

Maize price increases could cause unrest

A new study by the New England Complex Systems Institute (NECSI) pins South Africa's violence to starvation wages, as maize prices soar. This follows research conducted following the Marikana massacre.



Image courtesy of
FreeDigitalPhotos.net

The institute argues that these events, which triggered a bout of national soul-searching, have less to do with labour issues and corruption than the price of food. The strikers' impromptu demands coincided with record highs in maize, South Africa's staple grain.

"The conditions that give rise to social violence are often poorly understood," says Yaneer Bar-Yam, president of NECSI and a co-author of the study. "Worker demands for dramatic pay increases reflect that their wages have not kept up with drastic increases in the prices of necessities, especially food. Without attention to the global food price situation, more incidents of food based social instability are likely to rise."

The NECSI paper, 'South African Riots: Repercussion of the Global Food Crisis and US Drought,' analyses statistical data to provide clear evidence of a link between the current violence in South Africa and rapidly rising food prices. The authors analysed conditions in South Africa, a heavily maize-dependent country, to find that consumer food indices have undergone a dramatic increase.

Coinciding with massive labour strikes in mining and agriculture, food prices in South Africa have doubled since 2006 and are strongly associated with observed periods of extreme violence.

"Global corn prices have reached new highs and countries that depend largely on maize are more likely to experience high local food prices and associated pressures toward social unrest," said Bar-Yam.

The paper can be found at <http://necsi.edu/research/social/southafrica/>

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>