

INTRO: To sustain human life, certain physiological needs must be met, including, air, water, food and touch. But where there is a need, there's some body who's trying to make a quick buck. Municipalities charge for water provision and in some parts of the world clean air is on sale at specialist coffee shops. But it's the commodification of food that is causing major problems for ordinary South Africans. This is a spud caster podcast on the right to food and I am your host Candice Nolan

UPSOUND: (When I talk to the people I say I'm staying at sandton but I don't think this is a sandton...but we stay here)

NARRATION: Peggy stays in Sandton, an upmarket suburb north of the Johannesburg city centre. She lives in a shack. Tin roofs weighed down by stones and clothes pegged to makeshift washing lines. It all stands in stark contrast to the pristine lawns of Innes Free Park which surrounds the settlement....

UPSOUND: (JUST have a look now what I'm going to eat I haven't got even money to buy meat I'm going to eat spinach and a pap I'm going to cook the pap and I use the paraffin today...)

NARRATION: There are so many people like Peggy who struggle to make ends meet, unable to afford a healthy diet. Brittany Kesselman, a food researcher, spoke to an old age pensioner in the inner city...

UPSOUND: (When I asked her if she thought there was a role for the big supermarkets to help people who are hungry she said well yes, but only if they get something they must also get something and I thought you know this woman's pension is 1500 per month, the annual profits of shoprite Were almost seven billion rand at that time and she's concerned that they get something and that's just, to me, crazy but That just shows how deeply ingrained the concept is that food is something that's for profit)

NARRATION: Eileen, a street vendor outside the University of Johannesburg's Kingsway campus, echoes these sentiments...

UPSOUND: (me I like to eat rice and chicken and vegetables candice: So they say that food is something that should be free how do you feel about that? Ja its good candice: so you'd like to just walk into a shop and just take whatever you? Uh no its not good to take for free uh uh candice: why not so the one who is selling mustn't make a profit its not good they must make something candice: but its not right that we are hungry and not enough food? but even if you hungry you can't go to the shop and take for masala so the owner of the shop he's gonna pay what for rent)

UPSOUND: (and another woman who also was struggling to feed her family she was working in the inner city of Johannesburg she said you know What right to food I can't go into spar and take food for free.

So again its this idea that the food system is a system where you buy and sell something and that's the only way it works and therefore, how can you have a right to food because if you don't have money you can't buy food)

NARRATION: But the right to food is guaranteed in the South African constitution....

UPSOUND: (And that means that everyone is supposed to have access to healthy and sufficient food but the reality on the ground is completely different. About a quarter of South Africans live below the food poverty lines which means they literally cannot afford to eat healthy diet and in fact that line is incredibly low. So another quarter of the population sort of moves above and below that line so sometimes they are hungry and other times not. Which means basically half of South Africans are not enjoying a right that is guaranteed in the constitution. So its a challenge when don't know that they have that right and they don't mobilise and fight for it and demand it from government)

Protest sounds

UPSOUND: (in the current context in South Africa there's more than enough food for everyone between what we produce and what we import there is more than enough to meet everyones dietary needs. The reason why people are hungry is not a shortage of food its a shortage of cash to buy the food in a capitalist system. So its not a technical problem its a political problem)

NARRATION: Like the air we breathe, food is a basic human necessity....

UPSOUND: (I mean food is a matter of life and death lets just remember that. Without food we die Without sufficient nutrition we die. Now it doesn't always happen immediately. Most people in South Africa are not starving in the sense that they're about to collapse and die but they are malnourished in the sense that they don't have sufficient nutrients for optimal health.)

NARRATION: Kesselman says there are workable solutions....

UPSOUND: (Brazil has one of the widest gaps between rich and poor in the world. Some are extremely rich while others still suffer from hunger. But the real problem is not the lack of food, it is the access to food. From 1993 when was elected as mayor of the city, our government gave priority to food food for everyone)

NARRATION: According to Aljazeera there has been a sixty percent drop in infant mortality and a 75 percent decrease in children hospitalised for malnutrition...

UPSOUND: (Filing in by the hundred for what is as close to a free lunch as you can get. At this so called popular restaurant in the Brazilian city of belo horizonte, municipal workers hand out meals costing the equivalent of 85 us cents. Property taxes finance four of these eating halls. They cost each of the cities 2,4 million inhabitants about five cents a week in public money. Those of us who work here consider ourselves defenders of the right to eat any one rich or poor can eat here for us food is a basic right)

NARRATION: The Brazilian government also supports local farmers...

UPSOUND: (In low income areas throughout the city neighbours can get organically grown fruits, vegetables and medicinal herbs grown literally around the corner. I sell some of what I harvest I give some of it away to people who can't afford it And some of it goes to the church and school next door. Of course, urban gardens don't provide nearly enough food for a large city that's where these markets come into the picture. The city of belo Horizonte gives away land plots in impoverished areas to entrepreneurs who agree to build the markets. The only catch they must

offer at least 20 items of produce for no more than 38 cents a kilo. The low cost markets have flourished earning profits on high volumes despite low mark ups)

NARRATION: Brittany Kesselman says we need urgent interventions to stem the tide of preventable lifestyle diseases....

UPSOUND: (so what that means is that over time they become ill and if you look at how many people are getting diabetes these days hypertension, cardio vascular disease, strokes some of the kinds of cancer. All of those are linked to the fact that they don't have healthy diets and so what we see is that younger and younger people suffering from these things because they don't have healthy diets. We see people having limbs amputated and going blind from diabetes something that never would have happened if they had healthy diets. And at the same time with children if children don't have adequate nutrition in the first say 1000 days of their lives which includes when they're in the womb so it's about three years. It affects their development for the rest of their lives so that means that children who don't have sufficient food as infants. Literally their physical and cognitive development never reaches its full potential. And that means we're basically sacrificing the future of the country. Because, at the moment, about thirty percent of children are stunted, so that's almost one third of children who are not getting sufficient nutrition. And that should be a national scandal that's frankly all we should be talking about. But we're not)

OUTRO: Credits go out to Brittany Kesselman, Al Jazeera and the World Future Council. This podcast was brought to you by spud caster for baobulb.org and I'm your host, Candice Nolan