

New centre set to defuse malnutrition time bomb

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SOUTH AFRICA is sitting on a malnutrition time bomb, with people severely either over- or underweight, nutrition expert Professor Demetre Labadarios has warned.

Speaking at the launch of the Human Sciences Research Council's (HSRC) Centre for the Study of the Social and Environmental Determinants of Nutrition, Labadarios shared statistic which showed that globally 112 million children were underweight and that under-nutrition was the underlying cause of one third of all child deaths.

Labadarios, who will head the centre, also quoted statistics which showed that South Africa's overweight and obesity statistics were on a par with those of the US.

What made South Africa unique, however, were the similarly high levels of stunting, which pointed to massive inequality. He warned, however, that the underlying social and environmental factors were as critical as the nutritional in dealing with the problem.

It was hoped that the centre would identify the underlying causes of under-nutrition and chronic lifestyle diseases, such as obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure, and develop approaches to better understand mechanisms that linked the social factors to nutrition.

Speaking at the launch in Cape Town yesterday, Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi said he was looking forward to the centre assisting in providing research that could help the government develop more focused and custom designed policies.

Motsoaledi said research showed obesity was highest in black women and white men.

Understanding the social and environmental determinants of nutrition had become even more crucial because it was here that the government could intervene to change the ways people bought and prepared food.

The country needed a "road map" for nutrition and food security.

