

Chapter 4

Exploring Vhavenda Indigenous Food Practices and Knowledge Contributions to Food (in)security

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ABSTRACT

This chapter considers VhaVenda indigenous knowledge about foods, its production, and its consumption as a way of exploring indigenous-based solutions to food insecurity. External and internal factors contributing to food insecurity are discussed, beginning with an overview of the current state of food insecurity globally and then locally. Subsequently, the chapter discusses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on food security levels in both urban and rural settings within a single population. Specific attention is given to the rural setting of Thohoyandou Venda, drawing attention to its challenges and solution-possibilities with particular focus on subsistence farming and home gardening as aspects in VhaVenda culture. Finally, the authors provide a catalogue of indigenous food sources and agricultural practices thereby exploring local knowledge as a possible mechanism to combat food insecurity in the contemporary period.

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INTRODUCTION

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AN OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT STATE OF FOOD (IN)SECURITY GLOBALLY

Food security is defined as the ability of ‘all people, at all times, [to have] physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life’ (Chakona & Shackleton, 2018; IFPRI, 2020). This definition suggests that when we think about food security, we need to think about more than having food available at mealtimes. Food security also includes the ability to access nutritious food with ease, the ability to access the food one prefers or requires, and the ability to access enough food as and when one needs it. Simply put, food security can be considered a state in which the cost, access, quantity and quality of the food required by an individual for a healthy life is something they do not have to worry about.

Unfortunately, millions of people around the world do not have food security. This is referred to as the state of being food insecure. In their 2020 report, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) reported that 2 billion people, (that is 25.9 percent of the global population), experienced hunger in 2019 (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2020). The report also states that 690 million people, (the equivalent of 8.9 percent of the global population), were undernourished (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2020). These statistics show just how serious the issue of food insecurity is worldwide and each year these numbers increase.

A number of factors impact on the level of food security or insecurity in a community at a global level. Climate change, natural disasters and politically motivated wars are some of the more prominent factors. In past years, extreme weather conditions have decreased agricultural yields, promoted crop disease, and reduced biodiversity (Dube, et al., 2016; Herforth, et al., 2020). In Africa, the most visible effect of climate change has been the increase in hot temperatures resulting in severe droughts in different parts of the continent. These droughts have had a considerable impact and caused loss of food, fuel wood, medicine and agriculture-dependent income for the poor that depend greatly on the ecosystem for these provisions (Dube, et al., 2016).

In other parts of the continent, the impact of climate change has seen a surge in heavy rainfall and storms which have also disrupted the poorer communities. Countries such as Mozambique have suffered repeated storms and cyclones over the last decade, with adverse consequences on local communities’ abilities to grow crops, and the nation’s ability to sustain an agricultural sector (Leahy, 2019). Subsistence farming, a viable commercial agricultural sector, and ecosystem management are key areas of consideration in most African countries’ attempts at sustainable poverty reduction and an overall healthy

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