

8 *Ethical Obligation to Assist Impoverished South Africans*

Introduction

By November 2019, millions of South Africans are experiencing hunger pangs or pains (StatsSA, 2019). This gnawing feeling which is triggered by strong contractions of the stomach when it is empty can be alleviated by eating adequate food at regular intervals. I presume most of us have, on occasion experienced this abdominal sensation. But, does this feeling raise any ethical considerations, especially as the famished live in a country with high inequality, high per capita income and available agricultural products? Undoubtedly, the disproportionate percentage of people experiencing hunger in the midst of abundance cannot be ethically justified nor taken for granted. A deeply meaningful question worth responding to is this: Does the social contract entered into by the state and its people morally oblige the former to ensure the sustenance of the latter?¹

As some readers may have already gathered, the issue at hand is not merely about engaging in conceptual ramblings, rather it is the problem of everyone who sees famished women and children on street corners. Poverty, unemployment and exclusion from social assistance has plunged more than six million South Africans into hunger (StatsSA, 2019). At the national level, the state has instituted a social assistance programme which provides for those with special needs, namely, orphans, the disabled, aged and families caring for foster children (Nkrumah, 2018a). Nonetheless, millions who cannot attribute their hardships to natural causes such as being young, old or disabled are cut off. Suffice to say that on per capita basis, it is not beyond the capacity of the state to reverse this trend. But this can only happen when leaders

¹ A classic example of a social or political contract is the constitution. This form of contract could be defined as a binding agreement between the government of a state and its citizens, setting out the rights of the people, what measures should be adopted to safeguard these rights, and the limits on the powers of government.

decide to take decisions which are framed towards providing this 'missing middle' with the means to satisfy their basic needs.

Yet, despite the high number of food-insecure households, policy-makers have unfortunately (mis)directed resources to other projects. For comparative purposes, in 2018, the South African National Roads Agency awarded a ZAR 1.65 billion (US\$ 1.14 million) contract for the construction of a mega-bridge (Arnoldi, 2018; De Villiers, 2018).² The inference is that the state puts a higher premium on infrastructural development than on the wellbeing of the impoverished section of the population. At the local level, civil society organisations (CSOs) have not adequately responded to this dilemma in any significant manner. In a broader sense, these organisations have not actively embarked on a campaign, gone on strikes, filed court applications, taken to the streets or sent written memoranda to the executive or members of parliament demanding an all-inclusive social policy programme. These are the glaring facts about persistent hunger in South Africa. The state of hunger may, therefore, be said to be *man-made* (insufficient political will) and not *natural* causes per se. While there are several places across the globe where millions suffer the same fate of hunger, my focus is on South Africa due to the highly paradoxical state of its crises: hunger in the midst of plenty. With that, the next section considers whether there is any moral obligation for the haves to assist the have-nots overcome their hunger.

Why Help Is Needed?

Confronted with rising food prices, population explosion and high unemployment, the real question confronting South Africa is how the state can avert hunger. This section begins with the proposition that in the interest of both the haves and have-nots, it would be prudent if everyone in the first camp could be benevolent, and the uncharitable coerced through the imposition of poor tax. The history of poor tax could be traced to the sixteenth century, where Henry VII, King of England, mandated the Catholic Church to carry out different forms of welfare programmes, including provision of food and clothing for

² The exchange rate of the South African rand has greatly fluctuated over the last twelve months and is R14/\$ as at September 2019. Nonetheless, an exchange rate of R11/\$1 is used here.

paupers (Persky, 1997). As rulers of the Kingdom of England, the House of Tudor experimented with different 'poor laws' for five decades following a decline in the influence of the church to continue the practice (Cross, 1928).³ The poor laws contained provisions which demonstrated a genuine state concern by admitting those unable to support themselves into workhouses where inmates were provided with accommodation and employment. In 1601, Queen Elizabeth I adopted the Elizabethan Poor Law which sought to establish a mandatory taxation for distribution of relief to poor families (Chokshi and Katz, 2018). Based on the unique circumstances of each community, the law mandated local administrators to exercise their discretion on what type of assistance was needed, who qualified and how to ensure equitable distribution of resources. To ensure continuity of such assistance, the area of responsibility slowly widened from the parish, through the monarch (1834) to the local elites (1930), and ultimately to the entire nation (Bruce, 1968: 13). Beneficiaries were either entitled to indoor aid (entering into a workhouse) or outdoor aid which encompassed public employment, wage subsidies, direct transfers or food subsidies. By 1803, of the 11 per cent or one million citizens of Wales and England who benefited from this initiative, only 16 per cent were 'impotent poor' or physically infirmed such as the crippled, blind and elderly (Persky, 1997: 181). Poor relief was thus a ransom paid by the affluent to (i) keep their conscience and windows intact; (ii) shield them from the undesirable behaviour of paupers; and (iii) protect public order and private property as destitution triggers discontent (Van Leeuwen, 1994).

As in the Elizabethan era, a current poor tax could achieve its intended objective if the state set up a comprehensive food tax system, underpinned by strict legislation outlining how much is needed for the programme, who should pay what, who is eligible for assistance, and what or how much should be distributed to each vulnerable household. There should also be room for listing recognised NGOs mandated to receive and distribute supplementary assistance to the target group. To rid the programme of corruption and pilfering, there should be a monitoring mechanism to visit warehouses and distribution centres to ensure proper accountability on the part of government and private distribution agencies. Without the authority of the state, in the form of

³ Poor law was a body of laws adopted to provide relief for the impoverished.

providing accurate estimates of how much each should contribute, the affluent may either underestimate their obligation in this regard or be inadequately informed of the exact amount they are obliged to contribute. In other words, without universal estimation, some might comfort themselves with the thought that it is not their obligation to ensure the survival of others and opt for lesser contributions, as witnessed in sixteenth century British monasteries (Persky, 1997).

Even though rhetorically inspired by the aspiration of eradicating poverty and improving living standards, national interventions are mostly tailored towards stimulating investment and expanding aggregate production with little consideration on who gains, specifically in terms of individual and household access. Yet, as highlighted, expansion in supply has not translated into access for many. Does this trend raise an ethical question as to whether those currently contemplating on how to get bread be left in their despair? This question elicits a discursive, yet equivalent question: do the state, CSOs and the affluent have a moral duty to alleviate the hunger pains of the have-nots? It must be noted that the activities which the first two actors have instituted to remedy individual/household food insecurity have been hazy at best. To be exact, the manner in which those at the helm perceive hunger, as I shall argue in subsequent sections, needs to be revised, paying closer attention, in particular, to core issues which have been trivialised in our contemporary community.

It goes without saying that assessing moral responsibility and the hunger condition of a vulnerable group is a moral discourse. It entails questioning and ultimately taking a moral position. To this end, the chapter kicks off with the proposition that stomach pangs caused by hunger are heinous. While some readers may indeed agree, others may equally concur but with a different perspective. This will not be the chapter's claim. On the question of individual hunger, some may take different kinds of unconventional views, and maybe to them exhaustion from lack of nourishment is in itself acceptable if springing from man-made causes such as laziness or misuse of one's resources. It is, however, beyond the scope of this chapter to advance arguments aimed at refuting or justifying this observation. The chapter is limited to assessing the conditions of millions of people one cannot conclusively claim are all slothful or squandered a large proportion of their inheritance on unnecessary luxuries. At least, in the case of South Africa, there is a wide array of classical and contemporary scholarly work which

discusses the suffering of many black South Africans due to the negative impacts of its chequered past, current stagnant economic growth and high unemployment rate (Andrews, 2006; Boisen, 2017; Nkrumah, 2018b).

It is worth noting that some utilitarians believe that food insecurity places an obligation on states and the well-off to provide for their deprived counterparts (Singer, 1972; Hardin, 1995; Wenar, 2007). But, as a counter discourse, what if the state claims it lacks the budgetary allocation for this purpose? I draw from the work of the aforementioned utilitarian theorists in constructing my central arguments that South Africa ought to entreat its affluent communities to pay extra tax by foregoing some of their decadence and extravagances for the well-being of their fellow humans. This moral petition may somewhat appeal to the conscience of affluent residents of Sandton, Ballito, Atlantic Seaboard and City Bowl.

Worth noting that salvaging the famished requires parting with a minimum amount of one's resource (wage or income), and not necessary a deprivation of the livelihood of the benefactor who can still enjoy a considerably decent standard of living. This notion can be applied, for example, in a situation wherein my next-door neighbour asks me for crumbs of bread on my way to a cricket match, and I forgo the event and give her the money meant for the ticket. Although this will deprive me of a good social vibe, the neighbour's stomach ache will be relieved. This chapter, therefore, calls upon residents of affluent suburbs to support *ikasia* (township) residents of Botshabelo, Etwatwa, Tsakane and Vosloorus, who can be considered as have-nots to also have enough food for sustenance. While some may be willing to be generous, others may not, even though our moral obligation imposes a duty on us to help others from perishing.

The central argument in this chapter transcends merely problematising hunger, and more importantly, addresses an existential gap in theory for conceptualising and setting out key remedies for mitigating food insecurity. Still, in opposition to Singer's (1972) lifeboat analogy of rescuing drowning people, some (affluent) readers may object and possibly table four areas of concern: (i) how long do I have to keep sacrificing for the poor? (ii) what if the ruling African National Congress (ANC) embezzles my contribution?; (iii) what if my contribution is not sufficient to meet the needs of this great multitude?; or (iv) why should I assist when others decline? Essentially, these counter

arguments boil down to how the assistance channelled should be *used* (providing social grants or food vouchers), and not *how much* one should contribute.

Having said that, there is a competing discourse or other considerations. In support of the ungenerous, Hardin (1995) moots that rescuing drowning people may have extensive ramifications for every society. In what he terms as the logic of the commons, the theorist equates drowning people to the underfed trying to climb on to the lifeboats of the affluent. This boat, to him risks getting swamped and ultimately sinking if they are brought on board. Even if the boat could still accommodate more desperate people, it will, he argues, sooner or later be swamped as a result of the population explosion in poor communities. In consequence, Hardin and his contemporary neo-Malthusians, avow that salvaging the poor will inevitably exacerbate society's problems in the form of climate change, environmental pollution and depletion of natural resources, including food shortage (Osborn, 1948; Vogt, 1948; Borgström, 1967; Fletcher, 1977). This clique concludes that, for the sake of posterity, the hungry should not be fed in order to control their procreation and ensure surplus food supplies. They further conclude that the only means of safeguarding sufficient food and other basic resources such as water, clean air and land for future generations is to save up one's surplus resources for rainy days and not easily donate to the poor, as they are more likely to multiply and consume available resources. But, in the context of South Africa, this lifeboat metaphor or analysis is not really applicable as some manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers throw away edible surplus while homeless people scavenge in dustbins (Gwangwa and Ndlazi, 2018). Nonetheless, it is important to underscore that while Hardin and Singer arrived at completely contradictory conclusions, both adopt a similar utilitarian notion that our decisions and choices ought to be informed by their anticipated ends. In seeking to leverage the Hardin/Singer variance, several contemporary theorists have subscribed to Kant's notion of respect for individual's (socioeconomic) rights, by emphasising the importance of negative obligations (Cohen, 2009; Demenchonok, 2009; Szymkowiak, 2009).⁴ While some refute the existence of any obligation to assist some individuals (Varden, 2006; Gilibert, 2009; Maliks and Follesdal, 2013), others invoke the notion

⁴ A negative duty places an obligation on the state to restrain from doing or undertaking certain measures.

of perfect duty to refrain from causing harm to others as a means of safeguarding their right to life and dignity (Habermas, 2010; Franke, 2013). In line with states' absolute obligation to respect citizen's rights to utilise their resources as they deem fit, a reader could interpret this to mean that any attempt by the state to raise taxes directed at aiding the famished breaches this aforementioned absolute. Such a reader could simply conclude that the affluent ought not to be coerced into sacrificing for the poor, as the former are in themselves not simply a means to an end, but an end in themselves. This perception can be challenged on several fronts.

But, granted that this observation is valid, taxing the haves to benefit a few have-nots will not be morally wrong on the part of the state. This is based on the assumption that besides taking reactive measures to correct wrongs, the state, CSOs and the affluent themselves still have an obligation not to sit on fences while the poor perish, especially if they have the means to intervene. Besides taxation, an important avenue of eliciting assistance from the wealthy is through corrective action or compensatory justice. Some poor communities like Alexandria, Gugulethu and Khayelitsha are plunged into food insecurity due to the country's oppressive past, their current exclusion from major economic activities, corruption in government departments, inadequate access to education and resultant high unemployment rates. If the remote and immediate causes of these factors were/are triggered by the choices of the previous apartheid or current ANC-led government, then economic hardships in these locations cannot be attributed to the (in)actions of the (wo)men and children of these communities, but rather the decisions of the state and historically privileged white elites. Accordingly, if members of the government decide to set up a new pro-poor tax system, it may be justified on the basis of past and poor policies by the current regime.⁵

By all accounts, the state may, in addition, justify the imposition of poor tax on three grounds. First, on the basis of corrupt dealings by the wealthy which have created insecurity in the economy, increased transaction cost, impeded domestic and foreign investments, and imposed

⁵ Often termed as the most unequal country in the world, in South Africa, whereas the whites constitute 11% of the population, they own approximately 80% of the national wealth and 70% of agricultural lands, with the blacks making up about 88% of the population, owning 10% of the wealth and only about 10% of the land.

a regressive tax which militates against small and medium businesses. As demonstrated in the Gupta brothers' exploitation of the state through the South African Revenue Service (SARS), the plight of the poor could also be linked to the actions of affluent individuals in the community who make excessive profits on the backs of poor labour forces that are often underpaid (Bangani, 2019; Chabalala, 2019; XE, 2019).⁶ Second, food insecurity could also be placed squarely at the doorstep of the haves who fund particular political candidates who does not prioritise the needs of the electorate and rather (ab)use the resources of the state to satisfy elites' whims and caprices (Donagan, 1977; Ngoepe, 2016). A striking case in this regard is the use of some ZAR 246 million (US\$ 17 million) from state coffers by former president Jacob Zuma for the renovation and security upgrades to his Nkandla homestead. Meanwhile, Nkandla sits at the heart of the *uThungulu* district of Kwazulu-Natal where a great percentage of the population live in abject poverty and resultant food insecurity (Makatile, 2016). Third, the affluent, particularly political elites and decision-makers are morally obliged to contribute towards the poor tax as they have adopted and continue to operationalise economic policies which perpetuate mass exportation of grain rather than distributing a portion to citizens who lack the means to be net purchasers or producers, or both. Fourth, the affluents' use of high-powered car engines, industrial machines and generators contribute enormously to greenhouse gas emissions and the resultant adverse effects of climate change, which primarily leads to poor yields for smallholders and food price hikes for poor consumers. Finally, besides inadequate access to fertilisers and irrigation systems, the poverty situation of rural small-scale farmers is aggravated by inefficient transportation systems which hinder their attempt to fairly participate in national and global markets. When a government utility company like Eskom (2019) is unable to keep up with electricity or frequent load-shedding as a result of lack of maintenance of aging infrastructure and misappropriation of funds

⁶ In this particular scenario, SARS illegally paid approximately ZAR 420 million (US\$ 29 thousand) in tax refunds to Gupta companies (a conglomerate of business entities owned by a controversial, yet wealthy Indian family). The family is known for a series of money laundering activities from South Africa to their home country. The official currency used in the country is 1 ZAR (South African Rand). The conversions used in this book are based on the exchange rate of 1 October 2019, of 1 ZAR = US\$ 0.066.

by the elites, economic recovery and jobs get threatened by that heightening retrenchment and/or wage reduction.

Like a military person facing court martial for mistakenly shooting an unarmed civilian in a conflict zone, the state is (in)directly culpable for mass atrocities due to the life-threatening conditions faced by the food insecure. Just as the state may be hailed for endangering the lives of a few (fire fighters) to rescue others from flames, it may also be ethically permissible to cut the budgets of some projects towards a desirable end. As a soldier will not be spared for the accidental killing of civilians in the process of countering terrorism, the onus for the welfare of the hungry falls on both policymakers and benefactors of such policies.

Suffice it to mention that in fulfilling our moral duty to the hungry, one does not need to be directly involved in the policy formulation or implementation processes in order to have an obligation. If the executive adopts a decision to benefit a few others, the latter have an obligation to give back to the deprived on whose back they have thrived. For instance, since the launch of the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) in 2013, several ‘tenderpreneurs’ have benefited (sometimes) through corruption and kickbacks from the state.⁷ This principle could equally be extended to historically privileged white communities and those who have inherited large tracks of land (which may be considered loot of the apartheid regime) and their obligation to extend assistance to the poor, since their gains somewhat compromised the prospects of millions of others. As bemoaned by Dugard (1978: 73) during the apartheid era:

[a] vast web of statutes and subordinate legislation confine the African to his tribal homeland and release him only in the interest of the agricultural and industrial advancement of the white community. When he visits a ‘white area’ as a migrant labourer he does so on sufferance, shackled by the chains of legislation and administrative decision.

Even though families who inherited lands and fortunes from the oppressive regime (as well as some who are alive today) could claim

⁷ The BEE is a government intervention adopted to improve the economic participation and economic transformation of previously disadvantaged South African citizens, mainly African, Indian and Coloured populations. The term ‘tenderpreneurs’ is a portmanteau of ‘tender’ (to provide goods and services) and ‘entrepreneur’. It is a South African colloquialism for businesspersons who obtain state tenders or procurement contracts by using their political contacts, mostly as a token of reciprocal exchange of benefits or favours.

that they were not directly involved in the apartheid regime, they still had a stake and must, therefore, be willing to give back (at least) a minute percentage of their wealth to the famished, particularly within this period of excessive deprivation. More importantly, this principle could be extended to newly rich South Africans to assist their poor contemporaries, as they have benefited from recent state policies in the context of the BEE. Yet, whereas the state and few affluent individuals may have contributed to the current state of large-scale hunger, it is difficult to specifically earmark the degree of harm(s) caused by each party. Despite this challenge, it nonetheless does not negate the cardinal claim that these two actors owe a moral responsibility to alleviate the poor from their state of deprivation. This proposition flows from Kant's (1785) notion of humanity which avows that *all* moral agents have a duty to help others. To him, humans possess moral status not simply on the basis of being *homo sapiens*, but rather because of their *humanity*. Accordingly, all moral agents should treat other moral agents with dignity and respect, and see others as an end in themselves. Taking note that humans need the assistance of others in order to attain their target goals and objectives, we have a moral responsibility to assist each other towards the accomplishment of these ends. Moral actors such as political leaders and the affluent have a moral responsibility to refrain from mistreating the poor with disdain and rather extend true and genuine assistance towards their autonomy and self-sufficiency. It is, therefore, a taboo or forbidden not to enhance the survival of other humans, even though Kant does not specifically perceive this duty as mandatory. Granted that a reader agrees with this didactic, a normative question which cannot be quickly disposed of is: Is there an obligation to provide for households if their current deprivation was not triggered by white capitalists or politically connected individuals? In responding to this, it is important to emphasise that our negative and positive obligations are determined by the dependence of the have-nots on the haves, and failure to assist the former is to condemn them to perpetual impoverishment. There is, therefore, no moral justification to withhold assistance aimed at alleviating the plight of the famished, for just as humans are entitled to rights to security (irrespective of their social status), so are they entitled to subsistence rights, as failure to relieve them from their distress can be likened to depriving them of their human dignity and life (Dower, 2008). However, supposing that we all concur that truly, moral agents

have an obligation to intervene, the real question is what form of assistance and how much should each actor contribute? In responding to this, the next section will rely on historical and contemporary scholarship, religious doctrines, events and texts to set a benchmark which could be used to measure how *much* each person ought to be taxed to address the issue at hand.

What Is to Be Given?

The section begins with the proposition that while it may be challenging to determine (at this point) the exact contribution or how much each individual should contribute, I argue that it is the perfect or strict obligation of a person to act by ensuring that others have food to survive. The notion of *strict* obligation serves as a blueprint or instructs individuals to pursue moderation in their quest for virtue. Kant (1785) emphatically opines that an individual should not provide assistance beyond one's capability or to a point where (s)he becomes vulnerable or deprived. Going contrary to this precept may be perceived as seeking to attain some sort of 'sainthood' or considering others as a means to achieving one's own spiritual end. Singer (1972), therefore, encourages the wealthy to provide for the poor until one reaches the level of marginal utility. In other words, a wealthy South African is encouraged to provide for the needy until such a degree that giving more will render the benefactor impoverished or bring about undue suffering them and their dependents.

The crux of Kant's dogma is that it entreats one to avoid both extremes: one must refrain from completely giving up one's entire livelihood for the benefit of others and/or completely decline to provide for others. In the first scenario, the dogma entreats the giver to be charitable yet, leave some resources for own use, while the latter calls on individuals to abstain from perceiving the purpose and ends of others as less significant than their own. It may be argued that while the first instance violates equity, the latter can be said to violate benevolence and perhaps, equity. A person who declines to assist the poor may argue that the *willing* philanthropist should give more than is required or the famished do not deserve any assistance, as they have no moral claim or subsistence rights. It may be commendable for one to devote oneself to a cause of helping the impoverished, but such activity should not be undertaken at the expense of one's livelihood, as such sacrifice makes the good Samaritan a means to the ends of others.

Overly sacrificing oneself may be seen as loathing oneself to the benefit of others, which proscribes the second golden rule of the Christian ethics 'thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' (KJV Matthew 22:39). This quotation triggers a key question which the chapter has evaded for a while: what specific role can the state and those in the richest square mile of South Africa play in this light? Four steps come to bear: (i) an overarching food security social contract in the form of Food Security Act (FSA), which must set out which target group deserves assistance, what should be distributed and in what quantity; (ii) the establishment of an institution to oversee this operation; (iii) a comprehensive budget to ensure the full, regular and continuous operationalisation of the programme; and (iv) how much each affluent person is to contribute towards this end. The last two benchmarks are important as they will provide an indication on how much can be drawn from state revenue, including customs and excise duty, value added tax, income tax and what required percentage should be allocated to each affluent person. Akin to the steps adopted by the state in response to the #FeesMustFall movement, the state could then add this percentage to the tax obligation of individuals earning beyond a certain threshold to be paid every month. In the wake of the #FeesMustFall campaign in 2015, the state decided to provide fully subsidised education for households with an income of up to ZAR 600,000 (US\$ 40,689) to cover the gap in the 2016/17 fee adjustment (Pather, 2017). It, however, withheld this intervention from the wealthy, identified as investment bankers, doctors and advocates.

Drawing from this positive discrimination, an imposition of poor tax across the board, from government officials to the private sector, would ensure high compliance without much contempt or resistance. An analogy of this principle is as follows. As at September 2019, the state imposes 18 per cent taxable income on persons beyond sixty-five years of age with a yearly income exceeding ZAR 116,150 (US\$ 7,877) p.a. or below sixty-five years of age with a yearly income exceeding ZAR 75,000 (US\$ 5,087) (SARS, 2019). Like the English poor tax, the state could impose a monthly ZAR 20 (US\$ 1.5) tax on these taxpayers to support the deprived. This implies pensioners and the working class will each make a yearly contribution of ZAR 140 (US \$ 9.5) towards the Food Security Fund, which will leave them with a considerable ZAR 116,010 (US\$ 7,866) and ZAR 74 860 (US\$ 5,076) respectively. Yet, it is unclear whether these contributions

alone will be sufficient to provide for the millions who are currently facing food insecurity, and even if it does, will the food or cash pay-out meet their nutritional requirements. To boost the budget of this undertaking, it is important for this call not to be limited to individuals alone, but extended to the private sector as most of these rake up millions of profits to the disadvantage of people. Inspired by the recently held *#SandtonShutdown* campaign, the state could impose a corporate tax of 3 per cent on all profits made by companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) to be channelled towards this end (Pijoo, 2019). This proposal should not be deemed unthinkable as corporate South Africa equally needs to be held accountable, as they are not innocent bystanders in the dual challenge of poverty and food insecurity. Accordingly, this form of corporate social responsibility (CSR) or philanthropic activity will compensate for the regular price fixing and racketeering prevalent in the food market chain. Admittedly, if this duty is complied with by the wealthy corporate organisations, and backed by financial commitments from the state, it is possible that the poor tax could fundamentally transform the lives of food-insecure households. Nonetheless, the state has not considered this option and it is unclear whether it might in the near future.

Also, CSOs and religious bodies in South Africa do not perceive hunger as a major moral obligation to rally around and press for change. The few who have demonstrated some concern, often do so with the provision of evening meals to a few hobos on church premises or make food donations to those hit by flood, rather than calling for policy direction which could address food insecurity in a comprehensive manner. Speaking ahead of the country's 25th Freedom Day anniversary, President Cyril Ramaphosa mooted that the state needs to ensure that those without a means to earn a living and food 'can equally experience the economic and social benefits of freedom' (AFP, 2019). Suffice to say that three dominant CSOs – Oxfam, Centre of Excellence for Food Security and Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute – engage in some form of food security advocacy, research and policies analysis. While their mandates and activities are closely aligned with the president's aspiration of eradicating poverty and alleviating hunger, they have not been strong advocates for improving the conditions of their target group, especially as their attempts have failed to attract the needed public support or significantly impacted on policy reforms.

Why Bother?

But beyond the proposed tax, should the haves (individually) provide extra assistance to the have-nots to augment their basic needs? Indeed! Satisfying basic tax requirements does not relieve one from voluntarily donating alms to the famished. The haves may, in the comfort of their homes, crudely do an estimation of how much they can part with and then channel this amount to the food insecure through self-help or charity organisations. This recommendation is directed at those with more resources than they *need*, or those who could give up a portion of their income without endangering their livelihood.⁸ In his ‘theory of human motivation’, Maslow (1943) listed a five-tier model of human needs, often portrayed as a pyramid of needs. His classification, however, could be collapsed into four deficiency (D) needs and one growth or being (B) need. In this particular instance, individuals inherently need to satisfy their D needs before proceeding to the latter. While group D needs constitute physiological (food, sleep, sex, warmth, clothing, shelter, drink and air), safety (freedom from fear, stability, law, order and security), love and belongingness (love, giving and receiving affection, acceptance, trust, intimacy and friendship), and esteem (prestige, status, independence, achievement, dignity and mastery), the B-need is basically attaining everything one desires. Keeping this in mind, a section of the affluent may decide to divert resources meant for charity towards the pursuit of higher needs. Perhaps, a subject within this bracket may argue that a heartless act towards the poor may inspire them to utilise their potential or make certain sacrifices, such as cutting down on procreation, tilling available lands or acquiring new skills. The key challenge with this proposition is that most of the famished are arguably ill equipped, ill trained and often excluded from key decision-making.

In classifying his position on the most fundamental of needs, Maslow (1943: 375) mooted that ‘[i]t is quite true that man lives by bread alone – when there is no bread’. Flowing from this, the chapter argues that once the wealthy have plenty of bread and are well fed, they have a moral duty to at least extend the crumbs or leftovers to the poor so that they could effectively use their bodies and wits to aspire to higher needs and self-actualisation (Hoffman 1988). It is believed that if all

⁸ Something becomes a need when it is a requirement or very vital rather than simply desirable.

wealthy persons commit to this cause, the state could put brakes on the widespread food insecurity. The contribution of one or few without the support of majority will, sadly, not be sufficient or ultimately a drop in the ocean. The actions of the unkind might in some cases even disincentivise the kind-hearted to continue with their generosity. The rippling effect may be grievous as the contribution of the few may not adequately reach the larger population of the needy, and even if resources are stretched, the quality of food may not be as nutritious. Fortunately, this could not always be the case. It is anticipated that if some refuse to donate, their unmet portion might then be shifted to those with the ability to provide more than their allotted contribution. In this case, a hard question staring us in the face is: Is one ethically obliged to contribute more if one's neighbour is uncharitable? Put differently, is one absolved from their obligation to provide further assistance if others decide to withhold their contribution? If the response to the second question is in the affirmative, then the famished will essentially be rendered helpless, which is amoral. To Singer (1972), persons who subscribe to the second question are either lazy or merely aligning themselves to lame justification as numbers does not automatically exempt one from his/her responsibility. At a basic level, a simple though not simplistic response to the first question might be that giving a fair or more share does not exonerate or release one from further obligations. If an elderly couple, Veronica and Pokie, are trapped in their retirement village which is engulfed in flames, can one say one has *fairly* performed one's moral duty by saving one while the second burns, since the next person failed to join in the rescue? The Bible (in) directly responds to this question when God commands Christians to give generously to the hungry, and anyone who obeys this commandment will receive blessing. To be exact, Proverbs 19:17 reiterates that '[t]he generous will themselves be blessed, for they share their *food* with the poor' (own emphasis).

In addition, charity is mentioned dozens of times in the Quran, and followers of Islam are reminded to practice 'regular charity'. Among the plethora of charity-related verses in the second chapter of the holy book is Surah Al-Bagarah 2:274, which moots that '[t]hose who in charity spend of their goods . . . have their reward with their Lord'. In African traditional religion, there is the popular notion of 'ubuntu' or 'humanness' (Nkrumah, 2019: 193). The notion, often translated as 'I am because we are', captures the spirit of being human and calls for

humanity towards others (Metz, 2007). Presumably, there might be atheist, Buddhist, Chinese or Hindu versions to these concepts.

These religious principles, however, raise two counter discourses. First, the moral duty to give more towards charity could ultimately plunge the donor into becoming merely a means to the ends of others. That is, resources meant for improving one's safety, love, belongingness, esteem, personal growth and self-fulfilment have to be rerouted to the hungry. Therefore, in order to balance and achieve other higher needs, one needs to practice Kant's (1785) admonition against undue overburden or going overboard. Second, they do not clearly set out how much money, effort or time an individual should dedicate towards providing the basic needs of the poor and hungry. Regardless of these ambiguities or lack of conceptual clarities, the utmost supplication of these dogmas is that providing assistance beyond one's exact allocation is morally gratifying as '[p]eople curse those who hoard their grain' and the 'one who gives freely, gains even more' (Proverbs 11: 26; Proverbs 11:24).

Needless to say, the moral obligation of the affluent should not be limited to monetary contribution alone, but could be instrumental in bringing about policy shift. For instance, of the approximately 27 million registered voters in the country, if a million decide to double their time and effort in sending a yearly petition to their respective members of parliament calling for the adoption of FSA, this will be considered as enormous pressure by the national assembly to revolutionise social policy in this domain (ECSA, 2021). Without losing anything of enormous value, this small percentage of voters could, moreover, intensify the number of petitions sent yearly while motivating others to do the same. In stark contrast to the tax contribution, there is no exact benchmark on how much (time and energy) each individual should invest in this context, especially as this is not so much about fulfilling strict obligations, rather about living up to an ideal duty to assist a specific vulnerable group. In this sense, one could actually contribute more than what the community or nation expects, even in instances where there is no established threshold one ought to meet. Similarly, some may decide to double or quadruple their efforts by researching and generating in-depth understanding of the remote and immediate causes of hunger, the needed remedies or required institutional response.

This aspect brings to bear an important theoretical question: Should the provision of petty cash or food to poor black households by affluent

rich communities be considered as an act of *charity* or *responsibility*, particularly in light of the country's historical trajectory? Undoubtedly, handing a few cents to car guards, panhandlers and hobos in malls or urban parks are perceived as acts of benevolence and seen so by recipient. When they receive these generous hand-outs (whether a coin or leftovers), the beggar will bow in appreciation and thank the benefactor for his/her *kindness*.

By giving to the hungry, one is saving the famished from agony and possibly death, while spending on perfumes or new accessories does not necessarily satisfy any specific need. Still, it is not seen as unethical when a woman declines to give to the poor, as generosity is not considered an obligation, but rather as an act of charity. Like anywhere else, an uncharitable (wo)man in South African society is not criticised, even though the charitable one may be applauded. Yet, with reference to the religious texts, there are admittedly some acts that can be considered as charitable and others, a duty. Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to engage in theoretical contours or distinction between these terms, in the case of South Africa, the provision of food and other basic necessities to black communities by wealthy white (wo)men and political elites should be seen as an obligation rather than charity. Related to this is the occasional distribution of food parcels by retail chains, Woolworths, PicknPay and Shoprites. Receivers of these packages ought not to applaud these supermarkets, as their acts have neither moral value nor were dispensed on moral grounds. In most instances, these donations seek to serve ulterior motives, including meeting CSR, beating tax obligations or getting rid of possibly expired commodities.

However, in line with the proverbial saying of 'teach others to fish, and not just give them fish', while the chapter has argued for the provision of assistance to the food insecure, such assistance should not be given to the extent that it inhibits the potential of recipient(s) to be self-reliant or emerge out of their plight. It is obvious that over the last two decades, the state has operationalised a social welfare system for a selected group of people with special needs (disabled, very old and young), but has failed to establish an exit strategy for these groups. Young beneficiaries exit the system at eighteen years of age, and ultimately join the vast number of unemployed and food-insecure population. Presumably, the continuous assistance of the state to social welfare beneficiaries has reduced the latter's ability to strive and

make a living for themselves, even though there is no sufficient evidence to support this claim. It is, therefore, important that the state partners with relevant stakeholders (CSOs and affluent communities) to provide opportunities for individuals in this domain through job creation, education and skills development. These measures, coupled with the provision of land for own production, could assist underfed households to be self-sufficient or with basic wages to have sustainable access to decent meals.

Discussion and Conclusion

The central objective of this chapter was to contrast arguments for and against the provision of food and basic cash transfer to the food insecure. It begun by tracing the prevalence of hunger in post-apartheid South Africa and argues that the state and the affluent (beneficiaries/descendants of the apartheid system and the emerging black middle class) have a moral obligation to use their resources to ameliorate the plight of the hungry. The chapter demonstrates that using one's salary for luxurious items rather than channelling some of it to the wellbeing of the famished is immoral. This is based on the belief that followers of African traditional religion, Christianity, Islam or other sects share a common belief that each individual was born to perform a specific task, small or large, with some destined to use their intellect or resources to assist others. The chapter relies on basic theological principles as a means of demonstrating that passivity or failure on the part of the rich to assist the hungry is unethical, and that charity should be an aspiration of every religious or secular being. It argued that giving to the food insecure should not be seen as an act of charity by the affluent, retail chains or corporate South Africa as these actors have benefited by exploiting the poor, mainly in light of the country's historical trajectory and unfavourable economic policies. The chapter concludes by stating that it is not enough for the state to set up a poor tax system, but that it is necessary to assist vulnerable groups to be self-sufficient through the provision of quality education, skills development, job creation and land distribution.