petitions just in case it does backfire, so we're completely nondenominational” (Interview 29/07/2020 14.00).

For other organisations, a similar logic prevails in fears that if they attempt to work on more long-term change that it will not “fit the language that the donors are looking for” (Interview 27/07/2020). Others argue that “it is difficult to find people to fund lobbying right now and those structures really do struggle” (Interview 28/07/2020 15.30). Another CSO admitted their relationship with government funders kept them from campaigning: “it's like when you are dating a rich girl and then you really want to tell her things are wrong, but you are like thinking I don't want to break up with her. I mean I'm benefiting here. I think that's how I feel like. You know, like DSD is government, they are funding X programme. So we are part of the government” (Interview 27/11/2020).

Capacity Issues

Some food relief CSOs who might potentially be interested in engaging in campaigning lack the capacity to do so. As one interviewee explained: “there aren't necessarily the resources or the capacity or the time to do the bigger picture analysis” (Interview 10/02/2021). As another CSO put it: “To be honest, we've been a kind of hamster on a wheel just trying to keep the food rolling” (Interview 16/02/2021 16.00). Another CSO representative explained that moving into advocacy was a chicken and egg like situation because “the more you speak out, the more you advocate...the more you're also likely to attract resources. So it's a cycle that grassroots organizations are trapped in because you don't have a voice. So therefore, you aren't able to attract any form of resources. So then you aren't able to grow” (Interview 10/02/2021).

There are, however, food relief organisations willing to support, if not drive, action towards longer term change. There are also “lots of [non-food related] lobbying organizations around social justice. But if they can understand that nutrition or hunger is a social justice issue, and that if you marry the two in some way, they can drive it if they wanted to. But it's providing them with the right information to help them push the particular agenda (Interview 28/07/2020 15.30).

So at the moment, while food aid CSOs are numerous and active in the Western Cape, they are apparently mostly locked into a service delivery role with limited capacity or support to see their place in the food system or to work towards bringing about long -term change of that system (i.e. fixing the underlying ‘food problem’).

WAYS FORWARD

Acknowledge the Vital and Diverse Roles of CSOs

Historically the important role that CSOs play in providing services to poor and vulnerable communities has not been widely acknowledged by government resulting in limited contact with networks to activate during crises. There is a lack of visibility – both to the government and to the public - of the services delivered by non-profit organisations in general (EDP 2020c). During the lockdown through the media and also through activities in the Food Forum, this visibility has, however, increased and there is now evidence of more recognition for civil society within parts of government. The Western Cape Recovery Plan (Western Cape Government 2021), for example, acknowledges that the Western Cape Government has “appreciated anew the importance of partnerships” formed with civil society in the wake of the negative impacts of Covid.

It is now critical that the important role that CSOs play in managing the ongoing food problem are recorded, recognised and acknowledged. One interviewee from an intermediary CSO argued: “there needs to just be a wider awareness of the level of work that they're doing. That they're still people that have been volunteering to cook in their homes for almost a year now, and to have the whole community coming, and expecting meals, day in and day out” (Interview 26/02/2021). The interviewee continued there is also a “need to ensure that those organizations have an opportunity to be considered legitimate”. Another interviewee argues “it's about acknowledgement...community organizations stepped into the breach immediately, and didn't get funding...If you value somebody or something, you provide the support that they need in order to operate” (Interview: 01/04/2021 09.30).

Furthermore, it should be recognised that CSOs can play a wide variety of functions in society. There is a tendency in government to see CSOs principally as service providers to government rather than supporting them to fulfil their full range of potential functions. While this report focuses on CSOs that provide emergency food relief, we can already see that CSOs have fulfilled a number of roles to address the food problem including, setting up and running community kitchens, making and distributing food parcels, coordinating, facilitating urban agricultural projects, supporting and running ECDs including food provision, and assisting with economic development and livelihoods of vulnerable groups.

While the barriers to engaging in advocacy and as part of their day-to-day activities have been articulated by many of the CSOs that took part in this research, the wider functions that CSOs can play in principle in achieving long-term food system change have been well documented in the literature. These functions include: advocating for the food insecure and demanding political action; holding governments to account for their actions and responsibilities; cooperating in multi-stakeholder partnerships to tackle food insecurity;

holding deep knowledge about the local food system through diverse involvement; and performing food and agriculture related education (Dubbels et al. 2020).

In the case of South Africa, where the right to food is enshrined in the Constitution, CSOs have a particularly critical role in demanding government to fulfil its responsibility towards its citizens. CSOs are also ideally placed to contribute their local knowledge and unique perspective to contribute to an inclusive policy making. CBOs in particular can have a deep, fine grained understanding of the intricacies of the local urban food system and the specific needs of the most vulnerable in their communities. This makes them ideally place to be partners, not only for delivering emergency food aid, but also finding long-term solutions (including policy solutions) to the food problem that are grounded in the local social, cultural and economic circumstances. This partnership can include co-producing the knowledge on which decisions about the food system are made (Paganini et al. 2021).

Create an Enabling Environment for CSOs

There is also a need for government to recognize and appreciate that many of the CSOs are informal so it is necessary to find a way to work with those organisations without trying to fit them into a government-familiar mould (EDP 2020q). Creating an enabling environment for these informal organisations, rather than controlling through heavy-handed regulations is therefore critical. There are well-established government programmes for reducing red tape or increasing the ease of doing business, aimed at the private sector and stimulating the market. An ‘ease of doing community development’ to stimulate social innovation and to create an enabling environment for community-led initiatives could go a long way towards creating an enabling environment in the Western Cape (EDP 2020r).

As one interviewee argues “I firmly believe that these civil organizations should be treated by government as investors in our society. In the same way that they see private investors as people to prioritize...The NGOs, community kitchens, [and] community organizations doing this work, are investing in society with no profits, with no personal gain, but they are treated with less respect than private investors who are doing it for profit, which doesn't make sense. So I think they should be elevated and they should be treated as partners (Interview 01/04/2021 09.30).

Further investigation will be needed, as well as dialogue between CSOs and government, in order to identify what an enabling environment would look like in practice and where the leverage points are within government. Within this investigation the culture of regulatory compliance that underpins local and provincial government systems and processes is likely to come to the fore. There is a culture of “getting your processes and procedures right, so you can avoid getting into trouble with audit queries from the auditor general is valued higher than service delivery and transgressions are punished more than non-delivery of services” (CoE-FS 2021). This leads to public institutions that are no longer fit for purpose because they are designed to achieve regulatory compliance (‘governance for government’)

and not service delivery or an enabling environment for communities ('governance for communities') (ibid).

While institutional culture will take time to change, a more immediate way forward is to look at how formalized intermediary CSOs can build better partnerships and relationships with grassroots and informal CSOs, including being sensitive to issues of power and the need to build capacity in CBOs.

Shift from 'Participation' to 'Partnering'

Experiences over the last year have once again demonstrated that government cannot deal with the food crisis (or any other crisis) on its own and needs partners. Government needs to "accept that they can't do everything, ... you're not admitting failure, you just admitting that you can't do everything. And I think that that kind of happened in Covid ... So I think it's kind of continuing along that train of making themselves a bit vulnerable and ...reaching out to organizations and reaching out to companies, so not taking the passive role, but ...actively trying to partner" (Interview 11/11/2020).

So we need to find ways to shift the public sector community engagement approach from 'participation', which mainly involves commenting on government policies and plans, to 'partnering', which involves co-planning and co-implementation. Greater collaboration with CSOs can help to reach vulnerable individuals and groups of people who are hard-to-reach, especially those who are outside the grant system. In this way government should recognise the complementarity between their own efforts and those of CSOs and emergent solidarity networks. In a resource constrained environment, effective social relief will require increased coordination and collaboration across government, the CSO sector and private philanthropy (Wills et al. 2020). But this collaboration with civil society should not only take place during times of crisis, only to revert to type during a return to 'normality' (EDP 2020d).

Build Relationships Outside Times of Crisis

Building partnerships requires efforts, and resources, on both sides that must be sustained year on year. It is important not to squander the relationships that have been built over the past eighteen months in the spirit of 'doing things differently', after the crisis. The Food Forum has demonstrated that government and civil society are able to work together in a structured way to improve governance outcomes (EDP 2020d). Covid hotspot teams are another example of where unprecedented levels of collaboration between government and civil society has recently been demonstrated and could be built on. These intergovernmental teams were part of the Western Cape's Government's hot spot strategy which specifically targeted the needs of each area and community and quickly expanded to include active collaboration between all levels of government, the private sector and civil society, including collaboration in supporting community kitchens and gardens.

Andrew Boraine from the EDP suggests that there is a need to build on partnerships and networks within communities (bonding networks), social solidarity across race and class (bridging networks), and partnerships between government, farmers, food producers, formal and informal retailers, NGOs and communities (strategic food system networks) to connect the ‘top-down’ authorising environment with the ‘bottom-up’ mobilising environment (EDP 2020g). This could start by leveraging off existing community kitchens and related community resilience networks. These operations are closest to the issues on the ground, and have extensive local knowledge coupled with deep local credibility. Community kitchens could be places of employment for local youth through the Expanded Public Works Programme and the proposed Social Employment Fund and linked to community gardens and ECDs (EDP 2020c). These two funding mechanisms hold potential to support CBOs and social networks so that they can become more sustainable and is currently being explored by the Food Forum and the CANs.

The kitchens could also assist with local economic recovery efforts through, for example, leveraging local procurement to the kitchens. Public-private-community sector partnerships could also be established based around food kitchens to drive multiple programmes (EDP 2020c). This implies that government needs to give attention to how it can support and enable community-led recovery actions and structures as much as it focuses on delivering its own projects and programmes (EDP 2020a). A Whole of Society approach has been very effective for food relief distribution during the crisis and a lasting legacy of this crisis could be these community channels for tackling the food problem more long-term as well as for other development (CoE-FS 2020).

Link Short-Term Solutions to Long-Term Systems Change

There is a need to connect the short term solutions with the long term change. Food relief, although vital for thousands of people (before, during and after the crisis), is not a solution to the food problem in itself and must be linked to longer-term change. This also applies to the much needed micro level solutions on the ground such as community kitchens, community gardens and feeding programmes in ECDs. These activities and sites are important areas for community mobilisation and action to address immediate needs on the ground. However, they can also be ‘sites of struggle’ within the wider food system, where the dominant narrative of what the food system should look like and who it should benefit can be debated and contested (CoE-FS 2020). In this way community kitchens and gardens can act as a mobilising environment that become a means to an end towards wider food systems transition rather than a solution in itself.

However, to effect more long-term food system change rather than perpetuate cycles of service delivery, the CSOs engaged in these bottom up mobilising environments need to be connected to both the top down authorising environment of government and also the wider food systems governance networks. The CSOs also need to have the capacity to engage in these environments and platforms in a meaningful and strategic way so that they can also

contribute to shaping decisions about food. We can start to do this by helping CSOs and other stakeholders in the food system ‘see’ and understand the system as a whole (EDP 2020a). CSOs need a holistic view of the food system, not just separate parts of that system such as production, retail or food relief (ibid) if they are to connect to the longer-term change of that system.

Support and Participate in Inter-Sectoral Stakeholder Forums

We can also help connect CSOs through vibrant inter-sectoral stakeholder forums at a more strategic level. The success of similar structures in the health sector shows how multi-stakeholder forums can be mobilised quickly during a crisis to initiate and implement locally appropriate and innovative solutions (Interview 01/04/2021 12.30). There are already thick networks between civil society, academia and local government that have been building over the last 15 years around food, including: the Food Forum; the Western Cape Food Governance Community of Practice; and the Food Security Working Groups in Province and City. These networks are overlapping in a way that is beginning to form a ‘network-of-networks’ increasing connectivity and coordination of food stakeholders in the province. CSOs must be supported and encouraged to engage and shape these forums rather than working in their own silos.

In some parts of the world place-based urban networks have been able to actively shift food systems (Haysom 2020). They have been able to curtail national government’s fixation on the formal system, actively lobbying for more equitable distribution of benefits, to name but a few (ibid). New relationships, new networks and new partnerships, across income and race, have emerged during the Covid crisis. This may not yet reflect pluralistic governance but the governance processes of the past year have been very different to historical processes (ibid) and provide insights into novel collaborative food governance arrangements that could help provide far more integrated and local scale responses to food and nutrition security going forward.

CONCLUSION

Moving faster and more flexibly than government, CSOs mobilised to address the acute food needs of the millions of people in South Africa impacted by the massive shock of the pandemic. In the Western Cape CSOs provided at least half of the totally food relief in the first few months of lock down and continue to provide food relief over eighteen months on. While this is a tremendous achievement, we should take heed from a veteran researcher into civil society in South Africa, Adam Habib (2005), to take care not to fall into the trap of celebrating these efforts as representing the vibrancy of South African society: “Indeed they should be recognised for what they are, which is survivalist responses of poor and

marginalized people who have had no alternative in the face of a retreating state that refuses to meet its socio-economic obligations to its citizenry” (p.9). While during the pandemic there were innovative civil society responses that started to stretch beyond class and racial boundaries in the development of CANs, the food insecure remain largely voiceless and excluded from the food system. Agency has instead been expressed in the strategies applied to enable food access (Haysom 2018).

This research has shown that, CSOs within communities have been crucial in providing access to food for vulnerable people and households during the Covid crisis. At the same time larger intermediary CSOs have played a vital role in channelling funds and other resources to these CBOs. Much of this activity has been despite (rather than enabled by) the actions of government. While there does appear to have been an increased appreciation by the Western Cape Government of the importance of working with CSOs in this crisis, institutional compliance culture and a lack of existing relationships with CSOs has made working with CSOs at best difficult. Relationships between CSOs and the City of Cape Town are even more ambiguous.

Consequently, the Covid crisis provides another opportunity (similar to the 2017 water crisis) to consider what a stronger position government would have been in to act effectively had it already put in the work to become a collaborative enabling institution before the crisis. It is not too late. Now is the time to allocate resources to strengthen its relationships and partnerships and to create an enabling environment for CSOs as necessary components of building a resilient society and a responsive government.

Furthermore, consideration must be given to the almost universal view of the CSOs that food aid is not a sustainable solution to the ‘food problem’. The acts of self-determination and proactive agency (Haysom 2018) that we have seen in the actions of CSOs providing emergency food aid during lock down, especially those within communities, are a response to a formal food system that is not functioning for the majority of people in South Africa. This was the case before the Covid crisis and will remain so afterwards.

Food aid in the form of ‘handouts’ has previously been accused of “keeping people from rupturing the very system that gives them handouts” (Cherry 2016, p141). Most notably urban food banks have been highlighted as having the potential to “depoliticize food insecurity and hunger” (Warshawsky, 2014, p.112). Research into food sovereignty and food democracy has shown that “people require information to break the myths of the food system and make them aware that their problems are not unique to their situations, but rather [to do with] the structure of the food system in South Africa” (Cherry 2016, p141). The current (food) CSO landscape indicates a gap in these political and awareness raising roles necessary for food systems change.

Similar to previous research conducted in Johannesburg (Warshawsky, 2014) this research has found that most of the CSOs involved in food within the Western Cape are service

delivery organisations. Only a very few CSOs engage in advocacy and awareness raising and most of these are at the national level and/or are in the health sector. These advocacy orientated CSOs in the food sector are underdeveloped and under resourced. The literature on CSOs in South Africa warns us that the prevalence of service delivery CSOs may not be entirely neutral (Habib and Taylor 1999). For some critics (Bond, 2000; 2006), this represents an explicit co-optation of CSOs by the state to limit their role and curtail their autonomy and opposition to the state.

To link short-term solutions to food insecurity (and the CSOs that provide these) with long-term change, it is critical that the full range of CSOs and their functions are appreciated and supported by government and other partners. We must move away from a system where CSOs are locked into (only) service delivery 'like hamsters on a wheel'. A plurality of civil society and the diverse sets of relations that it engenders with government (both adversarial and collaborative) is a much needed element of healthy food democracy and local food governance in the Western Cape and should be enabled and embraced by government.

What if government viewed CSOs as champions of the people, incubators of innovation, partners in policy formulation rather than troublesome service delivery partners? What if government understood CSOs in terms of governance dynamics rather than focusing on individual organisations for purposes of administration, regulation and auditing? What if government understood the mutually reinforcing nature of the different roles that CSOs play in food system transition and acknowledged and supported a diversity of approaches through an enabling environment and strong investment in relationship building? What if CSOs were treated like a national resource and governance partners?

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Interviews Conducted

- 27/07/2020 09.00, FBO, Cape Town
- 28/07/2020 09.30, NGO, Cape Town
- 28/07/2020 14:00, NGO, winelands
- 28/07/2020 15.30, NGO, Cape Town
- 29/07/2020 11.30, CAN, WC
- 29/07/2020 14:00, NGO, Cape Town

- 30/07/2020, NGO, Cape Town
- 04/08/2020, NGO Cape Town
- 05/08/ 2020 12:00, NGO, Cape Town
- 12/08/2020 12:00, NGO, Cape Town
- 12/08/2020 14:00, CBO, Cape Town
- 13/08/2020 15.00, FBO, Cape Town
- 14 08 2020 10:00 CBO, Cape Town
- 12/10/2020, NGO, Cape Town
- 01/10/2020 11:30, CBO, Cape Town
- 26/10/2020, Advocacy CSO
- 27/10/2020, Advocacy CSO
- 28/10/2020 Advocacy CSO
- 29/10/2020, Advocacy CSO
- 04/11/2020, Advocacy CSO
- 5/11/2020 16.00, NGO Cape Town
- 5/11/2020 11.00 CBO & Advocacy, Cape Town
- 11/11/2020, Social innovation, Cape Town
- 12/11/2020 11:30, Social innovation, Cape Town
- 18/11/2020 12:00, FBO, Cape Town
- 19/11/2020 11.00, Advocacy CSO
- 23/11/2020 16.30, Advocacy CSO
- 24/11/2020 13.30, Advocacy CSO, Cape Town
- 27/11/2020 11:00, FBO, Cape Town
- 03/12/2020, NGO, Cape Town

- 07/12/2020, NGO, Cape Town
- 17/12/2020, NGO, national
- 09/02/2021, CAN, Cape Town
- 10/02/2021 12.30, CAN, Cape Town
- 15/02/2021 12:00, CBO, Cape Town
- 16/02/2021 16.00, CAN, Cape Town
- 16/02/2021 13.00, CAN, Cape Town
- 19/02/2021, NGO, Cape Town
- 22/02/2021 12:00, CAN, Cape Town
- 23/02/2021 15:00, CBO, Cape Town
- 24/02/2021 11:00, CBO, Cape Town
- 26/02/2021, Social Innovation, Cape Town
- 01/03/2021, CAN, Cape Town
- 09/03/2021, 11.00 Foundation, Cape Town
- 09/03/2021 10.00, CBO, Cape Town
- 10/03/2021,10:30, CBO, Cape Town
- 17/03/2021, Provincial Government, Cape town
- 23/03/2021, Provincial Government, Cape town
- 25/03/2021 12.00, Provincial Government, Cape town
- 01/04/2021 09.30, Collaborative Intermediary Organisation, Cape Town.
- 01/04/2021 12.30 Provincial Government, Cape Town
- 06/04/2021 14.30, Collaborative Intermediary Organisation

