



Communication and Marketing Department  
Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso  
Kommunikasie en Bemerkingsdepartement

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa  
Welgelegen House, Chapel Road Extension, Rosebank, Cape Town  
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 5427/5428/5674 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 5628

[www.uct.ac.za](http://www.uct.ac.za)

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## **Stokvels contribute to healthy eating, food security and women empowerment – UCT study**

Stokvels play a significant role in promoting healthy eating by making nutritious food more accessible and affordable to their members.

By purchasing groceries in bulk, stokvel members can secure better deals on food, allowing them to buy higher quality and healthier options, a University of Cape Town (UCT) PhD research by Tafadzwa Lukwa of the [School of Public Health and Family Medicine](#) in the Faculty of Health Sciences has found.

The research also highlighted that logistical factors, such as the frequency of shopping, delivery preferences, and proximity to shopping venues, are the primary drivers of food purchasing decisions within stokvels.

Stokvels are community-based groups where members pool money regularly to make collective purchases of groceries. The study focused on understanding the factors that drive food purchasing decisions within these groups and how these decisions can be aligned with healthier food choices.

“Interestingly, cost was not the most significant factor influencing food choices, suggesting that stokvel members prioritise convenience and access over price,” said Lukwa, who graduated for his PhD on Tuesday, 3 September.

Lukwa said the aim of the study was to evaluate how stokvels, which are informal savings and credit associations in South Africa, can influence healthier eating habits and improve nutritional outcomes among their members.

The study also found that stokvels are particularly beneficial for single, unemployed women who head households, as these groups help them ensure food security for their families.

“I was drawn to this topic by the pressing issue of food insecurity and poor nutrition in South Africa, particularly in economically disadvantaged urban areas. I wanted to explore how existing community structures, like stokvels, could be harnessed to address these challenges. My background in health economics and public health, combined with a deep interest in community-driven solutions, inspired me to investigate how stokvels could be

leveraged to promote healthier eating habits and improve overall health outcomes in vulnerable populations,” he said.

The study shows that stokvels, which are deeply embedded in South African culture, can be a powerful tool for promoting healthy eating and improving food security, particularly in low-income communities.

Lukwa said his study will inform policymakers and health practitioners on how to support and collaborate with these groups to enhance their impact on public health.

“Ultimately, I hope my work will lead to the development of targeted interventions and policies that empower stokvel members, especially women, to make healthier food choices and improve their communities' overall well-being. By supporting stokvels, we can address some of the root causes of diet-related non-communicable diseases and contribute to a healthier, more equitable society,” he said.

Lukwa said an interesting aspect of his study is the potential for stokvels to be integrated into formal health and economic policies. “Despite their informal nature, this suggests that with proper support, such as formal recognition, training, and resources, stokvels could be even more effective in driving health promotion and economic empowerment”.



Tafadzwa Lukwa

Photo: Supplied

***ENDS***

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**Thami Nkwanyane**

**Media Liaison and Monitoring Officer**  
Communication and Marketing Department  
University of Cape Town  
Rondebosch  
Tel: (021) 650 5672  
Cell: (072) 563 9500  
Email: [thami.nkwanyane@uct.ac.za](mailto:thami.nkwanyane@uct.ac.za)  
Website: [www.uct.ac.za](http://www.uct.ac.za)