

Voices of the poor: "We need people to know we are starving"

By [Andy du Plessis](#), issued by [FoodForward SA](#)

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We recently visited the home of Sisanda Plum, in the township of Mfuleni, in the northern suburb of Blue Downs. Plum is 34 years old, has three children and is unemployed. Two of her children live with her grandmother in the Eastern Cape and the fathers of the two children in the Eastern Cape have both passed away. Her youngest daughter lives with her and her boyfriend.



The only steady income in their home is a monthly child support grant of R480 that she receives for her daughter, which she says is not enough to cover her daughter's daily school needs. Plum says that they all live off this grant to survive. "As soon as I draw that money, it is up almost immediately. We buy some meat, six eggs, maize meal and packets of cheap noodles from the spaza shop. For the rest of the month, we have very little to survive on."

Plum also has a chronic illness, which makes it difficult for her to find regular work. She needs to take heavy medication every day. Plum does several piecemeal jobs to earn an income – like hand-washing clothing and cleaning. Sometimes she gets paid with food, clothing or old appliances. Her boyfriend goes out to look for work every day and sometimes gets a painting or gardening job, but often he is unable to find work.

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gives me hope. ”*

Plum, her partner, and her daughter all eat a meal every weekday at a local community kitchen run by an organisation called Women for Peace. "I have to eat every day, so that I can take my medication."

Plum arrives early each day at the community kitchen, to help with cleaning and setting up of the tables, chairs and plates. The organisation gives her a small gratuity with which she buys bread. On weekends, Plum helps a local fresh produce vendor sorting and packing the produce. As payment, he gives her some of the 'less appealing' fruit and vegetables for them to eat. She says she does not mind us telling her story, because 'she wants people to know that they are barely

surviving and they are starving'.

Mfuleni township is densely populated, with more than 52,000 people. The most pressing social problems are unemployment, HIV/Aids and crime. Women for Peace, where Plum and her family receive their daily meal, is an organisation that focuses on skills training for the unemployed and that offers an after-school care programmes for learners, to help them with their schoolwork and keep them off the streets. Women for Peace is one of 2,750 vetted beneficiary organisations that collectively reach close to one million vulnerable people daily, that form part of FoodForward SA's surplus food recovery ecosystem.

Millions of people like Plum are trying to eke out a living from the meagre resources available to them, but they are barely coping from day to day. Healthy diets are simply not affordable, given the barriers of inequality, unemployment, food, and fuel inflation.

Sis'Thandie Tofu, the director of Women for Peace says: "I won't lie. Times are tough in our community. But let me tell you, the surety that FoodForward SA provides us with good quality nutritious food every month, gives me hope."



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President Ramaphosa summarised our current South African context well, in one of his recent weekly updates: "The fundamental problem is the same – poverty, inequality, and unemployment. But the extent and depth of the problems are now far greater and the impediments to progress far more complex."

While we are set to face several complex problems in 2023, given our low economic growth forecast, load shedding, food price inflation, etc., there are still simple solutions that could make a meaningful impact.

FoodForward SA's foodbanking model is empowering people towards self-development and improvement, allowing them to seek better economic opportunities, and thereby strengthening underserved communities, while also saving the environment.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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