PUBLIC MONITORING OF GOVERNMENT FOOD SECURITY SERVICES IN SOUTH AFRICA: WHAT DATA NEEDS TO BE PRODUCED AND PUBLISHED?

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INTRODUCTION

If the general public is able to monitor the delivery of services, it can help hold the government to account and, ultimately, improve the quality of the services being delivered. But to effectively monitor services the public needs access to information.

The right to food for all South Africans is enshrined in the constitution.[1] There are currently a range of government programs delivered by multiple departments at the national, provincial, and local levels engaged in fulfilling this mandate. One such program is the Social Relief of Distress (SRD) program, which is implemented by the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) under the Department of Social Development (DSD). The SRD is "a temporary provision of assistance intended for persons in such dire material need that they are unable to meet their or their families' most basic needs."[2] It provides food parcels, vouchers, and/or a small cash transfer to those in need for a maximum period of six months.

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[1] Section 27(1) (a) of the Constitution provides that "Everyone has the right to have access to sufficient food and water". To fulfil this right, Section 27(2) provides that "The state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of each of these rights." The Constitution also contains a section on the rights of children. Section 28(1)*(c)* provides that "Every child has the right to basic nutrition, shelter, health care services and social services".

[2] SASSA Social Relief of Distress, available at www.sassa.gov.za/index.php/social-grants/social-relief-of-distress.

This note explores what information the government needs to publish to enable the public to monitor the delivery of the SRD program. It documents how much of this information is currently produced by government and how much of what is produced is also published. Finally, it assesses the regularity, comprehensiveness, and accuracy of the published information.[3]

WHAT BUDGET AND SERVICE DELIVERY INFORMATION DOES THE PUBLIC NEED?

If a civil society or member of the public wants to monitor the delivery of SRD in their local community or ward, they need information on the specific service delivery agent and site of delivery (facility). If information is not disaggregated to this level, the public will not be able to monitor what is meant to happen in their local area. Unfortunately, information published in government documents is often only disaggregated to the provincial or national levels.

To understand and assess the delivery of SRD services, the public needs six types of information to be published and disaggregated to the ward and facility level:

1. **Government's assessment of needs**: to assess whether services have been delivered as intended, the public first needs to know what the government thinks the vulnerability to food insecurity is in a particular ward or area. Without this information, it is impossible to know whether hunger and food insecurity are a result of poor service delivery or an inaccurate assessment of the needs of individuals and households.
2. **What government committed to deliver**: unless the public knows what is supposed to be delivered, they cannot evaluate whether actual delivery aligns with what the government paid for. Information on the scope of delivery should include the location of the service delivery site/facility, the number of food parcels that are available, the frequency (e.g. one parcel per day) of delivery, who is eligible to receive food parcels, what documentation is required to receive a food parcel, and detailed specifications on the nutritional make-up of the food parcels.
3. **Budget allocation**: the public needs to know how much money was allocated for SRD in their ward in the relevant year.
4. **Implementing agent**: the public needs to know who is responsible for providing SRD in their ward and who to report problems to. If SRD is not being delivered satisfactorily, information on the contractor and implementing agent is important so the public can report them to the relevant government department and know whether they are repeat offenders.
5. **Actual spending**: the public needs to know how much of the money that was allocated for SRD was actually transferred to and spent by the implementing agent. Without information understanding how much was transferred, it is not possible to know whether unsatisfactory delivery of SRD is the fault of the implementing agent (by failing to procure sufficient food parcels or miss-spending funds, for example) or was caused by delayed or under-payment to the implementing agent by SASSA. Without understanding how much was spent by the agent, they will not be able to understand why any delays or deficiencies in the delivery of SRD occurred. For example, were deficiencies caused by under-expenditure by the implementing agent, by a supplier failing to deliver procured goods, or because the

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[3] This is part of a series of similar assessments that will determine what information the public needs to monitor service delivery and to engage with government.

food parcels procured did not meet the nutritional standards set down by SASSA? This information should be provided on at least a quarterly basis so that the public can monitor delivery throughout the year, pick up on irregular spending patterns as they arise, and allow the implementing agent to quickly respond to and correct such patterns.

6. **Reported delivery**: this is what government *thinks* was delivered, i.e. what the implementing agent reported as having been delivered to DSD. If the public do not know what was reported to DSD by the implementing agent, they will not be able to tell whether the implementing agent has mislead government in their reporting.

If all of the above information were made available and accessible to the public on a regular basis (at least quarterly), the public would be able to effectively monitor the delivery of the SRD program.

HOW MUCH OF THIS INFORMATION IS PRODUCED AND PUBLISHED?

Table 1 shows whether the six types of information needed to monitor the SRD program listed above are produced and published by the government. The table indicates whether government produces the information states the name of the relevant source. It also indicates whether the information is: published; produced but not published; or published, but not regularly, comprehensively and/or accurately.

TABLE 1: THE SOCIAL RELIEF OF DISTRESS PROGRAM

Types of Information	Source of Information	Publication status
Government's assessment of needs	General Household Survey (StatsSA)	Partly produced and published annually but not comprehensively. Provides only provincial and national data that is not disaggregated to ward or facility level.
What government committed to deliver	SASSA Annual Reports and Performance Plans	Partly produced and published annually but not comprehensively. Breakdown in scope of delivery is only to the national level. Information on the scope of delivery is not available at the provincial, ward or facility level. Information on the nutritional content of the food parcels is not published.
Budget allocation	SASSA Annual Reports and Performance Plans	Partly produced and published annually but not comprehensively. Only for the national and provincial allocation. Information on the SRD allocation is not available at the provincial, ward or facility level.
Implementing agent	SASSA online: http://arcg.is/1mo76xg	Produced and published online on a google map but not comprehensively. Limited contact details are available (e.g. address but not telephone number).
Actual spending	SASSA Annual Reports and Performance Plans	Partly produced and published annually but not comprehensively. Only for the national expenditure. Information on SRD expenditure is not available at the provincial, ward or facility level.
Reported delivery	SOCPEN and SASSA Annual Reports and Performance Plans	Produced but not published. Annual and other reports only contain national level information on the number of SRD beneficiaries.

As Table 1 shows, of the six categories of information required for the public (or indeed government and oversight bodies) to effectively monitor the SRD program, none are comprehensively produced and published.

For the most part, information is produced and published only at the national level, with some information produced at the provincial level, and some information not produced at all. This means that there is little information for the public and oversight institutions to hold SASSA to account for its plans and delivery of the SRD program.

Recognizing the need for more in-depth information on food security, the government has set up the South Africa Vulnerability Assessment Committee (SAVAC).[4] This multi-stakeholder committee of experts has been tasked in the National Food and Nutrition Security Policy (gazetted in August 2014) with providing "food and nutrition security indicators for monitoring and evaluation of the [programs], interventions and projects at national, provincial and local levels." The work proposed by SAVAC (including new food and nutrition surveys and regular food security monitoring at the local, provincial and national level) should mean that the information required for the government to identify the food security needs would be produced. It is crucial that, along with producing the information, the government makes it publicly available. This will help to facilitate the effective monitoring of programs such as the SRD.

SOCPEN (Social Pension System) is a database used by SASSA to register and manage grant beneficiaries. SOCPEN is currently not available to the public, and information from the database is only selectively published in Annual Reports and Performance Plans. During a Portfolio Committee meeting in October 2015, a representative from SASSA said that "work is underway to develop a system, aligned to SOCPEN, which will assist with reporting on social relief of distress."[5] Based on the information collected by SOCPEN, no information on the SRD program is currently published, other than the total number of SRD beneficiaries nationally per year.

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[4] SAVAC will be administered by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries in partnership with the Department for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation in the Presidency, and takes forward a resolution adopted by all SADC countries.
[5] Available at https://pmg.org.za/tabled-committee-report/2550/

4