

The shrinking food basket and the DA's proposals to get people out of poverty

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Honourable Chairperson, the 81% of households cutting down on at least one meal a day and 41% having no means to feed their families are people – they are South Africans; they are men, women and children. Not so long ago, many of them had jobs through which they were earning a living to take care of their families.

All that went up in smoke when Covid hit causing unemployment to soar; when violent and devastating riots took place in July last year costing lives and affecting thousands of formal and informal businesses; and when floods wreaked havoc in KZN and the Eastern Cape, with many of those families still reliant on mass-relief shelters. This puts extra strain on their finances as they have to travel further to work and school, adding to their already high cost of living.

The high cost of food affects the quality of daily meals. In South Africa, 27% of children suffer from stunting, which is “the failure of children to reach their full growth potential as a result of long-term poor diet, health and/or care”. This definition could have easily been conceptualized for the South African strain of child stunting. The lack of care for especially children that has been displayed by the ANC government in the recent history is astounding.

Where else have you seen Ministers taken to court in order to provide starving children and families with meals? The National School Nutrition programme case comes to mind where millions of children were suddenly without food at a time when their caregivers had no means to fend for them. Is that caring for the day-to-day nutritional needs of vulnerable children?

No, it is not.

It is important to note that the DA was involved in all these court actions, because we will stop at nothing to ensure that the poor and vulnerable are cared for in real terms. Unlike the ANC government, we do not make empty promises. They speak one thing and do (or don't do) the exact opposite.

As champions of whole of society approach to South Africa's many problems, man-made and otherwise, the DA has continued to come up with well researched, realistically crafted and time sensitive interventionist solutions to the hardships so many are experiencing. We not only propose these from research but we are implementing some of them in our DA governments. We hope President Ramaphosa – to whom the DA Leader presented these interventions a couple of weeks ago – will put South Africans first and implement them. In short, the solutions are:

1. Cut taxes and levies on fuel to reduce the cost of transporting food;
2. Reallocate the R50 million food aid for Cuba to feed hungry people at home;

3. Scrap VAT on the food items most commonly purchased by the poorest households by reviewing and expanding the zero-rated food basket;
4. Review and reduce import tariffs on foods consumed by low-income households;
5. Provide private titles to all land reform beneficiaries to increase food supply and security while reducing prices.

As the Democratic Alliance, we have, and continue to demonstrate that caring is a doing word – not a slogan to try and win votes. In the DA-run Western Cape, we are implementing the following interventions to ensure people’s constitutional rights to food are achieved:

- Almost 500 000 school children are fed daily by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) through school feeding schemes,
- 25 000 children are fed by the WCED through after-school and youth development programmes;
- The WCED has helped establish 571 food gardens;
- WC DSD feeds 158 770 young children through ECD centres;
- WC DoH First 1 000 days programme provides nutritional support for children at risk of malnutrition; and
- WC DSD feeds 101 845 people through funding soup kitchens.

As a caring organization, we will not tire in proposing implementable solutions to save lives and livelihoods of the people of South Africa. The recent increase in food prices has reduced the value of grants that are way below the lower bound poverty line to levels where households depending on these grants are left with very little to live on.

According to the Household Affordability Index by the Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice and Dignity Group, an average food basket costs R4776 in 2022 compared to last year’s R4241. It is for this reason that creative and constructive initiatives need to be developed. This is why the DA is proposing leveraging the potential of communities to plant their own vegetables to feed families. Many of these initiatives are already thriving and form the backbone of not only survival, but also healthy living for many households.

It is a shame that millions of South Africans are facing starvation and hunger, the very human rights enshrined in the Constitution. This while the government of the ANC dithers.

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