


Chapter 4


Traditional Food Systems as a Tool for Achieving Food Sovereignty in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

With a national food system characterized as being variety deficient, and a heavy reliance on commercially available food options, South Africa (SA) faces issues of food insecurity at a household level, despite being considered food secure at a national level. This chapter investigates the challenges attributed in national food systems, in spite of their promising status in literature, these food systems are marked with lack of dietary diversity, inadequate access to food, and nutrition insecurities, specifically, at a household level. The study aims to explore the potential of traditional food systems in ensuring food and nutrition security, and to examine their role in achieving food sovereignty for rural and indigenous communities in South Africa. A scoping literature review was applied to investigate how the traditional food systems in indigenous communities have so far managed to offer household food security, and how said food systems, with adequate policy and social efforts, could be applied on a broader scale, with the intention of achieving national food sovereignty in South Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional food systems are collaborative that emphasize integrating sustainable food production, processing, distribution and consumption of food systems, containing variety of items from local and the natural environment that are culturally friendly (Duncan et al., 2021; Gutierrez et al., 2022; Feenstra & Campbell, 2014; Swiderska et al., 2022). In addition, Indigenous Climate Hub (2024) perceives traditional food systems as a framework that links people, land, culture and spirit. These food systems are not only a

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complex network of relationships, but advocate for the use of native species, such as plants, insects and animals, including traditional farming techniques, indigenous food processing and preservation methods, localized food production and distribution (Indigenous Climate Hub, 2024).

Batal et al. (2021) on the other hand, identified that traditional food systems provide foods rich in nutritional value, which significantly improve minerals intake, such as iron, proteins and magnesium, when included in an individual's diet. Despite nutritional, cultural, spiritual and health value, traditional food systems are perceived by Swiderska et al. (2022) as an important component in maintaining environmental sustainability and mitigating climate change.

However, the benefits of traditional food systems are not acknowledged and included, particularly within national food system planning and agricultural policies, due to prevailing negative perceptions. As noted by Swiderska et al. (2022), these perceptions often depict traditional food systems as backward and unproductive. Furthermore, this negativity and related challenges led to a surge in household hunger across millennia (Stats SA, 2011). Stats SA (2021) reported further that about 2,1 million household, representing 11,6% of households in South Africa are perceived as food and nutrition insecure.

REASEARCH SCOPE

This chapter grants an essential structure for utilizing traditional food systems as a means to attain food sovereignty in South Africa, through a comprehensive review of scholarly articles, books, journals, food policies, and programs, dissertations, and theses. This chapter underscores the significance and necessity of integrating traditional food systems into South Africa's food system and policy frameworks. Furthermore, it proposes the development of policies and regulatory frameworks to facilitate the realization of food sovereignty and further highlights the importance disseminating indigenous knowledge of traditional food systems to ensure their effective incorporation into the national food system.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

The chapter's objectives are as follows:

- To investigate the role of traditional food systems in achieving household food security.
- To explore how traditional food systems operate in local communities.
- To investigate the challenges associated with commercially available food options.
- To discuss how traditional food systems contribute to food sovereignty in local and indigenous communities.

This chapter's research questions are as follows:

- What role does traditional food systems play in local communities?
- How do local communities balance the use of indigenous foods in traditional food systems and commercially available (exotic) food options?
- What challenges are encountered with the use of traditional food systems?
- How can traditional food systems ensure food sovereignty?

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