



FOOD SECURITY

OUTCOMES SURVEY

REPORT

FOOD SECURITY OUTCOMES SURVEY REPORT

Assessing Household and Community-Level Impacts of the Social
Employment Fund (SEF) Programme

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FOREWORD BY THE MANAGING DIRECTOR

Food security is about far more than ensuring that households have enough to eat today. It is about creating the conditions that enable individuals, families, and communities to build resilient livelihoods, participate in local economies, and withstand future social, economic, and climatic shocks. Achieving this requires integrated approaches that strengthen both people and the systems on which they depend.

The findings presented in this report reaffirm the important role that the Social Employment Fund plays in strengthening household resilience and improving food security through integrated, community-based approaches. The evidence demonstrates that when employment opportunities are combined with productive livelihoods, skills development, and local food production, meaningful and lasting impacts can be achieved for vulnerable households and communities. Improvements in household income, increased access to nutritious food, and the establishment of productive, and commercial home gardens all point towards meaningful progress in strengthening household food security. Equally important, the assessment demonstrates the value of investing in productive assets and community capacity that can continue generating benefits beyond the duration of programme support. While some interventions remain in the early stages of implementation, the results provide a strong foundation upon which longer-term and more sustainable impacts can be built.

At Solidaridad Southern Africa, we remain committed to developing practical, market-oriented solutions that create sustainable livelihoods while strengthening resilient food systems. We trust that the findings and recommendations contained in this report will support continued learning, informed decision-making, and the scaling of interventions that deliver measurable social and economic outcomes.

It is our hope that the findings contained in this report will contribute meaningfully to ongoing discussions on employment creation, food security, and community resilience in South Africa. More importantly, we trust that they will help inform practical action to strengthen programmes that empower people, build resilient livelihoods, and contribute to more inclusive and sustainable food systems.

I extend my sincere appreciation to all programme participants, implementation partners, community stakeholders, and the assessment team whose commitment and contributions made this evaluation possible.



DR JONATHAN ATKINSON
MANAGING DIRECTOR
Solidaridad Southern Africa



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of the Food Security Outcomes Assessment conducted under the Social Employment Fund (SEF) programme. The assessment sought to examine the programme's contribution to food security outcomes across three interconnected pathways: participant household food security, household food production through supported home gardens, and community-level food access through produce donations made by participating farmers.

A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection. Quantitative findings were drawn from a structured household food security survey administered to a proportionally selected sample of 314 SEF participants from a participant population of 1,707 across seven implementation sites in Gauteng and North West. To assess broader community outcomes, the assessment further included seedling donation beneficiaries and households and institutions receiving produce donations from SEF-supported farmers. Qualitative evidence was generated through open-ended survey responses and 13 in-depth case studies, enabling the triangulation of statistical findings with beneficiary experiences.

The assessment found strong evidence that the programme is contributing positively to household food security. Overall, 71.0% of participants reported improvements in their household income since joining the programme, while 91.4% reported improvements in their household food situation. The monthly SEF stipend emerged as the primary mechanism through which participants improved their ability to purchase food and meet basic household needs. However, household vulnerability remains evident, with 66.9% of respondents describing their household income as only somewhat stable and 24.1% reporting unstable incomes.

Household food gardens demonstrated encouraging early outcomes by improving access to fresh vegetables, strengthening household food production, and reducing dependence on purchased food. Nevertheless, many gardens remained in the early stages of production during data collection, indicating that their full contribution to household food security is yet to be realised.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the SEF programme is contributing to improved food security through complementary pathways that strengthen household purchasing power, expand household food production, and improve community access to nutritious food. While some interventions remain in the early stages of implementation, the evidence indicates meaningful early outcomes and provides a foundation for monitoring longer-term food security impacts as the programme progresses.

Across all levels, food security outcomes remain heterogeneous; reflecting differences in household circumstances, access to resources, and local contextual factors.

1. INTRODUCTION

THE FOOD SECURITY OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT RATIONALE

Food security remains a persistent and multifaceted challenge for many vulnerable households, shaped by a complex interplay of unemployment, income instability, rising living costs and broader socio-economic pressures. These conditions often constrain households' ability to consistently access sufficient, nutritious and diverse food, thereby affecting overall well-being, resilience and quality of life.

Within the Social Employment Fund (SEF), food security outcomes are supported through a set of complementary intervention pathways operating at multiple levels. At the participant household level, the monthly stipend constitutes a critical income transfer mechanism that enhances purchasing power and enables households to meet essential consumption needs, including food. At the household production level, the programme supports subsistence and supplementary food production through the distribution of seedlings and the establishment of household food gardens, aimed at improving food availability and dietary diversity. At the community level, participating farmers contribute to local systems through the redistribution of produce to vulnerable households, schools, and community-based institutions, thereby the reach of food support beyond direct participants.

This assessment was undertaken to generate empirical evidence on the contribution of these intervention pathways to food security outcomes at both household and community levels. Moving beyond descriptive reporting of programme outputs and coverage, the assessment seeks to examine the extent to which participation in SEF influences food access, food availability, dietary diversity, and broader dimensions of household and community resilience.

The findings are intended to strengthen programme learning and adaptive management within SEF, while also contributing to broader evidence on integrated, multi-level approaches to food security. This includes informing future programme design, implementation refinement, and strategic decision-making aimed at enhancing the coherence and effectiveness of food security interventions across household and community systems.

METHODOLOGY

A. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopted a mixed-methods, cross-sectional design to assess food security outcomes with the SEF programme. The approach combined quantitative survey data with qualitative open-ended responses in order to generate both measurable indicators and contextual insights on household and community-level food security dynamics.

The design was informed by the need to capture early-to-mid implementation outcomes recognising that certain interventions are still maturing. As such, the study prioritises indicative outcome measurement and beneficiary-reported changes, rather than statistical generalisability.

The analytical framework is structured around a three-level food security pathway:

- Participant household-level outcomes (income, access, consumption, coping strategies)
- Household production-level outcomes (food gardens and utilisation of inputs)
- Community-level outcomes (food redistribution and donation flows)

B. DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLING

Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire administered through Google Forms among SEF programme participants and beneficiary groups across Gauteng and North West provinces. The instrument combined closed-ended questions with open-ended qualitative responses, enabling the integration of quantitative measurement with lived experience narratives.

The questionnaire was designed to capture key dimensions of food security, including:

- Household income sources and perceived income stability
- Food access, availability, and consumption patterns
- Dietary diversity and food insecurity experiences
- Coping strategies during seasons of low food access
- Household engagement in food production activities
- Experiences of food sharing and community-level redistribution

In addition to survey data, qualitative responses were used to enrich interpretation and provide contextual insight into household and community-level food security dynamics.

This was done through a stratified purposive sampling approach, employed to ensure representation across programme components, geographic areas, and beneficiary categories. The sampling design was guided by the structure of the SEF implementation model and the need to capture outcomes across three interconnected food security pathways.

The total population of **SEF participants was 1,707**, from which a sample of **314 (participant) respondents** was drawn. Sampling was proportionally allocated across programme sites based on the distribution of participants across localities to ensure balanced geographic representation.

C. PARTICIPANT HOUSEHOLD SAMPLE DISTRIBUTION

The participant sample was distributed across seven implementation areas as follows:

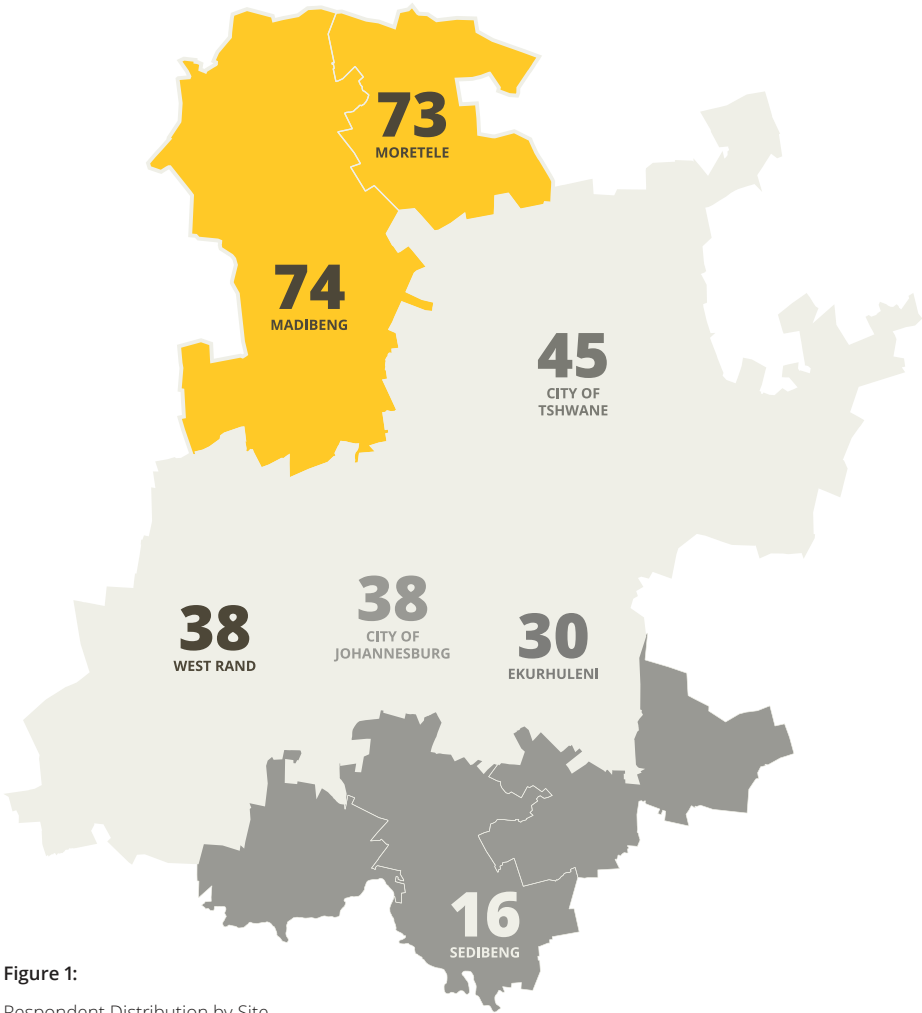


Figure 1:
Respondent Distribution by Site

Within each site, respondents were selected using a quota-based purposive approach, guided by beneficiary lists and supported by local field coordination structures. This ensured adequate coverage of localities while maintaining operational feasibility.

D. ADDITIONAL BENEFICIARY GROUPS

To capture the full food security intervention pathway, two additional beneficiary groups were included:

» FARMER/CBO PRODUCE DONATION BENEFICIARIES

A total of 41 households and institutions that had received produce donations from SEF-supported farmers were identified and included in the sampling frame. Given the relatively small size of this population, this group formed the basis for assessing community-level food redistribution outcomes.

From this frame, a sub-sample of 13 beneficiaries was purposely selected and interviewed for qualitative case study development. These case studies were drawn specifically from the North West province (Moretele and Madibeng), providing contextual insights into the nature and perceived impact of farmer-led food donations at community level.

» SEEDLING DONATION BENEFICIARIES

Households and institutions receiving seedlings were included as a distinct early-outcome group to assess initial household food production outcomes. This group covered an estimated 301 seedling recipients across West Rand and Ekurhuleni sites in the Gauteng province.

This component was intentionally included as an early-stage outcome pathway, recognising that production systems were still in the establishment phase at the time of data collection.

E. DATA ANALYSIS APPROACH

Quantitative data collected through the household food security survey were analysed using descriptive statistical techniques to summarise key indicators related to household food security, coping strategies, income changes, household gardens, and perceptions of SEF programme contributions. Data were cleaned, coded, and analysed to generate frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations using SPSS. Analysis was conducted across key respondent characteristics, including respondent type (SEF programme participants and seedling donation recipients), province (Gauteng and North West), and gender, to identify similarities and variations in programme outcomes. Findings were presented using tables and figures to illustrate patterns, trends, and differences across beneficiary groups.

Qualitative data collected through open-ended survey questions were analysed using thematic analysis. Responses were reviewed, coded, and grouped into key themes related to perceived household changes, benefits of household gardens, food security improvements, and challenges experienced by beneficiaries. Representative quotations were selected to illustrate beneficiary experiences and provide deeper contextual understanding of the quantitative findings. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings enabled a mixed-methods interpretation of the programme's contribution to household food security, livelihood improvements, and the sustainability of household food production practices.

2. RESPONDENT PROFILES

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

The survey respondents were predominantly female, who accounted for **nearly two-thirds (62.6%)** of all participants, while males represented 37.4% of the sample. This suggests that women were more actively represented in the survey and may constitute a significant proportion of SEF programme participants and beneficiaries. Respondents represented a broad range of age groups, with the largest proportion aged between 26 and 36 years (30%), followed closely by those aged 37 to 47 years (27.9%). Young adults aged 18 to 25 years accounted for 12.9% of respondents, while 19% were aged 48 to 58 years. Respondents aged 59 years and above constituted 11.0% of the sample.

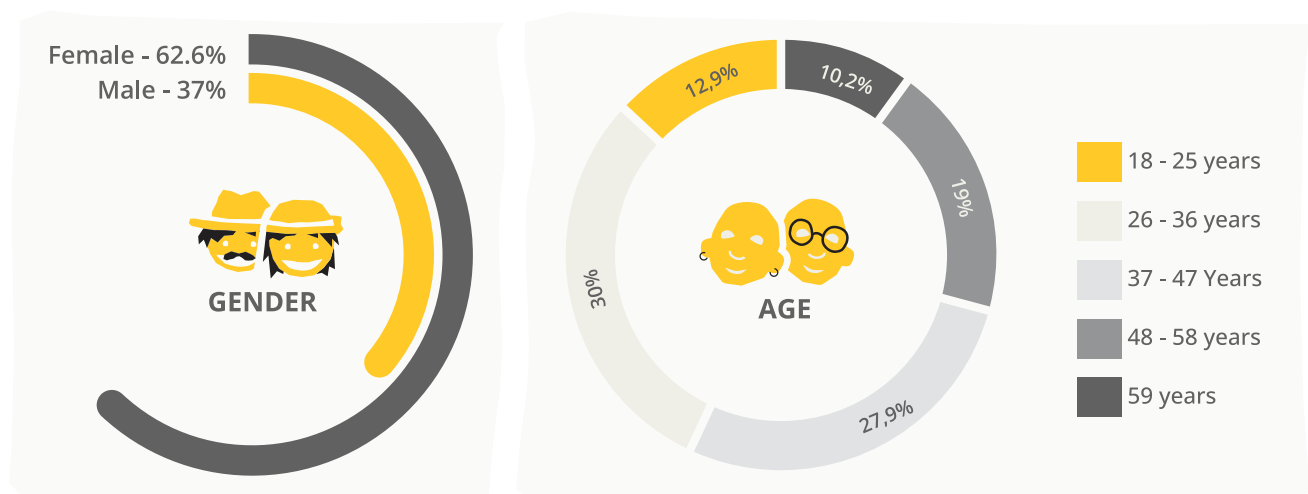


Figure 2: Gender & Age of the Respondents

In terms of the types of respondents, most respondents were SEF programme participants, accounting for 58.3% of all respondents. This proportion was considerably higher in Northwest (71.7%) than in Gauteng (53.8%), indicating that the survey sample in Northwest was largely comprised of direct programme participants. Seedling donation recipients constituted 33.8% of the overall sample and were predominantly drawn from Gauteng (37.6%) compared to 22.6% in Northwest. Farmer vegetable and produce donation recipients formed the smallest respondent category, accounting for 7.9% of the total sample. However, their representation was higher in Gauteng (8.6%) than in Northwest (5.7%).

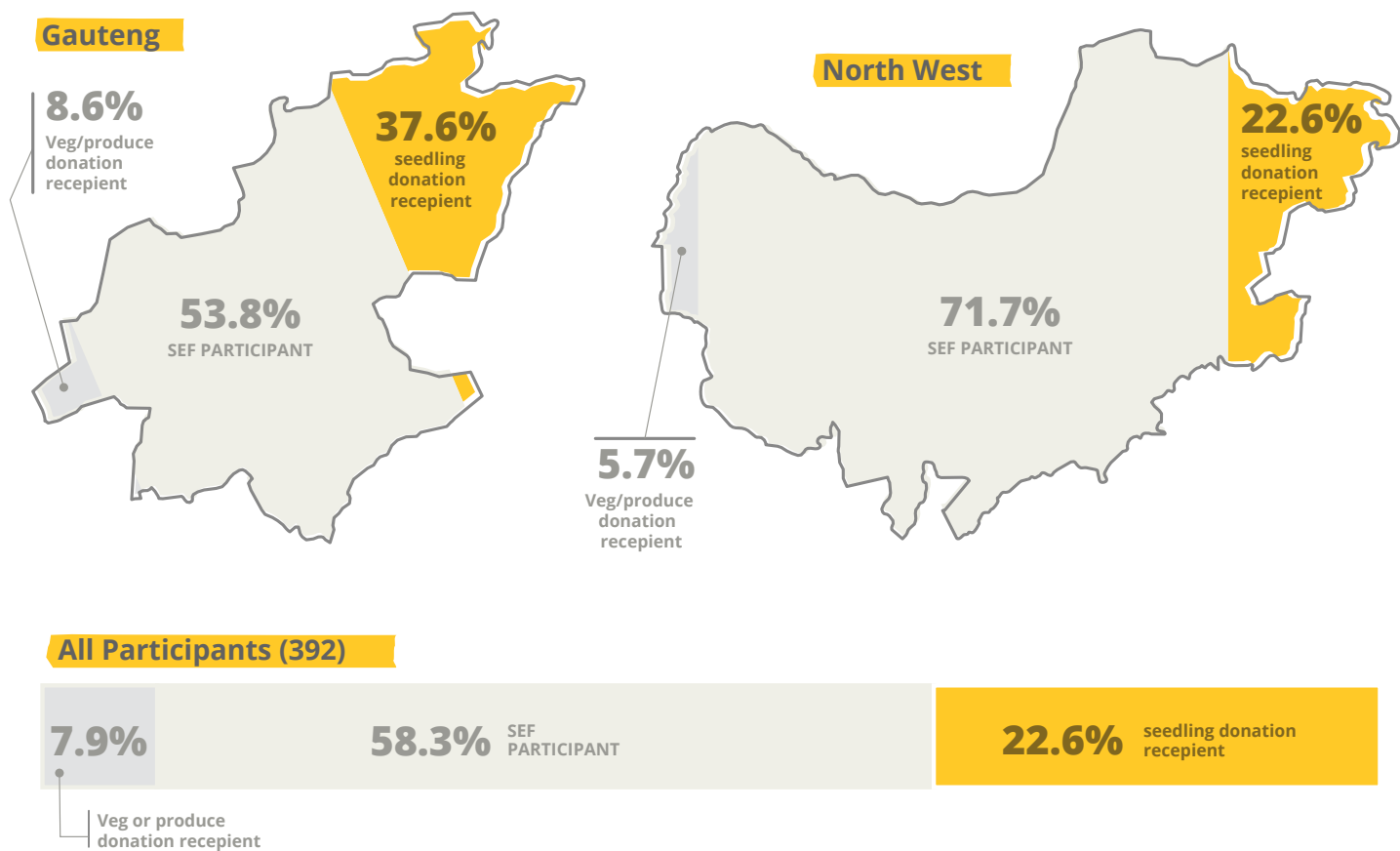


Figure 3: Type of Respondents

HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS

A. HOUSEHOLD DEPENDENCY

Household characteristics provide important context for understanding the food security needs and vulnerabilities of SEF beneficiaries. Household size and composition influence food consumption requirements, dependency levels, household expenditure patterns, and the capacity of households to benefit from livelihood and food security interventions. Findings show that most SEF beneficiaries households comprised between 3 and 4 members, representing 42.0% of SEF

beneficiaries. Approximately one-quarter (25.7%) reported having 5 to 6 household members, while 19.2% had more than 6 members. Only 13.1% of households consisted of 1 to 2 members. When it comes to children, the majority of households (52.1%) reported having one to two children under the age of 18, while 22.4% reported that they had three to four children. Overall, the findings indicate that most beneficiary households are supporting children, highlighting the importance of food security interventions in contributing to household nutrition and wellbeing, particularly for younger household members.

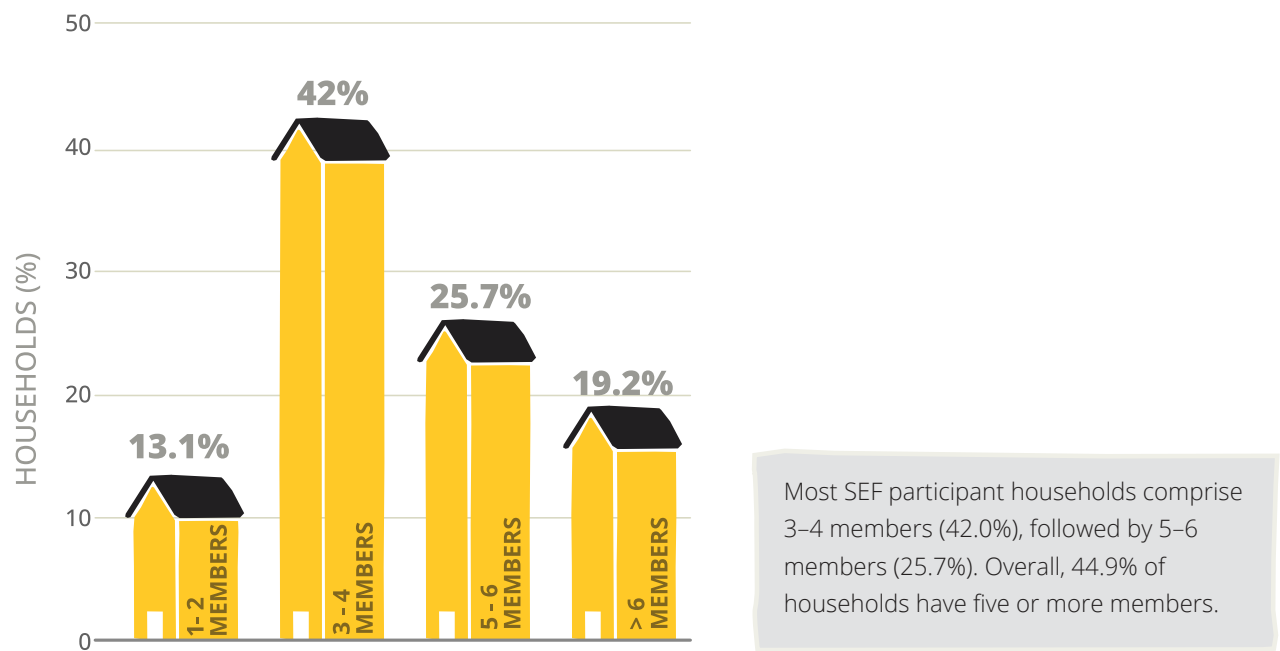


Figure 4: Household Size from where SEF participants are coming from

Further findings indicate that many beneficiary households support adult dependents in addition to children. Overall, 34.3% of households reported having more than 2 adult dependents, while 29.0% had two adult dependents and 23.3% had one adult dependent. Only 13.5% of households reported having no adult dependents. This suggests that a substantial proportion of households where SEF participants come from, carry significant dependency burdens.

The structural implication is straightforward but consequential. Larger households face a higher absolute cost of food security, a higher dependency burden per income earner, and a correspondingly lower margin for economic risk-taking, savings accumulation, or enterprise investment. When we speak about the barriers to entrepreneurship in this cohort, the fear of failure, the aspiration compression, the reluctance to invest, we are in part describing the rational economic behaviour of households operating with very little financial cushion and a large number of people depending on the outcome.

B. INCOME GENERATORS

When it comes to income generators, most participants’ households relied on a limited number of income earners. Overall, 42.9% of households reported having only one income-generating member, while 36.3% had two income earners. A smaller proportion (15.1%) reported having more than two income earners. Households in Northwest were slightly more likely to have multiple income earners, with 21.1% reporting more than two income-generating members compared to 12.4% in Gauteng. These findings show that most SEF participants’ households depend on one or two earners to support several household members and dependents.

Further, findings indicate that most SEF participants play a central economic role within their households. Overall, 60.8% reported that they are the main breadwinners, with this proportion being slightly higher in North West (65.8%) than in Gauteng (58.6%). The likelihood of being the primary breadwinner increased with age, rising from 31.1% among respondents aged 18–25 years to 78.8% among those aged 37–47 years. Parents were an important source of household support for younger beneficiaries, particularly those aged 18–25 years, where 37.8% identified a parent as the main breadwinner. Only 6.1% of respondents reported relying primarily on social grants, suggesting that most households depend on income-generating activities rather than social assistance as their main source of livelihood. The results further show that SEF participants support a considerable number of household members through their income and

contributions. Nearly half of respondents (42.4%) reported supporting one to two dependents, while 33.5% supported three to four people and a further 13.9% supported more than four people. Females were slightly more likely than males to support larger numbers of dependents, with 53.0% of female respondents supporting three or more people compared to 38.8% of males. These findings highlight the significant responsibility carried by many participants and underscore the potential importance of SEF-supported income and food security interventions in improving the wellbeing of entire households, rather than only the direct programme participants themselves.

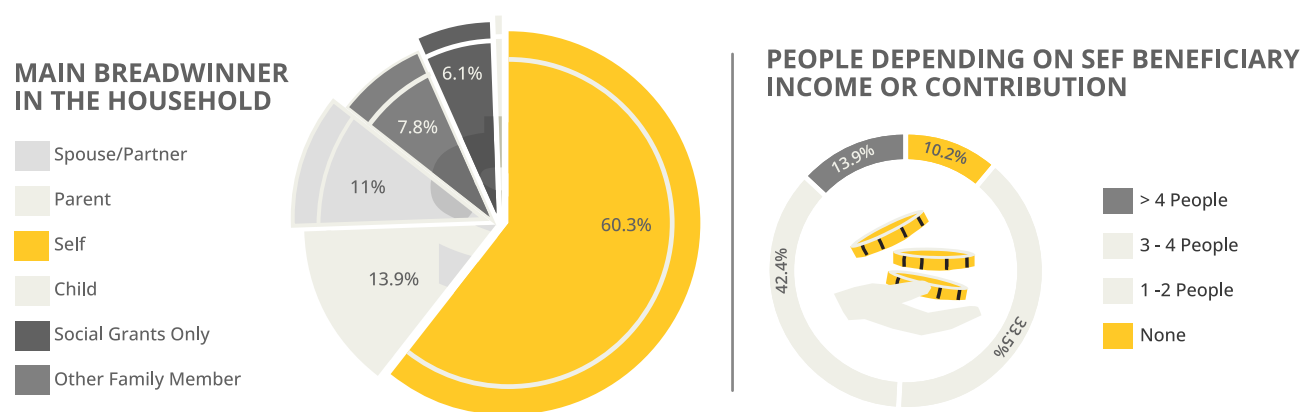


Figure 5: Overall Household Breadwinning and Income Dependence (n = 245)

	PROVINCE		GENDER		AGE				
	GAUTENG	NORTH WEST	MALE	FEMALE	18 - 25 YEARS	26 - 36 YEARS	37 - 47 YEARS	48 - 58 YEARS	59+ YEARS
n	169	76	98	147	45	97	66	34	3
MAIN BREADWINNER IN THE HOUSEHOLD									
Self	58.6%	65.8%	61.2%	60.5%	31.1%	59.8%	78.8%	70.6%	33.3%
Parent	14.2%	13.2%	20.4%	9.5%	37.8%	14.4%	3.0%	2.9%	0.0%
Spouse/Partner	13.6%	5.3%	5.1%	15.0%	8.9%	10.3%	10.6%	14.7%	33.3%
Other Family Member	7.1%	9.2%	10.2%	6.1%	13.3%	7.2%	6.1%	2.9%	33.3%
Social Grants Only	5.9%	6.6%	3.1%	8.2%	8.9%	8.2%	1.5%	5.9%	0.0%
Child	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.9%	0.0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
NUMBER OF PEOPLE THAT DEPEND ON SEF BENEFICIARY INCOME OR CONTRIBUTION									
None	11.2%	7.9%	14.3%	7.5%	20.0%	7.2%	9.1%	5.9%	33.3%
1 - 2 people	39.6%	48.7%	46.9%	39.5%	51.1%	43.3%	36.4%	41.2%	33.3%
3 - 4 people	36.1%	27.6%	27.6%	37.4%	15.6%	35.1%	42.4%	35.3%	33.3%
> 4 people	13.0%	15.8%	11.2%	15.6%	13.3%	14.4%	12.1%	17.6%	0.0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

TABLE 1: MAIN BREADWINNER AND DEPENDENCE BY PROVINCE, GENDER AND AGE

3. HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY OUTCOMES

This section presents the findings of the Food Security Outcomes Survey conducted among SEF project participants and beneficiaries. The analysis examines the contribution of the SEF project to household and community food security through improved household income, food access, dietary diversity, reduced reliance on negative coping strategies, establishment of household food gardens, and community food support initiatives. The findings are organised around the key outcome areas identified in the study objectives, namely household-level food security outcomes, household food production through

supported gardens, and community-level benefits resulting from produce donations. The section combines beneficiary perceptions and reported experiences to provide evidence of the project’s contribution to improved food security and community wellbeing.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME AND ECONOMIC STABILITY

The findings show that wages and salaries were the main source of household income among SEF participants, reported by 49.4% of participants. Social grants were the second most common income source (27.3%), followed by farming activities (9.8%) and piece jobs (8.6%). This indicates that while many SEF participants’ households have access to formal income sources, a substantial proportion remain dependent on social protection and less predictable livelihood activities. From a gender perspective, females were more likely than males to report social grants as their primary household income source (32.7% compared to 19.4%), while males were slightly more likely to rely on farming (12.2% compared to 8.2%) and piece jobs (11.2% compared to 6.8%). These differences suggest variations in livelihood pathways and income opportunities between male and female beneficiaries.

Despite wages being the dominant source of income, household income stability remains a challenge for many households. Overall, 66.9% of the households described their income as somewhat stable, while 24.1% reported unstable income from month to month. Only 9.0% considered their household income stable. The findings highlight the continued vulnerability of households to income fluctuations and the importance of SEF interventions in supporting more reliable livelihood opportunities and strengthening household resilience to food insecurity.

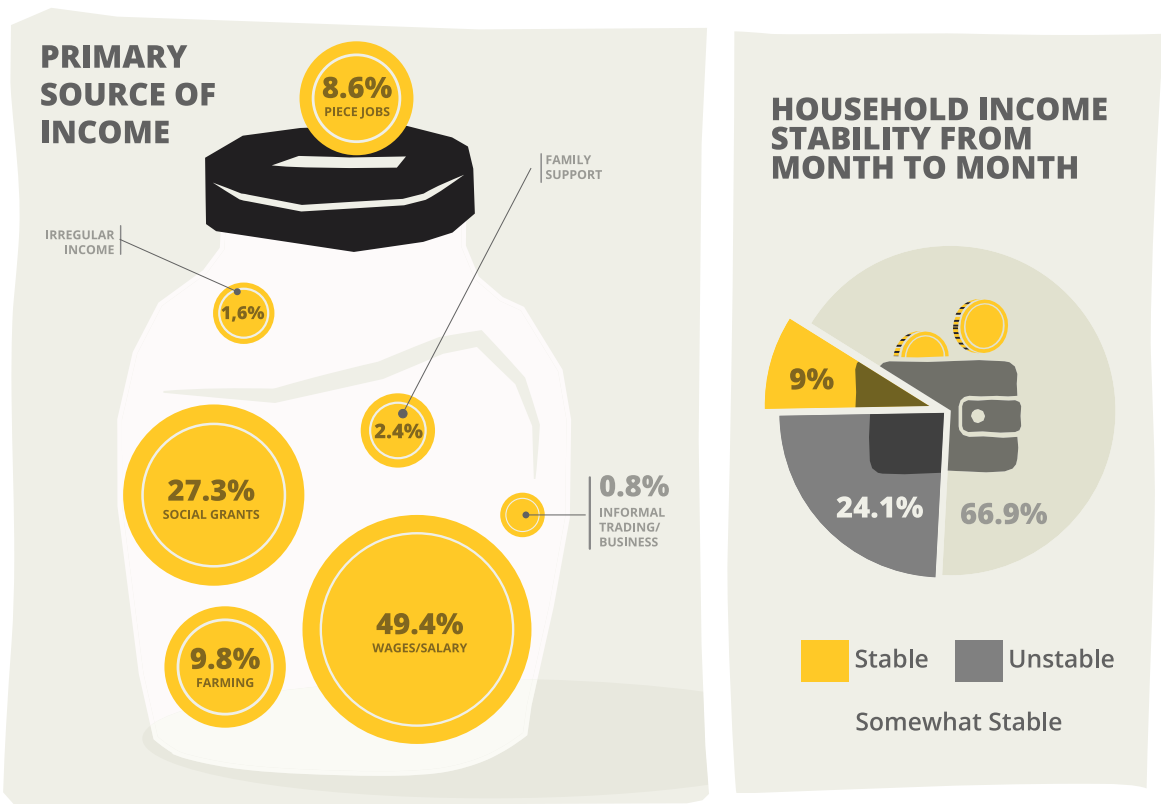


Figure 6: Household income sources and stability for all participants (n = 245)

	PROVINCE		GENDER	
	GAUTENG	NORTH WEST	MALE	FEMALE
n	169	76	98	147
HOUSEHOLD'S PRIMARY SOURCE OF INCOME				
Wages/Salary	51.5%	44.7%	51.0%	48.3%
Social grants	24.9%	32.9%	19.4%	32.7%
Farming	11.2%	6.6%	12.2%	8.2%

Piece Jobs	7.7%	10.5%	11.2%	6.8%
Family Support	3.0%	1.3%	3.1%	2.0%
No regular income	1.2%	2.6%	2.0%	1.4%
Informal trading/business	0.6%	1.3%	1.0%	0.7%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

HOUSEHOLD INCOME STABILITY FROM MONTH TO MONTH				
Unstable	27.2%	17.1%	24.5%	23.8%
Somewhat Stable	63.9%	73.7%	64.3%	68.7%
Stable	8.9%	9.2%	11.2%	7.5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

TABLE 2: HOUSEHOLD INCOME SOURCES AND STABILITY

CHANGES IN HOUSEHOLD INCOME SINCE JOINING SEF

This section examines participants’ perceptions of how their household income situation has changed since joining the SEF programme. Understanding perceived income changes provides insight into the extent to which SEF participation has contributed to improved household economic wellbeing and the ability of households to meet their basic needs, including food requirements.

The findings indicate that SEF participation has been associated with positive perceived changes in household income for the majority of participants. Overall, 71.0% of respondents reported that their household income situation had improved since joining SEF, while 22.4% indicated that their situation had worsened and 6.5% reported no change. Improvements were reported consistently across provinces, with 71.6% of beneficiaries in Gauteng and 69.7% in Northwest indicating improved income conditions. Gender differences were minimal, although male respondents were slightly more likely than females to report improved income (72.4% compared to 70.1%). Despite these positive trends, approximately one in five participants reported that their household income situation had worsened since joining SEF. This proportion was slightly higher among respondents in Northwest (25.0%) and among female beneficiaries (23.1%). While the survey did not investigate the underlying reasons for this perceived decline, the finding should not necessarily be interpreted as evidence of programme underperformance. It may instead reflect broader household economic pressures or temporary livelihood transitions commonly experienced by low-income households, where available income is diverted to absorb unexpected household shocks or support the establishment of new income-generating activities. These findings suggest that while SEF support has contributed to improved income opportunities for many households, some beneficiaries continue to experience economic challenges that may affect their ability to achieve sustained food security. Continued support aimed at strengthening income stability and livelihood resilience may therefore be important, particularly for more vulnerable households.

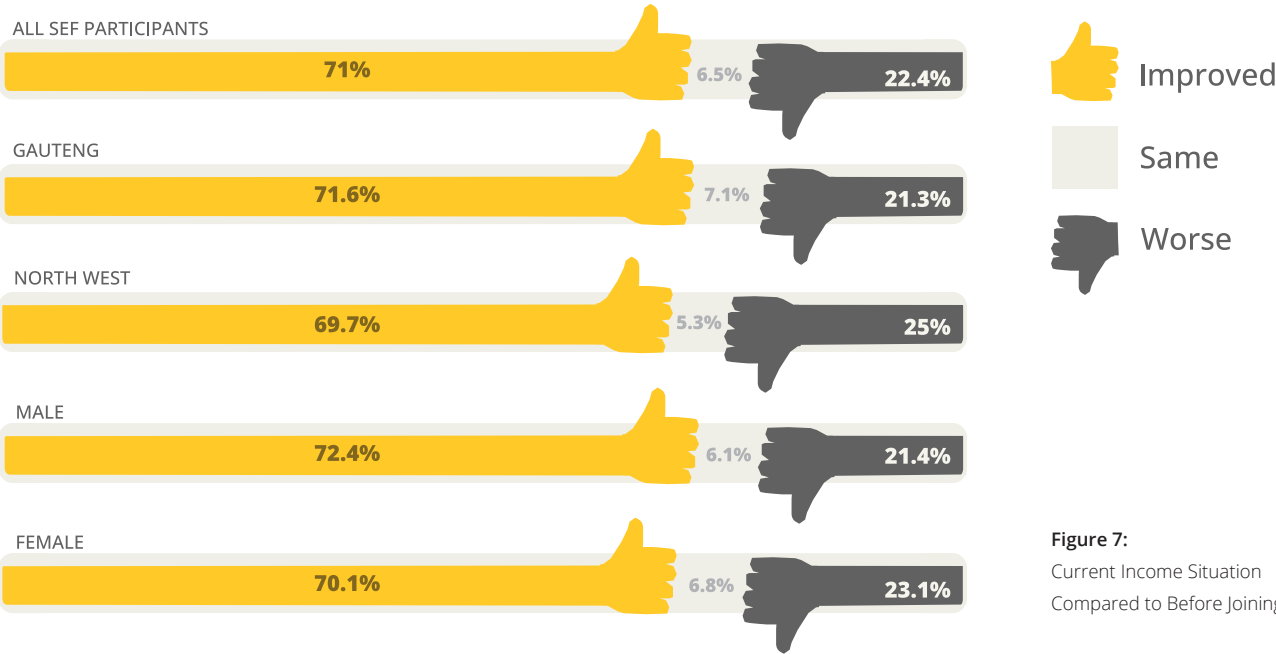


Figure 7:
Current Income Situation
Compared to Before Joining SEF

Beyond perceived improvements in household income, the survey explored the approximate magnitude of income experienced by beneficiaries and the extent to which SEF participation contributes to overall household income. Among beneficiaries who reported improvements in income, more than half (56.5%) indicated that their household income had increased by more than R1,000 per month since joining SEF. This pattern was consistent across provinces, with 55.9% of beneficiaries in Gauteng and 57.7% in Northwest reporting increases above R1,000 per month. Smaller income increases were reported by 43.5% of beneficiaries, including 22.9% who experienced increases of less than R500 per month and 20.6% who reported increases of less than R1,000 per month. From a gender perspective, male and female beneficiaries reported similar levels of income improvement, although males were slightly more likely to report increases above R1,000 per month (58.6% compared to 55.0% among females). Overall, the findings suggest that for many households, SEF participation has generated meaningful improvements in income levels.

The contribution of SEF income to overall household income was also substantial. Overall, 39.2% of SEF participants reported that SEF contributed between 25% and 50% of their monthly household income, while 25.3% indicated that SEF contributed more than 75% of their household income. A further 17.6% reported that SEF accounted for 51% to 75% of household income. The contribution of SEF was particularly notable in Northwest, where 30.3% of beneficiaries reported that more than three-quarters of their income came from SEF, compared to 23.1% in Gauteng. Gender differences were relatively limited, although female beneficiaries were slightly more likely than males to report high dependence on SEF income. These findings demonstrate the important role of SEF support as a household income source, while also highlighting the need to consider longer-term income diversification to reduce reliance on a single livelihood pathway.

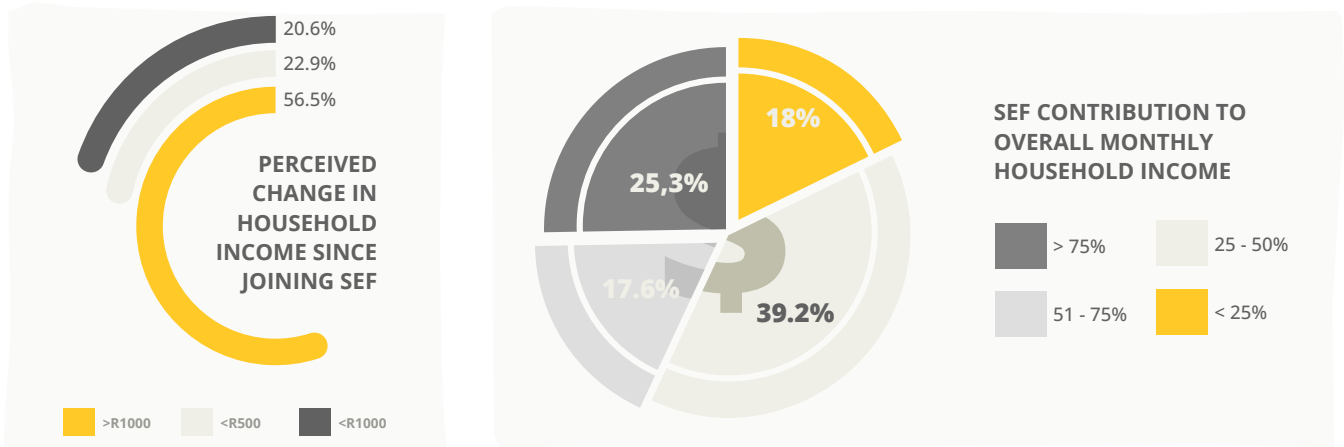


Figure 8: Overall Perceived Change in Household Income Since Joining SEF

PROVINCE					GENDER			
GAUTENG		NORTH WEST			MALE		FEMALE	
n	%	n	%		n	%	n	%
PERCEIVED CHANGE IN HOUSEHOLD INCOME SINCE JOINING SEF								
Increased by less than R1000/month	19	16.1%	16	30.8%	17	24.3%	18	18.0%
Increased by less than R500/month	33	28.0%	6	11.5%	12	17.1%	27	27.0%
Increased by more than R1000/month	66	55.9%	30	57.7%	41	58.6%	55	55.0%
Total	118	100%	52	100%	70	100%	100	100%
SEF CONTRIBUTION TO OVERALL MONTHLY HOUSEHOLD INCOME								
< 25%	33	19.5%	11	14.5%	20	20.4%	24	16.3%
25 - 50%	71	42.0%	25	32.9%	41	41.8%	55	37.4%
51 - 75%	26	15.4%	17	22.4%	14	14.3%	29	19.7%
> 75%	39	23.1%	23	30.3%	23	23.5%	39	26.5%
Total	169	100%	76	100%	98	100%	147	100%

TABLE 3: PERCEIVED CHANGE IN HOUSEHOLD INCOME SINCE JOINING SEF

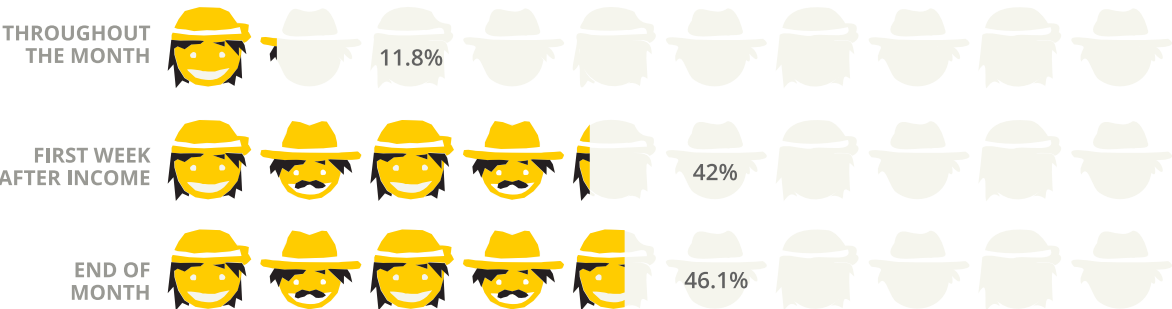
HOUSEHOLD FOOD AVAILABILITY AND ACCESS

This section examines household food security patterns among SEF beneficiaries, including periods during which households feel most food secure, the duration of food security, and perceived changes in household food situations since joining the programme. These indicators provide insight into households' ability to access sufficient food throughout the month and the extent to which SEF participation has contributed to improved food security outcomes.

The findings show that food security for many households remains closely linked to income cycles. Overall, 46.1% of beneficiaries reported feeling most food secure during the first week after receiving income, while 42.0% indicated that they were most food secure towards the end of the month. Only 11.8% reported stable food availability throughout the month. Households in North West were more likely to report being food secure towards the end of the month (52.6%) compared to those in Gauteng (37.3%), while Gauteng respondents were more likely to report food security immediately after receiving income (49.7%). Gender differences were relatively small, although female beneficiaries were slightly more likely to report stable food availability throughout the month than males (13.6% compared to 9.2%).

In terms of duration, the majority of households (81.2%) indicated that their period of food security lasts between one and three weeks, while only 15.1% reported being food secure for the entire month. Very few households (3.7%) indicated that their food security lasted for less than one week. These findings suggest that although many households experience periods of adequate food access, maintaining food security throughout the entire month remains a challenge for most beneficiaries. Despite these challenges, beneficiaries overwhelmingly reported improvements in their household food situation since joining SEF. Overall, 91.4% indicated that their household food situation had improved, while only 5.3% reported no change and 3.3% reported that their situation had worsened. Positive perceptions were evident across both provinces and genders, with 94.1% of respondents in Gauteng and 85.5% in North West reporting improvements. Similarly, over 90% of both male (90.8%) and female (91.8%) beneficiaries reported improved household food situations. These findings provide strong evidence that SEF participation has contributed positively to household food security, with beneficiaries reporting enhanced access to food and improved overall food availability since joining the programme.

PERIOD OF THE MONTH WITH GREATEST FOOD SECURITY



CHANGES IN HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY SINCE JOINING SEF



DURATION OF HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY DURING THE MONTH



Figure 9: All Respondents' Household Food Security Patterns

	PROVINCE				GENDER			
	GAUTENG		NORTH WEST		MALE		FEMALE	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
PERIOD OF THE MONTH WHEN HOUSEHOLDS EXPERIENCE THE GREATEST FOOD SECURITY								
Food availability is stable throughout the month	22	13.0%	7	9.2%	9	9.2%	20	13.6%
First week after income is received	84	49.7%	29	38.2%	47	48.0%	66	44.9%
End of the month	63	37.3%	40	52.6%	42	42.9%	61	41.5%
Total	169	100%	76	100%	98	100%	147	100%
DURATION OF HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY DURING THE MONTH								
Less than 1 week	9	5.3%	0	0.0%	2	2.0%	7	4.8%
1 - 3 weeks	134	79.3%	65	85.5%	80	81.6%	119	81.0%
Entire month	26	15.4%	11	14.5%	16	16.3%	21	14.3%
Total	169	100%	76	100%	98	100%	147	100%
CHANGES IN HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY SINCE JOINING SEF								
Worse	2	1.2%	6	7.9%	5	5.1%	3	2.0%
No Change	5.3%	8	4.7%	5	6.6%	4	4.1%	9
Improved	91.4%	159	94.1%	65	85.5%	89	90.8%	135
Total	100%	169	100%	76	100%	98	100%	147

TABLE 4: HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY PATTERNS

It is important to note that cyclical food insecurity is distinct from chronic food insecurity in its temporal structure, but its consequences for household wellbeing and child nutrition are cumulative and significant. Children who experience regular periods of inadequate nutrition (even within a monthly cycle) face developmental risks that are not captured by average consumption measures. Cognitive development, school attendance, and learning outcomes are all sensitive to nutritional consistency, not just nutritional average.

HOUSEHOLD DIETARY DIVERSITY

This section examines two important dimensions of household food security among SEF beneficiaries: dietary diversity and experiences of food insecurity. Dietary diversity provides an indication of households' access to a variety of food groups necessary for adequate nutrition, while food insecurity experiences capture the extent to which households face challenges in accessing sufficient food, including reduced meal frequency, smaller portions, hunger, and complete food deprivation. To assess the severity of food insecurity, a Household Food Insecurity Severity Score was calculated using four indicators: reduced number of meals (HFS22), reduced portion sizes (HFS23), experiences of going to bed hungry (HFS24), and spending a whole day without eating (HFS25). Higher scores indicate more frequent and severe experiences of food insecurity. The results provide insight into the extent to which SEF beneficiaries have achieved improved food access and the remaining vulnerabilities affecting household food security.

These findings should be interpreted within the context of the survey period, which was conducted during the week preceding month-end when many participant households were approaching their next stipend payment. As household food access was shown earlier in the assessment to fluctuate according to monthly income cycles, the dietary diversity reported for the previous seven days may reflect reduced purchasing power during this period. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that many beneficiary households continue to experience challenges in maintaining consistently diverse diets throughout the month.

Overall, 85.3% of households reported consuming fewer than five food groups in the previous seven days, while only 14.7% consumed five or more food groups. Dietary diversity was slightly higher among households in the North West, where 18.4% consumed five or more food groups compared to 13.0% in Gauteng. Gender differences were limited, although male-headed

households were marginally more likely to report consuming five or more food groups than female-headed households (16.3% compared to 13.6%). These findings suggest that while SEF support may have contributed to improved food access, many households may still have limited access to diverse diets.

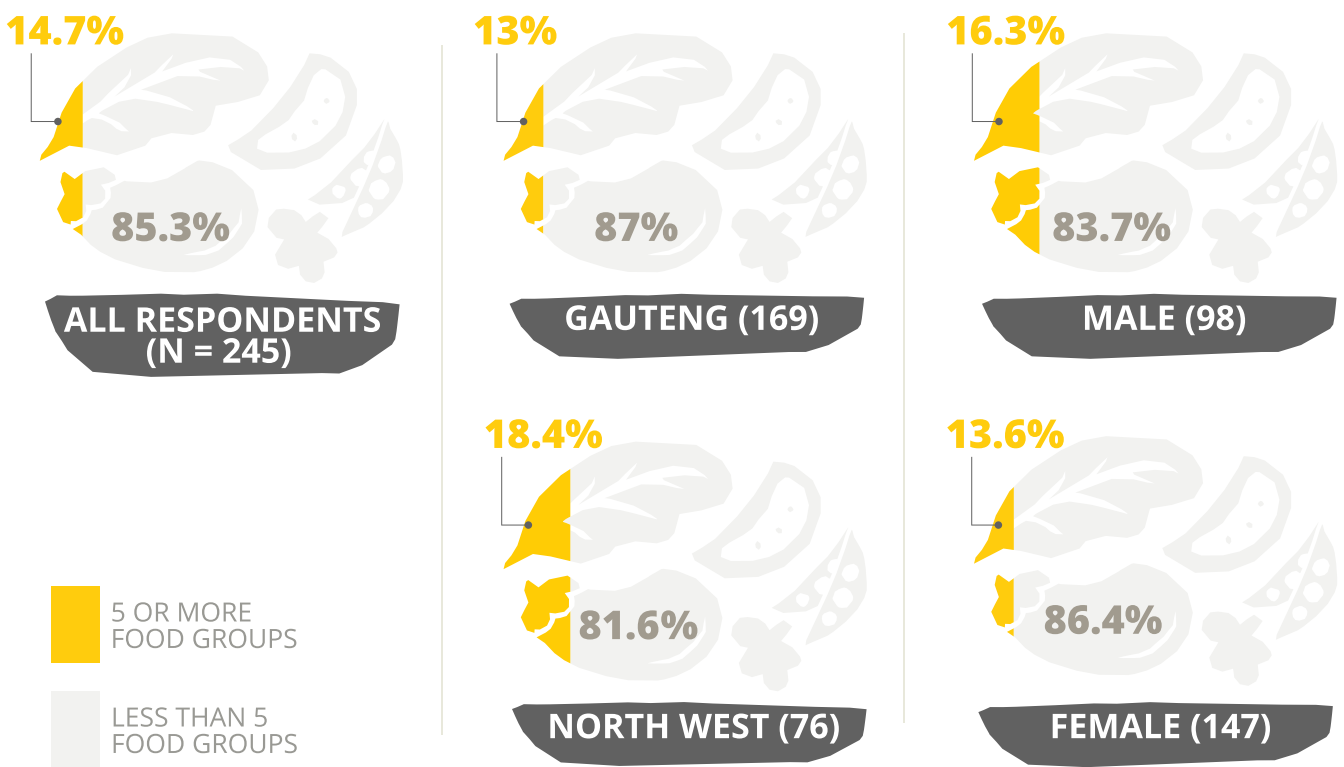


Figure 10: Household Dietary Diversity in the Past Seven Days

The food insecurity severity score further highlights the continued food security challenges experienced by some households. Overall, 44.9% of households were classified as food secure, while 45.7% experienced moderate food insecurity and 9.4% experienced severe food insecurity. Food insecurity was more pronounced among households in the North West, where 52.6% were classified as moderately food insecure and 10.5% as severely food insecure, compared to 42.6% and 8.9% respectively in Gauteng. Although North West households reported slightly higher dietary diversity, they also experienced greater food insecurity, suggesting that while households may access a variety of foods, this access is not always consistent or sufficient throughout the month.

From a gender perspective, female respondents were more likely to be classified as food secure (47.6%) compared to males (40.8%), while male-headed households had a slightly higher prevalence of severe food insecurity (11.2% compared to 8.2% among female respondents).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that although a substantial proportion of SEF beneficiaries have achieved improved food access, many households continue to experience constraints related to food quantity and dietary quality. The persistence of moderate and severe food insecurity among some households highlights the importance of continued livelihood support, household food production initiatives, and interventions aimed at improving access to diverse and nutritious foods.

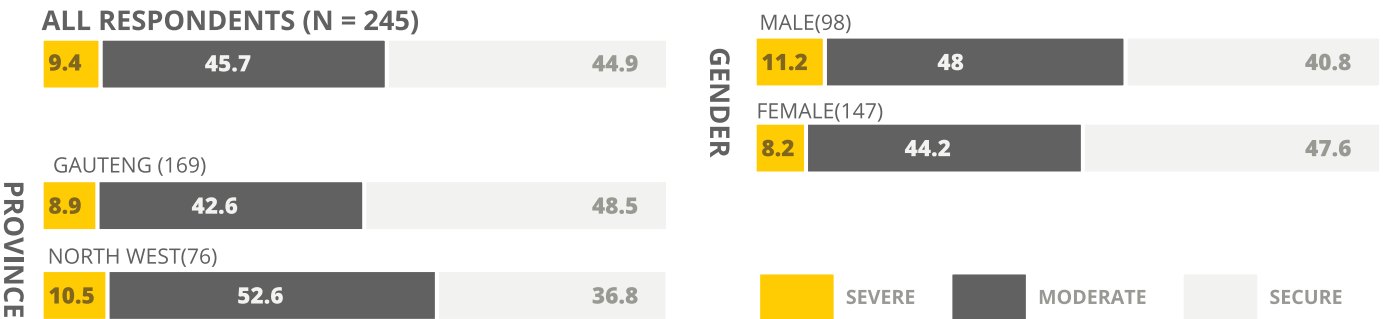


Figure 11: Household Food Insecurity Severity

HOUSEHOLD COPING STRATEGIES DURING FOOD SHORTAGES

This section examines the strategies households use when food is insufficient, providing insight into the extent and nature of food insecurity among respondents. Coping mechanisms such as reducing food consumption, borrowing resources, or relying on social networks are commonly adopted when households face temporary shortages. Understanding these behaviours helps to assess household resilience and the degree to which families remain vulnerable despite improvements in food security outcomes.

The findings show that the most common coping strategy was reducing meal portions, reported by 37.6% of respondents, followed closely by borrowing money (34.7%). About one-quarter of households (24.5%) relied on neighbours, friends, or relatives for support, while 20.4% purchased food on credit. More severe coping mechanisms were less common, with only 8.2% reporting that they skipped meals and 3.3% indicating that they borrowed food. Respondents in Gauteng were more likely to rely on neighbours for support (30.2%) compared to those in North West (11.8%), suggesting stronger use of informal social support networks in Gauteng.

A gender analysis reveals some differences in coping behaviours. Female respondents were more likely than males to reduce meal portions (40.8% versus 32.7%) and skip meals (10.9% versus 4.1%), indicating that women may be more likely to absorb the effects of food shortages within the household. In contrast, male respondents were slightly more likely to borrow money (36.7% versus 33.3%), buy food on credit (21.4% versus 19.7%), and borrow food (4.1% versus 2.7%). Overall, the relatively low prevalence of severe coping mechanisms such as skipping meals and borrowing food suggests that while food shortages still occur, many households are able to manage them through less extreme strategies.

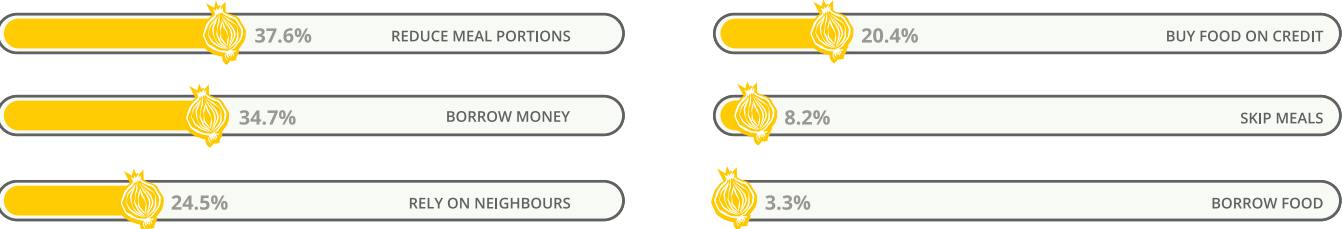


Figure 12: Coping Strategies, All Respondents (N = 245)

	PROVINCE		GENDER	
	GAUTENG (N=169)	NORTH WEST (N=76)	MALE (N=98)	FEMALE (N=147)
Reduce Meal Portions	36.1%	40.8%	32.7%	40.8%
Borrow Money	35.5%	32.9%	36.7%	33.3%
Rely on Neighbours	30.2%	11.8%	25.5%	23.8%
Buy Food on Credit	20.1%	21.1%	21.4%	19.7%
Skip Meals	8.9%	6.6%	4.1%	10.9%
Borrow Food	3.6%	2.6%	4.1%	2.7%

TABLE 5: COPING STRATEGIES

The findings indicate that participation in the SEF programme has been associated with a substantial reduction in the use of negative food-related coping strategies. Participants were specifically asked whether the coping strategies they typically rely on during periods of food shortage had become less frequent since joining the programme. Overall, 93.1% of respondents reported that these strategies had become less frequent, with 50.2% indicating that they had decreased significantly and a further 42.9% reporting that they had decreased somewhat. Only 6.9% of respondents reported no change in their reliance on coping mechanisms. These results suggest that the programme has contributed positively to strengthening household food security by reducing the need for households to adopt adverse measures such as reducing meal portions, borrowing money, purchasing food on credit, or skipping meals when food is insufficient.

Provincial differences were evident, with respondents in North West more likely to report a significant reduction in their reliance on coping strategies (60.5%) compared to those in Gauteng (45.6%). Conversely, Gauteng respondents were more likely to report a moderate reduction (45.6% versus 36.8%). From a gender perspective, female respondents were more likely than males to report that their reliance on coping strategies had decreased significantly (54.4% versus 43.9%), while male respondents were more likely to indicate a moderate reduction (50.0% versus 38.1%). The stronger improvements reported by women may reflect the programme’s contribution to reducing food-related pressures within households, particularly given that women often play a central role in managing household food consumption and responding to periods of food shortage. Overall, the findings provide strong evidence that SEF participation has reduced households’ reliance on negative coping strategies, an important indicator of improved food security and household resilience.

HOUSEHOLD’S FREQUENCY OF COPING STRATEGIES SINCE JOINING SEF

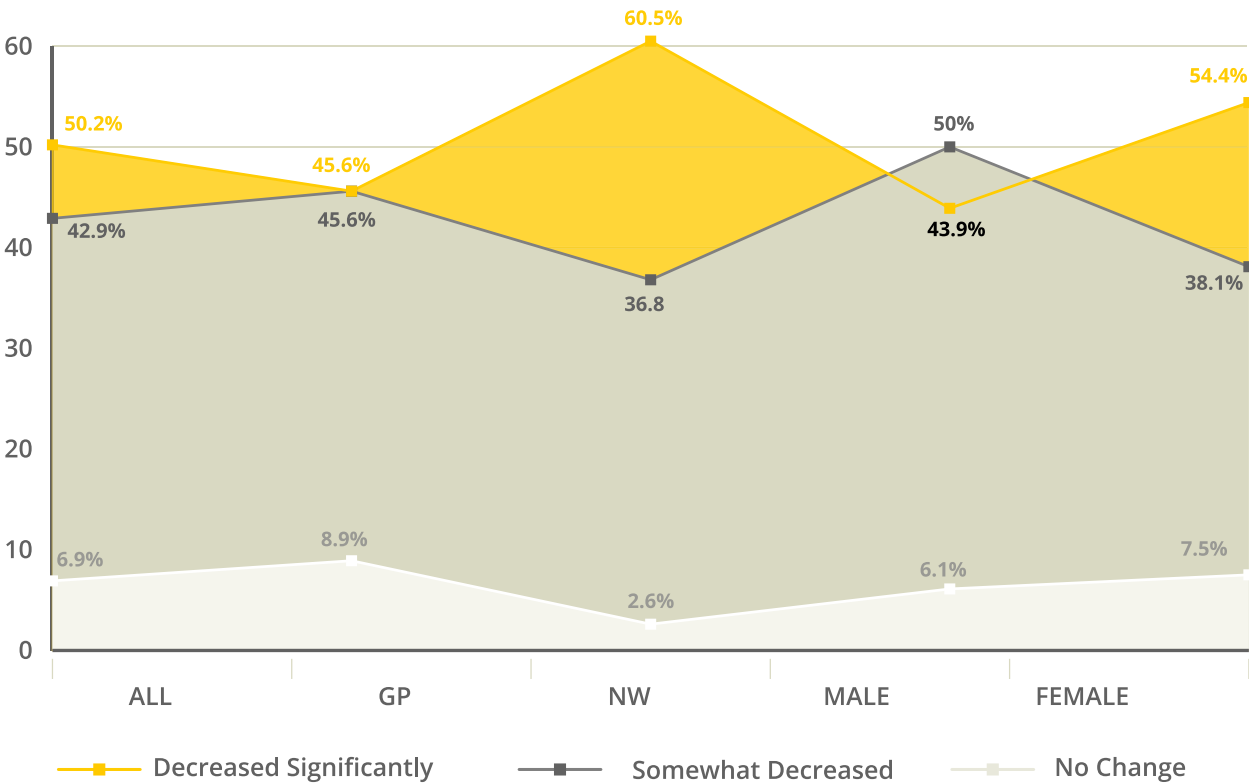


Figure 13: Change in the frequency of household food coping strategies since joining SEF

BENEFICIARY PERSPECTIVES ON HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY

To complement the quantitative findings on food security, beneficiaries were asked to describe in their own words how participation in the SEF programme had affected food availability and daily life within their households. The responses provide valuable insights into the lived experiences of participants and the perceived pathways through which the programme contributes to household wellbeing. Overall, the narratives reveal overwhelmingly positive experiences, with beneficiaries reporting improvements in food access, dietary quality, household income, financial stability, food production, and general wellbeing. Only a small number of respondents indicated no significant changes or noted challenges related to delayed payments or difficulties with gardening activities.

The most frequently reported change was improved access to food and reduced food insecurity. Many participants noted that they were now able to buy sufficient food, eat more regularly, and avoid going to bed hungry. A female participant from Moretele explained that “Since I joined SEF I no longer go to bed hungry,” while a male participant from Sedibeng stated that “Since I joined this programme I’m no longer food insecure....I’m able to buy enough food....I even have a garden at home currently.” Similarly, a female participant from Sedibeng remarked that “So far we managed to have enough food for the whole month; our life has improved.” Several respondents also highlighted increased meal frequency, with one male participant from COJ noting that “It has made life much better; we are able to have three meals a day.” These narratives reinforce the quantitative findings showing improvements in household food security among programme participants.

Improved dietary diversity and nutrition emerged as another major theme. Beneficiaries reported consuming healthier foods, increasing their intake of vegetables, and providing more nutritious meals for their families. A female participant from Ekurhuleni stated, “We now afford to eat more nutritious food than before,” while a female respondent from Moretele explained that “We eat healthy and nutritional food, even if we don’t have protein at least we have vegetables to have with starch.” A female participant from Madibeng similarly reported that “Since joining SEF, our household eats better and more regularly, our nutrition has improved.” Others highlighted the ability to access a greater variety of foods, with a female respondent from COT noting that “Since joining SEF I am able to provide a variety of meals for me and my family.” These responses suggest that the programme is contributing not only to food availability but also to improved dietary quality.

Many respondents attributed these improvements to the additional income received through SEF, which strengthened their ability to purchase food and meet other household needs. A female participant from COJ explained that “The SEF helped in terms of extra income and better food purchases,” while a male participant from West Rand stated that “It has a lot of impact because I’m able to put food on the table and also now have a stable source of income.” Beyond food, beneficiaries reported being able to pay rent, purchase electricity, buy clothing, support children’s schooling, and reduce debt. A female participant from Moretele described the broader household benefits, saying, “It brought change at home. Not only focusing on food but also I’ve managed to buy building materials at home.” Similarly, a male participant from Moretele reported that “SEF helped me to pay debts.” These accounts indicate that the programme is helping to strengthen overall household resilience and economic wellbeing.

Beyond food-related outcomes, respondents frequently described improvements in personal wellbeing, confidence, independence, and reduced stress. A female participant from Madibeng reported that “Since joining SEF, my life has improved in many ways that I’m independent, confident and financially stable.” Similarly, a female participant from West Rand noted that “We no longer rely on my parents for basic necessities,” while another from Sedibeng stated that “It’s made me more independent and aware that small actions at home can save money and reduce stress for everyone.” Several respondents also indicated that the programme positively affected their mental wellbeing by reducing financial pressures and uncertainty around food access.

4. CONTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLD FOOD GARDENS

Household food gardens represent an important pathway through which SEF contributes to strengthening household food security by improving access to fresh, nutritious, and locally produced food. In contexts where households experience financial constraints, rising food prices, and periods of limited food availability, household gardens can provide a reliable supplementary source of vegetables while reducing dependence on purchased food. Beyond improving food availability, household gardening can enhance dietary diversity, promote healthier eating practices, reduce household food expenditure, and strengthen resilience during periods of economic hardship.

This section examines the early contribution of household food gardens to food security among SEF beneficiaries. As seedling distribution was still in the early stages of implementation at the time of data collection, the assessment focuses primarily on garden establishment, utilisation of distributed seedlings, initial production experiences, challenges encountered, and beneficiaries’ perceptions of the anticipated contribution of household gardens to future food security. The analysis therefore explores early outcomes such as the uptake of household food production, adoption of gardening practices, and perceived potential for improving access to fresh vegetables, reducing household food expenditure, strengthening dietary diversity, and enhancing household resilience over time, rather than long-term food security impacts.

The establishment of household gardens and acquisition of agricultural knowledge were also frequently mentioned. Many participants reported that training and access to seedlings enabled them to grow their own vegetables, thereby reducing food expenditure and improving food availability. A female participant from Ekurhuleni noted that “The SEF has helped me a lot because now I can even plant my own food in a home garden.” A male respondent from COT stated that “It’s improved food security in the household whereby I also have a garden in the house through the skills I received.” Likewise, a female participant from COT remarked that “It changed my life because now I am able to plant in the yard and eat; I am no longer buying vegetables.” Participants also highlighted improved meal planning and food management practices, with one female respondent from Moretele explaining that “We plan meals ahead instead of buying food last minute, which saves money.”



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DISTRIBUTION AND UTILISATION OF SEEDLINGS

Table 6 presents findings on the distribution and utilisation of seedlings provided through the SEF programme. Overall, programme coverage was nearly universal, with 99.3% of respondents reporting that they had received seedlings from SEF. Receipt rates were similarly high across both provinces, reaching 99.2% in Gauteng and 100% in North West. Most beneficiaries (91.5%) reported receiving seedlings only once, while 7.0% had received seedlings two to three times and a small proportion (1.4%) reported receiving regular ongoing support. These findings suggest that the programme successfully reached its intended beneficiaries, although repeated seedling support was relatively limited.

The results further indicate that beneficiaries actively utilised the seedlings they received. Nearly all respondents (93.7%) had already planted the seedlings, while only 2.1% had not yet planted them and 4.2% reported sharing seedlings with others. Notably, no respondents reported that seedlings died before planting, suggesting that beneficiaries were generally able to manage and utilise the distributed inputs effectively. The high planting rate demonstrates strong beneficiary interest and commitment to establishing food gardens as a strategy for improving household food security, as well as the confidence participants have to independently apply the knowledge and skills acquired through the programme.

Regarding planting locations, the majority of seedlings (79.6%) were established in home gardens, highlighting the programme’s strong household-level orientation. A further 15.5% were planted in institutional gardens, while 4.9% were planted in community gardens. Provincial differences were modest, although North West recorded a slightly higher proportion of seedlings planted in institutional gardens (20.8%) compared to Gauteng (14.4%). The predominance of home-based gardens suggests that beneficiaries primarily viewed the seedlings as a means of enhancing household food production, improving access to fresh vegetables, and reducing food expenditure. At the same time, the use of institutional and community gardens demonstrates broader community-level benefits, including support for schools, early childhood development centres, and other shared food production initiatives.

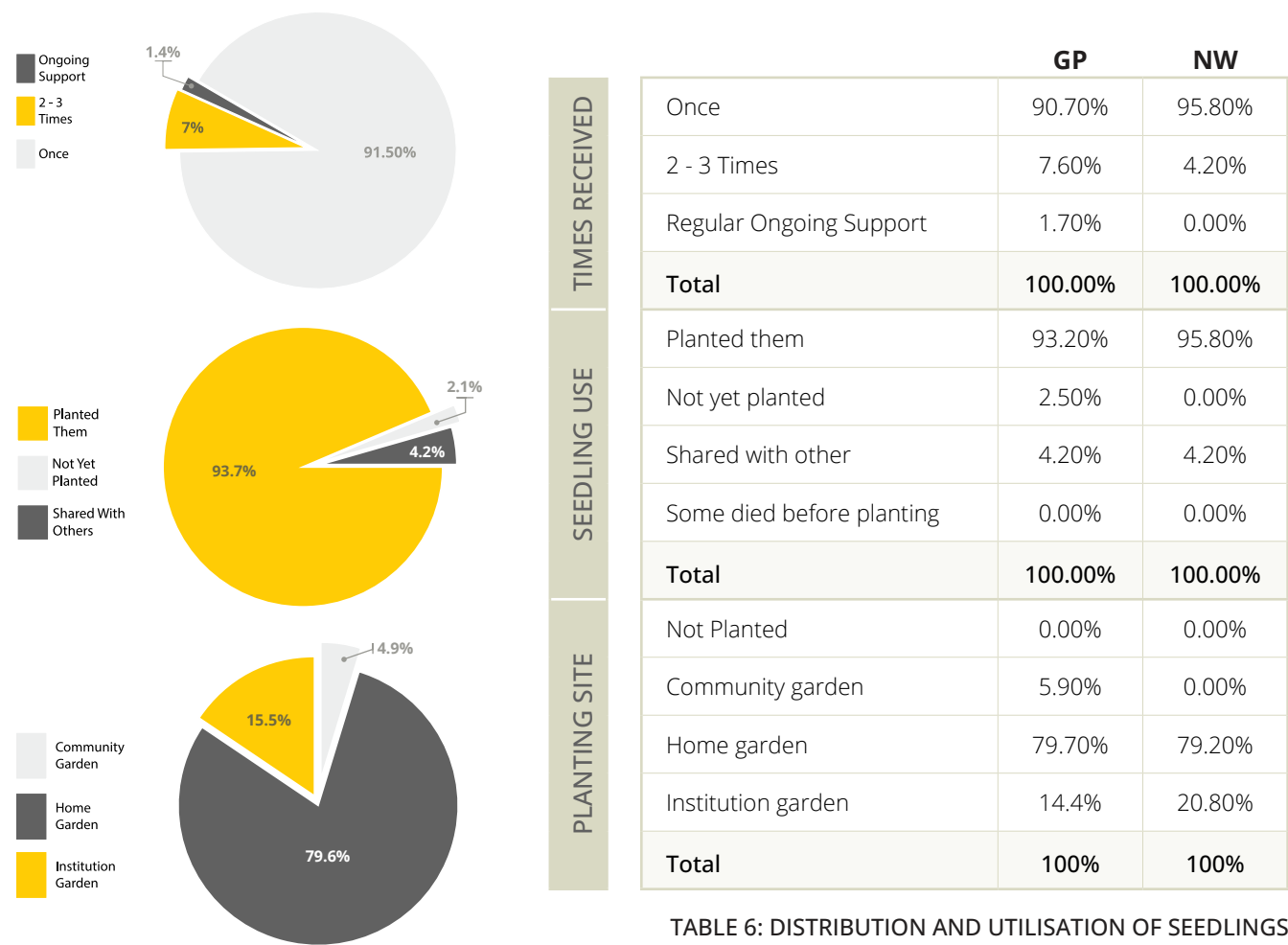


Figure 14:
Distribution and Utilisation of Seedlings
All Respondents (N = 245)

TABLE 6: DISTRIBUTION AND UTILISATION OF SEEDLINGS

The seed recipients were asked to identify the main crops currently being cultivated using the seedlings received through the SEF programme. The findings indicate that spinach is by far the most widely cultivated crop, reported by 95.1% of respondents overall, with consistently high proportions in both Gauteng (94.9%) and North West (95.8%). This reflects the popularity of spinach as a fast-growing, nutrient-rich vegetable that can contribute significantly to household food availability and dietary diversity. Onions were the second most commonly cultivated crop, grown by 54.2% of respondents overall. However, there was a notable provincial difference, with onion cultivation being substantially higher in North West (91.7%) than in Gauteng (46.6%). This suggests differences in crop preferences, agroecological conditions, or seedling distribution patterns between the two provinces.

A diverse range of additional vegetables were also being cultivated, although at lower levels. Rape greens was grown by 33.8% of respondents overall and was particularly common in Gauteng (39.0%) compared to North West (8.3%). Cabbage was cultivated by nearly one-quarter of recipients (24.6%), with higher uptake in North West (37.5%) than Gauteng (22.0%). Other vegetables included mustard greens (16.2%), China spinach (14.8%), and tomatoes (10.6%), indicating efforts by households to diversify production and improve dietary variety. Less commonly cultivated crops included Swiss chard (4.2%), carrots (3.5%), beetroot (1.4%), and lettuce (0.7%). Overall, the crop mix demonstrates that households are primarily focusing on leafy vegetables and other nutrient-dense crops that can provide regular harvests for home consumption while also creating opportunities for surplus production and potential income generation.

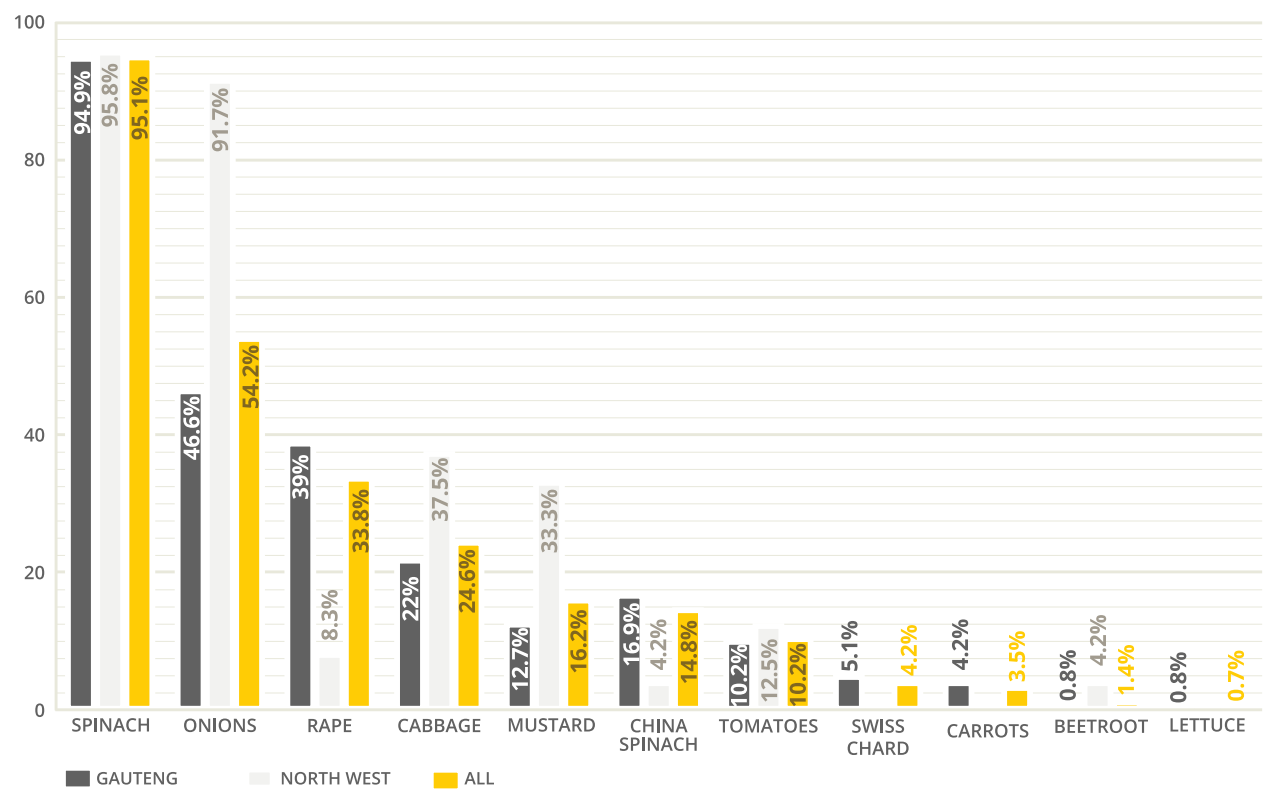


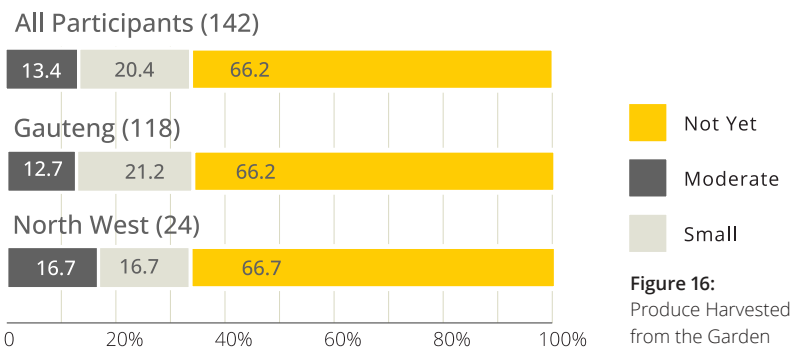
Figure 15: Main Crops Planted by Seed Recipients

HARVESTING AND UTILISATION OF PRODUCE

To assess the early outcomes of the household gardens, seedling recipients were asked whether they had harvested any produce from their gardens since receiving support from the SEF programme. The findings show that, at the time of the survey, two-thirds of recipients (66.2%) had not yet harvested any produce, with virtually identical proportions reported in Gauteng (66.1%) and North West (66.7%). This was due to the fact that many gardens were still in the establishment or growing phase, reflecting the relatively recent distribution of seedlings and the time required for crops to mature before harvest.

Despite the high proportion of respondents who had not yet harvested, approximately one-third (33.8%) had already begun benefiting from their gardens through crop production. Overall, 20.4% reported harvesting small amounts of produce, while 13.4% had harvested moderate amounts. North West recorded a slightly higher proportion of respondents harvesting

moderate quantities (16.7%) compared to Gauteng (12.7%), while Gauteng had a slightly higher proportion harvesting small amounts (21.2% versus 16.7%). These findings indicate that although most gardens were still developing, a substantial number of households had already started producing food for consumption, demonstrating the potential of the programme to improve household food availability and dietary diversity as the gardens become more established and productive over time.



Among respondents who had already harvested produce from their gardens, the findings indicate that the primary use of the harvest was for household consumption. More than half of respondents (55.5%) reported that the produce was consumed by their household members, highlighting the direct contribution of household gardens to improving food availability and access to fresh vegetables. This finding suggests that the gardens are already playing an important role in strengthening household food security and supplementing daily meals with nutritious produce. The benefits of the gardens extended beyond the immediate household. Nearly one-third of respondents (31.0%) reported sharing their harvest with neighbours, demonstrating the potential of the initiative to promote social support and food sharing within communities. In addition, 11.0% indicated that they sold part of their harvest, providing evidence that some households are beginning to generate supplementary income from their gardens. A smaller proportion (approximately 2.0%) reported using the produce to support elderly people, reflecting the broader social and welfare benefits of the intervention. Overall, these findings suggest that while household consumption remains the primary purpose of the gardens, the produce is also contributing to community support networks and creating emerging livelihood opportunities for participating households.

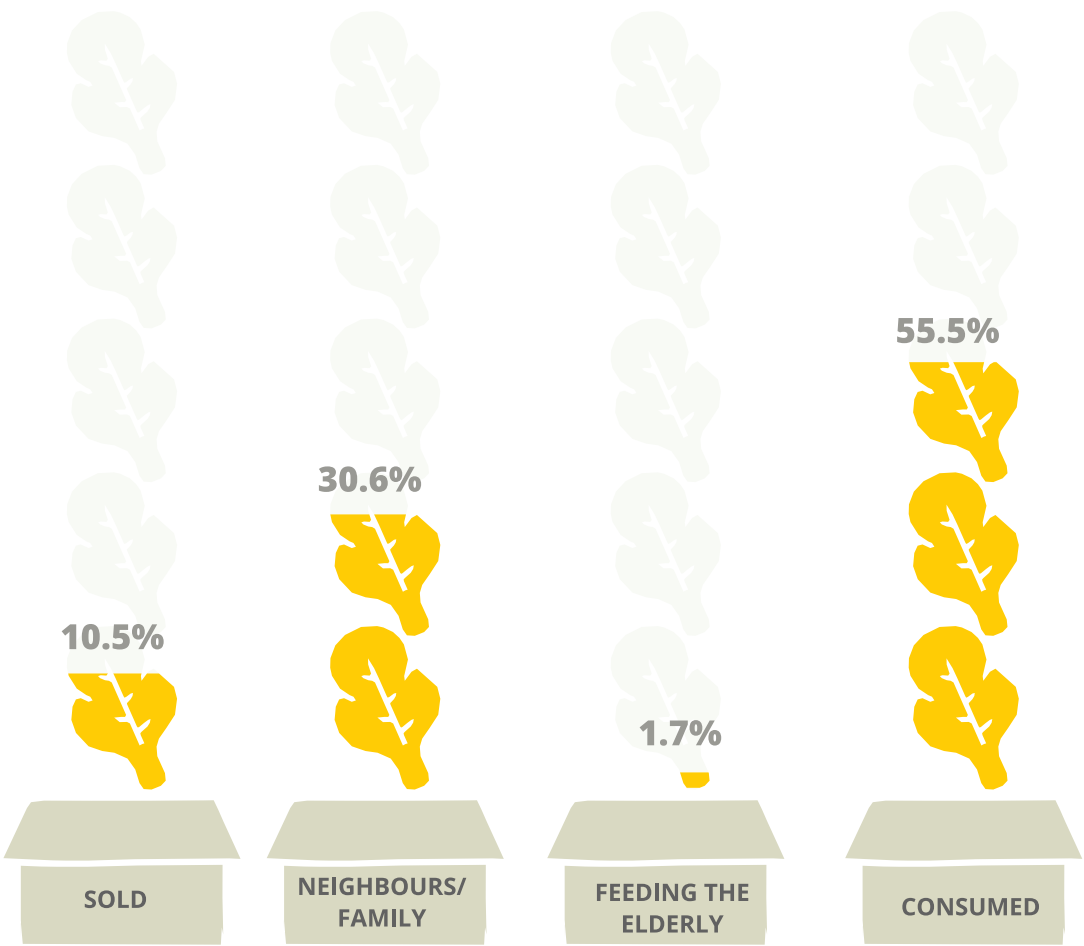


Figure 17:
Primary Utilisation of Harvested Garden Produce

GROWING INTEREST IN HOUSEHOLD FOOD PRODUCTION

Respondents were asked to assess how their household's interest in growing food had changed since receiving support through the SEF programme. The findings reveal a substantial increase in enthusiasm for household food production, with 96.4% of respondents reporting some level of increased interest. Overall, 66.3% indicated that their interest had increased significantly, while a further 30.1% reported that it had increased somewhat. Only 3.7% stated that there had been no change in their household's interest in growing food. These findings suggest that the programme has been highly effective in stimulating interest in food production and encouraging households to view gardening as a viable strategy for improving food security and household wellbeing.

The increase in interest was evident among both SEF programme participants and seedling donation recipients. Among seedling recipients, 66.9% reported a significant increase in interest, compared to 61.9% of programme participants, while approximately one-third of both groups indicated a moderate increase (29.6% and 33.3%, respectively). The very low proportion reporting no change demonstrates that exposure to gardening activities, seedling support, and related knowledge transfer has motivated households to become more engaged in food production. This growing interest is an important outcome because it lays the foundation for the longer-term sustainability of household gardens, increased self-reliance, improved dietary diversity, and potentially greater household resilience to food insecurity in the future.

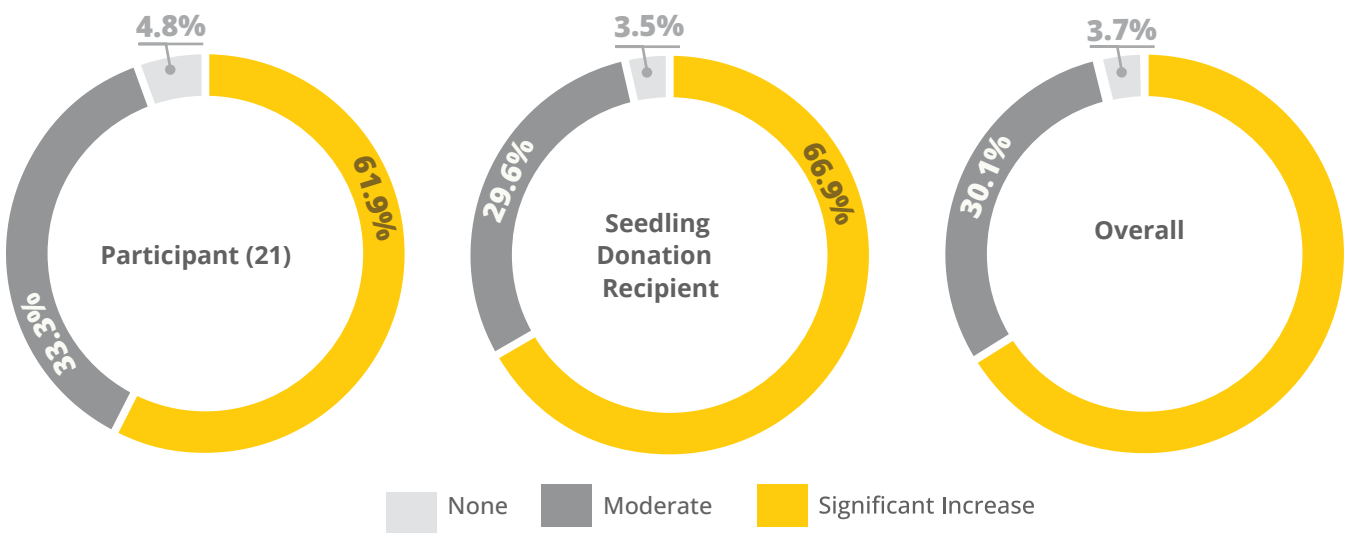


Figure 18: Change in Household Interest in Growing Food Since Receiving SEF Support

MOST SIGNIFICANT BENEFIT OF THE GARDEN

Beneficiaries were asked to describe the most important benefit they had experienced or expected from establishing a household garden. The qualitative findings demonstrate that household gardens are perceived as contributing to multiple dimensions of food security, including improved access to fresh vegetables, reduced household food expenditure, improved nutrition, increased self-reliance, and opportunities for income generation. While many gardens were still at an early stage of production, participants expressed strong expectations that the gardens would provide a sustainable source of food and reduce dependence on purchased vegetables.

The most commonly mentioned benefit was improved availability of fresh vegetables and increased household food access. Many participants highlighted that having vegetables available at home reduced the need to purchase produce from shops, particularly given increasing food prices. A female seedling donation recipient from Sedibeng explained, **“I will have fresh vegetable in my garden, I will not buy,”** while a female participant from Madibeng noted, **“We started the garden in old age because the vegetables became expensive, so we made the garden so we wouldn’t have to keep buying vegetables anymore.”** Similarly, a male participant from West Rand stated that the garden would help them **“spend less money at vegetable stores as it will be beneficial in our own gardens.”** These responses suggest that household gardens are viewed as an important strategy for reducing vulnerability to food price increases and improving consistent access to nutritious foods.

Reduction of household food costs was another dominant theme emerging from the responses. Beneficiaries frequently mentioned that producing their own vegetables would allow them to redirect limited household resources towards other essential needs. A female seedling recipient from Ekurhuleni stated, **"Vegetables are very expensive these days and this helps us finish the month smoothly without worrying about what we are going to eat."** A male participant from Sedibeng similarly explained that the garden would help **"reduce the cost of buying food everyday."** Another female participant from West Rand highlighted that the garden would provide **"food supplies to the household"** while reducing expenses. These perspectives indicate that beneficiaries perceive household gardens not only as a source of food but also as a mechanism for improving household financial stability.

Improved nutrition and access to healthier foods were also frequently identified as important benefits. Participants described the ability to consume fresh vegetables regularly and improve the quality of household meals. A male seedling recipient from Ekurhuleni stated, **"The great impact is that we are able to have a vegetable with every meal,"** while another male participant from Ekurhuleni explained that **"my family gets food nutrition from the garden."** A female participant from COT highlighted that the garden would enable them to access **"reduced costs and eat healthy vegetables from my own garden."** These responses show that beneficiaries associate household gardening with improved dietary quality and healthier lifestyles.

Beyond household consumption, some beneficiaries identified income generation and livelihood opportunities as a key benefit of gardening. Participants indicated that surplus production could be sold to generate additional income for household needs. A female participant from Madibeng explained, **"We no longer spend money to buy vegetables and sometimes we sell to people and we generate money to buy bread so it benefits us a lot."** Similarly, a male participant from Ekurhuleni stated, **"People will buy vegetables from my garden and I will have an income which will help my family."** Another male participant from Sedibeng noted, **"I will be able to sell some of the produce once the crops have grown, and be able to support my family financially."** These accounts highlight the potential of household gardens to move beyond consumption benefits and contribute to small-scale economic empowerment.

Learning new skills and developing greater independence were also important perceived benefits. Several participants described gaining agricultural knowledge, confidence, and a sense of ownership through gardening. A female participant from West Rand stated, **"The program helped me to understand the importance of having a home garden because now I see that I will spend less on buying vegetables because I will be harvesting in my garden."** Another female participant from Ekurhuleni explained, **"I've learned how to take care of plants and maintain the garden."** A male participant from West Rand described the broader impact of the experience, stating that **"having a garden that will supply food regularly in times of need and receiving the seedlings from SEF it really changed my lifestyle as now I understand the importance of having something that I can do on my own and benefit from it without spending money."**

Some participants also highlighted community-level benefits, including sharing produce with vulnerable households and supporting institutions such as early childhood development centres. A female participant from West Rand noted that the garden would help with **"providing vegetables to my NGO,"** while a male participant from COJ stated, **"I am able to support my family, create jobs for the youth and the community."** These responses suggest that household gardens have the potential to generate wider social benefits beyond individual households.

However, a few participants indicated that benefits had not yet been realised because gardens were still maturing or due to production challenges. For example, a female seedling recipient from West Rand stated, **"So far there hasn't been any benefit,"** while another explained, **"So far I don't see any benefits because pests and rodents have eaten the seedlings, but I hope next time it will be better."** A participant from Madibeng similarly noted, **"So far the garden is still new so the main benefit is learning how to grow food. I expect it will help more with food and cost in the coming months."** These responses reflect the early stage of some gardening initiatives and the importance of continued technical support to address production challenges and enable households to realise the expected food security benefits.

Although the majority of responses were positive, a small number of beneficiaries reported limited changes or challenges. Some participants indicated that they had not yet harvested from their gardens, while others cited issues such as livestock damage to crops or delayed stipend payments. For example, a female participant from West Rand commented, **"We haven't harvested anything yet but looking forward to the first harvest,"** while another noted that **"The seedlings were eaten by rabbits but I'm going to make a plan to get a fence around my beds."** A few respondents reported no significant

impact thus far, including a female participant from Ekurhuleni who stated **“No big changes,”** and a male participant from COJ who indicated that there was **“No major effect but it definitely improved the income.”** Nevertheless, these responses represented a minority of views, with the overall narrative strongly indicating that SEF has positively influenced household food security, nutrition, income, and wellbeing among participating households.

Overall, the qualitative findings demonstrate that beneficiaries view household gardens as an important pathway towards greater food security, reduced food expenditure, improved nutrition, and increased household resilience. While immediate benefits are largely centred around access to fresh vegetables and reduced food costs, many participants also anticipate longer-term benefits including income generation, self-reliance, and improved household wellbeing.

GARDEN MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

The findings indicate a high level of household engagement in garden activities among both SEF participants and seedling donation recipients. Overall, more than half of respondents (56.4%) reported that household members work on the garden daily, while a further 35.0% indicated that they work on the garden a few times a week. Only small proportions reported working on the garden once a week (6.7%) or rarely (1.8%). This suggests that the majority of supported households are actively maintaining their gardens on a regular basis, reflecting strong commitment to food production and the importance attached to the gardens as a source of food and livelihood support. Daily engagement was reported at similar levels among programme participants (57.1%) and seedling recipients (56.3%), demonstrating consistent involvement across both groups.

The results also provide insights into who is primarily responsible for managing household gardens. Overall, adult women were the most commonly identified garden managers (35.0%), followed closely by households where responsibility was shared among members (31.9%). Adult men were reported as the primary managers in 20.9% of households, while youth were responsible in 12.3% of cases. Notably, programme participants were more likely to report shared responsibility for garden management (52.4%) compared to seedling recipients (28.9%), suggesting greater collective household involvement among participant households. In contrast, seedling recipient households were more likely to identify adult women as the main managers (36.6%). These findings highlight the central role of women in household food production while also demonstrating that gardens can serve as a shared family activity that promotes cooperation and collective responsibility for food security.

		OVERALL (N=163)	PARTICIPANT (N=21)	SEEDLING DONATION RECEPIENT (N=142)
How often does your household actively work on the garden?	Rarely	1.8%	9.5%	0.7%
	Daily	56.4%	57.1%	56.3%
	Once a week	6.7%	9.5%	6.3%
	A few times a week	35.0%	23.8%	36.6%
Who is mainly responsible for managing the garden?	Youth	12.3%	9.5%	12.7%
	Adult men	20.9%	14.3%	21.8%
	Adult women	35.0%	23.8%	36.6%
	Shared responsibility	31.9%	52.4%	28.9%

TABLE 7: HOUSEHOLD PARTICIPATION IN GARDEN ACTIVITIES AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR GARDEN MANAGEMENT

CHALLENGES AFFECTING GARDEN PERFORMANCE

Respondents were asked to identify the main challenges affecting the performance of their household gardens. The findings indicate that pests and diseases were the most commonly reported constraint, affecting 24.5% of respondents overall. This challenge was particularly prominent among seedling donation recipients, where 63.4% reported experiencing problems related to pests or diseases, compared to only 5.3% among SEF programme participants. The high prevalence of pest-related challenges among seedling recipients suggests that newly established gardens may require additional technical support, including guidance on pest management, crop protection practices, and environmentally appropriate methods for maintaining healthy crops.

Other challenges reported included poor soil quality (7.6%), lack of water (7.9%), lack of knowledge (6.2%), livestock damage (5.7%), and lack of time (4.5%). These challenges were again more frequently reported among seedling donation recipients than programme participants, particularly poor soil (18.3%), lack of water (16.2%), livestock damage (15.5%), and lack of knowledge (14.1%). This may reflect differences in the level of gardening experience, access to resources, or exposure to ongoing agricultural support between the two groups. Ensuring access to water sources, providing practical gardening training, and strengthening support on soil improvement and pest control could help households overcome these barriers and improve garden productivity.

Despite the challenges identified, 26.1% of seedling donation recipients reported experiencing no major challenges, indicating that a substantial proportion of households have been able to establish and maintain their gardens successfully. Interestingly, no SEF programme participants reported having no major challenges, although the overall low reporting of challenges among this group may suggest that they have benefited from additional support, experience, or skills gained through programme participation. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of continued technical assistance and follow-up support to ensure that household gardens remain productive and sustainable over time.

	SEF PROGRAMME PARTICIPANT	SEEDLING DONATION RECEPIENT	TOTAL
Lack of Water	4.1%	16.2%	7.9%
Pests or Diseases	5.3%	63.4%	24.5%
Lack of Time	0.8%	12.0%	4.5%
Lack of Knowledge	2.4%	14.1%	6.2%
Poor Soil	2.4%	18.3%	7.6%
Livestock Damage	0.8%	15.5%	5.7%

TABLE 8: CHALLENGES AFFECTING HOUSEHOLD GARDEN PERFORMANCE

CONFIDENCE IN FUTURE FOOD SECURITY CONTRIBUTIONS

Seedling donation recipients were asked about their level of confidence that their household gardens would contribute to improving household food security over the following 6–12 months. The findings demonstrate very high levels of optimism among recipients, with almost all respondents expressing confidence in the future contribution of their gardens. Overall, more than 95% of both male and female respondents reported being confident that their gardens would improve household food security, while only a small minority expressed uncertainty.

Confidence levels were consistently high across gender groups, with 97.8% of female recipients and 95.9% of male recipients indicating confidence in the future benefits of their gardens. The slightly higher confidence among women may reflect their greater involvement in household food preparation and garden management, where increased access to fresh produce can directly support household nutrition and food availability. These findings suggest that the SEF-supported gardening initiative has successfully fostered a positive outlook among beneficiaries and that households perceive gardens as a sustainable pathway for strengthening food security, reducing dependence on purchased vegetables, and improving resilience to future food shortages.

5. FARMER PRODUCE DONATIONS TO HOUSEHOLDS



Beyond household-level outcomes and household production effects, the SEF programme contributes to food security through community-level redistribution of agricultural produce. This pathway reflects the role of participating farmers in extending the benefits of production beyond their own households by sharing surplus produce with surrounding households, institutions, and vulnerable community members.

The analysis of this component focuses on documented instances of farmer-led produce donations, where food was distributed to identified beneficiary households and organisations across project sites. These activities provide insight into the extent to which SEF-supported production systems contribute to broader food access, informal support networks, and community-level resilience.

In total, 41 farmer-linked donation cases were identified within the timeline of the current phase of the programme and included in the analytical sample of this component. These cases form the basis for understanding the scale and nature of community-level food redistribution within the SEF food security model. To complement this structured analysis, a sub-sample of qualitative case studies was developed to provide deeper insight into the lived experiences of selected beneficiary households and institutions that received these donations.

6. BEYOND THE NUMBERS: BENEFICIARY VOICES

A total of 13 case studies were drawn from North West Province (Moretele and Madibeng), selected from the broader pool of identified donation recipients. These cases were purposively included to reflect variation in beneficiary context and to capture lived experiences of food access support beyond quantitative indicators.

The case studies provide illustrative evidence of how farmer-led redistribution is experienced at household and institutional level, particularly in relation to food consumption, community support practices, and local food security dynamics. They serve to contextualise and deepen the findings presented in the preceding quantitative analysis.



Obed Special School in Jericho, Madibeng, is a primary school serving 365 children living with disabilities, many of whom come from households facing significant economic hardship. For a number of these learners, the meal they receive at school is more than just lunch. It is often one of the most reliable meals they will have in a day.

Before the establishment of the school's food garden, the school relied on purchasing vegetables from local vendors and informal markets. According to Vice Principal Mr Motepe. This often came with challenges, including inconsistent supply and periods when sufficient vegetables were simply unavailable. While the school continued providing basic meals such as pap, samp, rice and tinned fish, access to fresh vegetables was limited.

That began to change in 2023 when local farmer Samuel Phaloane partnered with Obed Special School to revive and maintain a food garden on the school premises. In addition to operating his own farming activities in the community, Mr Phaloane regularly works with the school garden, supported by SEF participants who assist with planting, maintenance and harvesting.

Today, the garden regularly supplies fresh produce, particularly spinach, which supplements the school's feeding programme. While the produce alone is not enough to meet all the school's food needs, Mr Motepe explains that it has become an important part of ensuring learners receive more balanced and nutritious meals.



The garden is not enough, and what we buy is also not enough, but together they make enough for the learners to have decent meals in school.

The impact extends beyond simply adding vegetables to a plate. Many of the learners attending the school come from vulnerable households where food insecurity remains a daily reality. According to Mr Motepe, some learners arrive at school having had little or nothing to eat at home. Ensuring that these learners receive a meal during the school day not only supports their nutrition but also their ability to participate, learn and concentrate in class.



Some learners go home and sleep without having eaten anything, and the mere fact that they get fed here is one of the reasons they come to school. It helps with concentration in class, as they already have a limited attention span.

The benefits of the garden are also reaching beyond the school's feeding programme. Learners involved in gardening activities are developing practical skills in food production, with some beginning to replicate what they learn at school within their own households. According to Mr Motepe, several learners have started planting vegetables at home after seeing the results achieved in the school garden.

The school also uses produce from the garden to support particularly vulnerable learners. Through information gathered from school records and engagement with parents, learners identified as being most in need are provided with vegetables to take home, helping to extend the benefits of the intervention to their households.

Behind this impact is a broader farming operation led by Mr Phaloane, supported by ten SEF participants. According to him, the additional labour provided through the project has significantly increased production capacity on his farm.



Before they came, I was working on one hectare in my plot. Now we have planted it on a three-hectare space.

The increased production has enabled Mr Phaloane to go beyond supporting the school. Produce is regularly donated to vulnerable households and community institutions, while community outreach initiatives have expanded to include support for families facing hardship. Mr Phaloane believes this would not have been possible without the contribution of the SEF participants.

Before the SEF participants came, we were only working to sell. Now we are able to make more, sell more and donate more to the community.

For Mr Phaloane, the value of the project extends beyond food production at the school. As both a farmer and a community member, also pastoring locally, he sees the donations as a practical way of responding to the challenges faced by many households in the area.



When I donate, I feel like I am making a difference because I know there isn't much work in this community. Even donating something small to a household can make a big difference.

While the future of the garden depends on the continued availability of support and labour, both the school and the farmer recognise the significant contribution it is already making. What began as a garden revival project has grown into an intervention that supports learner nutrition, strengthens food access for vulnerable households, builds practical agricultural skills and contributes to wider community wellbeing.

Reflecting on the impact of the initiative, Mr Motepe concluded:



I'm not a member of this community specifically; I am by virtue of working in the school. But one sure thing I can tell you, the SEF project is making a big difference here. The community needs you.



CASE STUDY 2

WHEN A FUNERAL MET THE FARM

Funerals carry their own kind of urgency in Mmukubanye, Moretele. For the Mapoane household, it was a week where everything had to stretch further than usual; time, energy, and especially food. Thapelo Mapoane, 35, was at the centre of it all, managing the household alongside her mother as visitors came and meals had to be prepared continuously.

In the middle of that week, two 7kg bags of onions and spinach arrived from Kgatologo farmer, Modiegi Liena. On paper, it is a simple contribution. In practice, it became one of the quiet anchors of the week; present in nearly every pot, every meal, every shared plate that moved through the household during the funeral.

It was not the first time the household had accessed vegetables beyond shop purchases, but it was the first time support arrived in a

moment where everything else was already stretched thin. Traditionally, the household relied on buying vegetables from local shops when money allowed, making food access something planned around cost and distance. Over time, that pattern has started to loosen. Alongside shop purchases, there is now occasional access to farm produce, and a small household garden that contributes to daily meals.

What stood out most for Thapelo was not only what was received, but what remained. After the funeral, the excess vegetables continued to be used in the household kitchen, quietly extending the value of that single moment of support into everyday meals long after guests had left. In that way, the funeral week did not end with depletion, but with a small continuation of abundance.

The support also removed pressures that often go unseen; fewer trips to the shop during a demanding week, less money spent on transport, and fewer decisions about what could or could not be afforded in the moment. It allowed the household to focus on the responsibilities of mourning and hosting, without the added strain of sourcing food daily.

About 10 SEF participants that work on Liena's land enabled this. Their work has expanded production capacity. That shift in scale is what makes both sales and occasional household-level support possible.

For Thapelo, the experience has also subtly reshaped how she thinks about food in her community. Not as something distant or transactional, but as something that can circulate more closely between people who live in the same space. Even in moments of grief, like the funeral week, that circulation becomes visible; carried in something as ordinary, and as essential, as onions in a pot.



CASE STUDY 3

THE DAUGHTER SHE NEVER HAD

At 88 years old, Jacobeth Makape lives alone in Mmukubyane, Moretele. Age has brought many changes to her life, but one of the greatest challenges has been navigating daily life without the support system that many elderly people rely on.

Since the early 2020s, however, she has found an unexpected source of support through local farmer Modiegi Liena of Kgatologo Enterprise. Whenever food in her household begins to run low, fresh vegetables arrive at her doorstep; spinach, lettuce and beetroot grown on the farm and shared as part of ongoing donations to vulnerable community members.

For Mrs Makape, the vegetables provide far more than nourishment.

Speaking about the support, she pauses before describing what it has come to mean to her.



This farmer has turned into the daughter that I needed.

The donations have become a regular source of comfort and security. Living alone can often make older people particularly vulnerable to food insecurity and isolation, yet Mrs Makape says knowing that someone is looking out for her has made a meaningful difference in her life.



I am happy. It brings me comfort to know that life is better when lived together.

She believes the support has also improved her health and wellbeing.



My body feels stronger. I eat very healthy.

The vegetables that reach Mrs Makape’s doorstep are the result of many hands working together, including ten SEF participants who support production on the farm. The impact has been visible in the farm’s expansion.



Since they have been placed, I have increased from 12 beds to 28 beds of planting.

The increased production means that the farm is now able to supply local customers and continue supporting vulnerable households through donations



I have more production now because of their assistance with the labour, and therefore I can donate better now.

For Ms Liena, the value of the project extends beyond agricultural production. The opportunity to host participants creates benefits for multiple households at once, both through employment opportunities and through the food that reaches vulnerable community members.



I am excited. The fact that I am providing space for participants to work and provide for their families means a lot.

When asked whether the support will continue, Mrs Makape answers without hesitation.



Yes. This farmer is practically a daughter that I have been given to help me live the last days of my life.

Her response reflects something deeper than food assistance alone. While the vegetables help strengthen food security, the relationship that has developed through this support speaks to a broader outcome; one of care, dignity and community solidarity.

In a community where many elderly people face the challenges of aging alone, a simple donation of vegetables has become a reminder that no one should have to face those challenges entirely by themselves.



CASE STUDY 4

FANANG DIATLA HOME CARE CENTRE
– COMMUNITY FOOD SUPPORT
THROUGH FARMER DONATIONS

Fanang Diatla Home Care Centre, based in Opperman, Moretele, is a community organisation that provides daily cooked meals to vulnerable learners and community members. It serves Thulwe Primary School with about 40 learners, Letlope Secondary School with about 35 learners, as well as approximately 35 additional children from food-scarce households, alongside elderly community members who attend clinic services nearby.

Before receiving support through SEF-linked farmers, the centre struggled significantly to maintain consistent meal provision. There were periods when they could not cook at all due to lack of ingredients, forcing them to rely on external assistance such as donation requests to local supermarkets, community contributions, and occasional support like a retail store voucher from Boxer. Even with these efforts, food availability remained uncertain and irregular, limiting their ability to consistently meet the needs of the learners and other beneficiaries.



From 2025, this situation began to shift when the centre started receiving food donations from SEF-supported farmers in the area, including Munous Farmer, Matlala Farmer, and Dangisi Farmer. These contributions made it possible to prepare regular, balanced meals such as rice with soya and vegetables, ensuring that feeding could happen consistently throughout the week. Over time, this changed the day-to-day functioning of the centre, as cooking became more stable and predictable rather than dependent on uncertain external support.

With this improved access to food, the organisation observed noticeable changes among the learners. Meals were not only more regular, but also more nutritious and balanced, which the interviewee associated with visible improvements in children’s wellbeing, including healthier appearance. More importantly, children were able to attend class having eaten properly, which improved their ability to concentrate and complete schoolwork. In this way, the food support began to extend beyond immediate hunger relief and contributed to improved learning conditions.

The impact also extended into the broader community. Beyond the two schools, meals are provided to children from food-insecure households who take food home, as well as elderly community members who receive support during clinic days. This has positioned the organisation as an informal but important food support point within the community, helping to reduce immediate hunger among some of the most vulnerable groups.

For the centre, the meaning of this support is deeply personal. The interviewee reflected on growing up in the same community under similar conditions of poverty, where such support was not available. Being able to now provide consistent meals to children in the same environment is experienced as both fulfilling and emotional, reinforcing a sense of responsibility to “give back” and ensure children have better opportunities than previous generations. The support is also seen as a reminder of shared humanity and collective care within the community.

The food support is made possible in part through the involvement of SEF participants working on farms linked to the supplying farmers. Around 20 participants are involved in activities such as crop and livestock farming, supported through SEF training. While engagement levels vary among participants, their combined efforts contribute to the production that enables these donations. The organisation noted that although food donations existed before SEF involvement, the current arrangement has strengthened consistency and reliability of supply.

Looking ahead, the organisation hopes to build greater sustainability by establishing its own food garden to supplement donations and reduce dependency over time. At the same time, they intend to continue their broader community support work, including assisting vulnerable households directly. The vision is to become more self-sufficient while still maintaining the collaborative support system that currently exists between farmers and the community.



CASE STUDY 5

**FINDING STABILITY IN
EVERYDAY MEALS**

Mapule Maseko is a 63-year-old woman living in Dipompong, Madibeng, where access to fresh vegetables has long depended on what could be purchased when money was available. For many years, her household relied on occasional trips to the local station to buy vegetables, and when finances were tight, fresh produce would simply not be part of the household diet.

This situation began to change in 2023 when the household started receiving vegetable support linked to local farming activities involving Muhle Investment Farmer and Ms Mhlongo. The support included regular supplies of vegetables such as tomatoes and onions, as well as seasonal bulk harvests like spinach. Over time, this began to reshape how the household accessed and used food.

Instead of planning meals around what could be afforded at a given moment, vegetables became something more consistently available in the home. The household began to eat a more varied diet, with vegetables becoming a regular part of meals rather than an occasional addition. For Mapule, this shift is most visible in the predictability it brought into daily cooking, removing the uncertainty that previously shaped food choices.

What stands out in her experience is not only the increase in quantity, but the change in how food is experienced. Meals are now more complete, and there is less dependence on travelling or waiting for funds before being able to prepare food. This has strengthened the household’s sense of stability around food and improved dietary diversity over time.

The support is also experienced as something shared rather than transactional. Mapule describes it as being part of a broader community system where food is circulated in ways that make daily life easier for households like hers. Over time, this has shifted how she thinks about food access in her community, from something individual and constrained to something more collective and accessible.

Looking forward, the household hopes to build on this stability by developing its own small garden. The idea is to gradually reduce dependence on external supply while maintaining the improved dietary variety they now experience. There is also a quiet sense of inspiration drawn from the farming support system itself, which has shown what consistent food access can look like at community level.



CASE STUDY 6

NOURISHING A HOUSEHOLD, STRENGTHENING A COMMUNITY THROUGH FARMING SUPPORT

Seventy-year-old Betty Dibe lives in the same Dipompong community in Madibeng, where her household also depends on support linked to Muhle Investments Holdings, led by farmer Ms Mhlongo. For Betty, the challenge of food access was closely tied to income constraints and distance, as vegetables were mainly sourced through occasional purchases from the local station.

This changed in August 2024 when she began receiving monthly deliveries of fresh vegetables from the farm. The support typically includes carrots, green peppers, spinach, onions, tomatoes, and beetroot, bringing a more regular flow of fresh produce directly into her household.

For Betty, the most immediate difference has been in the quality and consistency of meals. Where before meals depended heavily on what could be afforded at the time, she now describes being able to prepare fuller and more balanced meals for her household. This has brought a sense of relief in knowing that there is usually something available to cook, even during difficult financial periods.

Beyond the food itself, the support has created a sense of reassurance in the household. It has reduced the stress associated with uncertain food access and created more confidence in day-to-day meal preparation. Over time, this has improved both the variety and reliability of food consumed at home.

Betty also reflects on the broader role of the farm in the community. She notes that the support extends beyond her household, reaching other vulnerable community members through similar vegetable distribution and community-sharing practices. In her view, this has made a meaningful difference in how food circulates within the area, especially for households that struggle to access fresh produce.

What makes this support particularly significant for her is the sense of dignity it carries. She speaks with appreciation about being able to receive food in a way that feels consistent and thoughtful, and this has influenced how she views her place within the community. It has also shaped her own outlook on helping others, with Betty expressing that she would like to support children in need if she had the opportunity.

Her experience reflects how consistent access to vegetables can shift a household's daily reality from uncertainty to stability, while also influencing broader ideas of care and responsibility within the community.



CASE STUDY 7

FINDING STABILITY IN EVERYDAY MEALS

In Makapanstad, Moretele, the Tlou household lives quietly within a food system that has become part of their everyday surroundings rather than something separate from it. The household is headed by 69-year-old Roseline Tlou, who lives with six other family members.

For Roseline, the memory of how food used to be accessed is still clear. After the passing of her husband, the household relied heavily on her pension to buy vegetables and other basic food items. It was a life of careful budgeting, where food purchases were often planned around what could be afforded rather than what was needed. In that period, food security was closely tied to whether there was enough cash available at the right time.

Over time, this pattern shifted through the presence of nearby farming activity led by Mr Phasha. Instead of vegetables being something only purchased, they also became something accessible through proximity to the farm itself. The household now receives regular produce such as butternut, cabbage, green peppers, and spinach in quantities measured in kilograms. In addition to receiving food, Roseline also describes a unique relationship with the farm as neighbours, they are allowed to collect vegetables directly from the farm when needed.

This change has not only increased the amount of food available in the household but has also changed the sense of certainty around it. Roseline describes it simply: they are no longer in “such poverty with regards to food” because there is now always something to eat. What this reflects is less about abundance and more about stability; the removal of constant uncertainty about whether there will be food on a given day.

The farm itself is supported by around 19 SEF participants who carry out the daily work of production. Their labour has been central to maintaining productivity and keeping the farm consistently active and clean. According to the farmer, without this level of support, the current level of production and therefore the ability to share food, would not be possible.

This production surplus is what enables both regular sharing with households like the Tlous and broader community donations, including contributions during funeral periods where vegetables such as cabbages are distributed in meaningful quantities. The link between labour and food availability is direct: more consistent work in the fields translates into more consistent food flowing into the community.

For Roseline, the meaning of this support is deeply personal. It is not only about receiving food, but about being remembered and included at moments when vulnerability is highest. She speaks with emotion about what it means to have someone nearby who shares what they harvest, especially in a context where support after loss is not always guaranteed. The support becomes, in her words, something that fills a gap where she would otherwise have nowhere to turn.

At the same time, the farm is experienced by SEF participants and the farmer as something rooted in shared community life. Participants take pride in the fact that the food they help produce is eaten by people they live among. The work is not distant or abstract; it is directly connected to households in their own surroundings, which gives it a sense of personal meaning and accountability.

For Roseline, the idea of helping others is also shaped by what she has received. Even in small ways, she expresses a willingness to share what she has with those who have less, reflecting how support received at household level can influence attitudes toward giving within the same community.



CASE STUDY 8

FEEDING DIGNITY AT THE RETIREMENT CENTRE

In Dipompong, Madibeng, the Morwesi Thusa Retirement Centre provides care and daily support to 11 elderly residents who rely on the centre not only for meals, but for routine, companionship, and dignity in their later years. For the caregivers managing the centre, ensuring consistent nutrition has always been both a moral responsibility and a financial challenge.

Before 2025, food provision depended largely on purchasing supplies from shops. This meant that a significant portion of the centre's limited resources was directed toward basic food items, leaving less room for other essential needs such as toiletries and cleaning materials. Meals were provided, but every improvement in quality or variety came at a direct financial cost.

This began to change when the centre started receiving regular vegetable support from the Lethebo farmer. Twice a month, deliveries of spinach, onions, carrots, and butternut, often in bundles ranging between 15 and 20, began to arrive consistently. Over time, this shifted not only what the centre could serve, but how it managed its overall budget and care priorities.

With vegetables now supplied more regularly, the centre found itself able to redirect part of its food budget toward other essentials. Savings were used to purchase toiletries, cleaning products, and other items that contribute to the daily comfort and hygiene of the elderly residents. In this way, the food support created a ripple effect; strengthening care beyond nutrition alone.

The nutritional impact was also noticeable in everyday routines. Meals became more varied, and fresh vegetables were available more often, improving dietary quality for residents who depend entirely on the centre for their daily food. Staff observed that the elderly were eating more consistently, with improved access to nutritious meals forming part of their daily wellbeing.

Beyond the practical changes, the experience of receiving food support carried a strong emotional weight for the caregivers. The act of receiving and distributing the vegetables often evoked reflection on the vulnerability of the elderly residents, many of whom have limited or no family support. For the caregiver interviewed, the process of receiving donations became a moment of empathy; a reminder of the fragility and dignity of those in their care.

The farm behind this support is supported by 19 SEF participants, who are involved in day-to-day agricultural work including planting, weeding, fertilising, and composting. Their contribution has supported increased production levels, ensuring that the farm is able to maintain consistent output. While the farm representative acknowledges this support, she also notes that her and the farmers' commitment to community giving is deeply personal and would continue regardless, as part of her broader sense of responsibility toward those around her.

From the farmer's perspective, the experience of delivering food to the centre has been emotionally impactful. Seeing the elderly residents and their caregivers reinforced the human reality behind the donations; particularly the resilience of caregivers and the vulnerability of some residents who appear to have been left without family support. This moment of encounter strengthened the sense that the work being done on the farm has direct human meaning.

Looking forward, the centre expresses a strong desire for continued support, emphasising that the donations have become an important part of sustaining care. At the same time, there is a vision of expanding the centre's own capacity, including creating opportunities for local youth employment, so that the facility can grow its role within the community.

CASE STUDY 9

WHEN HUNGER USED TO BE NORMAL



At Tshwene's Farm in Moretele, the Mr Mtsweni household is part of a small but shifting food landscape that has changed how meals are experienced day to day. The household, supported through produce from Nolwaezwakho Farm, has been receiving vegetables such as cabbage and spinach.

The person closest to this change is Jabulani Masina, a team leader linked to the farm. The experience of food insecurity in this household is described directly by Mr Mtsweni himself. He reflects on a time when the household's earlier reality in simple terms: there were times when food was not guaranteed, and nights could pass without a meal. Food access was uncertain, and survival often depended on whatever could be found or afforded at the time.

Over time, the household began to experience better nutritional intake through regular vegetable consumption. This shift also had a physical impact, with the interviewee noting improved strength and energy to work. Food was no longer only about survival in the moment, but also about having the energy to participate in daily life.

What makes this case stand out is how the experience of food insecurity is remembered. The contrast between "sleeping on an empty stomach" and having regular meals is still very present in how the support is described. The emotional weight of that contrast gives meaning to what might otherwise seem like simple vegetable donations.

The farm behind this support operates with around 25 SEF participants who are involved in core agricultural work. The farmer describes the participants as an essential part of the farming system; not only in terms of productivity, but in how they make consistent harvests achievable. Their involvement has been described as essential to maintaining production levels, reducing pressure on the farmer, and enabling consistent output from the farm.

For the farmer and those involved, the impact of this system is experienced as both practical and personal. There is a shared sense that contributing to food access in the community carries meaning beyond agriculture itself. It becomes a way of participating in addressing hunger within the same environment where they live and work.

The household beneficiary, Mr Mtsweni also reflects this sense of shared responsibility. Having experienced food insecurity directly, there is a strong emotional response to the idea that others should not go through the same situation. The experience of receiving food becomes something that extends outward into empathy for others in similar conditions.



CASE STUDY 10

WHEN SUPPORT BECOMES SOMETHING YOU CAN TASTE EVERY DAY

The Tshabalala household lives in Tshwene's Farm, Moretele, where seven family members share not only a home, but also the ongoing challenge of making food stretch far enough. For years, meals were shaped by scarcity, not in theory, but in the everyday decisions of what could be left out, reduced, or delayed.

That reality is described directly in simple terms: it was, and still is, difficult to make ends meet. Food is not always guaranteed, and there were moments when the household would go to bed hungry. Meals, when available, were often limited in both quantity and consistency.

When Nolwaezwakho Farm decided to intervene with vegetable produce donations, the change was felt in the most immediate way possible, in the number of meals per day. Different vegetables including spinach, cabbage, and beetroot began to form part of their regular diet, shifting the household from uncertainty toward a more predictable pattern of eating. Instead of one unstable meal cycle, there is now enough food to support at least two meals a day.

For the household, this reposition is not described in technical terms. It is described in terms of relief. Food is now present in a way that allows the body to feel cared for; strength, health, and general wellbeing are all mentioned as part of what has improved since the support began. It is not only about eating more, but about feeling more stable in the process of daily living.

There is also a strong emotional layer to this experience. The household expresses gratitude, but also a sense of hope that similar support can reach others facing the same conditions. The experience of receiving food has created a kind of awareness; that food insecurity is shared, and so too should be the response.

About 25 SEF participants are involved in daily agricultural work at Nolwaezwakho Farm. The farmer describes their contribution as a major relief, making it easier to manage the workload and maintain consistent output.

The farmer is clear that without the level of participation the SEF participants are currently on, this labour support in place, the production would not have improved the way it has. That which enables the farm to generate enough surplus to support both sales and donations. The vegetables that reach households like the Tshabalala family are therefore directly linked to the steady work happening in the fields each day.

For both the farmer and the SEF participants, there is a sense of fulfilment in knowing that even small contributions of vegetables can ease pressure in struggling households. At the same time, there is recognition that continued impact depends on improving production capacity, particularly through stronger yields and expanded output.

From the household perspective, the support is seen as essential and likely to continue, particularly because it addresses immediate food insecurity in both household and community contexts. It is not framed as a luxury, but as a necessary form of support in a setting where many families continue to struggle.



CASE STUDY 11

THE BUTTERNUT SEEDS THAT KEPT GROWING

For the Mahlangu household in Dipompong, Madibeng, a donation of vegetables arrived at a time when it was needed most. During a family bereavement, the household received a wheelbarrow full of butternut and spinach from local farmer Mr Itireleng Kgwatlhe. What began as a once-off act of support during a difficult week continued to benefit the family well beyond the funeral timeline, with the vegetables lasting for more than two weeks after the burial.

The household consists of four members and relies largely on the support of an aunt who lives elsewhere and serves as the family's primary breadwinner. According to 24-year-old Botshelo Mahlangu, who is now the family representative by default, food donations such as these provide welcome relief by reducing the amount of money that needs to be spent on groceries and ensuring that the family has access to fresh vegetables that they may not otherwise be able to afford regularly.



The donations mean a lot because we depend on my aunt, and the vegetables help reduce the cost of the groceries she has to buy for us, Botshelo explained.

Beyond helping the household access more diverse meals, the donation sparked an unexpected outcome. After the family discarded the seeds from the donated butternuts, Botshelo noticed that some had started germinating. She decided to care for the seedlings herself, creating the beginnings of what could become a small household food source of their own.



We now eat meals with different vegetables, and when I saw the butternut seeds growing, I decided to look after them so that one day we can produce some of our own food at home, she said.

The donation was made possible through the work of Mr Kgwatlhe's farming project, Itireleng, where 20 SEF participants support activities such as transplanting, mulching, irrigation, pruning, spraying, crop monitoring, and general farm maintenance. According to the farmer, beyond their involvement significantly increasing production capacity, they have taught him how to manage different people, as well as teach him a thing or two, as inexperienced as they were with regards to the farm business.

Mr Kgwatlhe credits the participants with helping to organise donation efforts and ensuring that produce reaches households in need. He believes the participants take pride in contributing to food security within their own community, particularly because they understand the realities faced by households with little or no income.



As community members who earn a stipend, they feel it is important to help those who do not have work at all, - Kgwatlhe explained.





CASE STUDY 12

A GARDENER HELPING ANOTHER GARDENER

When Mr Bokaba speaks about food, he does not speak as someone waiting for assistance. He speaks as someone trying.

Earlier in 2026, he decided to start a small household garden. It was not his first attempt. He had gardened before, but circumstances forced him to leave his previous growing space. Determined to try again, he began rebuilding a small garden at home in February.

The challenge, however, was that growing food takes time, while hunger does not wait.

As his garden slowly took shape, farmer Miriam Kgabo Sera began donating spinach and onions to his household. Since April 2026, the donations have arrived regularly, providing fresh vegetables while his own crops were still developing. The support filled an important gap.



The number of meals has increased from once a day to two or three times a day, he explained.

Beyond increasing the amount of food available, the donations improved the quality of meals in the household. Vegetables became a regular part of the family's diet, and the need to purchase them from local shops reduced significantly.

What makes this story notable is that the support did not replace Mr Bokaba's efforts; it strengthened them. While receiving vegetables, he continued investing time in his own garden, motivated by the possibility of one day producing enough to support others as well.



I could also donate to the community if my small garden does well. Do to others what they do unto me.





CASE STUDY 13

MORE THAN VEGETABLES:
A REMINDER THAT
SOMEONE CARES

In December 2025, as many families prepared for the festive season, the Sekhu household in Jericho received a simple donation from Fresh Nton Nton farmer Solomon Malope: a packet of tomatoes and two bundles of spinach.

For the five-member household, the vegetables were a welcome addition to meals that would normally rely on groceries purchased by the family's breadwinners. While the donation may have appeared modest, it made a meaningful difference by reducing the need to buy vegetables and adding variety to the food prepared at home.

The impact was felt most strongly in the household's approach to nutrition. Tiisetso Sekhu explained that vegetables have become an important part of family meals, particularly for her elderly mother-in-law, whose health requires a more balanced diet.

What remained with the family, however, was not only the food itself.



To know that at least there are people who think of us and are considerate of our family means a lot, because there aren't many families that receive donations.

For farmer Solomon Malope, the value of these donations extends beyond the vegetables distributed.



I am happy because I see so many changes in community members. My wish is to donate even more, even as I see some households starting their own backyard gardens.

In the Sekhu household, the donation served as more than a source of fresh produce. It was a reminder that even small acts of support can help families feel seen, valued, and connected to the wider community around them.

7. CONCLUSIONS

This assessment offers an integrated evaluation of the SEF programme's impact on household and community-level food security, utilising a mixed-methods approach that synthesises participant surveys, beneficiary narratives, and qualitative case studies. The evidence demonstrates that across all focal areas, the SEF initiative has catalysed substantive improvements in food access, dietary quality, and income stability, while bolstering community food redistribution and local production systems through household gardens and farmer-led donation networks.

At the household level, findings indicate a consistent upward trend in food security conditions. A vast majority of respondents noted enhanced access to food after joining the programme, alongside a marked decrease in reliance on adverse coping mechanisms such as reducing meal sizes or skipping meals entirely. While varying degrees of food insecurity persist—particularly concerning dietary diversity and sustained food sufficiency throughout the month—the general trajectory points toward fortified resilience. Income data further validates this pattern, with most households reporting improved earnings and an increased capacity to meet essential needs, despite remaining vulnerabilities linked to income fluctuations and a reliance on diverse livelihood sources.

The establishment and growth of household food gardens have emerged as a vital mechanism for achieving food security gains. High rates of seedling distribution and planting reflect extensive programme reach and robust participant engagement. Although many gardens remain in the early production phase, a significant number of households are already harvesting and consuming their own produce, leading to reduced food costs and improved dietary variety. Crucially, these initiatives have stimulated a broader interest in food production and sustainable livelihoods, indicating a potential for long-term structural and behavioural shifts in household-level food systems.

At the community level, the farmer produce donation system serves as a powerful complementary pathway for food security. Evidence from the 13 documented donation cases that are qualitative narratives, illustrates how farmer-led systems extend benefits to schools, care centres, and vulnerable individuals. These contributions have enhanced food availability in institutional settings, improved nutrition for children, and provided consistent support in areas where services were previously erratic. The case studies further underscore the social depth of these interventions, showing how food sharing is deeply embedded in community relationships of care, solidarity, and mutual support.

The synthesis of quantitative and qualitative data leads to a primary conclusion: the SEF operates as a cohesive food security system where income support, household production, and community redistribution are mutually reinforcing. Rather than isolated interventions, these components work together; income facilitates access, gardens diminish market reliance, and farmer donations broaden food availability. Together, they enhance household wellbeing, reduce the severity of food insecurity, and strengthen local food systems.

However, the data also highlights enduring vulnerabilities. Many households still face cyclical food insecurity tied to income timing, limited dietary breadth, and production-related constraints in their gardens. Furthermore, early-stage challenges such as pests, water access, and technical knowledge gaps indicate that ongoing institutional and technical support remains vital to ensuring the long-term productivity and sustainability of these household-based food production systems. Similarly, although most participants reported improved household income since joining SEF, a notable proportion perceived their income to have worsened. This finding may reflect the continued vulnerability of low-income households to unexpected financial shocks or the temporary income fluctuations associated with establishing new livelihood and income-generating activities. These dynamics underscore that improvements in household resilience are often gradual and require sustained support beyond initial programme participation.

In conclusion, the SEF programme has made a clear, multi-dimensional contribution to food security at both household and community levels. The evidence points not only to immediate improvements in food access but also to the development of more resilient, locally-driven food systems. By combining household gardens, income-linked support, and community redistribution, the programme serves as a layered intervention with both short-term relief and long-term developmental impact. Consolidating these gains will require continued investment in production capacity, the stabilisation of income pathways, and the expansion of community-based food networks.

ANNEXURES

- Annexure 1: [Survey Questionnaire Results](#)
- Annexure 2: [Sampling](#)
- Annexure 3: [Farmer Food Donations to Households and Organisations](#)
- Annexure 4: [Donations Impact Interviews feedback](#)

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