

A RECIPE FOR BUILDING ADAPTIVE FOOD SYSTEMS

By Shelagh McLoughlin (SaveAct)



Photo credit: SaveAct | Savings group members in the garden that provides food for 100 children, five days a week in Mehloolanoeng, Eastern Cape. The group started an NPC to address hunger in their remote community.

An enhanced version of a simple tool, used by people across Africa, could be an adaptive game-changer for millions living in poverty — and the food systems they rely on. SaveAct, a national organisation, has been refining a version of the village savings group since 2005 and believes this model has huge potential for mitigating extreme weather impacts on vulnerable people and food systems.

“This methodology enables people to build their own start-up kit for a better life. It does this with a savings group (SG) model that teaches members to be money-smart and goal-driven while imparting important skills and positive behaviours.” - Anton Krone, founder of SaveAct.

Crucially, SaveAct’s method also focuses on livelihood development and small-scale farming. This combination of interventions produces, sometimes, startling results, and is driving demand that has seen the organisation’s number rise to 110 000 members.

Savings groups are formed by a field officer (FO), who helps the group draw up a constitution and elect office bearers. The group meets monthly and is guided through the savings process and methodology by the FO, who also helps them with their first share-out after 12 months. During this time, the group is taken through several financial education modules. Topics include budgeting, debt, agroecological agriculture and an introduction to developing an enterprise. After about 18 months the group ‘graduates’, although the FO stays in contact with them.

The focus is on women, who make up 92% of its members, youth, and other vulnerable groups. SaveAct’s people are therefore among those likely to be most affected by extreme weather effects, such as flooding, drought, and famine. What has been identified as a critical factor in adaptation is behavioural change while the financial capacity to

make these changes is another factor. SaveAct’s model offers access to both.

Gugu Ngubane, a single parent in Msinga, KwaZulu-Natal, is an example of how some SG members use the methodology to move forward and secure their future. Gugu is a security guard who joined a savings group in 2018 with the goal of finishing her house. This was completed with an extra room after one year, and she has since acquired two fridges, a four-plate stove, kitchen cupboards and sofas. She has also invested in a thriving livestock enterprise, and has bought water tanks for the household.



Photo credit: SaveAct | Gugu Ngubane from Msinga has created security and sustainability for her family through saving and investing in a livestock enterprise and JoJo tanks.

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