



“EVERYTHING THEY TOUCH TURNS TO DUST” (former ANC Member of SA Parliament the late Dave Dalling, on the ANC!)

SA FOOD SECURITY AT RISK – LOAD SHEDDING CATASTROPHIC FOR AGRICULTURE

South Africa for all its troubles, past and present, has never run out of food. After the Second World War, many refugees from a war-torn Europe chose South Africa and Australia as preferential countries where they could find peace and security because “there will always be food”. Food scarcity and outright hunger stalked Europe during the conflict, and people who experienced famine knew that food could never be taken for granted. They saw these southern countries as havens of plenty.

South Africans have been so used to not only food in abundance, but to top quality sustenance due to, without doubt, the skills of South Africa’s commercial farmers whose numbers (now around 32 000) provide reliable and consistent nutrition to an ever-growing population (now purportedly 60 million).

But if the South African government does not immediately act to make commercial farming a national key emergency free of load shedding (as in the case of some hospitals), then food availability in this country as it has always been, may be no more. SA’s organised agriculture has expressed grave concern at the effect load shedding is having on irrigation and all other facets of the agricultural process. Urgent action must be taken to reinstate uninterrupted supplies of electricity to key farms for, as we write, farmers are losing their crops to relentless heat, with no water in sight. In the Northern Cape, some farm workers have died due to temperatures reaching 45 °C, with no water available because the dam levels are low and the pumps cannot be used to pump water in emergencies when there is no power. This is redolent of Ethiopia

or Somalia. It surely cannot happen here, or can it?

People not familiar with agricultural practices generally think of irrigation as similar to watering the lawn, or block spraying a golf course. Farm irrigation is however a highly sophisticated and scientific process. Timing is everything and the type of irrigation is attuned and programmed to maximise water supply to the crop being watered. Irrigation is only as effective as the reliability of the power supply driving the irrigation machinery. "Power is essential to modern farming practices and the recent increase in load shedding has seriously disrupted farming operations. Pumping stations, irrigation, cooling and other systems all depend on power. While some farmers have the means to move away from the country's power grid, most are unable to do so. This is especially true for the more vulnerable small-scale farmers." (Engineering News 12.8.22)

Although some farmers have ready access to water in the form of their own private dams or even sluice channels, they are still hobbled by a lack of electricity under load shedding. Farmers try to irrigate in off-peak times, such as in the evenings or early mornings, to save money. But if the power is unavailable during those periods, they are forced to pay the more expensive rates for peak-time watering. Another problem is that sluice channels are timed for use because many farmers use the same channel. If the sluice gates open for you at a certain pre-arranged time and there's no power, then you have to forego the water in the channel. You lose it if you can't use it.

Some crops, such as maize, need optimum water which need plenty of water in the early stages of growth and especially during the seed phase. Strong and regular spraying is crucial at these stages. Load shedding would cut into that very necessary high volume of water, thus interrupting and even hobbling optimum growth of the plant. Also irrigation is usually scheduled for cooler times of the day, and if load shedding is scheduled for those times and the farmer is then forced to water during the hotter hours, effectiveness is squandered because evaporation takes place too quickly for the watering to have maximum potency. The key to irrigation is to have the availability of electricity when you want to irrigate, by whatever means (drip, sluice channels, pumping from the river or the dam to the spraying equipment), and during whatever period of the day, load shedding has seriously disrupted a crucial element of a successful and profitable farming operation,

and in many cases the higher stages, such as stage 6, leaves no room to manoeuvre around these no-power periods to cut losses. It is generally not known to the public that although farmers may have water on their properties (such as rivers and/or boreholes), this water is owned by the government. They cannot water when they like, nor can they water "at some other time" if the power is off because some of them are allotted certain times to irrigate, and that's it. No power at the allocated time, no irrigation. This lapse could cause serious harm to the harvest. The farmers have planted but there's no water because the pump doesn't work as there's no power for the pump. Farmers were already reporting large losses six months ago as processing machinery, irrigation equipment and other plant was damaged and operations had come to a standstill owing to power outages. "With essential systems unavailable during the day, farm workers were required to work after hours. Overtime wages thus increased production costs". (Engineering News 12.8.22) Food storage at regulated temperatures is another key area of disaster. Load shedding is causing waste and financial losses in this sector of production. Retailers have already started to reject fresh produce, mainly vegetables, owing to delays in delivery and disruption in the cold chain. "In summer this challenge increases exponentially. This reduces the amount of food available and will increase food costs to the consumer. Less food, higher prices for what's available," says Engineering News.

FOOD INSECURITY

A growing concern among all South Africans is food security. This is now happening in a land that used to be one of only six countries in the world exporting food. Very few of South Africa's 60 million people even think about how the food reaches the retail shelves or the takeaway counter. Full page newspaper ads glow with the colours of the enormous variety of fruit, vegetables, meat and poultry, at very reasonable prices (compared to other countries), available in hundreds of stores throughout the country. These retail outlets are world class, but this factor has always been taken for granted by SA consumers. Yet these very people will be the first to feel the supply pinch. Already several take-away chicken outlets have closed down. News 24 reported on 18 January that 10 million chicks have been culled due to load shedding. A WhatsApp doing the rounds shows the broken bodies of more than 50 000 chickens in one large shed that perished due to lack of power cooling. Their

limp bodies were being flung onto the back of trucks to be carted away!

The all-important cold chain is vital in South Africa's heat-plagued agricultural conditions. This chain needs full-on electricity supply, no interruptions, no variations, no ons-and-offs. Any stoppage in this chain is a calamity because it cannot be just fixed and the chain carries on as before. Once it happens, the chain is broken and the efficacy of the promise of 100% fresh food is lost there and then. From the soil to the farm's refrigerated storage unit, thence by air conditioned transport to the retailers, there can be no break in this chain.

IRRIGATION IS COMPLICATED

The type of irrigation used depends on what has been planted, be it vegetables, tobacco, corn or lucerne! In the case of tomatoes, for example, Irrigation is programmed to run at 110% capacity, day and night. If your farm measures 100 ha, you will plant at 110% to carry any losses. If there is no guarantee of full-on irrigation, you will reorganise your schedule and plant maybe 50 ha. This can be only temporary, to say the least. Extended load shedding will put paid to this arrangement. Huge losses will result if load shedding continues.

With drip irrigation, pumps run 24/7, three shifts per day. The water pumps never stop. So without guaranteed power, the result is catastrophic. Many farmers have already taken a knock. Small farmers do not have stand-by generators. Farmers with generators on wheels move them from one pump house to the next. This can be only temporary, and many of these farmers will not survive. Work schedules, harvesting seasons and supply expectations become impossible to maintain under load shedding. Forward planning is useless because power is not guaranteed. There is not enough time between the blackouts to successfully farm. "If phase 6 load shedding lasts for a week", says one farmer, "it will be fatal for our summer crops. We are sick to our souls". (Rapport 15.1.23)

One farm group tells TLUSA that the costs and damages so far under load shedding have been: diesel – R3,16 million, the purchase of additional generators – R2,4 million, and loss of harvest – minimum R5 million. These figures are equivalent to 60% of their profits, and they still have to buy more generators. These costs occurred since October 2022. Fifty five ha of their onion plantings are now in ICU, as the farmer put it. They can manage with phase 2 to 4 load

shedding, but at phase 6, they will have to throw in the towel.

A Thabazimbi farmer revealed that irrigation is crucial to the successful production of at least 43% to 46% of South Africa's staple foods, while 96% of vegetables sold to consumers need irrigation. Less power, less irrigation, less food produced, less labour needed. More unemployed on the streets of South Africa! On a citrus farm 90% of the production day needs power, not just for irrigation pumps but for cold storage and machinery used for packing. If Stage 6 load shedding continues, many farms will be bankrupt in one season.

In the meantime, farm input costs have sky rocketed over the past few years. Since 2015 the cost of diesel has increased by 160%/170%. Fertilizer has increased 150%. All farmers are affected in one way or another. Poultry farmers, fruit producers, the wine industry, dairies, animal feed crop farmers. The elephant in the room is grain. When there is not enough maize to fill the silos, what then President Ramaphosa? You can hold all the meetings you want, but it won't put pap (ground corn) on the table for more than 40 million people every day.

“DO NOT BE AFRAID OF WHITES – THEY ARE NO LONGER IN POWER” - RAMAPHOSA

But the president is wrong about power, real power, tangible power! Although he declared the above during an address at the ANC's 8 January conference in Bloemfontein a few weeks ago, he is seriously off the mark. (The main theme of his speech was a recent racial swimming pool incident, while South Africa was falling apart around him!)

It is the ANC that is losing power: they can talk in parliament till the cows come home, but they can't make things work. All of South Africa now knows how useless they are. They cannot even keep the lights on!

Private enterprise has already taken up the slack in many areas of the economy. Commercial farming has led the way with 32,000 privately-owned farms feeding the country, with no contribution whatsoever from the ANC! Now it's time for the provision of electricity, the country's life blood, to be taken over by competent

people. It will soon be in these hands, with privately-owned and run pebble bed reactors planned for the future. In the meantime private companies will sell electricity to a public sick and tired of ANC blackouts. Already privatised are postal and telephone services, medical care and hospitals, schools and universities. Citizens' road maintenance will increase. There are six times more private security personnel than there are policemen in SA. Ten years ago four very smart towns in the Free State handed over the supply of electricity to a private company. The towns' roads, sewage treatment units and clean municipal offices show up against the contrasting ANC shambles around them – the crumbling buildings, the long grass, the sewage in the streets. In addition, these four towns enjoy the cheapest electricity in the country and they believe they are the first towns in SA to be completely free of load shedding! What does the ANC actually control successfully? Actually nothing! Roads have deteriorated, potholes are a national joke, the railway system has either collapsed or sections of it have disappeared, state hospitals are in some instances death traps and schools don't open on time because there are no roofs. Municipal "services" have degenerated into third world status.

Private enterprise controls the banking system, the Reserve Bank, the retail food, clothing and furniture sectors, certain bus routes, cell phone companies, newspapers, magazines and the printing industry, the major hotel groups, IT companies, and most of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. So who has the power that makes things work, and who has the power to destroy what others built? The ANC cannot govern, they cannot organise, they cannot manage and nothing works under their stewardship.

WHAT TO MAKE OF THE ANC'S ESKOM PERFORMANCE?

Of course citizens have a right to ask – their lives have been disrupted, thousands of businesses have folded. People have lost jobs. Not only did the ANC destroy Eskom, they crippled the railways, they disabled municipalities and they ruined almost everything else they could lay their hands on. They have been hallmarked throughout the world as corrupt and typical of everything that makes the African continent the disaster it is. Eskom is their most terrible failure, but "it will not be privatized" says deputy president David Mabuza. The ANC is fearful of losing control, whatever happens to South Africa in the process. Mabuza told the

National Council of Provinces on 15 September 2022 that his party was “handling the challenges concerning Eskom.” New Eskom directors were announced by minister Pravin Gordhan on 30 September 2022, at the very same time as farmers were begging for electricity to water their burnt-out crops. These directors can do nothing to stop the Eskom rot – corruption, incompetence, thieving and vandalism are so deeply embedded in the organisation's DNA that only an entirely new Eskom with new personnel can operate effectively. The chance of this occurring is virtually nil. In December 2022 Eskom CEO Andre de Ruyter was poisoned – an attempted assassination. So far no one has been arrested for this crime, although there can't be many people in his office who knew which coffee cup was his.

Much of the blame for the Eskom debacle can be placed at the feet of Cyril Ramaphosa. His cadre deployment policy played a vital role in Eskom's decline. He only thought it wise a month or so ago to place the army at key power points to guard against the endemic vandalism and destruction of Eskom property. But what about the police? Are they any more awake now than they were in July 2021 when Durban was under siege from looters, murderers and rabble rousers? Police minister Bheki Cele is arguably the world's most ineffective police minister but the president keeps him on for political reasons. Why else would Cele have a job? Answering questions in the National Council of Provinces on 30 August 2022, the president declared he had “full confidence that (police) minister Cele has the ability to lead the fight against crime in South Africa.”

The chickens have come home to roost for the ANC! On 2.9.15 deputy president Cyril Ramaphosa declared that in the following 18 months/two years, “you will forget all about the challenges we had with power and energy and Eskom.” On 6.5.16, president Jacob Zuma told us that there would “never again be load shedding”. On 3.4.19, minister Pravin Gordhan declared that from that date, “Eskom's goal is to ensure that there will never be any more load shedding”. On 13.1.23, Minister of Energy Affairs Gwede Mantashe said it will only take from 6 to 12 months to solve the load shedding problem”. Citizens however know another reality – there will be load shedding for at least another two years.

Meanwhile farmers struggle to survive. The Minister of Agriculture has

setup a “task force” to find a solution to load shedding in agriculture. The solution is easy – make farming a special dispensation sector and abolish load shedding as quickly as possible. Harvests are being lost as we write. Bankruptcy stares many farmers in the face. They cannot come back once they’ve lost all. They cannot trust the government not to introduce these punishing restrictions again. Who will take their place? Has the ANC a plan B for food scarcity in South Africa?