



PIETERMARITZBURG AGENCY FOR COMMUNITY SOCIAL ACTION



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Media Statement

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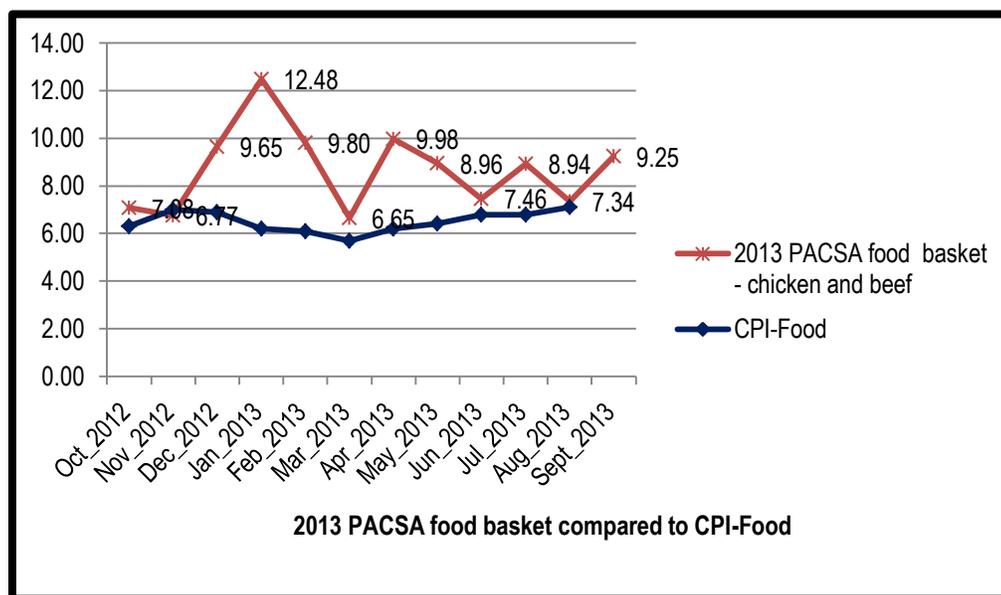
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“POOR HOUSEHOLDS ARE STRUGGLING TO AFFORD THE BASIC STAPLES FOODS”

Poor households are struggling to afford a basic basket of staple foods their families need for adequate health and nutrition, according to the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action’s 2013 Food Prices Barometer.

The report was released to coincide with **World Food Day on 16th October** and states that a basket of 32 food products which form the basic foods in the shopping trolleys of poor and working class households in Pietermaritzburg increased to R1509.34 in September 2013, an increase of 8.7% year-on-year. Poor and working class households spend most of their incomes on food.

- The inflation on the 2013 PACSA food basket is higher than the Consumer Price Index of 6.4% and CPI-Food of 7.1% and indicates that poorer households carry a greater inflation burden.
- One of the core findings in the 2013 PACSA Food Price Barometer is that the core staples of maize meal, rice, flour, bread, potatoes, sugar and oil are becoming more expensive and increasingly unaffordable.
- Core staples, mainly made up of starches form the core of the working class and poor household diets. Starches must be bought regardless of price. This means that households have to spend more money on starches and less money is available to buy meat, dairy, fats and oils, and vegetables. This has a significant impact on dietary diversity and has serious implications for people’s health.



Supermarkets are the main source of food for the majority of South African households. Food availability across the country is not generally a problem but access is. Food may be on the supermarket shelves but if people cannot afford to buy it; they have no access. Household income and the prices of food are therefore crucial in determining access to affordable and sufficient food for adequate nutrition. Households in KwaZulu-Natal continue to face high levels of hunger and food insecurity.¹

- Sixty per cent (60%) of Pietermaritzburg households earn less than R3 200 a month (Census 2011). Poor and working class households spend most of their incomes on food. The total 2013 PACSA food basket was R1509.34. This means that households spend 47% of their total household income on a basic basket of food.
- Old age pensions increased by 5% from R1200 to R1260. The inflation on CPI-Food was 7.1%; the 2013 PACSA food basket was 8.7%. Households living on an old age pension will struggle to buy a basket of basic nutritious food: their pensions falling well short of the cost of a basic basket of food.

The food price inflation for foods in the 2013 PACSA food basket are as follows (from highest to lowest): Potatoes 51.40%, Cheese 35.56%, Canned fish 20.67%, Rice 20.25%, Coffee 17.28 %, Brown sugar 16.63 %, Fresh Milk 12.42 %, Brown bread 11.47 %, Carrots 10.43 %, Cabbage 10.10 %, Maas 9.15 %, Tea Bags 8.88 %, Cake Flour 8.49 %, Cooking Oil 7.80 %, Canned beans 6.30 %, Maize meal 5.58 %, Onions 5.36 %, Samp 5.36 %, Pasta 4.23 %, Stock 3.90%, Curry Powder 3.55 %, Cremora 2.59 %, Soup 2.32 %, Yeast 1.93 %, Sugar Beans -0.84 %, Eggs -0.98 %, Margarine -4.28 %, Chicken -8.03 %, Tomatoes -10.97 %, Beef -13.66 %, Salt -18.61 %.

Other key findings:

- All of the foods within the starches and sugar (10.6%), dairy products (17.8%), fresh vegetables (7.8%)² categories, including cooking oil (7.8%), canned fish (20.67%) and canned beans (6.3%) increased significantly.³
- Chicken and beef prices experienced significant deflation over the September 2012 to September 2013. Frozen chicken pieces had declined by -8.03% and beef by -13.66%. These foods acted to skew the true picture of food price inflation on the basket. The 2013 PACSA food basket without chicken and beef was a much lower 4.9%. However we found that poor **households no longer bought red meat** at all as it was still far too expensive. **Households were also switching quite dramatically from frozen chicken portions to cheaper cuts like heads and feet, necks, livers and turkey.**
- The **spikes in food prices continue**. When prices come down after a spike, they stabilize off a higher base. Significant fluctuations on the majority of foods from one month to another makes it extremely difficult to budget for food.
- **The price spike peaks over the Christmas period may be driving higher levels of food price inflation throughout the year.**
- **Many families experience a very limited diet for the last 7-10 days of the month** and typically only have maize meal, rice, cake flour, brown sugar, cooking oil and salt in their homes.
- High food prices are influencing what people buy and eat and how they prepare their meals. **As prices of basic food increase households are buying less and cheaper food.** Women expressed concern that the cheap foods that they are forced to buy is making them sick.
- **High electricity prices are changing what households eat and the way food is prepared** in an attempt to save on electricity costs.

¹ Tshintsha Amakhaya (2012) found that 27% of their sample of KwaZulu-Natal households reported that they 'often or always' went hungry; with 56% indicating that they 'sometimes' went hungry. The report is based on a baseline survey conducted from 2010-2011 in 12 municipalities across 4 Provinces (KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, Western Cape and Limpopo).

² Except tomatoes which declined by a significant 10.97%.

³ For example, dairy products experienced a 17.8% overall increase with significant price inflation seen on all the products in the category - cheese (35.56%), fresh milk (12.42%) and maas (9.15%); the starches and sugar category increased by 10.6% and similarly saw significant food price inflation across all foods in the category: potatoes increased by 51.40%, rice 20.25%, brown sugar 16.63%, brown bread 11.47%, cake flour 8.49%, maize meal 5.58% and samp 5.36%.

The PACSA 2013 Food Barometer Report **recommends** that national government focus on five public policy areas. These are:

- ensuring that staple foods are affordable;
- overcoming income poverty through greater employment;
- linking annual wage and social grant increases to CPI-Food and raising the CPI-Food component in the CPI to better reflect the high proportional food expenditures of poor households;
- increasing support for small scale farmers to increase agricultural production that provides nutritious and healthy food that is affordable and is grown close to the table;
- facilitating immediate interventions for households that sometimes or always go hungry.

The following quotes are from what women in Pietermaritzburg are saying about high food prices

"Mealie meal is expensive; but we must have it. It has to be bought." (Mpophomeni, 8 April, 2013).

"As long as maize meal is in the trolley; it is fine. Maize meal is good because we can eat it all day. In the morning we can feed it to our children with sugar and we can eat it for lunch and supper with anything we can find, maybe a small cabbage from the spaza or a few potatoes from our neighbours" (Dindi, 04 April 2013).

"At the end of the month sometimes the only thing we have in our fridge is cold water; the only thing in our cupboard - maize meal and sugar." (S'nathingi, 05 April 2013).

"If it is cheap and doesn't make us sick - we buy it" (S'nathing, 05 April 2013).

"We just look at the cost" (Dindi, 04 April 2013).

"Isobho, isobho, isobho! We add stocks and soups to most of what we eat. We never used to add this stuff to our foods. In the past we cooked our food for much longer and mostly added onions and chilli. We ate real meat and there was enough for everyone. Now meat is so expensive. It's a game that we play to fool ourselves and trick our children into believing that we actually are eating beef and real chicken. We use the stock cubes, the soups, the soya mince to give a meaty taste and reduce the cooking time. We are busy - life is difficult" (Gezubuso, 03 April, 2013).

"You see it is difficult. We have to buy some type of meat. Chicken is the cheapest so we buy it but it is not affordable. We don't really know why it is cheaper. It could have been on the shelf for a long time - it might not be good. We have to buy it to provide some protein for our families. Our children cry for some Nando-sie taste! But these chickens that we buy aren't like they used to be, the bones are weak and so when we eat it our bones are also weak, the meat is not full and nice. It's fatty and watery" (S'nathingi, 05 April 2013).

"The foods that we eat are making us unhealthier and we are getting sicker more often" (Dindi, 04 April 2013).

"We cook beans, ujeqe and samp on wood outside. We would like to cook these foods more often but we don't because they use lots of electricity and so we have to use wood" (S'nathing, 05 April 2013).

The full 2013 PACSA Food Price Barometer can be accessed off the PACSA website at www.pacsa.org.za

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About PACSA

The Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action (PACSA) is a social justice and development NGO that has been in operation since 1979. PACSA's work focusses on socio-economic rights, gender justice, youth development, livelihoods and HIV & Aids. Our work and our practice seek to enhance human dignity. We are convinced that those who carry the brunt of the problem must be a part of the solution – at the heart of PACSA's core strategy is the notion "nothing about us without us."

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