

Please note that we have included additional data and commentary on the high cost of core staple foods (Page 1), volatility in rice prices (Page 2), and the impact of the Cape Town Taxi Strike on the household purse and food (Page 3-4).

Key data from the August 2023 Household Affordability Index

The August 2023 Household Affordability Index, which tracks food price data from 47 supermarkets and 32 butcheries, in Johannesburg (Soweto, Alexandra, Tembisa and Hillbrow), Durban (KwaMashu, Umlazi, Isipingo, Durban CBD, Hammarsdale and Pinetown), Cape Town (Khayelitsha, Gugulethu, Philippi, Langa, Delft and Dunoon), Pietermaritzburg, Mtubatuba (in Northern KwaZulu-Natal), and Springbok (in the Northern Cape), shows that:

- **In August 2023:** The average cost of the Household Food Basket is **R5 124,34**.
- **Month-on-month:** The average cost of the Household Food Basket **increased** by **R42,40 (0,8%)**, from R5 081,94 in July 2023 to R5 124,34 in August 2023.
- **Year-on-year:** The average cost of the Household Food Basket **increased** by **R348,75 (7,3%)**, from R4 775,59 in August 2022 to R5 124,34 in August 2023.

Cost of the core staple foods remain a concern.

The foods which make up the core staples, and which are prioritized first in the trolley and the purse, remain stubbornly high. In August 2023, these foods cost **R2 826,37**. These foods take up a large proportion of the money households have available to buy food. Because these foods are core staples, they must be bought regardless of price escalations. Over the past year, these core staple foods have gone up by **R201,44 or 7,7%**.

What are these foods and why is it so important that their cost comes down?

The core foods are bought first and these foods ensure that families do not go hungry whilst ensuring that meals can be prepared. Women have identified 17 such foods: maize meal, rice, cake flour, white sugar, sugar beans, samp, cooking oil, salt, potatoes, onions, frozen chicken portions, curry powder, stock cubes, soup, tea, and bread (brown and white). (See page 3 of August 2023, Household Affordability Index).

Only after the core staples have been secured do women allocate remaining money to the other critically important nutritionally rich foods which are essential for health and well-being and strong immune systems (viz. meat, eggs and dairy which are critical for protein, iron, and calcium; vegetables and fruit which are critical for vitamins, minerals, and fibre; and *Maas*, peanut butter and pilchards, good fats, protein, and calcium essential for children. The high cost of core staple foods result in a lot of proper nutritious food never reaching the family plate. There is very little diversity of foods on our plates just generally and we are not getting the nutrients our bodies need. This has negative consequences for household health, and well-being, child development and the ability to resist illness, and particularly maternal health because mothers eat last, and sacrifice their own bodies to secure whatever little nutritious foods might still be available for their children.

There can be no talk of improving health and wellbeing and nutritional outcomes of our children, mothers, persons with chronic illnesses, and our population in general without reducing the cost of the core staple foods.

As the cost of these foods continue to increase, food producers, manufacturers and retailers alike should be alert to the likelihood of falling profits on foods which fall outside of the core-food ambit, because the majority of South Africans have no money to buy these foods. It is in all our interests to ensure that the prices of core foods are kept low.

The following foods increased in price in August 2023.

Foods which increased in price in August 2023, by **5% or more**, include: rice (5%), butternut (9%), apples (8%), and oranges (8%).

Foods which increased in price in August 2023, by **2% or more**, include: white sugar (4%), samp (3%), potatoes (2%), frozen chicken portions (3%), stock cubes (2%), tea (3%), wors (3%), spinach (2%), *cremora* (3%), bananas (4%), peanut butter (3%), and white bread (4%).

Volatility in rice prices.

Whilst South Africa imports most of its rice from Thailand (76,5%), with Indian imports making up a much lower 19,1%, the India rice ban is starting to impact on rice prices on South African shelves. In almost half of the supermarkets tracked, rice prices increased – some marginally, but some surged. The India rice ban will likely lead to global rice prices increasing. Rice is a core staple food in most South African homes.

Whilst maize meal is the most important starch, rice is the second. Women alternate maize meal and rice, and to a lesser degree samp and *ujeqe* (steamed bread). This rotation of maize meal and rice is important because it provides some variance in the meal, even if everything else on the plate is the same. Rice is therefore relatively inelastic (demand remains constant)– like maize meal, when prices increase, rice is still bought. *“If the price of rice goes up, even if it goes up a lot, we will still buy it, we are used to it, and we need it” (Pietermaritzburg, 23 August 2023).*

The time rice takes to cook is quicker than maize meal. It is lighter on electricity and takes less time to prepare. Further rice does not need to be vigilantly watched or stirred, unlike maize meal, and so it frees up women’s time to do other things while they are cooking. Women tell us that rice is a safer bet when loadshedding is unpredictable – if rice is on the boil and the lights go off, it will continue cooking in the residue heat. Maize meal, after two hours with no electricity, is typically unsalvageable and must be discarded.

The price of rice is therefore important, it being a core staple food for most South African households. And an energy food, which staves off hunger. And that it provides some starch variance in the diet. Further, it being a food which is part of the foods which women prioritise and spend money on first, its cost needs to remain low, to ensure that other foods, also important for nutrition and health, can also be bought.

Rice prices in supermarkets will need to be carefully monitored, including ensuring that the India rice ban is not used to raise prices higher than what is reasonable or fair (price gouging).

Statistics South Africa’s latest Consumer Price Index.

Statistics South Africa’s latest *Consumer Price Index* for July 2023ⁱⁱ shows that **Headline inflation was 4,7%**, and for the **lowest expenditure quintiles 1-3, it is 9,3%, 8,7% and 7,4%** respectively. **CPI Food inflation was 10,0%** (for CPI Food & NAB it was 9,9%, we use the figure excluding non-alcoholic beverages). *STATS SA’s Producer Price Index* for June 2023ⁱⁱⁱ shows **agriculture was 4,2%** (July PPI to be released on 31st August 2023).

Inflation on the food baskets per area tracked.

In August 2023, food baskets increased in all areas except Pietermaritzburg, which decreased marginally.

The Joburg basket **increased** by R64,28 (1,2%) month-on-month, and **increased** by R327,28 (6,7%) year-on-year, to **R5 215,79** in August 2023.

The Durban basket **increased** by R47,73 (1,0%) month-on-month, and **increased** by R261,62 (5,4%) year-on-year, to **R5 069,40** in August 2023.

The Cape Town basket **increased** by R7,24 (0,1%) month-on-month, and **increased** by R437,40 (9,5%) year-on-year, to **R5 062,03** in August 2023.

The Springbok basket **increased** by R79,71 (1,5%) month-on-month, and **increased** by R447,72 (9,1%) year-on-year, to **R5 380,03** in August 2023.

The Maritzburg basket **decreased** by R14,58 (-0,3%) month-on-month, and **increased** by R259,81 (5,6%) year-on-year, to **R4 930,14** in August 2023.

The Mtubatuba basket **increased** by R54,51 (1,1%) month-on-month, and **increased** by R351,80 (7,2%) year-on-year, to **R5 223,79** in August 2023.

Workers

The National Minimum Wage is **R25,42** an hour and **R203.36** for an 8-hour day. In August 2023, with 22-working days, the maximum National Minimum Wage for a General Worker is **R4 473,92**. Workers work to support their families. The wage workers earn is not just to sustain themselves alone, it is used to support the entire family. For

Black South African workers, one wage typically must support 4 people. **Dispersed in a worker's family of 4 persons, the NMW, is reduced to R1 118,48 per person – this is below the upper-bound poverty line of R1 558 per person per month.**

The August 2023 cost of a basic nutritional food basket for a family of four persons is **R3 528,55** (See page 6 of August 2023, Household Affordability Index).

On our calculations, using Pietermaritzburg-based figures for electricity and transport, and the average figure for a minimum nutritional basket of food for a family of four, puts electricity, and transport, taking up **55,7%** of a worker's wage (R2 490,92/R4 473,92). Food is bought after monies for transport and electricity have been paid for or set aside (leaving only **R1 983,00** – for food and everything else), and so in August 2023, PMBEJD calculates that workers' families will **underspend on food by a minimum of 43,8% (having R1 983,00 left after transport and electricity, and with food costing R3 528,55). In this scenario there is no possibility of a worker being able to afford enough nutritious food for her family. If the entire R1 983,00 all went to buy food, then for a family of 4 persons, we are looking at R495,75 per person per month. This is below the food poverty line of R760** (See page 8 of August 2023, Household Affordability Index).

Women and children

In August 2023, the average cost to feed a child a basic nutritious diet was **R900,03**. Over the past month, the average cost to feed a child a basic nutritious diet **increased** by **R0,49** or **0,1%**. Year-on-year, the average cost to feed a child a basic nutritious diet **increased** by **R79,77** or **9,7%** (See page 6 of August 2023, Household Affordability Index).

In August 2023, the **Child Support Grant** of **R500** is **34%** below the **Food Poverty Line** of **R760**, and **44%** below the average **cost to feed a child a basic nutritious diet (R900,03)**.

Household domestic and personal hygiene products

The August 2023 *Household Domestic & Personal Hygiene Index* shows an **increase** of **R11,22 (1,2%)** month-on-month. Year-on-year the household domestic and personal hygiene products index **increased** by **R74,54 (8,3%)** bringing the total average cost of basic household domestic and personal hygiene products to **R974,99 in August 2023** (See page 5 of August 2023, Household Affordability Index).

The cost of basic hygiene products is high. These products compete in the household purse with food. These products are essential for good health and hygiene.

The impact of the Cape Town Taxi Strike on the household purse and food.

(This is a summary of the conversations we had with women in Gugulethu, Philippi, Khayelitsha, Dunoon and Delft, from the 5th of August to 23rd August).

The timing of the Cape Town Taxi Strike in the first week of August, although unplanned, could not have been worse. Food runs out in low-income homes long before the end of the month – from the second, to last week of the month and into the first week of the new month. While people wait for money to come in, there is almost no food in the house.

The taxi strike started on the afternoon of the 3rd of August. The 3rd of August was pension payout day. The Child Support Grant was paid out on the 4th when the strike was well under way. The strike caused chaos for women trying to buy food for their families. With not enough money in the purse to begin with, the big monthly shop is a carefully thought-out procedure. With no transport to or from supermarkets, shopping patterns were severely disrupted. Instead of women's normal strategy of shopping around in several supermarkets to seek out and buy at the cheapest prices, women were forced to walk and buy in the closest supermarket. Instead of buying in the usual larger volumes (viz. 10kg maize meal, 10kg rice, 10kg flour, 10kg sugar, 4L fish oil etc.), women were forced to buy much smaller volumes of basic foods because they could only buy what they could carry home. Smaller volumes are priced higher per kilogram than in bulk. Further, only the very basics of the basics were bought, again because they had to be carried home.

And women were frightened, traumatised, panicked – not knowing what was happening at home where their children were, and how safe they were with their groceries on the streets, which had turned dark and violent. Shopping was done in a frenzy, and with not enough money in the purse to begin with, it left women feeling terribly anxious,

knowing that how they were forced to shop was going to be terribly disadvantageous to them with the whole month still spread out before them, and with uncertainty about when the strike would end, and if supermarkets would run out of stock or close, if the looting and violence continued to escalate.

"The timing of the strike is very bad. We had nothing in the cupboard and so when our monies came in, we had to risk our lives going to buy what we could for our families and hurry back home. We went to the closest shop and bought in that one shop, just the basics in very small volumes, so that we could carry everything quickly home. The other things we left behind, we must buy from Spaza's, which are too expensive ...

The situation is traumatising here in Dunoon, Cape Town. Because people they walk to go to work, they walk to go buy food. No taxis no truck no car. The road is quiet. It is really really traumatising ...

We are so frightened, people are being killed, there is violence, there is a lot of fires, it is very scary and dangerous ...

We only have so much money, and this strike has really cost our pockets because we couldn't shop and buy the way we usually so carefully do. This month is going to be a very hard month to get through" (Dunoon, Cape Town, 7 August 2023).

Perhaps it would be trite to say that before deciding on a strike, organisers should first check that mothers have done their grocery shopping and that their kids are safely back from school, but the taxi strike revealed some important realities that we would be well to heed. The strike highlighted the severity of the household affordability crisis, and subsequently the food security crisis, and how these beget further vulnerabilities. Our baseline wages are too low, as are our social grants – most families do not have enough money to secure enough food for the month. Food runs short. Because women had no food in their cupboards they had to go out and confront the strike. Women voiced this as having to risk their lives. Most families have no buffer against crisis – there is no surplus food in the home, there is no savings – we are increasingly vulnerable. The Taxi Strike, in its form of social disruption, presented a peculiar crisis, primarily because of its timing but also because it operated to close-off access to supermarkets and disrupt shopping patterns.

The Taxi Strike, likely not intentionally, unfolded as an assault on the person. On women's freedom, responsibility, and capability to feed their families, in the best way that they can. The strike prevented women from applying their myriad strategies to make their money stretch, and therefore secure as much food for their children as possible with the little money they had. By not being able to shop as they usually and so carefully do, food cost women so much more than normal: they were not able to buy what they wanted to buy, in the volumes usually bought, at the cheapest price, from the cheapest preferred supermarkets, and therefore food would also run out a lot faster than normal. Women therefore experienced the strike as one which took money out of their pockets and food off the table.

Listening to women, we get a sense that there is a growing weariness to social disruption, in what ever form it takes – strikes, or protests or other, and especially if violent and chaotic, and organised by persons external to the will and control of the people. Simply because the negative consequences of such protests appear to be becoming more severe and increasingly outsourced as a burden of which ordinary women and their families must carry. Ordinary people whose lives are already so tenuous. This sentiment was similar when speaking with women in Pietermaritzburg, Durban and Joburg, during and in the aftermath of the July unrest of 2021. Although both the Cape Town Taxi Strike and July unrest were fundamentally different in character, both arose from external actors and were not organic community protests, and both unleashed extreme violence and mayhem that unintentionally hurt ordinary people. Whilst not all protests are reactionary and violent, it is possible that the deepening affordability crisis may be shifting how ordinary people engage in and feel about protest actions; and that this may begin to shape a more cautionary approach to protest actions going forward.

ⁱ Biacuana G (2023). Bizcommunity. South Africa's reliance on rice imports. 26 June 2023. Citing TradeMap ITC: "According to data from TradeMap ITC, South Africa imported approximately 1.1 million tonnes of rice to the value of R7.8 billion in 2022. South Africa's leading sources of rice imports in 2022 were Thailand (76.5%), India (19.1%), Pakistan (1.8%), Viet Nam, (0.8%) and China (0.5%), amongst others." See link: <https://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/742/239560.html#:~:text=Estimates%20indicate%20that%20South%20Africa.of%20the%20Covid%2D19%20pandemic.>

ⁱⁱ STATSSA (2023). **Consumer Price Index July 2023**. Statistical release P0141. 23 August 2023. Statistics South Africa. Pretoria. P4, 7. See Link: <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0141/P0141July2023.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ STATSSA (2023). **Producer Price Index June 2023**. Statistical release P0142.1. 27 July 2023. Statistics South Africa. Pretoria. P12. See Link: <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P01421/P01421June2023.pdf>