

Unemployment Drives Young People to the Brink of Hunger

By Viwe Mazwana

19 October 2023

The cost of living continues to rise in South Africa, making it increasingly difficult for young people to afford basic necessities, especially food. As unemployment rates remain extremely high in South Africa, a growing number of households find themselves having to make the painful decision to eat just one meal a day to make ends meet.

This harsh reality has become a daily experience for Siphuxolo Luthuli, a 27-year-old from Thokoza, "I eat one meal a day because my sister is the only one employed at home, her minimum wage salary feeds five adults and her two kids in our house, and the groceries she buys can't sustain us for the whole month," he explains. His story is not an isolated case either: in many communities, young people and their families are struggling with the same challenges, unemployment and poverty.

There are many root causes of this crisis, including economic instability, poor governance, and the continuous increase in the price of essential basic needs, particularly food. Food prices in South Africa have increased dramatically in the past few years, making it difficult for many homes to sustain a balanced diet. The cost of staple foods such as maize, bread, cooking oil, and eggs has skyrocketed, leaving many with no choice but to cut back on meals. This problem has a serious consequence not only on nutrition but also on the overall health and well-being of young people.

The unemployment rate in South Africa among the youth remains very high. The lack of job opportunities has left young people burdened by financial hardships that force them to make difficult sacrifices.

As a result, some people in Thokoza who run feeding schemes which run in schools have stepped in to provide assistance to those affected by this crisis. This group of women take what food is left-over after feeding school learners and distribute it amongst local unemployed youths, offering the second meal of the day and in many cases, a lifeline. "For the past five years, I've been tirelessly looking for a job with no luck. Receiving bread from the ladies at the school really alleviates the stress of wondering where I'm going to get the next meal from," said Thabang Lekota, who benefits from the feeding scheme.

Ayanda Magubane, the founder of Bongumosa Non-Profit Organisation (NPO), has witnessed the hardships faced by young people in Thokoza, and this critical issue motivated him to take action, "I have seen the struggles and desperation of young people here in Thokoza. It broke my heart to see them go without proper meals, that's why I started an NPO – to provide monthly food parcels and also to bring hope and sustenance to those who need it the most," he adds.

Communities are facing the difficult task of finding sustainable solutions to food insecurity, "Communities must organise and provide land patches for food gardens to fight the battle against hunger amongst young people and their families," says Poppy Makhubo, a young social activist based in Thokoza.

As working class communities struggles with the rising costs of living and expensive food, it is important for the community to work together.

This article was submitted on 09 October 2023. You may republish this article, so long as you credit the authors and Karibu! Online (www.Karibu.org.za), and do not change the text. Please include a link back to the original article.

