



RUDZANI MATSHILI
rudzani.matshili@ini.co.za

HUNGER is a norm and part of life for students as they pursue their studies, the National Colloquium on Access to Food for Students in South African Tertiary Institutions has revealed.

According to the organisation, there was an under-reported and under-recognised crisis of "hidden hunger" among students.

The National Research Foundation's Dr Stephen Devereux said the National Student Financial Aid

NSFAS accused of feeding 'hidden hunger' crisis

Scheme (NSFAS) contributed to this hunger by failing to distribute funds and adequate food vouchers.

Tshwane students, who formed part of the statistic, said they were stressed by the conditions experienced due to hunger.

Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) student Markus Makgoba said he and his roommate often had to combine the little money they got from NSFAS to buy food in bulk.

"Students are going hungry because a majority of them come from very underprivileged backgrounds whereby even in their homes they sleep without having had anything to eat.

"You can imagine how stressful it is for students who know that their parents cannot afford to buy groceries for their child in tertiary education and at home."

Makgoba said students often had

to exchange their meal vouchers for cash with customers in stores in order to buy other essentials such as clothes. Sometimes, he said, they did that just to buy food at cheaper grocery stores where vouchers were not accepted.

First-year Unisa student Mulalo Matseba recalled going to bed without food for two consecutive days two months ago. She said she could not ask her parents because she knew

they were also trying to make ends meet at home.

"NSFAS is only paying for my tuition fees, but my parents have to make sure I have something to eat every month.

"And unlike other students who buy fancy stuff when they get money from parents, when I get money for groceries I just buy basic things like sugar and maize meal, and soap and toothpaste," she said.

Andile Souls, a media studies student at Damelin, said: "I am fortunate because both my parents can afford to buy me food, but it's a different story for others.

"I know of young female students who go out with older men just so they can have something to eat at the end of the day."

Students receive R1400 monthly from NSFAS for food, but said they felt it was not enough because they needed to buy other essentials and cover small unexpected costs.

They said they hoped that it could be increased to at least R2000.

