

Little food security in Masi and Ocean View

YOLANDE DU PREEZ

A study on food security in Ocean View and Masi-phumelele has revealed that more than 80% of households have experienced hunger.

The study done by Swedish student, Helena Rommelmann, 46, included Kommetjie and found that while most Kommetjie residents had never experienced hunger, it was an everyday occurrence for many in Ocean View and Masi-phumelele.

Speaking to the Echo while visiting South Africa, Ms Rommelmann said she defined food security as having access to and being able to afford nutritious food.

During her study in March, a total of 902 households were sampled and the survey she used was based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES), developed by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

She said residents from each community as well as women from the expanded public works programme (EPWP) conducted the surveys by going door-to-door at formal and informal houses.

The FIES survey consists of eight questions and is specifically-designed to measure the experiences of food access and result in an index showing the severity of food insecurity in households ranging from 0 up to eight where 0 indicates a food secure household and eight indicates a household experiencing hunger.

A total of 687 households completed the FIES questions which resulted in a 76% response rate and in addition, six focus groups were carried out, involving 29 individuals.

"The survey results indicate significant differences in means between all three areas," she said.

In Kommetjie, research showed that households were generally food secure with an average of 0.54 on the FIES scale while Masi-phumelele and Ocean View experienced moderate to severe food

insecurity, with an average of 5.44 for Masi-phumelele, and a 6.56 for Ocean View.

That, Ms Rommelmann said, was due to the high unemployment rate in both areas. Statistics further indicated that 8.1% of people in Masi-phumelele relied on grants as their only income while in Ocean View it was 38%.

"These figures indicate considerable differences in engagement with the labour market between the two areas, and by this, it is interpreted that Ocean View has higher unemployment rates," she said.

Except for the eight FIES questions, enquiries about the household income were made as an additional way of measuring the distribution of food security and she looked at how money was spent on food in relation to the costs of an adequate, but basic, nutritional diet.

For this research she used the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action (PACSA) Food Price Barometer, a monthly report that gives a more accurate picture of food price inflation for low-income households.

The Pacsa report showed the average cost of feeding one person was R614.58 a month, keeping in mind that cost could vary according to the person's age and gender and range between R542.26 for a child between 3 to 9 years old and up to R686.90 for a teenage boy, a physically active man or a pregnant or breastfeeding woman.

Dividing the median costs for food, with the number of people in the households, the costs of food are about R2 000 per person per month in Kommetjie.

For Masi-phumelele the monthly amount spent on food for one person is about R267, while the money spent on food for one person per month in Ocean View is about R250.

Sherine Arendse, project manager of the Valley Development Project (VDP), an NPO that provides holistic developmental inter-



■ Members of youth who helped Helena Rommelmann find participants for the focus group interviews in Masi-phumelele. Pictured, from left, are, Phumza Kibi, Zizo Mdingi, Farai Mudi, Ms Rommelmann, Sivuyisiwe Mbede and Abulele Bekiswa.

vention in Masi-phumelele and Ocean View, said up to 600 children a day were fed through its feeding programme but this has shrunk to 200 a day due to reduced funding.

Ms Arendse said the children were fed throughout the year through VDP's youth groups, camps and excursions, holiday clubs and after-school programme.

The biggest hurdles to feeding more children were limited funding, the inability to pay staff, running costs such as gas used for cooking and the spike in the fuel price.

"Nutrition is one of the basic needs for human existence and this basic need is not always met and unfortunately the children are at the receiving end of this," she said.

Dr Jo Hunter-Adams, of the UCT School of Health and Public Medicine, said a team of researchers at the African Centre for Cities at UCT found very high levels of food insecurity in low-income neighbourhoods in Cape Town. She said in some of the house-

holds, 88% had gone without food at least once in six months.

She said their current Nourishing Spaces research project, which is based in Masi-phumelele and in other African countries, highlighted the overlap between hunger and diet-related diseases like diabetes and high blood pressure.

She said they found where families go through cycles of hunger, food choice was very limited, and people ended up eating ultra-processed foods that lacked nutrients because these foods were relatively cheap.

"We found that residents of Masi-phumelele are very aware of and concerned about diseases such as high blood pressure and diabetes, and they have noticed that many people are ill," she said.

Justin Bonello, founder of Neighbourhood Farm, an NPO which focuses on the cultivation of urban food and the picking, cleaning and packaging of food crops in urban environments, said food security was closely tied to an individual having a job.

"Our pilot project has been run-

ning for almost nine months and we now have 25 permanent staff drawn from Ocean View and Masi-phumelele that are predominantly paid by the sale of produce to more well resourced or affluent areas such as Kommetjie and Fish Hoek.

"This bridge between our food in-secure and food secure communities we believe will be critical in dealing with food security going forward," he said.

He believes the way forward is by setting up a market garden in Ocean View to train an army of independent growers and farmers, and provide them market access, nurturing both jobs and food security.

Cayla Ann Tomas Murray, spokeswoman for the Department of Social Development (DSD), said the department supported early childhood development centres that provided food to children in various communities, and the Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport (DCAS) was responsible for mass participation, opportunity and access and development and growth (MOD) centres, which provide food to children at schools involved in the after-school game changer programme.

She said there were two MOD centres in Ocean View, at Marine Primary School and Ocean View High School. Both these schools receive feeding during MOD programme activities.

However, there are no MOD centres in the Masi-phumelele.

In addition, Ms Tomas Murray said, the Western Cape Education Department fed up to three schools in Masi-phumelele and Ocean View as part of its feeding scheme.

The programme had expanded year on year, with allocations to the nutrition scheme having more than doubled since 2009/2010.

This year, she said, was no different with the amount allocated to the feeding programme for the 2018/2019 financial year being just over R357 million, an increase of more than R20 million compared to last year.