ISAN MAGAZINE

FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

July-Sept 2025

ISSUE 14

About ISAN Magazine

ISAN Magazine was born in 2021 out of the Knowledge Hub for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Southern Africa, a project funded by GIZ and operationalised by African NGOs through five knowledge hubs making up the Knowledge Centre for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Africa. Today, we are working towards financial sustainability, partnering with leading NGOs and movements to bring you news you can use!

ISAN Magazine is dedicated to building a strong network of informed civil society actors and organisations across the southern African region to advocate for organic agriculture and agroecology as a framework for regional food and farming systems.

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CONTENTS

Infuriating facts 1

- Stumps and Silence: How Malawi's Forests Are Disappearing in Plain Sight

A changing climate 7

- Persistent Floods in Zambia: A Wake-up Call for Rainwater Harvesting
- Resources: Water Harvesting
- Seeds of Resilience: Annie's Story of Climate-tolerant Farming, Zambia
- Resources: Improving Food Security & Environmental Impact with Climate-Resilient Crops

Markets & trade 15

- Market Days along the M1: How Weekly Rural Markets Keep Malawi Fed
- Resources: Fresh Food Market Assessment Reports: Lusaka and Lilongwe
- Scaling Organic Trade in Africa: Uganda Shows the Way
- Seeds of regeneration: The Biodiversity Partners Program grows enterprises for a thriving future

Movements & advocacy 23

- Seeds of Change: Youth, Culture & Agroecology at the Machikichori Festival
- The South African People's Tribunal on AgroToxins: exposing human rights violations and a toxic crisis
- KHSA Update: Growing a Regionally Rooted Movement for Agroecology

Future of food 32

- Chef's Corner: The superpowers of pumpking

Food & farming systems 35

- Heart and soil: The Future of Growing in South Africa: A Community Perspective

Beyond our borders 38

- The East African Gems: Tales of Mbale and Kisumu

Farmers' tips and voices 42

- Two Farms, One Field: How Your Soil Is Farming Beneath You
- Cracked Foundations: Why Soil Structure—Not Just Fertiliser—is Costing You Yields

Resources and events 47

Editor's Note

By Fortunate Nyakanda

This issue celebrates changemakers—farmers, educators, entrepreneurs and youth—who are refusing to accept business as usual. From the vibrant market days along Malawi's M1 to the cultural revival of indigenous foods in Zimbabwe, their work shows that food systems rooted in justice, sustainability and community connection are not only possible, but already taking shape.

In this issue of ISAN Magazine, we bring you stories of both crisis and hope—accounts that remind us how deeply intertwined our food systems are with climate resilience, cultural heritage and economic justice.

Across Southern Africa and beyond, communities are grappling with escalating climate shocks: devastating floods in South Africa's Eastern Cape, unrelenting droughts in Zambia, and the silent but urgent crisis of deforestation in Malawi. These environmental challenges are not distant threats—they are the daily realities shaping what we grow, how we eat and who is left behind.

Yet amid these pressures, there is powerful momentum for transformation. In Malawi, grassroots innovators are reclaiming degraded landscapes and championing clean energy alternatives.

In Zambia, farmers like Annie Mutale Katongo are proving the resilience of traditional seeds and regenerative practices.

Across the continent, movements are rising to reclaim seed sovereignty, fight multinationals' push for chemical inputs, expand organic markets and amplify women's leadership in agroecology.

As you read these pages, I invite you to consider your own role in this movement. Whether you are a farmer, policymaker, consumer or advocate, your actions matter. Building a more equitable and resilient future starts with recognizing that every meal, every seed and every story carries the potential for change.

Organically yours
Fortunate Nyakanda

Infuriating Facts

Across Africa, we continue to contend with widening inequality, environmental breakdown and political volatility—forces that often seem out of reach and beyond our control. Though our resilience is undeniable, we are too often sidelined from the decisions that shape our destinies.

Infuriating Facts is a space to name and examine these injustices. It brings into focus the hard truths behind global and regional systems that harm Africa—policies, practices and events that carry devastating consequences for our people and ecosystems. But not all harm comes from beyond our borders. The roots of deforestation, land degradation or extractive practices often lie in energy poverty, poor governance, lack of infrastructure and limited economic options. By shining a light on both external pressures and internal constraints, this section offers a fuller picture of why things fall apart, and who bears the cost. This section doesn't promise easy answers. But it does aim to clarify, provoke and connect the dots—to challenge the narratives that obscure responsibility and to sharpen our understanding of the global and local forces at play.

Stumps and Silence: How Malawi's Forests Are Disappearing in Plain Sight

By Isaac Mafuel, Staff Writer

In Malawi, cutting trees for charcoal used to be a secretive act—done quietly, almost shamefully. Today, it happens in broad daylight, without fear of punishment or remorse. Late June this year, I visited my father's village. As I entered, I saw families cutting down trees and digging out stumps from a woodlot once sponsored by a donor-funded project. When I asked why, they simply said, "It was the chief who started it, now everyone is just getting their share." Just like that, a woodlot that had provided forest cover and sustainable firewood was gone.

This wasn't an isolated case. In Chimaliro Mzuzu, one family living across the river from a nearby forest close to the Botanical Gardens woke up one morning to people chopping down trees without a care. Within two weeks, the entire forest rich with indigenous species had vanished. "They didn't even leave the stumps," the family said. "Nothing to regrow."

Across the country, forests are falling fast. With them goes the stability of the land, the livelihood of rural families, and the cultural knowledge that once helped preserve nature. To understand the depth of this crisis we spoke to two Malawians deeply engaged in forest conservation: Thrissah Kamadzi, founder of Eco-Craft Solutions, and Patrick Ulele Chikoti, Director of The Research Institute. Their stories reveal a nation on the brink of losing all forest cover.

Roots of the Crisis

"The biggest causes of deforestation right now are people cutting trees for firewood and charcoal, farming on forest land, and just how fast the population is growing," says Thrissah Kamadzi, whose social enterprise promotes sustainable cooking technologies. "Most people don't have clean energy options, so they use what's available, trees."

Patrick Chikoti echoes this view, pointing to energy needs, agricultural expansion, and even logging in designated forests like Chikangawa as major drivers. "We're losing forestry cover at alarming rates, up to 5% per annum," he warns. "In the past decade alone, an estimated 18% of forest cover has vanished."

A landscape transformed

Comparing today's forests with those from ten years ago paints a bleak picture. "Back then, we had more green cover. Now, most areas are bare or severely degraded," says Kamadzi. The southern and central regions particularly Blantyre, Zomba, and Mulanje are hardest hit due to high population densities and the intense demand for charcoal. But Chikoti notes an emerging concern: "The northern region, once a green haven, is now topping the list in deforestation rates."

Ripple effects on rural life

Deforestation's impacts on livelihoods and food security are direct and devastating. "No forests mean poor soil, less rain and smaller harvests," Kamadzi says. "It's hard to survive in rural areas now. Forest loss means more hunger and poverty." Chikoti adds that forests have long served as fallback food systems in times of scarcity.

Without forests, rural communities are losing access to fruits, insects and herbs. This collapse in food diversification is worsening household food insecurity."

Charcoal: A necessary evil?

Charcoal production is both a major cause and a symbol of the poverty-driven nature of deforestation. "People know it's harmful, but for many, it's the only income they have," says Kamadzi. "Survival comes first." Chikoti points out that even enforcement of forest protection laws is often compromised by this survival mindset. "Poverty and poor agricultural alternatives make it difficult to implement these laws at the grassroots."

A gendered burden

"Women and girls are hit hardest," Kamadzi stresses. "They walk long distances for firewood, miss school, and spend hours cooking with smoky fuels." Chikoti adds that this time burden impacts education and income generation, perpetuating gender inequality.

Law versus reality

Both interviewees agree: Malawi's forest conservation laws look good on paper but suffer from weak enforcement. "People cut trees with no consequences," says Kamadzi. Corruption, lack of funding and limited personnel further cripple these efforts. Chikoti cites a lack of political will as another major barrier. Yet local leadership could be a key ally. "Some chiefs are helping with awareness and bylaws," says Kamadzi. Chikoti emphasizes that "local leaders are custodians of communal lands. They play vital roles in governance, advocacy and tree planting."

Climate consequences

Malawi is already feeling the heat. "When trees go, the rain changes," says Kamadzi. "We get droughts, floods, and strong winds. Climate change is real—and deforestation makes it worse." Chikoti explains the link more scientifically: "Forests act as carbon sinks and regulate rainfall through transpiration. Remove them, and we get erosion, siltation and extreme weather events."

The environmental toll

Both experts point to visible damage. Rivers dry up quicker. Yields plummet. Firewood and wild foods are scarce. "Even forests near gravesites, once sacred, are vanishing," says Chikoti. He adds that traditional spiritual beliefs once helped preserve forests, but modern pressures are eroding these norms.

Seeds of hope

Not all is lost. Across Malawi, people are fighting back. "At Eco-Craft, we work with school clubs and train youth in clean energy," says Kamadzi. "Young people are stepping up with fresh ideas." Their initiatives include biomass pellets, clean cookstoves and school outreach. Chikoti highlights sustainable businesses like Mabuu Drive Inn in Salima, which merges tourism and forest conservation, and praises the return to indigenous tree planting and climate-smart agriculture. "These efforts link forests with livelihoods," he says.

Tech for trees

Innovation holds promise. "We use WhatsApp to share forest alerts," says Kamadzi. "Technology helps us act smarter." Chikoti advocates for satellite monitoring and GIS mapping to track forest changes, and using social media to spread awareness and foster community-based solutions.

A message to policymakers and donors

Kamadzi's plea is clear: "Support community solutions. Fund youth and women-led green businesses. Forests are life. Protecting them protects people." Chikoti agrees, but adds a caution: "Top-down solutions won't work. We must listen to local communities—find out what they believe will work—and build from there."

As Malawi's forests fall, so too do the invisible pillars holding up rural life. Yet amid this crisis, these voices remind us that hope still grows, if we water it with innovation, inclusivity, and community wisdom.

About Eco Craft Solutions, Malawi

Founded by Thrissah Kamadzi, Eco Craft Solutions tackles Malawi's overreliance on firewood and charcoal—key drivers of deforestation, climate change and indoor air pollution. The company produces and distributes affordable, multi-fuel gasifier stoves and biomass briquettes. Beyond clean energy access, Eco Craft Solutions creates green jobs, training women artisans to manufacture stoves and fuels, and supporting sustainable livelihoods. To date, the venture has reached more than 500 households, reduced carbon emissions and helped conserve forests. With ambitions to reach 5 000 households and create 500 green jobs, Eco Craft is scaling a model that protects biodiversity while improving health and household resilience. Email Thrissah for more information.

About The Research Institute, Malawi

The Research Institute is working to halt forest degradation in Naluva, Salima District, where deforestation is eroding biodiversity and threatening the livelihoods of over 6 400 people who rely on forest resources for food, fuel and cultural practices. The Institute is launching a participatory research project to identify the most overexploited forestry resources and co-develop sustainable alternatives with local communities. Through workshops, mapping and action research, the study aims to equip leaders and institutions with the knowledge to protect and regenerate forests. When funded, the project promises high-impact outcomes—restored forest access, improved food and energy security, and strengthened local stewardship of vital ecosystems. Email Patrick for more information.

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A Changing Climate

Across Africa, the climate crisis is not a distant threat. It is a lived reality. From erratic rainfall and prolonged droughts to destructive floods and rising temperatures, the impacts of climate change are already disrupting food systems, depleting water sources and undermining livelihoods—especially for rural communities. These changes are not abstract; they are deeply felt and increasingly visible in everyday life. Yet too often, climate reporting sidelines African voices. The dominant narratives focus on international negotiations, distant carbon markets or high-tech solutions designed elsewhere. What gets missed is the rich, practical knowledge held by communities on the frontlines of environmental change—and the urgency of supporting local responses.

A Changing Climate brings together examples of African climate adaptation and ecological knowledge in practice. It explores what it means to face the climate crisis with integrity, with imagination and with roots in place. As the pressure to adapt intensifies, these community-led responses offer practical solutions and also a broader rethinking of how we live with the land.

Persistent floods in Zambia: A Wake-up Call for Rainwater Harvesting

By Rabecca Mwila, Staff writer

The Zambian government projected normal rainfall for the 2024/2025 season, but warned of intermittent heavy rains and flooding in vulnerable areas. By January 2025, 69 of 116 districts were at risk, with over 660 households affected and 159 displaced.

In response, the government activated its National Multi-Hazard Contingency Plan, offering rental relief, setting up disaster camps and distributing supplies. Long-term measures include the Urban Renewal Project and the Lusaka Storm Water Management Master Plan, aimed at improving drainage infrastructure.

Experts say Zambia's floods are a wake-up call to invest in rainwater harvesting.

Dr Oliver Bulaya, a climate-smart agriculture expert, notes that Zambia receives about 180 billion cubic litres of rain annually, but only 80 billion is effectively used. "We are letting billions of litres go to waste," he warns, "this, combined with the recent severe drought experienced in 2024, underscores the demand for innovative policy aimed at enhancing water harvesting."

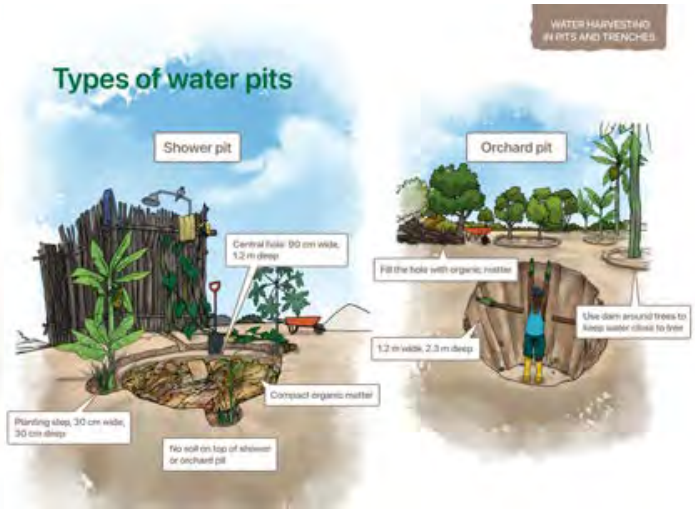
Dr Bulaya advocates for widespread adoption of water harvesting technologies—such as rooftop tanks, underground reservoirs and small dams—as vital tools for sustainable agriculture and drought resilience.

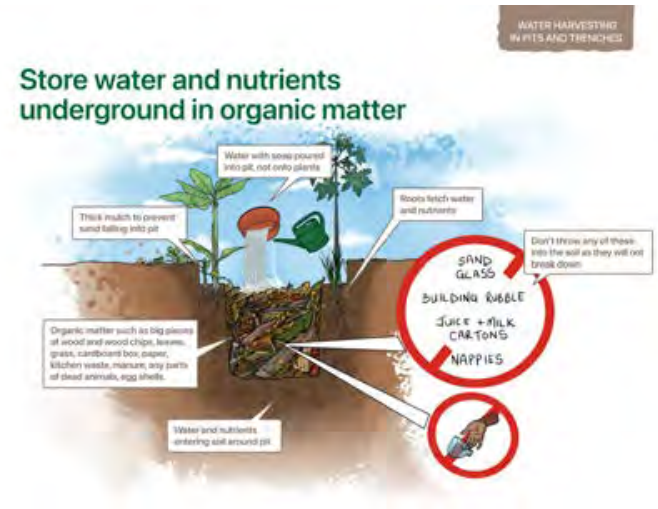
Statutory Instrument 73 of 2024 was introduced to promote and regulate water harvesting and storage. Minister of Water Development and Sanitation, Collins Nzovu, has tasked the Water Resources Management Authority (WARMA) with leading the implementation of the statutory instrument, ensuring that water harvesting is prioritised at household, institutional and community levels.

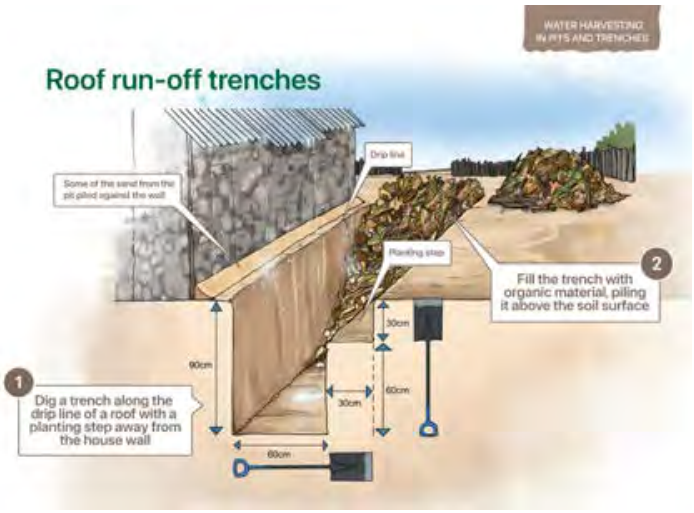
Nzovu notes that "the severe drought experienced last year has underscored the fragility of our water system." The 2023–2024 farming season saw a 90% crop failure in 106 districts, underscoring the rising threat to food security and rural livelihoods.

Both Dr Bulaya and Minister Nzovu agree that water harvesting is not optional—it's essential for Zambia's resilience in a changing climate.

Resources: Water harvesting with the Namibia Nature Foundation







The above user-friendly posters show simple rainwater harvesting techniques that can be implemented on and around the home. On the back of each poster are clear instructions. The set of posters is also accompanied by a user guide with more detail. They were developed by the Namibian Nature Foundation as part of their work for the Knowlege Hub for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology and can be downloaded from the KCOA platform.

Download 'Store water and nutrients underground in organic matter'.
Download 'Types of water pits'.
Download 'Household garden benefitting from run-off water'.
Download 'Roof run-off trenches'.

Seeds of Resilience: Annie's Story of Climate-tolerant Farming, Zambia

By Rabecca Mwila, Staff writer

In the heart of Zambia's Shibuyunji District, set against the rolling hills around Chilonga village, Annie Mutale Katongo wakes with the sun. As a smallholder farmer, she works on the land and protects the old seeds passed down through generations including maize, groundnuts, bambara nuts, cassava, sorghum and millet. Yet the 2023-2024 rains brought more than work; they delivered a tough lesson, and a deep reminder of how fragile farming can be. "I realised that climate change is real," Annie recounts.

A severe drought had swept across the land, and she watched helplessly as her six hectares of maize and two hectares of groundnuts withered under the unforgiving sun. It was a devastating loss that could have broken her spirit.

But where disaster struck, resilience grew. From a small two-lima plot of sorghum, planted between December and January, Annie harvested eleven 50-kilogram bags of grain. While the commercial crops failed, the local seeds endured. "This made me realise that growing seeds that germinate fast and require low rainfall makes a huge difference," Annie says.

It was the sorghum and the steadfast cassava that fed her family when all else failed. This is the power of local small grains.

In an era of unpredictable weather, these heritage crops are Zambia's climate-tolerant solution. Their magic lies in their adaptation, with deep root systems and efficient water use, they can survive and even thrive on little rain, a trait Annie enhances with traditional farming practices. "I stopped using commercial fertilisers and now use organic fertilisers," Annie explains.,"I also practise potholing and mulching as this helps to conserve water, especially during low rainfall."

The advantages extend far beyond the harvest. These grains are nutritional powerhouses. "Patients with high sugar levels can reduce their sugar levels by eating sorghum," Annie shares from her community's experience. "Sorghum porridge also gives energy to children with low energy."

This is the kind of deep, generational knowledge that supports community health in ways modern science is only beginning to reaffirm.

And yes, people are growing these crops. Annie is not alone. “A friend of mine harvested 2 950 kilograms bags of sorghum during the 2023-2024 season. Most neighbours benefited as they bought from her to feed their families.”Annie said.

This simple transaction highlights a vital truth: small grains can be sold to earn income, creating local, circular economies where communities support each other directly, turning surplus into vital cash for school fees, food and other necessities.

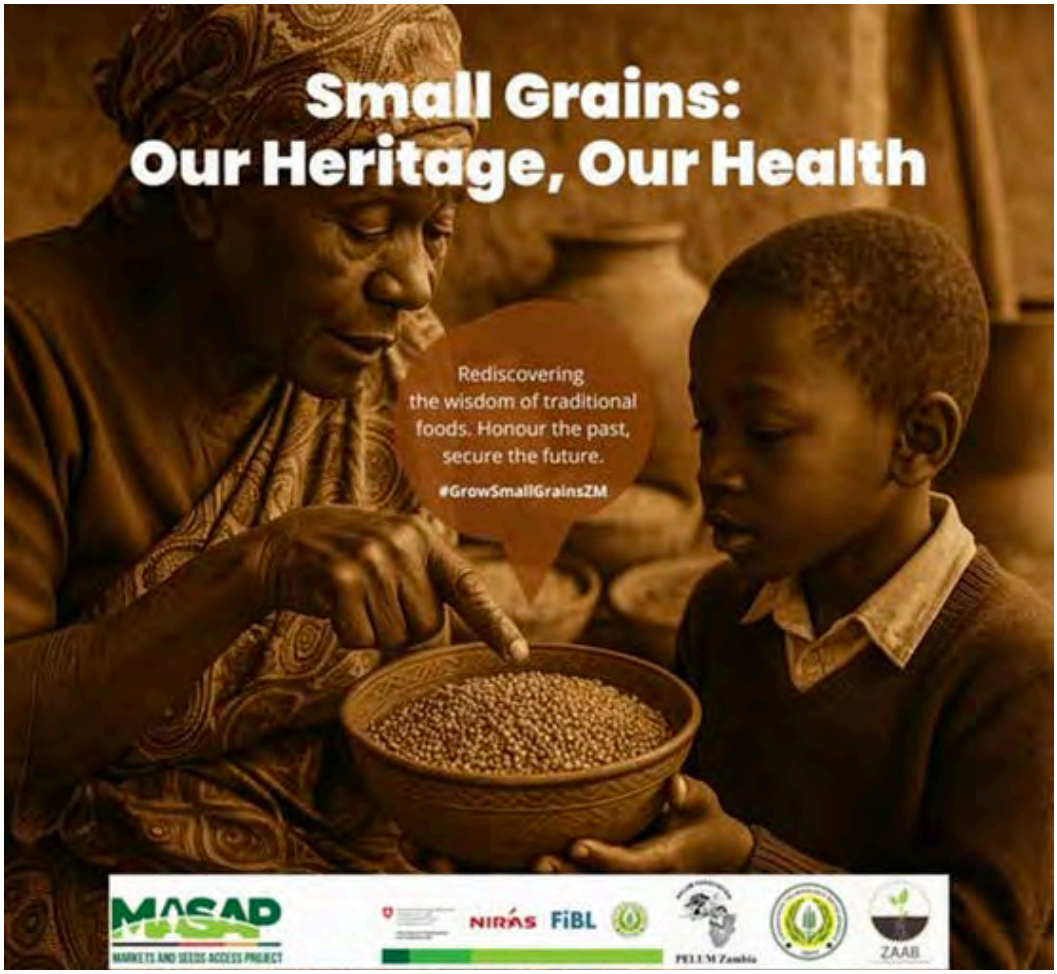
The growing movement to embrace these crops is supported by national initiatives. The Zambian Government, in partnership with organisations like PELUM Zambia, has embarked on programmes to hold traditional seed and food festivals across the country, creating greater awareness and raising the profile of local seeds and foods.

These festivals provide a platform for farmers to share knowledge and seeds, strengthening the very fabric of community-based agriculture.

Where can one access these remarkable seeds? The answer lies in looking back to move forward. “Let us embrace our old ways of farming, in which our forefathers never used to buy seeds. They used to keep seeds from their harvest for the next season” Annie says. The most reliable and affordable source of seed is a farmer’s own hands and their community. By saving seeds, farmers can drastically reduce the high costs associated with buying commercial seeds every year.

This spirit of sharing is alive and well in Shibuyunji District. Annie says, “As a member of Kapyanga Women's Association, we are always ready to share our farming practices. Those interested are welcome to visit us and we will be happy to share our knowledge”.

Annie’s story is a powerful testament. It is a call to action for farmers, especially women, to reclaim their seed sovereignty, to trust in the resilience of indigenous crops, and to build a food future for Zambia and the rest of the world.



Resources: Improving Food Security & Environmental Impact with Climate-Resilient Crops with Food Plant Solutions

About Food Plant Solutions

Food Plant Solutions (FPS) was formed in 2007, to address hunger, malnutrition and improve food security by enabling individuals, communities and NGOs to identify and grow healthy nutritious local food plants.

Leveraging information from the Food Plants International database, FPS creates educational resources that identify highly nutritious local food plants alongside information on how to grow the plant and its use, including key nutritional information that explains how these nutrients grow, to overall health and wellbeing with a strategic focus on climate resilient production. Communities can make informed choices on the food they grow and eat, while taking into consideration the nutritional, economic and environmental impacts.

Recent projects

- **Reinvigorating traditional food plants in Zimbabwe**

Zimbabwe is facing increasing challenges regarding food insecurity, undernutrition and obesity. These problems have been brought about in part by an overreliance on maize over traditional more nutritious foods such as sorghum, millet, cowpeas and Bambara nuts.

FPS is working with the Zimbabwean Alliance, My Food, to promote traditional crops that are more nutritious and more resistant to pests and diseases, poor soils and drought. Initiatives including better seed selection, seed banks and seed exchanges as well as intercropping and alternative agroforestry are making a real difference in enhancing nutritional outcomes as well as increasing the markets for consumption of traditional food.

- **Unique composting programme in Pacific Island countries**

FPS has partnered in the expansion of a unique composting programme in Pacific Island countries, which builds on recent success in Samoa. The programme incorporates compostable nappies and commercial food waste to support food production. This successful project provides not only employment for local village women but also addresses environmental issues of nutrient and microplastic pollution.

- **Supporting a sustainable agricultural future in Africa**

FPS is working with the Biovision Africa Trust to promote sustainable agriculture and agroecology in Africa. This partnership will provide essential resources on important food plants for Kenya, Madagascar and Rwanda, including translations into local languages. This project will ultimately help to enhance agricultural productivity and foster resilient farming communities for a brighter future.

With more than 150 published resources for nearly 60 countries, FPS has an experienced team who know how to communicate and promote information about highly nutritious local food plants to lay people. The style and presentation of the resources can add significant value to food, nutrition and sustainability development projects and allows decision makers to act.

Contact FPS by email or visit their website.

When the Waters Rise: Eastern Cape Floods Expose South Africa's Climate Crisis

By Thabo Molelekwa

The numbers tell a devastating story: 101 people dead, dozens still missing, and a national disaster declared after catastrophic flooding swept through South Africa's Eastern Cape province in mid-June. But behind these statistics lies a stark warning about climate change's accelerating grip on South Africa and the deadly consequences of our collective failure to adapt.

The floods struck with brutal force on 9-10 June, catching many residents asleep in their homes. Water levels reached 3-4 metres high in places around Mthatha, sweeping away houses, cars and lives with equal indifference.

At least 127 schools and 20 health facilities were damaged, while more than 4 700 households found themselves homeless, their homes either submerged or completely destroyed.

Premier Oscar Mabuyane's stunned reaction—"I have never seen something like this"—captures the scale of devastation, but it also reveals a troubling truth: South Africa is woefully unprepared for climate change's new reality.

The climate emergency is here

President Cyril Ramaphosa was unequivocal in linking the Eastern Cape floods to climate change, and the science is crystal clear. Global warming is supercharging South Africa's weather systems, making extreme rainfall events more frequent, more intense and more deadly. What were once "100-year floods" are becoming regular occurrences as our warming atmosphere holds more moisture and unleashes it with devastating force.

From the catastrophic KwaZulu-Natal floods of 2022 that killed over 400 people to repeated flooding across the Eastern Cape, South Africa is experiencing what climate scientists predicted: weather extremes that our current systems cannot handle. Each degree of warming loads the atmosphere with more moisture, turning weather systems into potential weapons of mass destruction.

The floods have brutally exposed how climate change amplifies existing inequalities.

The Eastern Cape, one of South Africa's poorest provinces, contributes least to global greenhouse gas emissions yet bears the brunt of climate impacts. Rural communities, predominantly Black and impoverished, find themselves on the front lines of a climate crisis they did not create.

Roads that should channel water safely become death traps. Bridges collapse under climate-enhanced storms. These are not natural disasters beyond human control—they are the predictable consequences of a warming world colliding with decades of underinvestment in climate-resilient infrastructure.

The true cost of climate denial

The economic toll is staggering and entirely predictable. The Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs estimates infrastructure damage at R5.1 billion, with road repairs alone requiring R935 million. Yet the province's available disaster funds total just R120 million—a stark illustration of how climate denial translates into deadly underfunding.

This financial shortfall isn't an accident—it's the inevitable result of treating climate change as a future problem rather than a present emergency.

With 51 roads remaining impassable and R461 million needed for temporary residential units, South Africa is paying the price for decades of climate inaction.

The human cost is immeasurable and morally unacceptable. Families have lost loved ones to a crisis that scientists have warned about for decades. Children have lost their schools to floods that climate models predicted would intensify. Entire communities have been displaced by weather patterns that are becoming the new normal as greenhouse gas concentrations continue climbing.

A climate adaptation emergency

The declaration of a national disaster unlocks relief funds, but emergency response cannot be South Africa's climate strategy. The country needs immediate action to build climate resilience before the next inevitable extreme weather event strikes. South Africa must treat climate adaptation as a national security priority, investing massively in climate-resilient infrastructure.

This means redesigning systems for extreme rainfall, strengthening infrastructure to withstand climate-enhanced floods, and implementing early warning systems for the next climate disaster. Building codes must reflect climate projections, not historical weather patterns. Development must be restricted in flood-prone areas that will become increasingly dangerous as extreme weather intensifies.

Climate resilience cannot remain a privilege for the wealthy—it must become a fundamental right for all citizens.

The climate reckoning

The Eastern Cape floods represent South Africa's climate reckoning. The country can continue its pattern of crisis response—mourning the dead, rebuilding the damaged, and waiting for the next climate disaster—or it can finally acknowledge that we are living through a climate emergency that demands emergency action.

Climate change is not waiting for South Africa to get ready, and the window for gradual adaptation is rapidly closing. The 101 lives lost in the Eastern Cape are climate casualties—victims of our collective failure to take the climate crisis seriously until it was too late.

The waters will rise again, and they will rise higher. The only question is whether South Africa will finally treat climate change as the existential threat it has always been.

Markets & Trade

Across Africa, trade is constantly in motion—connecting farmers, vendors, transporters and consumers in vibrant, complex food networks. Much of this exchange takes place in informal spaces: roadside stalls, open-air markets, and small-scale cross-border trade routes that rarely feature in official statistics but play a vital role in feeding communities and supporting livelihoods.

These informal markets are central to how food moves across the continent, especially for fresh, locally produced goods. They provide income for millions, especially women and youth, and offer affordable food to those who need it most. Yet they often operate without the infrastructure, policy support or investment they deserve.

To build stronger, more inclusive food systems, we must recognise and support the spaces where trade is already happening. That means investing in safe, accessible marketplaces, improving access to services and finance, and valuing the role of informal trade in achieving food security and economic resilience.

Market Days along the M1: How Weekly Rural Markets Keep Malawi Fed

By Isaac Mafuel, Staff writer

Driving along the M1 road in Malawi, you'll pass through a chain of rural trading centres, bustling, dusty, and full of life, especially on market day. These once-a-week markets are more than community events; they are critical nodes in Malawi's agri-food system, linking rural farmers to urban tables and feeding both local economies and livelihoods.

As you slow down at one of these trading centres, you're drawn into a different kind of rhythm. Men and women crowd roadside stalls and mats, touting fresh produce; tomatoes, onions, Irish potatoes, bananas, pumpkins, beans and greens, all harvested from the surrounding villages. If you step out of your car, you're immediately swept up in the noise, the colour, and the scent of food and trade.

But beneath the vibrant chaos lies a web of relationships that keep Malawi's food system moving. Many of the sellers lining the road are not farmers themselves but vendors, middlemen and women who buy in bulk from smallholder farmers to resell at a margin. With town-honed instincts, you might not even notice. But if you venture deeper into the market, you'll likely find someone who's buying directly from farmers or, better yet, meet the farmers themselves. These are the wholesalers of the rural economy.

Often men or women who arrive early, sometimes with oxcarts laden with produce, sometimes balancing a heavy basket on their heads, or sometimes just pushing a bicycle heavy with a sack of produce, they prefer to sell everything in one go. No time for bargaining over small heaps. If you're buying in bulk, this is your golden opportunity, fresh, cheap and straight from the farm.

These market day interactions form the bedrock of a decentralized food distribution network in Malawi. Vendors from towns and cities travel deep into the countryside to stock up on produce. In the past, you could see them riding on top of articulated trucks, seated on their bags of tomatoes and sacks of maize as they rumbled back to town. But after a series of tragic accidents, laws were revised to prohibit this risky practice.

Now, these women, and many men, but mostly women, board minibuses while their goods ride separately on trusted trucks. The relationships built over time ensure that their produce arrives at the urban market safely, often before they do. This trust between vendor and driver has evolved into a dependable logistics chain without formal contracts, warehouses or apps.

Yet it's not just urban vendors making these treks. Rural traders also travel across districts to buy what their own areas lack. Vendors from as far as Blantyre make their way to Jenda in Mzimba District, some 500 kilometres away, to buy onions or Irish potatoes.

Along this route, produce grown in one corner of the country ends up feeding families on the other side. These trading centres may seem informal and chaotic, but they're highly efficient in their own way. They move tons of produce across Malawi, provide livelihoods for tens of thousands, and help stabilize food availability in areas facing shortfalls. They're also a space where women dominate the informal trade landscape, asserting economic power and mobility in a system that has long overlooked them.

If policymakers and planners are serious about strengthening food systems in Malawi, these market days must be seen not as peripheral but as central.

Investing in their infrastructure, safety, and transport links could go a long way in supporting food security, rural livelihoods, and gender equity.

So next time you find yourself driving down the M1, don't just pass through. Pull over. Step into the buzz. You may walk away not only with a better price but a deeper understanding of how Malawi feeds itself, one market day at a time.

Resources: Fresh Food Market Assessment Reports: Lusaka and Lilongwe from ICLEI Africa

ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability is a global network with a bold vision for a sustainable urban future, working with and effectively advocating for local and subnational governments in the global arena for more than 30 years.

Marketplaces have emerged as a vital space for intervention for food systems education and awareness for direct improvements to infrastructure and services, and locations for value-addition to food and associated livelihood generation. Recognising the vital role of marketplaces in food systems, ICLEI, with the support of GIZ, has launched the "Strengthening fresh food markets for healthier food environments" project.

These two reports on fresh food markets in Lusaka, Zambia and Lilongwe, Malawi provide detailed analysis on markets in these cities, including locations, customer and product/trade volumes, state of infrastructure and the extent to which the markets are ready for and able to capitalise on investment. They are well worth the read!

Download the Lusaka, Zambia report here and the Lilongwe, Malawi report here.

Scaling Organic Trade in Africa: Uganda Shows the Way

By Fortunate Nyakanda

This article is based on the presentation by Alex Lwakuba at the workshop "Leveraging Trade of Organic Products in Africa," organized by NOGAMU, IISD, and AFRONET in Kampala, Uganda (11–12 June 2025). For more information about the workshop, click here.

Uganda shows the way forward in tapping the growing global demand for organic products. Alex Lwakuba noted that "The time to leverage organic trade is now. Let us organize, innovate, and invest."

A new dawn for African organic agriculture

From health-conscious global consumers to climate-focused policies, the momentum behind organic agriculture is undeniable. For Africa, this is more than an economic opportunity—it is a sustainable development pathway.

The recent workshop on "Leveraging Trade of Organic Products in Africa: Creating an Enabling Environment to Facilitate Organic Trade" brought together policymakers, practitioners and partners in Kampala, Uganda (11–12 June 2025). Organised by the National Organic Agricultural Movement of Uganda (NOGAMU) in partnership with the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) and Africa Organic Network (AFRONET), the workshop made one message clear: Africa must organize and act now to become a competitive force in the global organic market.

Global growth, African opportunity

The global organic food market is booming—valued at USD 228 billion in 2024 and projected to reach USD 660 billion by 2030. Africa, with its untapped agroecological potential and rich biodiversity, is uniquely positioned to meet this demand—if the right systems are put in place.

"Organic agriculture is not a trend. It is our chance to lead with sustainability and indigenous wisdom," said Alex.

Uganda: Africa's organic powerhouse

Uganda offers a compelling example of progress and potential:

- **404 246 certified organic producers – highest in Africa, second globally after India.**
- **505 000+ hectares under organic cultivation, growing at 15% annually.**
- **Organic exports surged from US$50 million in 2018 to US$174 million by 2022**
- **Leading products: vanilla, coffee, cocoa, sesame, pineapples and fish.**

These achievements result from long-term commitment, farmer-driven innovation, enabling policies like Uganda's National Organic Agriculture Policy (NOAP, 2019), and increasing alignment with regional trade frameworks.

Enabling regional and global trade

Africa's organic ecosystem is being nurtured through:

- African Union's declaration supporting organic agriculture.
- The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).
- Regional Economic Communities.
- Standards like EAOPS and the Kilimohai Mark for East African trade.

But bottlenecks remain:

- Limited and inconsistent supply
- High cost and complexity of certification
- Gaps in postharvest infrastructure
- Weak branding and market intelligence
- Trade barriers and capacity limitations.

Strategic pathways for scaling up

To unlock organic trade across Africa, a set of coordinated strategies is essential:

1. **Prioritise market access:** Align production with international and regional market standards, with public-private support for certification and compliance.
2. **Focus on niche products:** Invest in high-demand, high-margin crops where Africa has a comparative advantage—like Uganda's organic vanilla or Ghana's cocoa.
3. **Build strong partnerships:** Connect producers, cooperatives, processors and exporters through value-chain partnerships that ensure consistent quality and supply.
4. **Strengthen branding and identity:** Develop recognisable national and regional organic brands to enhance visibility and value in competitive markets.
5. **Invest in infrastructure and Innovation:** Support facilities for processing, packaging, cold chains and logistics while integrating digital tools for traceability and marketing.
6. **Leverage digital and E-commerce platforms:** Online platforms can bridge the gap between rural producers and global buyers, while improving transparency and data-driven marketing.

"Uganda's progress shows what is possible when grassroots innovation meets policy support and market alignment."

- Alex Lwakuba

From words to action: A regional call

The Kampala workshop was a clarion call to move beyond discussions toward action. Key takeaways include the urgent need to:

- Invest in organic infrastructure and knowledge systems.
- Support national organic movements to scale certification and aggregation.
- Integrate organic trade into national agricultural strategies.
- Foster intra-African organic trade as a stepping-stone to global markets.
- Engage youth and women in organic farming and enterprise development.

Conclusion: The time is now

Africa holds the key to the future of sustainable food systems. With growing demand, political will, and community knowledge, the continent is poised for an organic transformation. As Uganda's experience illustrates, coordinated investment, innovation and capacity building can transform potential into prosperity. Now is the time to act—strategically, collectively, and boldly.

Seeds of regeneration: The Biodiversity Partners Program Grows Enterprises For a Thriving Future

By Angela Coetzee, African Project Solutions

Across Southern Africa, communities are rising to meet the intertwined crises of biodiversity loss, climate change and economic exclusion. The Biodiversity Partners Program (BiPP) is helping lead this response by equipping a new generation of African entrepreneurs with the tools, networks and confidence to turn environmental challenges into opportunity.

About the BiPP

The BiPP is an initiative of the Campus Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and implemented by African Project Solutions (APS) in Southern Africa. BiPP launched in 2021 with a simple but radical aim: to support regenerative businesses rooted in biodiversity, inclusion and local resilience.

Since then, it has grown into a dynamic ecosystem of innovators—stretching across Southern and North Africa, with a South East Asian cohort launching soon.

The 2025 BiPP southern Africa pitch series showcases 19 enterprises that are already delivering impact. From urban food farms and climate-smart aquaculture to clean cooking solutions, youth leadership initiatives and circular waste models, these businesses are reimagining how development can work for people and planet.

Each pitch session is free and open to the public. Register to attend, connect with inspiring founders and explore investment-ready models for a regenerative future.

Session 1: Nourishing Futures – Local, Clean & Indigenous Foods

- 15 July 2025 | 1–2:15pm SAST

🔗 Register here

City Green Urban Farms, South Africa | Andile B. Xaba: Transforming urban dumpsites into vibrant agroecological food hubs, City Green supplies fresh produce to low-income households, community kitchens and schools while restoring neglected spaces and promoting women's leadership.

MajesticAfrica, Zimbabwe | Getrude Chambati: Making traditional foods convenient and accessible, MajesticAfrica curates meals and meal kits that celebrate Zimbabwean heritage, improve nutrition and link smallholder farmers to new markets.

Trokass, Malawi | Tabitha Kasongo: Addressing the protein gap through an innovative rural-urban fish distribution model, Trokass sources organic fish from small-scale aquaculture farmers and delivers affordable, healthy food to underserved communities.

Biodynamic Fish Farm, Lesotho | Leah Makatleho Phekola: Using water-efficient aquaculture technology, this venture boosts access to affordable protein while restoring food security in low-income communities, particularly for women-led households.

Misitu Enterprise Ltd, Zambia | Yande Chisha Musenda: Championing organic farming in Zambia, Misitu trains farmers in sustainable methods and supplies healthy, poison-free food while regenerating soils and protecting indigenous seeds.

Session 2: Roots of Change – Growing Leaders for a Regenerative Future

- 16 July 2025 | 1–2pm SAST

🔗 Register here

EcoNature Farm, Malawi | Innocent Mac Chaphinza: Delivering offline, solar-powered agroecology education, EcoNature empowers smallholders with climate-smart knowledge and practical skills through accessible, community-based learning.

Junior Agripreneur, Zambia | Nkosilathi Brian: Bringing climate-smart agriculture and entrepreneurship into elementary classrooms, this initiative builds the mindsets and skills young learners need to become future food leaders.

Project Biome Fellowship, Regional | Keamogetswe Rakgoadi: Reconnecting youth with land and purpose, this immersive fellowship equips young people in rural areas with tools for ecological stewardship, land restoration and regenerative livelihoods.

Social Innovation & Incubation Centre, Angola | Paulo Manuel Miguel de Oliveira: Based at the Catholic University of Angola, this centre nurtures green startups tackling biodiversity loss and inequality through bootcamps, incubators and startup challenges.

Session 3: Powering Possibility – Clean Energy for a Regenerative Future

- 17 July 2025 | 1–2pm SAST

🔗 Register here

Renewable Energy for Agriculture, Zimbabwe | Hardlife Mudzingwa: Empowering women farmers with solar irrigation and climate-resilient practices, this initiative boosts food security, restores degraded land and builds local resilience.

Makos Trading (CLAS Project), Zambia | Mpazi Kamoso (Nezy): Producing clean, affordable briquettes from agricultural waste, this enterprise reduces deforestation, improves health and creates green jobs amid Zambia's energy transition.

Eco Craft Solutions, Malawi | Thrissah Kamadzi: Offering clean cooking alternatives with multi-fuel stoves and biomass fuels, Eco Craft supports healthier households and empowers local women artisans.

Session 4: Waste to Worth – Circular Solutions for a Regenerative Future

- 22 July 2025 | 1–2pm SAST

🔗 Register here

EcoLink, Botswana | Dintle Segootsane: A digital marketplace connecting small businesses to affordable, eco-friendly packaging, EcoLink enables a shift away from single-use plastics across southern Africa.

Omama Bemvelo, South Africa | Nomfundo Mkhaba: Establishing community recycling hubs in low-income areas, this grassroots initiative creates green jobs, reduces waste and promotes circular living through local leadership.

Abundance Wholesome Foods, South Africa | Siyabonga Mngoma: Turning farm surplus into nutritious snacks and flours, this circular food processor reduces waste, boosts smallholder incomes and supports ethical consumer markets.

Nubiyan Nurseries, Malawi | Steve Diouf: Combining biochar production, agroforestry and regenerative farming, Nubiyan helps farmers restore soil health while building local knowledge and biodiversity.

Session 5: Regenerating Roots – Business that Grows with Nature

- 23 July 2025 | 1–2pm SAST

Register here

Shanyababwe – Mbira Trail Project, Zimbabwe | Ryan Moss: Co-designed with local communities, this regenerative tourism trail restores forests, celebrates culture and offers immersive, ethical experiences for travellers and diaspora.

Moorabool Enterprises – Hemp Technology, Zimbabwe | Nyasha Muchochomi: Manufacturing hemp-based building materials that are carbon-negative and cost-competitive, Moorabool pioneers climate-positive construction across African and European markets.

The Research Institute, Malawi | Patrick Ulele Chikoti: Conducting participatory forest research in Salima, this initiative supports communities to co-design practical strategies for biodiversity conservation and sustainable land use.

Follow the BiPP Africa Community

The BiPP Africa Community of Practice has more than 60 members, participants of the BiPP from 2021 to 2024. The 2025 cohort will join them on graduation, helping to raise awareness of the need for pro-nature and pro-people enterprises in the region. Follow the Community on LinkedIn or Instagram.

www.biodiversitypartnersprogram.com

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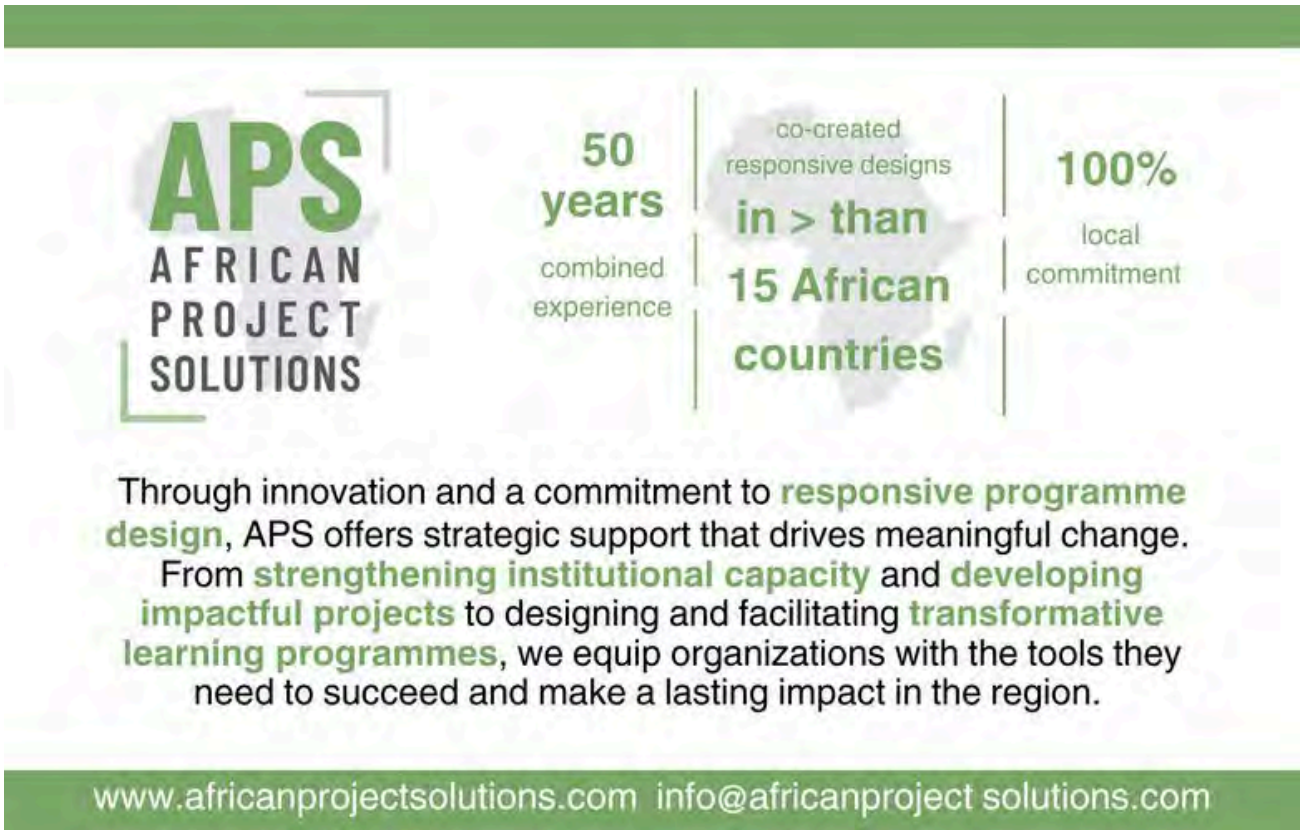


Movements & Advocacy

This section, **Advocacy and Movements**, celebrates the bold and visionary efforts of Southern African organisations, coalitions and grassroots networks working to transform our food and farming systems. These movements are not simply calling for reform—they are building alternatives rooted in justice, care for the land and the collective right to shape how we grow and share food.

Across the region, changemakers are championing agroecology as a pathway to sustainability, resilience and sovereignty. Their work confronts the deep inequalities built into industrial agriculture, and instead places power in the hands of farmers, communities and Indigenous knowledge holders. From influencing policy to running farmer field schools, from seed saving to citizen organising, they are shifting both practice and power. Here we share their stories —these movements and changemaking organisations remind us that food is not just about production, but about connection—to land, culture, biodiversity and each other. Local action, when rooted in solidarity and vision, can shape the future far beyond its borders.

Seeds of Change: Youth, Culture & Agroecology at the Machikichori Festival

By Linda Kabaira, SCOPE Zimbabwe

Children drawn from various schools during the Machikichori Festival held at SCOPE ecovillage, Chitubu 26 May 2025 Credit: SCOPE Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe faces serious challenges of malnutrition and child stunting, with many children dropping out of school and grappling with the harsh effects of climate change. Intense heatwaves and droughts driven by El Niño have made it harder for families to secure nutritious food, highlighting the urgent need for inclusive solutions. In response, engaging young people in agroecology and food sovereignty has become crucial.

SCOPE Zimbabwe is leading innovative efforts by uniting schoolchildren, youth, researchers and communities in hands-on eco-labs. These initiatives empower young minds with practical skills in water harvesting, soil regeneration and growing resilient, locally adapted crops. Incorporating artists into these programmes brings additional excitement and shines a spotlight on sustainable diets.

The importance of youth inclusion

A standout event is the Machikichori Festival 2025, held on 26 May to mark Africa Day and the Day of the African Child—dates that celebrate children's rights, especially the right to food produced in harmony with the environment. This festival not only honours African heritage and culinary traditions but also underscores the critical role of youth in building food sovereignty.

The importance of youth inclusion

Young people are on the frontlines of 21st-century challenges such as climate change and economic instability. Engaging them in agroecology helps them advocate for their communities and develop innovative solutions. SCOPE Zimbabwe is working with over 100 schools and communities across the country, showing how empowering youth can drive lasting impact.

The fusion of art and agroecology advocacy

The festival demonstrated the power of blending art and environmental action. Traditional mbira music and dance performances immersed participants in African culture, sparking inspiration and a sense of pride. A youth talent show provided a vibrant platform for young voices to share messages about climate change and traditional foods through poetry, songs, and dance.

Performers illustrated how agroecological practices learned in their schools could address contemporary problems. To celebrate their efforts and motivate continued engagement, young talents received US$50 prizes in categories such as culinary arts, poetry, music, dance, and painting. This recognition underscored how creativity can drive meaningful change within communities.

Community engagement and highlights

The festival attracted over 210 learners, artists and community members, who came together to celebrate Zimbabwean and African cuisine through cooking competitions and live demonstrations.

Traditional dishes like finger millet sadza, mahewu, mazondo, and road runner chickens showcased nutritious foods adapted to local conditions.

"This festival filled me with pride in my heritage. I learned so much about our traditional foods and why they matter for our future."

- Festival participant

The event also fostered intergenerational knowledge exchange. Local educators emphasized how traditional wisdom aligns with Zimbabwe's heritage-based curriculum, reinforcing the importance of passing down skills and stories to the next generation.

Amplifying young voices

Feedback from the talent show was overwhelmingly positive. One judge remarked, "I haven't witnessed such a wealth of talent and thoughtful messages about environmental issues and local food. The future looks incredibly promising."

The top performers will now receive further mentorship in professional studios, where they will create music, art, and dance pieces to share with wider audiences across Zimbabwe and beyond. The strong interest in celebrating African food and culture revealed a clear appetite for similar initiatives.

Recommendations for the future

Looking ahead, the priority is to strengthen partnerships with artists, schools and communities to expand the festival's reach and impact. The Machikichori Festival 2025 has laid a strong foundation for future cultural and educational projects that celebrate African identity while inspiring sustainable agricultural practices.

By deepening these relationships, we can nurture a generation that honors its roots and champions a greener, more food-secure future. With creativity and commitment, young people can lead the way back to the soil, discovering the knowledge and inspiration that will shape resilient communities across Zimbabwe.

Left: Glenview 6 Primary learner' winner of poetry category; Top right: Glenview 6 Primary School learners performing in the talent show music category; Bottom right: Musicians Vanchoga and Chipo Muchegwa judging the talent show
Credit: SCOPE Zimbabwe

The South African People's Tribunal on AgroToxins: Exposing Human Rights Violations And a Toxic Crisis

By Haidee Swanby

Farmworker spraying in vineyard, South Africa Credit: Wisaal Abrahms

"I speak with the pain of generations, pain that is personal, that is political, that is deliberately ignored by those who profit from our suffering. My story begins with my grandfather, a man who gave his life to the farm only to be stolen by the very chemicals meant to increase productivity. He was the sole breadwinner in our family. And when he fell ill to the pesticides still being used today, we were not met with compassion or care. Instead, we were illegally evicted. We were dumped in a township, stripped of our dignity, without sanitation, without basic services and without justice."

- Testimony of Deneco Dube, Secretary General of the Commercial Stevedoring, Agricutural and Allied Workers Union

The South African People's Tribunal on AgroToxins was held on the weekend of Human Rights Day (21-23 March 2025) in Stellenbosch — the heart of South Africa' winelands in the Western Cape province. This community-driven process was developed over a two-year period by a coalition of vulnerable and affected peoples, civil society organisations, trade unions, academics and individuals working together to expose the harmful reality of pesticides in South Africa, and support those who work with agricultural toxins in their daily lives.[1]

Three phenomenal and formidable women agreed to bear witness at the Tribunal, and to use their significant profiles to amplify the voices of the voiceless and press for change: Judge Navi Pillay, Human Rights Commissioner Phililе Ntuli and Dr Sophia Kisting-Cairncross.

Farmworkers work in the sacrifice zone of the toxic food production system

South Africa is one of the largest consumers of agro-toxins in Africa, with 9 000+ toxic chemical compounds registered for use in farming and industry.

The South African government continues to assert that industrial agriculture is the only route to food production and food security. There is no evidence to support the claim that pesticides and food security are inextricably tied. In fact, while South Africa produces enough food to export, more than half of South African households are categorised as food insecure and a shocking quarter of our children suffer from stunting due to malnutrition. It is clear that food insecurity is a problem of accessing food as opposed to lack of production.

Commercial farmers and industry use many agrochemicals that are categorised highly hazardous pesticides (HHPs), slated for banning by the international community. In recognition of this, South Africa's Pesticide Management Policy of 2010 committed to banning HHPs, but has largely failed to do so to date, pandering instead to the chemical industry that has a vested interest in keeping their dangerous products on the market.

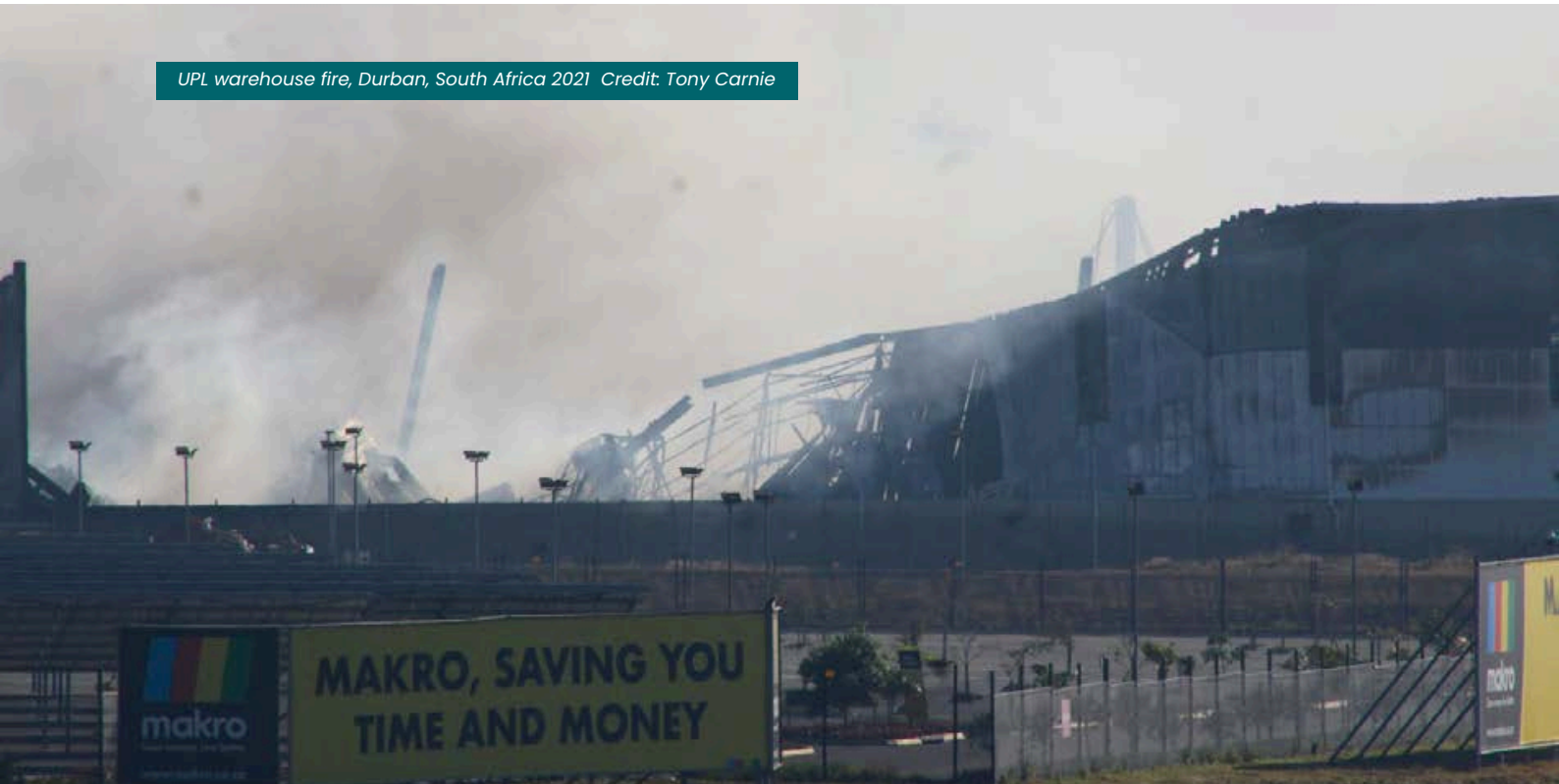
Information on pesticide registration in South Africa is not publicly available, but it is estimated that at least 192 HHPs are still used in South Africa, over a third of which are banned in the European Union.

Farm workers, farm dwellers and their families bear the brutal consequences of working in a food production system that is designed to be wholly dependent on the toxins. Experts gave testimony at the Tribunal of their ongoing research with children living on farms, showing significant impacts on cognitive and behavioural development from pesticides. Farm workers gave harrowing testimony about how they are often forced to work with pesticides without training or information and without protective gear or adequate washing stations. It was shocking to learn that farm workers do not automatically receive the results of their medical visits, which instead go straight to their employers. Once too sick to work, farm workers can expect to be evicted, to be replaced by the next disposable body. Testimonies on pesticide exposure exposed the stark reality of what Commissioner Ntuli called "the unfinished project of dismantling apartheid", where "certain bodies are historically deemed to be worthy of oppression, worthy of marginalisation and worthy of ill treatment".

AgroToxins reach beyond farms

These dangerous chemicals do not only affect people on farms — as we learned from testimonies of fisherfolk and community members affected by the catastrophic Cornubia City fire in KwaZulu-Natal in 2021 when a warehouse belonging to the Indian agrochemical company, UPL, went up in flames.

Thousands of tons of chemicals burned for 11 days, many of which are banned in other countries, such as atrazine, chlorpyrifos, 2,4D and others. The acrid smoke caused serious respiratory and other health problems, dead fish lined the local shores for kilometres, local drinking and washing water was poisoned and soils were too toxic for food gardens.



UPL warehouse fire, Durban, South Africa 2021 Credit: Tony Carnie

Fisherman Harold 'Bob' Abrahms testified, "Our family don't know how long we will live. It's poisonous, toxic and something that's not going to go away. Is there any cure? Is there any come back? Are we living to die?" The complete lack of consequences for UPL to date, and the lack of urgency from government to care for the surrounding communities impacted by the catastrophe goes to the heart of the necessity for this People's Tribunal.

Dangerous chemicals that are restricted for agricultural use in South Africa also find their way into domestic settings as people buy 'street pesticides' to deal with pest infestations resulting from a lack of service delivery.

The Tribunal delved into the highly publicised deaths of children who ate food contaminated with a viciously toxic pesticide called Terbufos. The Tribunal, along with other civil society actors have railed against the government and chemical industry strategy to blame spaza shops for these deaths and kept up the pressure to ban Terbufos.

The Minister of Agriculture and chemical industry body, CropLife, were determined to keep it on the market and phase it out over the next decade, using the convenient excuse that a ban will undermine food security. Fortunately, South Africa's Cabinet went over the Minister's head and approved an immediate ban on 13 June 2025.

Civil society and human rights defenders drive the advancement of human rights

The People's Tribunal was a bright moment when affected peoples bravely shared their daily struggles and committed to keep shining a light on a human rights and environmental crisis that affects the whole of society.

Judge Navi Pillay explains why events such as these can be so powerful and so effective. "The Tribunal does not have legal or policy-making authority. It is an initiative of multiple civil society bodies exercising their right to democratic public participation. The adjudicators have been selected for their independence, impartiality and expertise.

Judge Pillay notes "it is a matter of record that pressure from civil society and human rights defenders drove the advancement of human rights protections far more than did actions innovated by authorities. In fact, the creation by the United Nations of the office of High Commissioner of Human Rights, (a position I served for six years, 2008-2014) is credited to the NGOs who made strong demands at the United Nations Human Rights conference in Vienna in 1993."

Judge Pillay stated that the Tribunal had held two days of hearings featuring testimony from farm and factory workers, trade unions, researchers and experts. They exposed the harmful impact of corporate pesticide use on poor and marginalised communities, and the government's failure to uphold international obligations—often colluding with companies, withholding crucial information and prioritising profit over public health.

Witnesses shared harrowing accounts of working without protection from toxic sprays, suffering long-term health damage, and facing retaliation or eviction for speaking out. Some likened their treatment to the exploitation endured by their grandparents under colonial rule. Their demands were clear: reparations, justice and accountability.

The Juror's verdict and recommendations are due out at the end of August 2025.

Members of the Tribunal appeal to all South Africans to assist in having these recommendations implemented for the health of our nation and in solidarity with marginalised communities that bear the brunt of the toxic load.

[1] **The partners who collaborated and supported to bring this event together** include the African Centre for Biodiversity, Women on Farms Project, groundwork/Friends of the Earth SA, South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), members of the Blackburn and Phoenix Communities, Commercial Stevedoring, Agricultural and Allied Workers Union (CSAAWU), Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE).

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KHSA Update: Growing a Regionally Rooted Movement for Agroecology

By Stefanie Swanepoel

KHSA country leaders at in-person workshop, Cape Town, June 2025
Credit: KHSA

Funded by BMZ and implemented by GIZ in partnership with the Sustainability Institute, the Knowledge Hub for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Southern Africa (KHSA) is part of a continent-wide Knowledge Centre for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology (KCOA) that works to strengthen agroecological knowledge exchange across Africa.

Leaders Collective workshop

In June, KHSA hosted its first in-person Leaders Collective workshop in Cape Town, bringing together partner organisations from Malawi, Namibia, Zambia and South Africa. This gathering helped define a shared purpose, mapped key actors and gaps, and set out priorities for collective action. These include joint fundraising, policy engagement, peer learning and scaling of Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS).

Expanding knowledge and visibility

KHSA partners have produced over 219 knowledge products, now housed on the KCOA Digital Knowledge Platform, which hosts more than 1 000 Africa-specific resources. From farmer training guides to policy briefs and media tools, the platform is a growing hub for practitioners across the continent.

In parallel, the ISAN Magazine launched a special PGS edition in June 2025, spotlighting PGS models in Namibia, Zambia and South Africa. Partners are increasingly using storytelling, media and grassroots mobilisation to build public support for agroecology and strengthen the African narrative around regenerative food systems.

Country highlights

Zambia

PELUM Zambia's small grains campaign is promoting traditional crops like sorghum and millet through workshops, seed festivals and a national communications push. District seed festivals in Sioma and Chipata celebrated farmer knowledge, biodiversity and food sovereignty, while also advancing discussions on seed laws and GMO policies.

The Kasisi Agricultural Training Centre (KATC) continues to offer practical training to farmers and extension workers on organic farming, climate resilience and natural resource governance. Highlights include a community dialogue in Chongwe on protecting sacred sites and an agroforestry learning visit in partnership with Mendel University.

Malawi

The Kusamala Institute of Agriculture and Ecology is implementing two major projects: Nutrition Smart Communities, which has improved dietary diversity and livelihoods in 43 villages through home gardens, small livestock, and seed support; and Better Livelihoods through Sustainable Forest Management, which combines reforestation, irrigation and livestock pass-on schemes with community seed banking.

Soils, Food and Healthy Communities (SFHC) is strengthening its Farmer Research Team model through targeted multiplier support. A new report by the African Food Fellowship showcases SFHC's innovative leadership approach—one that blends agroecology with gender justice, nutrition and long-term community ownership.

Namibia

The Namibian Organic Association (NOA) and the Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF) are championing climate-resilient farming and innovative approaches to knowledge sharing. Recent activities include beekeeping trainings, composting workshops, and a community theatre initiative to engage farmers on sustainability themes.

NNF also launched Blue Table Discussions in Lüderitz—an inclusive new platform focused on marine conservation and coastal livelihoods—and continues to support community oversight in Environmental Impact Assessments across Kavango, Kunene and Erongo regions.

South Africa

The South African Organic Sector Organisation and Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) South Africa are expanding their Pollinator Programme, training multipliers in agroecology, PGS and farm visit assessments. SAOSO also played a prominent role at the Good Life Show in Cape Town, highlighting the public appetite for organic, sustainable products and lifestyles.

A growing partnership between SAOSO, WWF South Africa and Project Biome is positioning agroecology as a solution for food system transformation and ecosystem restoration. Their Heal the Planet programme, focused on Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape, combines bioregional planning, youth empowerment and regenerative agriculture. With WWF supporting traceability, PGS expansion and carbon tracking, and Project Biome leading design sprints and living labs, the partnership is piloting a model of radical collaboration that blends grassroots action with systemic change.

Looking ahead

From seed festivals to policy advocacy, KHSA partners are advancing food system transformation through community-based, ecologically sound and socially just practices. With growing capacity in storytelling, leadership and collaboration, KHSA is helping shape a regional movement for agroecology—rooted in African realities and led by African voices.

Future of Food

Across Africa and beyond, the way we produce and consume food is undergoing rapid change. From plant-based eating to smart packaging and climate-conscious farming, a new wave of innovation is reshaping the food landscape. These shifts bring both challenge and opportunity—particularly for those working in agroecological and organic systems.

The **Future of Food** section explores the emerging trends driving sustainable food production and consumption. It highlights how changing diets, new technologies and regenerative practices can strengthen organic farming, respond to growing consumer demand and build healthier, more resilient food systems

Alongside insights and enterprise stories, this section also brings recipes that celebrate indigenous and underutilised crops—helping to preserve food cultures, improve dietary diversity and build value around traditional ingredients. These recipes are a small but powerful way to reconnect with land, memory and nourishment.

Chef's Corner

The Multifaceted Pumpkin Plant: A Sustainable Superfood in Zimbabwe

By Odette Mavunga, Staff Writer

In Zimbabwe, the humble pumpkin plant is one of the most common and versatile crops, providing a wealth of nutritional benefits and culinary delights. From the leaves to the seeds, every part of the plant is utilized, reducing food waste and promoting sustainable living.

The leaves: A nutritious relish

The leaves of the pumpkin plant are a popular relish in Zimbabwean cuisine, rich in vitamins A, C and E, as well as minerals like iron and calcium. They're packed with antioxidants and have anti-inflammatory properties, making them an excellent addition to a healthy diet.

The pumpkin: A versatile fruit

The pumpkin itself is a versatile fruit, used in a variety of dishes, from soups to stews, and even desserts. It's an excellent source of fibre, vitamins and minerals, making it a nutritious and filling addition to meals.

The seeds: A crunchy snack

The seeds of the pumpkin plant are also edible and make for a delicious roasted snack. They are rich in healthy fats, protein, and minerals like magnesium and zinc. Roasting pumpkin seeds brings out their natural nutty flavor, making them a great alternative to traditional snack options.

Health benefits

The pumpkin plant offers numerous health benefits, including that it:

- Supports immune function
- Reduces inflammation
- Promotes digestive health
- Provides essential vitamins and minerals.

Did you know?

- In Uganda, pumpkins are intercropped to control erosion and boost yields.
- South African cuisine features favourites like pampoenkoekies (pumpkin fritters) and pumpkin pap, a maize-pumpkin mash.
- Zimbabwe's nhopi combines pumpkin with cornmeal for a gluten-free porridge.
- In Benin, some varieties' leaves are used to treat fevers and haemorrhoids.

RECIPE: PUMPKIN LEAVES WITH PEANUT BUTTER

Ingredients

- 2 cups pumpkin leaves
- 2 tablespoons peanut butter
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 tomato, chopped
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper

Method:

- Wash the leaves to remove any dirt.
- Peel the outer skin of the pumpkin leaves, then chop them.
- Sauté the chopped leaves with onion, salt and pepper.
- Add the chopped tomatoes.
- Add peanut butter and stir well.
- Serve with sadza or rice.

RECIPE: SAUTÉED PUMPKIN LEAVES

Ingredients

- 2 cups pumpkin leaves
- 2 tablespoons cooking oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 tomato, chopped
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper

Method:

- Wash the leaves to remove any dirt.
- Peel the outer skin of the pumpkin leaves, then chop them.
- Sauté the chopped leaves with onion, salt, and pepper in cooking oil.
- Add the chopped tomatoes.
- Serve with sadza or rice.

Food & Farming Systems

This section **Food and Farming Systems** dives into the diverse, place-based approaches transforming agriculture across Africa. From agroecology to regenerative practices, we unpack the principles that nurture soil health, revive ecosystems and strengthen communities.

Through stories and case studies from the region, we spotlight practical, locally led solutions that protect the land and ensure food sovereignty. These examples show how sustainable farming isn't just possible—it's already happening. For farmers, organisers and changemakers, this is a chance to learn from what works and explore how these approaches can be adapted to build a more resilient food future.

What emerges clearly is that these practices are more than technical fixes—they are grounded in relationships, culture and care. Whether it's reviving ancestral knowledge, fostering seed sharing or designing farms that mimic natural systems, each approach offers lessons in how to farm with, not against, nature.

NEW COLUMN

Heart & Soil

The Future of Growing in South Africa: A Community Perspective

By Jo Hunter-Adams, Heart & Soil

Dr Jo Hunter-Adams is a qualitative researcher, small-scale farmer and advocate for regenerative food systems in South Africa. Based on a one-acre homestead near Masiphumelele, Cape Town, where she lives with her partner, children and parents, Jo combines hands-on farming experience with academic rigor to document and support the country's growing food sovereignty movement. Through her **Heart & Soil Newsletter**, *Jo has spent over a year collecting stories from growers, homesteaders and small-scale farmers across South Africa, creating a vital archive of knowledge and inspiration for the regenerative agriculture community. Jo offers* consultations *to help individuals and organizations develop sustainable growing practices and food systems strategies, bridging the gap between grassroots innovation and broader systemic change.*

For over a year, I've been documenting the stories of people who grow their own food across South Africa. When I ask each person where they see growing going, their responses paint a picture that's both sobering and hopeful.

The necessity

Craig from Tamakoa Homestead puts it bluntly: "As food and electricity prices continue to increase, the homesteading movement may become the only viable option for millions of people."

This isn't just about saving money—it's about quality. "We have been marketed to that bright, firm, shiny fruit and vegetables that can last is healthy, when in fact the opposite is true," Craig explains.

Food systems researcher Stef Swanepoel provides context: "Over the past 30 years, our food systems have become more corporatised. Only about 2 000 commercial farmers produce 80% of the food we see on supermarket shelves." The result? "It costs about 60% more to eat healthily in South Africa."

The community response

What gives our growers hope is the emerging community. Millennials Audry and Masana from Mpumalanga are "excited to see more millennials taking steps towards sustainability and self-sufficiency." Meanwhile, Lara from Wildwood Homestead credits this growing network with creating "a hopeful community of pioneers." This spans generations and geographies.

Jarryd-Michael has trained over 200 students in KZN through his Esizayo Organics, while Sipho and Bianca from Embo Farmstead see local food networks as key: "Stop going to the shops—I'm hoping more families will start investing in their local businesses."

The South African advantage

What strikes me most is how our interviewees see challenges as strengths. "As South Africans we are resilient, adaptable, creative, non-conforming and diverse," says Lara, "and I firmly believe that this is our strength."

This adaptability is everywhere. Siphiwe from African Marmalade focuses on indigenous crops, noting that "whoever controls the seeds, dictates what you eat," while building extensive seed banks. Bertie and Alette from Lowerland Farm demonstrate that regenerative farming works at commercial scale. Raymond Auerbach's decades of research prove that organic systems can outperform conventional ones when properly established.

Beyond individual gardens

The vision emerging isn't just about individual self-sufficiency—it's about building entirely new food systems. Angelo from Abitz Farming is "busy in collaboration with Dept of Agriculture to develop the existing chicken coop into a packhouse where AbitzFarming will be a value adding tool for all the small-scale farming communities in the Swartland." Meanwhile, Jessica from Food Club Hub envisions "Food Clubs on every corner" and "a more resilient food system, where more farmers are compensated fairly to change their farming methods to more regenerative solutions."

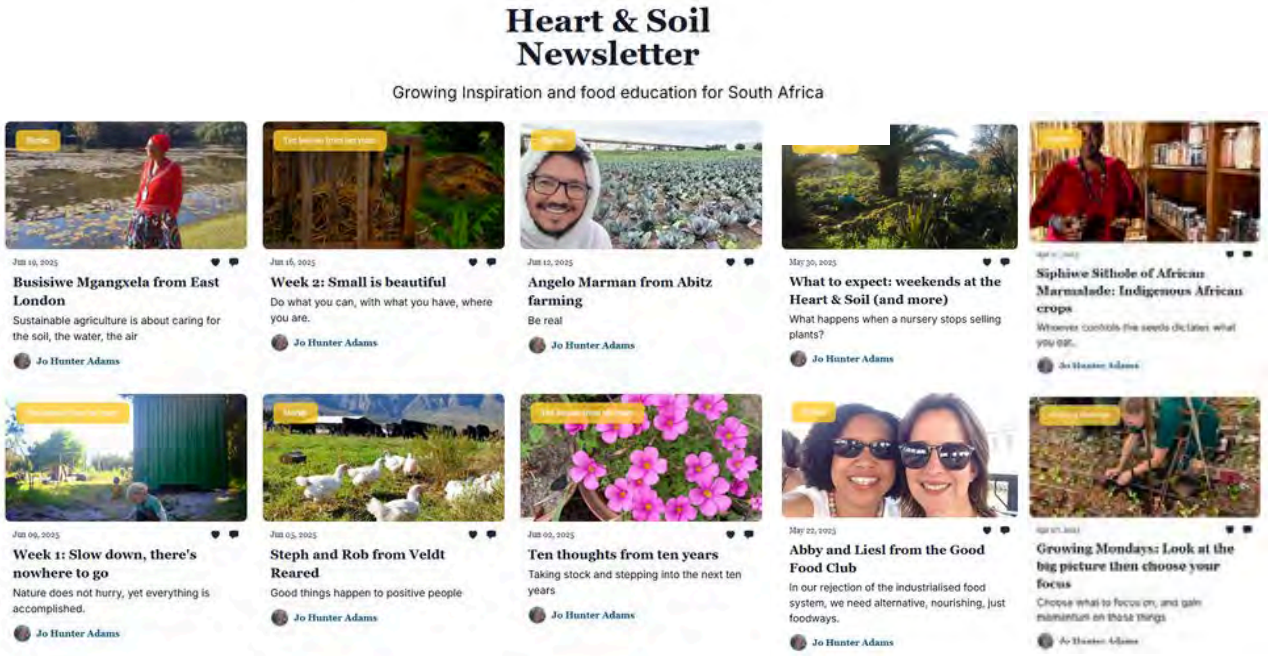
A movement

The growers I speak with aren't just planting vegetables—they're cultivating food sovereignty. From Audry and Masana's millennial homesteading to Siphiwe's indigenous seed banking, from Angelo's community processing facilities to Jarryd-Michael's fruit tree propagation, this movement combines economic necessity with cultural reclamation and environmental restoration.

Adaptability isn't just an advantage but a way of life. Food sovereignty is a movement that shifts our priorities and empowers us to take action.

Subscribe to the Heart & Soil newsletter here.

Heart & Soil



Beyond Our Borders

Around the world, farmers and communities are reimagining how food is grown—combining traditional knowledge with modern innovation to build systems that are both sustainable and resilient. In Latin America, Indigenous farming methods are being revived and protected. Across Asia, agroecology is reshaping how food is produced, with governments and grassroots movements working together. And in many African countries beyond the southern African region, similar transformations are already underway.

By blending cultural wisdom with appropriate technologies, they show us how to protect biodiversity, restore soil and ensure food security in the face of climate and economic uncertainty. As we look outward, we also look inward—drawing inspiration to strengthen local practices and shape a food future rooted in African realities and resilience. These connections remind us that Africa is not on the periphery of innovation, but a vital part of a global movement for food systems that are just, regenerative and deeply rooted in place.

The East African Gems: Tales of Mbale and Kisumu

By Sam Wesamoyo & Christine Bonaneri, AfriFOODLinks ambassadors

Top image: Kisumu City Credit: County Government Of Kisumu
Bottom image: Mbale CityCredit PPU

AfriFOODlinks

The AfriFOODlinks project is revolutionising urban food systems from Africa to Europe, with a special focus on empowering young leaders through its Youth Ambassadors Programme. Read more about the project here.

In recognition of World Creativity and Innovation Day, observed annually on April 21st to honour the role of creativity and innovation in advancing sustainable development—we shine a spotlight on two dynamic innovation hubs in East Africa.

In the heart of East Africa, two cities—Kisumu in Kenya and Mbale in Uganda—stand as vibrant symbols of growth, resilience, and potential. From the tranquil shores of Lake Victoria in Kisumu to the scenic foothills of Mount Elgon in Mbale, both cities boast breathtaking natural beauty that stirs the soul. Though separated by a national border, they share a rich tapestry of cultural heritage, striking landscapes, a steadfast commitment to progress and a shared vision for a prosperous future. In these emerging cities, innovation and creativity are essential drivers of economic growth, improved quality of life, sustainability and adaptability.

Circular agribusinesses

Mbale, Uganda

In Mbale, local entrepreneurs are embracing circular agribusiness by adding value to agricultural products through innovative and sustainable practices. Some notable examples include Bayaya Speciality Coffee (coffee-based skincare), Grabepha (processed tomatoes), and Mink Innovations (bio-fertilisers and pesticides). These entrepreneurs are significantly contributing to the local economy through tax revenues and job creation while also inspiring youth in the region.

Kisumu, Kenya

Circular businesses in Kisumu have undergone a notable transformation over the years:

- Mvuvi is a food-tech startup that processes fish concurrently transforming fish waste into valuable products like animal feed, fertiliser and bioenergy.
- EcoKud collects organic waste from Kibuye Market and uses it to rear Black Soldier Fly larvae, creating a sustainable option to fish meal for animal feed.
- Obunga is a women-led circular economy fish market, where fish remnants are transformed into food products, fish leather and animal feed.
- KIYA's Organic Farm, run by Kisumu Young Agripreneurs, promotes agroecological farming and will support a school garden initiative.

Multi-stakeholder platforms

Multi-stakeholder platforms unite diverse food system actors to collaboratively address governance challenges and drive food system transformation.

Mbale Uganda

In Mbale, Under the Good Food 4 Cities Program, two key platforms were established: the Good Food Council (GFC) and the Good Food Parliament (GFP). These platforms include representatives from both political and technical sectors, as well as vendors, farmers, businesspeople, media, researchers, and cultural institutions, among others.

The GFC is responsible for decision-making, developing action plans, and proposing resolutions for consideration by the GFP. It also reviews the progress of implemented interventions, offers technical guidance, and compiles issues raised during community engagements for debate in the GFP. The GFP focuses on addressing specific challenges related to achieving sustainable urban food security by strengthening coordination and implementation efforts. It promotes transparency, inclusivity and accountability, with clearly defined, shared responsibilities among all stakeholders. Together, these platforms are reshaping the food systems landscape.

Kisumu, Kenya

In Kisumu, the Food Liaison Advisory Council (FLACK) is a multi-stakeholder platform focused on building an inclusive, sustainable and resilient urban food system. Formed as an evolution of the earlier Food Liaison Advisory Group (FLAG), FLACK aims to improve how food is produced, distributed, accessed and managed within the urban context. The platform brings together key food system actors, including county government departments, universities, youth groups, farmer cooperatives, market vendors, researchers, and development partners.

Mvuvi Agriprenuers Credit: Christine Bonaneri

These stakeholders collaborate to address critical food system challenges such as food insecurity, poor nutrition, limited urban agriculture, weak coordination and food waste. FLACK plays a central role in shaping food system governance by advocating for enabling policies and frameworks, coordinating cross-sector interventions, and supporting participatory decision-making. It promotes urban agriculture by turning idle urban land into food-producing spaces, engages in market-level food safety improvements through training and capacity building and supports organic waste recycling to create compost that improves soil health and reduces environmental harm. Through community dialogues, workshops and technical consultations, FLACK integrates local voices into food system planning, ensuring that interventions are both locally relevant and inclusive.

Urban farming initiatives

Mbale, Uganda

Urban farming is gradually gaining popularity in Mbale, with a growing number of young people embracing the concept. As the city's population continues to rise, so does the demand for food. Urban agriculture offers a reliable source of fresh and safe produce, enhances household food security, provides an additional stream of income, creates employment opportunities and contributes to reducing the city's carbon footprint.

A notable initiative in this movement is the Elgon Integrated Urban Farmers' Association, which champions innovative practices such as vertical farming, hanging gardens, briefcase gardening and the use of polythene and plastic containers.

Kisumu, Kenya

Urban agriculture in Kisumu has seen residents embrace smart farming technologies like vertical gardens, conical gardens, and hanging kitchen gardens to ensure a steady vegetable supply.

Facing challenges like limited space and rising food costs, people have turned to these innovative methods, using vertical and conical setups to grow crops such as kales, spinach, and tomatoes in stacked layers or sacks, maximising small urban plots or balconies. Hanging kitchen gardens, often crafted from repurposed materials, allow even those in tight quarters to cultivate fresh produce year-round. These practices, supported by community training and local initiatives, have boosted food security, cut grocery expenses and empowered residents with sustainable, accessible vegetable sources.

Aquarech is transforming lives in Kisumu by using Recirculating Aquaculture Systems (RAS) to provide a steady, sustainable fish supply, overcoming the limits of traditional fishing with Tilapia farming, efficient water use, and eco-friendly feed like insect meal, boosting year-round fish availability, affordability, and local jobs while empowering the community through training.

Private actor and programme interventions

The private sector actors and other programmes play a vital role in the growth and development of emerging cities, particularly through investments and funding for infrastructure, among other critical interventions. One notable initiative is the AfriFOODlinks project, which seeks to tackle the root causes of food insecurity and environmental degradation, aiming to drive meaningful transformation. Kisumu and Mbale are among the cities benefiting from this project. Below are some of AfriFOODlinks' focus areas in these two cities.

Mbale City

- Transforming waste at the municipal market into compost at the incubation centre.
- Redesigning spaces in the municipal market to improve general safety.
- Upgrading the market food court and cooking area to improve food safety and vendor's conditions.
- Setting up school gardens in selected schools.
- Investing in young entrepreneurs to scale up circularity ideas.

Kisumu City

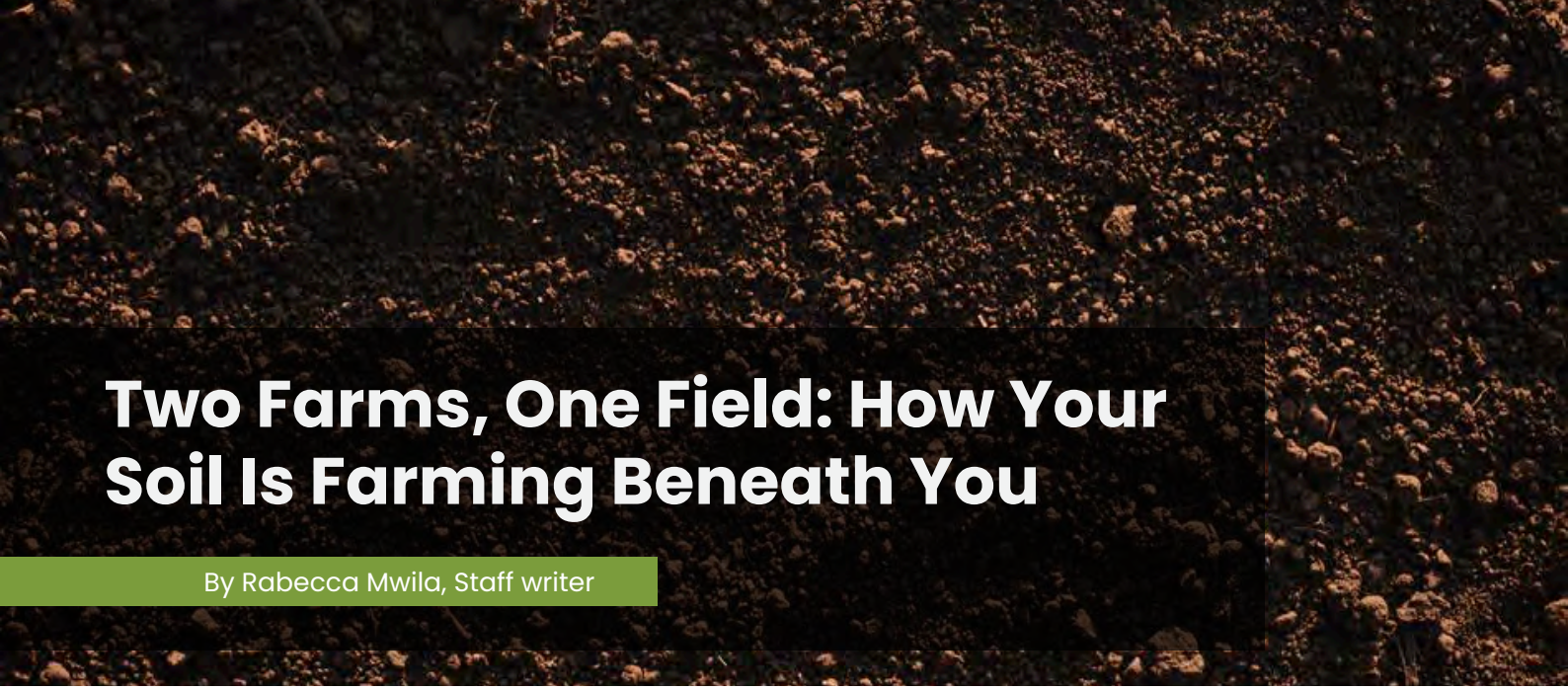
- School feeding programme and school gardens
- Redesigning and improving the current market structures (Obunga Market).
- Investing in young entrepreneurs to scale up circularity ideas.

These cities have become vibrant centers of creativity and entrepreneurship, where innovative individuals, businesses and initiatives are making significant strides in enhancing food security, improving livelihoods and protecting the environment.

Farmers' Tips & Voices

In this section **Farmers' Tips & Voices** we hear directly from the farmers shaping Africa's agroecology and organic farming landscape. Their experiences, challenges and innovative solutions offer valuable insights for others in the field. From practical tips on sustainable practices to inspiring success stories, these voices highlight the power of local knowledge in building resilient, sustainable farming systems across the continent.

Through their firsthand accounts, we explore how farmers are overcoming obstacles such as climate change, market access and soil health, while staying true to agroecological and organic principles. Their resilience and creativity in adapting to new methods and technologies is helping to create a more sustainable future for agriculture in Africa, proving that every small change can have a significant impact on the broader movement. These stories also challenge the notion that innovation must come from outside—showing instead how African farmers are generating knowledge and solutions that are rooted, relevant and replicable.



Two Farms, One Field: How Your Soil Is Farming Beneath You

By Rabecca Mwila, Staff writer

When most farmers look over a field, their thoughts land on what is easy to see-lit green leaves, sturdy stalks, and the heft of the harvest hanging from the plants. Yet just a hand-tremor below that rows another unseen farm. It has no shiny tractors or polished tools, but it does employ billions upon billions of tiny workers.

Under a healthy field, earthworms, fungi, bacteria, mites, nematodes and creatures that we hardly notice join forces in a second, living farm. They never clock out, never complain, and in their quiet, tireless way, they prepare the ground, feed the growing plants, and fend off trouble.

Meet the hidden farmers

These soil dwellers are partners you hire every season, and they may be your most dependable crew.

Earthworms: The plow team

Think of earthworms as the old-fashioned plow that pulls itself. By boring through soil, they drag oxygen and rain deep where the roots can reach. Their castings, rich in nutrients, drop out like nature's slow-release fertiliser, gently boosting fertility for weeks.

Fungi: The resource transporters

Mycorrhizal fungi weave vast underground webs that rival highways. By latching onto plant roots, they stretch farther than any root ever could, trading hard-to-get water and phosphorus for the sugary snacks plants make in sunlight.

Bacteria: The soil chemists

Though they are too small to see, bacteria handle jobs most farm chemists envy. They fix nitrogen from the air, break down leftover crops and manure, and release the fresh nutrients that keep seedlings strong. Some even help shield plant roots from disease.

Mites and springtails: The debris crew

These tiny critters shred decaying leaves and stalks into bite-sized bits, giving bacteria and fungi an easy meal. Picture them as the first gardeners in a backyard compost heap-nature's own recycling team.

Millipedes and slaters: The breakdown brigade

A bit bigger, these soft-bodied scavengers munch on whole piles of dead leaves and stems, and every mouthful jolts nutrients back into the soil. By converting farm waste this way, they secretly stock the future fertility of fields.

Nematodes: The soil managers

Some species act like tiny assassins, boring into roots; plenty of others hunt pest larvae and help steady all the microscopic populations around them. The trick is keeping that underground balance from tipping.

What happens if this farm dies?

Take away these tireless workers and soil packs down, losing air, life and the power to hold water or feed plants. Chemical fertilisers will still green the crop for a while but can never rebuild living structure. Once the soil crew collapses, bringing productivity back can take years of careful work-sometimes decades.

How to keep your underground farm thriving

Treat soil like a bustling city, not a lifeless container, and it will reward you with healthy plants. Here are five simple rules that act like pay raises for your hidden workforce:

1. Feed them well: Add compost, mulch, manure or chopped crop residues on a regular schedule, so there is always fresh food waiting.
2. Don't overtill: Limit plowing and harrowing; even the lightest pass destroys tunnels and homes that took months to build. Practice low- or no-till farming to protect soil structure.
3. Skip the toxic chemicals: Common pesticides and synthetic fertilisers wipe out many beneficial soil creatures. Whenever you can, reach for organic or naturally derived options.
4. Rotate your crops: Just as workers thrive on varied tasks, soil perks up when different plants take turns. Crop rotation also invites greater diversity into the underground community.
5. Keep it covered: Exposed soil bakes in sun and washes away in heavy rain. A blanket of cover crops or fresh mulch locks in moisture and steadies the temperature, creating a perfect home for soil life.

The future of farming is underground

The next time you walk into a field, remember you stand on two farms. One is above, where you plant and harvest. The other is below, where tiny workers cycle nutrients and keep crops strong.

They never ask for a paycheck. They don't clock out for the weekend. They basically want a little attention, some plant scraps, and a safe, quiet place to live. Look after your soil community, and in return it will feed you and your crops.

Cracked Foundations: Why Soil Structure—Not Just Fertiliser—is Costing You Yields

Dr. Brix | Agroecology & Agribusiness Expert | Regenerative Agriculture Advocate

"You can't build a house on a cracked foundation." Yet season after season, many farmers build their hopes on fractured, weak, and collapsing soil structures—expecting miracles. After years of diagnosing farms across Southern Africa, one truth has stood out like a recurring ghost: the issue is not just what is in the soil—it is how the soil holds itself together. This is not just about pH levels or nitrogen content. It is about soil aggregation—how soil particles bind to form stable structures, or "crumbs." When this system breaks down, the entire soil ecosystem begins to collapse. Literally.

The hidden science of soil aggregates

Healthy soil is not just loose sand or sticky clay. It is a living, organized matrix of aggregates held together by natural glues—secretions from plant roots, fungi, and soil microbes. These soil aggregates:

- Allow air and water to move freely
- Hold nutrients like a sponge
- Create space for root growth
- Resist erosion and compaction.

But once this structure is lost, the soil becomes lifeless: a crust of dust when dry and a mass of sludge when wet. Plants suffocate or starve. Fertilizer cannot fix it.

When the rain failed: A real-life lesson

I will never forget a visit to a sorghum field in Matabeleland. The farmer had done everything by the book: new hybrid seed, fertilizer and weed-free rows. Then came the rain. Days later, the crop looked pale and wilted. I dug into the soil—and found the real problem. The surface had crusted, water was running off, and the roots were trapped in a compacted, lifeless layer. It was a dead zone.

The soil had no structure. Just dust on top, concrete below. This was not a problem of seed or fertilizer. It was a broken foundation.

What destroys soil structure?

- Over-tillage: Each pass of the plough tears apart fungal networks and microbial "glues" that hold soil crumbs together.
- Lack of organic matter: Dead soils can't form aggregates—they collapse into dust or sludge.
- Bare soil under heavy rains: Without cover crops or mulch, raindrops pound the soil into crusts.
- Chemical overuse: Excessive use of ammonium-based fertilizers acidifies the soil and damages microbial bonding.

How to rebuild soil structure from below

- Add compost and mulch: Feed the microbes that build soil aggregates.
- Promote mycorrhizal fungi: These fungi act like rebar in concrete, strengthening the soil matrix. Legumes are great fungal partners.
- Reduce tillage: Adopt shallow ripping or zero-till practices to minimize disturbance.
- Plant cover crops: Deep-rooted species exude natural glues and enhance soil structure.

Final thought

"Soil is not just where plants grow—it is how they grow." Before you reach for another bag of fertilizer, take a moment to check your soil's structure. If the foundation is cracked, everything above it will suffer.
Rebuild from the inside out. Then watch your farm breathe, drink, and thrive again.

Dr Brix is a specialist in agroecology, sustainable agribusiness value chains, and regenerative agriculture. With over a decade of experience transforming farming systems across Southern Africa, he advocates for farming practices that heal the land while feeding the future. Contact Dr Brix.

KCOA

Knowledge Centre for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Africa

KCOA is a collaborative country-led partnership that aims to scale up the adoption of organic and agroecological farming practices through a network of five Knowledge Hubs in Africa. KCOA partners are based in 18 countries and with the involvement of over 30 civil-society organisations.

Scan to discover more!

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Resources & Events

Events

Goodlife Show, South Africa

The Goodlife Show is coming! If you operate in the plant-based, natural & organic, free-from foods and sustainable living arena, be part of an inspirational and aspirational event that brings together a mix of premium brands – including food, drink and sustainable living products – and innovative and interactive experiences that educate and entertain. Exhibit at The Good Life to show your brand, elevate your brand's visibility and grow your network.
Date: 1-3 August
Venue: Kyalami International Convention Centre, Johannesburg
Apply: goodlifeshowafrica.com/exhibit/

Courses

New FAO e-learning: Trade and nutrition

FAO has launched a free, short online course, "Trade and nutrition: Policy coherence for healthy diets." Based on the 2024 State of Agricultural Commodity Markets report, it explores how trade policies can better support nutrition and public health. Designed for policymakers and food systems actors. Access the course here.

Webinars to watch

AFSTC ISSUE BRIEFS

The African Food Systems Transformation Collective (AFSTC) has developed 19 issue briefs to inform transformational philanthropic investment strategies. Attend the launch of the first five, which focus on the links between food justice and agroecological transitions.

When: Monday 21 July, 14:00-15:30 SAST
Where: Online - Register here

- Gender and Women in Agroecological Transition - Dr Lesley Hope
- Just Transitions - Dr Andrew Bennie
- Pan-African and Regional Trade and Policy for Agroecological Transitions - Dr Kenneth Odero
- Competition Reform in Africa for Fair Agrifood Systems - Flo Kroll & CCRED (tbc)
- Harvesting Change: Innovative strategies for delivering food systems adaptation finance for local-level impact - Dr Daniel Adeniyi (ECDPM)

Resources

New open-access African food systems dataset released

A major open-access database mapping food systems across 51 African countries has been published in Scientific Data by Nature. The dataset, developed by IIASA and partners, covers over 180 indicators across food supply, nutrition, livelihoods, governance, environment and more. Drawing from 120+ public sources, it offers spatially detailed data for more than 5,500 regions—filling a critical gap for researchers and policymakers. The resource aims to support evidence-based planning and help drive sustainable food system transformation across the continent. See more here.

New review explores link between women's collective action and resilience in agri-food systems

A rapid evidence review has analysed how women's collective action influences resilience to shocks in agri-food systems across low- and middle-income countries. Covering 33 studies from 27 countries, the review found that collective action—especially savings groups in rural areas—can improve women's access to finance, strengthen livelihoods, support peer networks, and build skills. However, the review also highlights key gaps, including limited intersectional analysis and challenges in defining and measuring resilience. The authors call for future research to explore how factors like age, ethnicity and socioeconomic status shape women's participation and outcomes. See full paper here.

Food Barons 2024: Corporate power in the food system

ETC Group's latest report reveals how corporate control over global food and farming has intensified. Just a few companies dominate seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, machinery and more—fuelled by digital tech, gene editing and greenwashing tactics. The report calls for urgent action to break up monopolies and support democratic, farmer-led food systems. Read the report here.

Women's seeds & local food systems

This photo story series highlights the role of rural women farmers in preserving and promoting nutritious, culturally important crops. Part of the Collaborative's Nutritional African Foods Initiative (NAFI) project with funding from the Agroecology Fund and the 11th Hour Project, it showcases ten agroecologically grown local plants—like millet, cowpeas, amaranth and Bambara nuts—documented through research and storytelling led by women in five African countries. See the photo stories here.

Fuel to fork: How Big Oil is taking over food systems

A new IPES-Food report exposes the deepening ties between industrial food and fossil fuels. Food systems now account for 15% of global fossil fuel use. As Big Oil shifts focus to fertilisers and plastics, the risks to climate, health and food access grow. The report calls for urgent action to build fossil-free, agroecological food systems. Read the report here.

IFOAM Seeds Platform

The Seeds Platform is thrilled to launch its latest digital asset - a Directory/Map for any and all stakeholders interested in seeds for whatever reason - check out the list of categories possible. The purpose of this Directory is to enable greater communication, cooperation, synergy and sharing of learning and resources.

July-September 2025

ISAN MAGAZINE

FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

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