

# MIZIZI MAGAZINE

ROOTED STORIES OF FOOD, LAND AND LIFE

ISSUE 16

[www.mizizimag.africa](http://www.mizizimag.africa)



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# About Mizizi Magazine

Mizizi Magazine began in 2021 as ISAN Magazine, emerging from the Knowledge Hub for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Southern Africa. It was created to strengthen learning, exchange and advocacy around organic agriculture and agroecology across the southern African region. In 2026, the magazine became Mizizi Magazine. Mizizi is a Swahili word meaning 'roots', chosen in its plural form to honour the many knowledge systems, cultures and relationships that sustain food and farming systems across Africa. The name change marks an evolution rather than a departure. Our purpose remains the same: to tell stories that begin at the roots, grounded in land, practice and intergenerational knowledge. And to do so in a way that is mobile-friendly to suit our readership better.

Visit [www.mizizimag.africa](http://www.mizizimag.africa) for more information.

Mizizi Magazine is published by Mycelium Media Colab and works in partnership with civil society organisations, networks, institutions and ethical brands to share place-based stories and knowledge that strengthen just and resilient food and farming systems.

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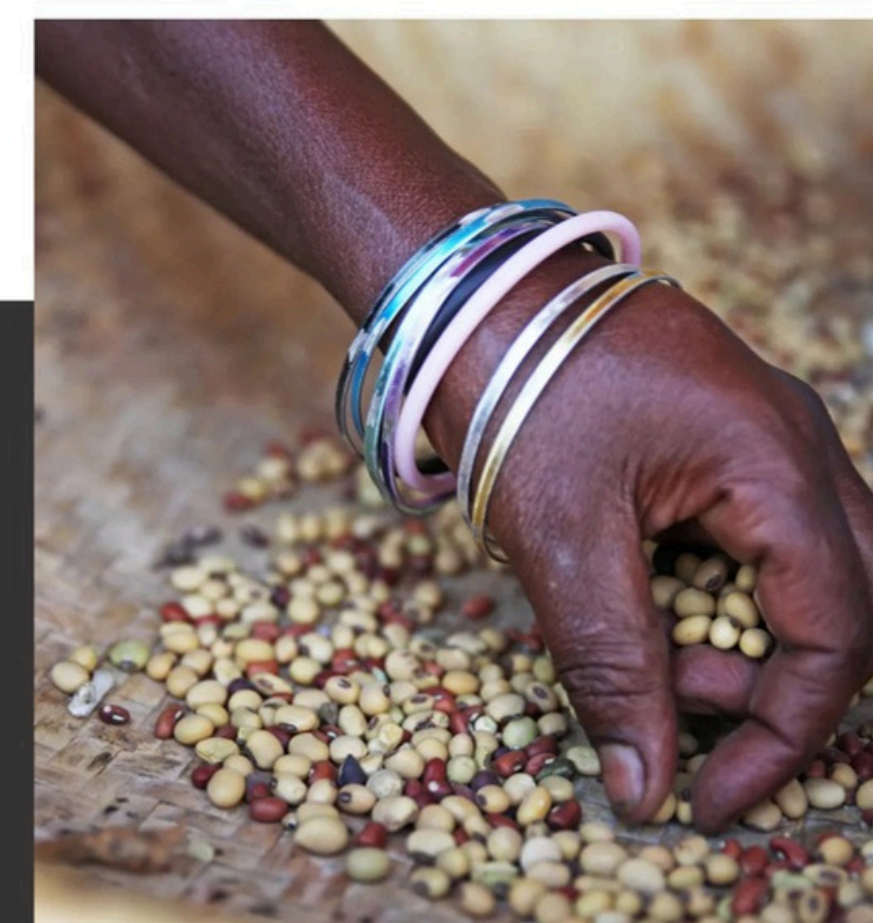
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# Editor's Note

Dear friends and partners,  
With this issue, **ISAN** Magazine  
becomes **Mizizi** Magazine.

The change is deliberate. Mizizi means **roots** in Swahili. We chose it in its plural form to honour the many knowledge systems, cultures and relationships that sustain food and farming systems across Africa. Our commitment remains the same: to **strengthen organic agriculture and agroecology across Africa through credible, grounded and mobile-friendly storytelling**. What has sharpened is our clarity and our focus.

Our new [website](#) features stories, videos, resources, events and more; our readers can quickly choose what they want or need to read or download the full PDF version to access it all! Readers can share links from stories they like or information that needs to travel further.

In this edition, we share the work of Soils, Food and Healthy Communities in northern Malawi, where regenerating soil is inseparable from improving nutrition, strengthening gender equity and building community leadership. It is a reminder that food system transformation begins underground and within households. From Zimbabwe, we explore the tension between livelihoods and landscapes as forests are depleted for energy and income, and examine how restoration, regulation and innovation must go together if ecological and economic realities are to be balanced.

In our Knowledge to Practice section, we translate recent agroecology research into practical implications for programmes and partners, because research only matters if it reaches practitioners on the ground. And we share resources and tools to enable more training organisations, farmers and food activists to drive the transition towards sustainable farming systems in Africa.

We also highlight youth leadership from Uganda's urban farming movement and celebrate African women advancing agroecology across borders. Mizizi exists to connect these threads: practice and policy, research and lived experience, soil and society.

As we move forward under this new name but with old partners and friends, we invite you to continue walking with us.

Rooted in resilience  
**Fortunate Nyakanda**  
Editor-in-Chief

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# Healthy soils, healthy people

How communities in northern Malawi are rebuilding soils and health from the ground up

By [Stefanie Swanepoel](#), Editor-in-Chief

**In the villages surrounding Ekwendeni in northern Malawi, conversations about food often begin not with crops, but with children. Two decades ago, staff at the local hospital noticed a troubling pattern: children arriving with severe malnutrition were not simply lacking food. Their families were farming, often diligently, yet diets were narrow, soils exhausted and harvests unreliable.**

The problem, it became clear, was not only hunger but the condition of the land. Out of this recognition, [Soils, Food and Healthy Communities \(SFHC\)](#) began to take shape. What started as a small pilot linking health workers and farmers has grown into a long-term, community-rooted approach to food systems change, one that places soil health, farmer leadership, gender equality and nutrition at its centre.

## **When soil fails, households follow**

Across much of Malawi, smallholder farmers depend on rain-fed agriculture on increasingly degraded land. Years of monocropping, deforestation and erosion have stripped soils of organic matter and nutrients. For farming households, this shows up as stunted crops, declining yields and limited crop diversity. For families, it means meals dominated by a single staple, usually maize, and little buffer against climate shocks or rising input costs. As SFHC's Esther Lupafya explains, degraded soils undermine both food quantity and quality. When soils cannot nourish crops properly, households harvest less and struggle to diversify what they eat. This affects nutrition directly, particularly for young children, and reduces the ability of families to sell surplus produce as livelihoods.

## **At the heart of SFHC's work is a simple but powerful idea: healthy soils behave like a living sponge.**

Soils hold water during dry spells, release nutrients gradually to crops and support the microorganisms that protect plants from pests and disease. Restoring soil health is not only an agricultural intervention but a climate, nutrition and health strategy.

Through farmer trainings and demonstration plots, SFHC promotes practices that regenerate soil fertility using locally available materials. Farmers learn to produce bio-inputs such as 10-day fermented bokashi, mineral-enriched liquid fertilisers, native microbe solutions and activated biochar. These inputs rely on materials farmers can source themselves, from crop residues and animal manure to ash and local soils, reducing dependence on expensive synthetic fertilisers.

## **Farmers lead learning and knowledge generation at SFHC; they are not passive recipients of training**

SFHC works through Farmer Research Teams (FRTs), volunteer farmers selected by their communities to experiment, host field days and share learning. Farmers are not passive recipients of training. They choose what to trial, assess results and teach others. Over time, this has strengthened confidence and local leadership. SFHC's origins in the health sector continue to shape its perspective. Improving soil fertility is not seen as an end in itself, but as a pathway to healthier diets and more resilient households. As soils recover, farmers report improved crop growth and greater willingness to plant legumes, vegetables and indigenous crops alongside staples.



SFHC's FRT members recording an episode of the Ulimi wa Chilengedwe podcast, Mzuzu, Malawi, 2023 Credit: SFHC

## **SFHC's leadership model is rooted in relationships rather than projects – it is built for the long-term**

Leadership is distributed across the organisation and villages, shaped by trust built over time, and supported by partnerships with researchers, civil society organisations and government extension services. The organisation's work also pays close attention to gender and inclusion. Training sessions actively invite women and young people, and leadership roles within FRTs are designed to be shared. For SFHC, inclusive decision-making is not an add-on, but central for change. In 2025, SFHC started working with youth more deeply, training them on production, financial literacy and proposal writing to enable them to meaningfully engage in farming economies.

## Leadership that grows slowly through relationships

The SFHC experience offers a different model of food system leadership, one rooted in relationships rather than projects. Leadership is distributed across villages, shaped by trust built over time, and supported by partnerships with researchers, civil society organisations and government extension services.

This model has allowed SFHC to adapt as conditions change, whether responding to fertiliser shortages, climate shocks or shifting policy environments.



SFHC's Edundu and Bwanda Youth Clubs, Mzuzu, Malawi, 2025 Credit: SFHC

## Soil regeneration on its own cannot make food systems secure if household decision-making remains unequal

Participatory research in Malawi showed that, after controlling for land size, wealth and education, farmers who discussed farming decisions with their spouses were 2.4 times more likely to be food secure and to have diverse diets (Bezner Kerr et al., 2019). Gender equity improves resource access, leadership and nutrition. Through participatory theatre and shared learning spaces, SFHC addresses power dynamics in collaborative ways. SFHC's experience shows that transformation is relational. Healthy soils matter. But so do healthy relationships. When communities regenerate land and lead their own learning, the effects ripple outward – strengthening health, resilience and dignity.

Follow SFHC's story at [www.soilandfood.org](http://www.soilandfood.org) or contact them directly by [email](#).



# INDIGENOUS RECIPE BOOK



SFHC has worked with farmers to address malnutrition by strengthening the link between agroecological production and household nutrition. This practical, user-friendly Indigenous Recipe Book grows out of that work. It supports SFHC's Farmer Research Teams to share nutritional knowledge and locally rooted recipes through community cooking demonstrations and household sessions.

The recipes centre on six traditional, drought-tolerant and nutrient-rich crops – common bean, sorghum, millet, groundnut, Bambara nut and soybean – alongside locally prepared relishes. These are crops already grown by many smallholder farmers in the region. By building on what communities know and produce, the book reinforces the connection between healthy soils, diverse harvests and healthier families.

**Download this resource [here](#) and more than 200 other innovative KHSA knowledge products from the [KCOA platform](#).**

# Balancing livelihoods and landscapes

Zimbabwe's response to deforestation

By the Zimbabwe Forestry Commission

**Zimbabwe is losing forests at an estimated 262 000 hectares a year. Driven by energy demand, tobacco curing and expanding settlements, deforestation is undermining water security, biodiversity and climate resilience. What appears as short-term survival carries long-term ecological costs.**

**Tobacco production is responsible for an estimated 20% of deforestation in the country....**

This important economic industry that generates about USD900 million a year comes at a significant environmental cost. Most growers are small-scale farmers that lack access to alternative energy sources to cure their tobacco, which requires significant volumes of wood to generate the necessary heat, and are not in a position to establish or to manage private woodlots.

**In many tobacco-growing regions, farmers have exhausted local timber supplies and are now encroaching on communal forests, disadvantaging communities who rely on them for subsistence.** The pressure has become so intense that trucks can be seen transporting illegal firewood from non-tobacco growing regions, as forest depletion spreads outward.

**Energy scarcity is growing and driving unsustainable forest use**

More than 90% of rural households depend on firewood, while urban reliance on wood-based energy is rising due to power shortages. Rapid commercialisation has fuelled large-scale charcoal production, often using inefficient kilns that consume five tons of wood to produce one ton of charcoal. Producers can also spend days and nights working in hazardous conditions, often exposed to toxic fumes with no protection.

**Trees are treated as 'free', masking their true ecological cost.**

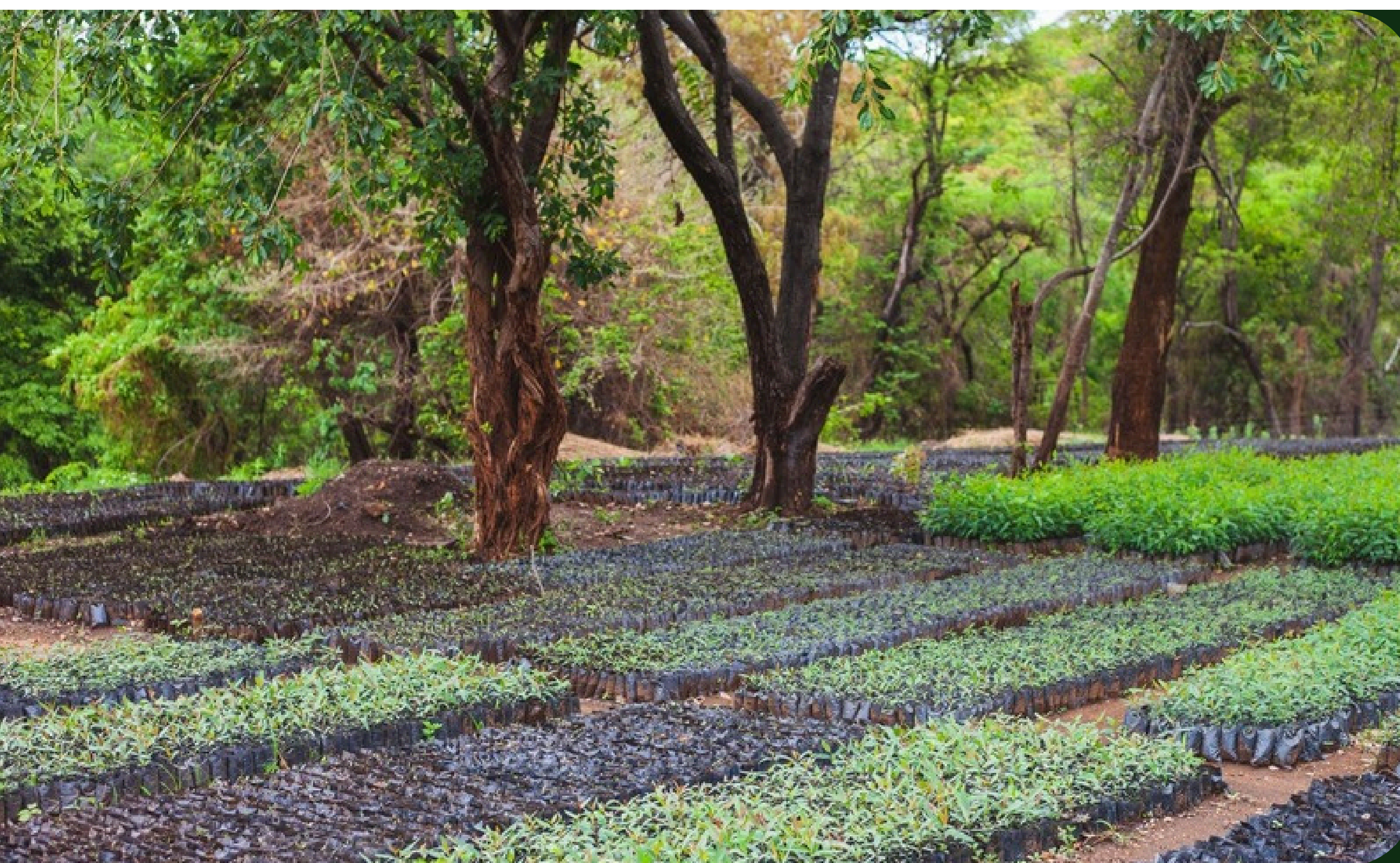
## **The rapid expansion of human settlements has converted vast tracts of forest and wetlands into housing stands**

This is most visible in urban and peri-urban areas. Simultaneously, agricultural expansion further fragments habitats, replacing indigenous biodiversity with monocultures. There is thus an urgent need to integrate forest protection into national spatial planning.

## **Zimbabwe's multifaceted response to this interlinked challenge of forest loss and energy needs**

The Government of Zimbabwe, through the Forestry Commission, has enacted a range of measures and programmes to balance energy demand, ecological health and the financial gains necessary for its economy. It established the Afforestation Fund, which deducts 1.5% from tobacco sales to finance reforestation through the Tobacco Wood Energy Programme. Under this programme, farmers can obtain tree seedlings for free and receive advisory services on establishing woodlots of fast-growing species.

Partnerships between the Forestry Commission and agencies working with tobacco farmers have been instrumental in encouraging farmers to view their fuel wood requirements as equally important as seed or fertiliser. There is also a clear need for investment into more energy-efficient technologies like 'rocket barns' and improved furnaces that can reduce wood consumption by 50% compared to traditional barns.



Establishment of tree nurseries to support reforestation, Zimbabwe, 2025 Credit: Zimbabwe Forestry Commission

Restoration programmes are being rolled out to promote woodland management, including assisted natural regeneration and targeted tree planting. The GEF-7 Sustainable Forest Management Impact Program on Dryland Sustainable Landscapes supports forest and land management in the miombo and mopane landscapes of the Runde and Save river basins. This entails managing degraded land to allow trees to regrow from stumps and roots, supported by silvicultural practices such as pruning, thinning and invasive species removal.

The programme also facilitates conservation works such as silt traps, gabions and contour ridges to control soil erosion following forest loss. There is a strong desire to also restore and protect woodlands so that they can continue to play their role as social safety nets for local communities, through wild harvesting and localised processing, such as for marula.

## **Forests have the potential to contribute to livelihoods and poverty reduction, but only if they are used sustainably**

This requires coordinated action among traditional leaders, local authorities, regulatory agencies, the private sector and communities. Government and stakeholders have agreed on globally recognised sustainability principles to ensure Zimbabwe remains a green and ecologically productive nation.



Promotion of sustainable wild harvesting and localised processing, Zimbabwe, 2025 Credit: Zimbabwe Forestry Commission

# Green urban harvest:

Cultivating organic success in Mbale City, Uganda

By Sam Wesamoyo, AfriFOODLinks Ambassador



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**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. This is an edited excerpt from Sam’s article; read the full article [here](#). For more youth stories from AfriFoodLinks, visit their [website](#).**

Like many young men on leaving school, Juma Wepukhulu set out in search of employment and was fortunate enough to secure a job as a manager at one of the guest houses in Mbale City. In his free time, Juma would read the daily papers left at reception for guests. One day, he came across an article about a woman in Kenya who had started gardening to feed her household, but over time, she began selling the surplus—first to neighbours, then to local restaurants and eventually to large hotels in the area. Her venture became so successful that she hired community members as outgrowers to meet the rising demand. “I was so inspired by her story,” Juma recalls. That moment marked the beginning of his own urban farming journey.

## **Taking time to plan is a key element of farming success**

Juma took time to analyse the feasibility of the idea within his own context. After careful consideration, he came up with a plan that included starting an urban farm, using it as a demonstration and training site, while also selling vegetables to generate income. He began this venture right outside his rented residence. From the outset, the project showed great promise. The quick returns uplifted his hopes, and the creativity of his setup drew attention from the local community interested in forming an association to reduce local food insecurity.

**In 2014, Juma officially registered the association under the name Elgon Integrated Urban Farmers Association (EIUFA) with an initial membership of 30. In 2018, EIUFA was certified as one of the local organisations operating a practical demonstration site within the municipality.**



Juma Wepukhulu at the EIUFA demonstration garden, Mbale, Uganda  
Credit: Sam Wesamoyo

## **EIUFA has challenged the perception that farming is only for those with large plots and deep pockets.**

EIUFA provides training for communities and farmers, holds radio talk shows and makes innovative bio-pesticides (from rabbit urine and local plants), among other outreach activities. EIUFA is known for its innovative farming techniques, including tower and vertical gardening, sack and briefcase gardening, entrance growing, pipe planting, banana stem planting and polyethylene bag gardening.

**Juma's impactful work has earned him widespread recognition in the community and through the media, and he is fondly known as 'Uncle Farmer'.** Through school garden initiatives, Juma trains students to set up gardens, rear maggots and write proposals, among other skills that generate income. Learners have organised themselves into 'Uncle Farmers Clubs'.

## **From farmer to trainer to author...**

In early 2022, Juma was introduced by the municipality to visitors from the Resilient Urban Food Systems Project (RUFSS), implemented by Makerere University's Department of Geography, Geoinformatics and Climatic Sciences and funded by the Swedish International Development Agency. The team brought Juma on board as a trainer of municipal teams and as the focal person for the programme in Mbale City, a position he still holds to date. The project helped bring one of his long-held ideas to life: transforming his experiences and knowledge into a book.

With both technical and financial support from the project, Juma published his first book in 2023, [Climate Smart and Resilient Urban Farming: A Guide for Smallholder Farmers](#). Since the book's release, Juma has landed contracts with schools and hotels.

## What's next for Juma and the EUIFA?

The long-term vision is to expand community training on vegetable production, establishing a network of 30-member groups that can act as outgrowers to meet demand, forming a cooperative to enable fulfilment of large supply contracts, and acquiring land to host a larger demonstration garden and enterprises, such as livestock production, aquaculture and apiculture. Income would be generated through product sales, agri-tourism and training.

**Juma says, "This so-called dirty work is where the money is—we need to move beyond white-collar job fantasies." "People think going to school is just to get a job, but it's really to gain knowledge—and that knowledge should be used to create income," he adds.**

Juma advocates for greater awareness among farmers on the proper use of pesticides and urges the government to invest in youth-led entrepreneurial ventures across the country.

Juma's journey is not only inspiring, but also highlights the power of organic urban farming as a transformative pathway toward healthier, more resilient and sustainable food systems. His work is a testament to how innovation and community-driven solutions can enrich lives and shape the future of our urban spaces.

**Read more youth stories from AfriFOODLinks [here](#).**



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## Bold voices in agroecology

### Zimbabwe's AWOLA Cohort 3 Shines at the Africa Women in Agroecology Learning Exchange Expo 2025

By Violet Makoto and Valerie Chatindo, AWOLA Zimbabwe

There is a certain magic that happens when women gather. Beyond the laughter and radiant smiles lies authenticity, kindness and unspoken solidarity that transforms a space into something extraordinary. That spirit was evident when the African Women Leaders in Agroecology (AWOLA) Cohort 3 from Zimbabwe joined sisters at the PELUM Kenya-hosted Africa Women Expo and Exchange Learning in Agroecology, Agro-preneurship and Land Rights 2025 from 2 to 3 December at the Desmond Tutu Conference Center, Nairobi, Kenya.



Two days of building a sisterhood that transcends borders and languages, 2025 Credit: AWOLA

Hosted by PELUM Kenya, the opening day was nothing short of a celebration. Women from Nigeria, Tunisia, Ghana, Uganda, Kenya, South Africa, Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe entered the hall waving their national flags, their dances filling the air with rhythm and joy. It was a kaleidoscope of African diversity, a reminder that agroecology is not just about farming, it is about culture, identity and resilience.

The first plenary, *From Local Voices to Policy Tables*, emphasised the need for women’s active participation in food systems governance and the urgency of broader adoption and deeper inclusion of women in policymaking processes. If the first day was about vision, the second was about action. A plenary session opened the floor to a dynamic panel discussion titled: *Women at the Frontlines of Agroecology: Powering Markets, Seeds and Enterprise Transformation Across Africa*.

The session *Amplifying Women’s Voices in Agroecology* noted that despite being central to African agricultural economies, many women lack secure land tenure. Speakers stressed the need for governments to prioritise women’s access to and control over land as foundational to agroecological transformation.



Zimbabwe’s Shean Mukocheya (2nd from left) received the Community Agroecology, Mentorship and Leadership Award, which honours women advancing agroecological transformation, championing climate justice and mentoring others. Credit: AWOLA

Leaving Kenya, AWOLA Zimbabwe Cohort 3 carried renewed commitment: hope that agroecology will continue to grow as a movement for justice and sovereignty and hope that women’s voices will not only be heard but influence policy and markets. The Expo was more than a conference—it was a declaration. Women are not waiting for permission to lead, they are already leading. Agroecology is not just farming – it is justice, equity and sovereignty. And when women come together, they create not only energy, but transformation.

# Africa at the heart of the global organic movement

By IFOAM–Organics International

## Across Africa, organic agriculture is not a trend, it is a lived reality

From smallholder farmers preserving biodiversity to national movements strengthening local markets, to innovative businesses building resilient value chains, Africa is actively shaping the future of sustainable food systems.

At a time when climate instability, soil degradation and market pressures are intensifying, organic agriculture offers resilience, dignity and long-term sustainability. But for organic to reach its full potential, African voices must not only be heard locally – they must be present and influential globally. This is why the upcoming Extraordinary General Assembly of IFOAM – Organics International is such an important moment. Held online and open exclusively to members, it is where key decisions about the direction and governance of the organisation are discussed and adopted.

## The Extraordinary General Assembly of IFOAM – Organics International is not a symbolic gathering...

It is a democratic process that defines priorities, strengthens leadership and ensures accountability. Members can register to vote through their member area. The voting deadline is 10 May 2026. Only members have voting rights, and this is where Africa's opportunity becomes clear. **Become a member.**

## Membership matters: It is stepping into a global platform that amplifies your voice, strengthens your impact and connects African organic leadership to international decision-making.

- Members gain access to regular free webinars, knowledge exchange platforms and global collaboration opportunities.
- IFOAM – Organics International stewards the Global Organic Guarantee System, including the IFOAM Family of Standards, “Standards from the Shelf,” and the promotion of Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS).
- IFOAM represents the organic movement in major global policy spaces. This enables African realities and experiences inform discussions on climate policy, food security, biodiversity and sustainable trade.
- IFOAM – Organics International amplifies the voices of African initiatives, innovations and successes, through its channels that reach thousands daily.
- Members have voting rights and directly shape the organisation's direction, ensuring that African priorities influence global strategies.

**Join as a member, participate and lead to influence global organic policy, strengthen organic integrity and market opportunities and amplify African leadership.**

IFOAM – Organics International welcomes farmer associations, national organic movements, private organic businesses, and organisations aligned with organic principles. Membership fees are structured according to the size and budget of your organisation, making participation accessible to groups of different scales. Associates and Supporters engage with and strengthen the movement. Affiliates take the additional step of shaping it.

**Become a member.** Africa’s organic future will not be defined elsewhere. It will be defined by those who cultivate it, defend it, and lead it.

For questions, [email IFOAM – Organics International.](#)

**Join. Vote. Shape the future.**

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# Knowledge to practice

[Mizizi Magazine](#)

## Recent research

Too often, important findings remain in academic journals or donor reports, distant from those who could benefit most. We provide accessible updates in Mizizi Magazine.

[Madsen, S., Bezner Kerr, R., Kamiliq, K., Cevallos, M.F., Bazille, C., Paracchini, M.L. and Wezel, A. \(2025\) Agroecology supports sustainable development in Africa: A review, \*Agronomy for Sustainable Development\* 45:34.](#)

Madsen et al. (2025) provide one of the most comprehensive reviews of agroecological impacts across multiple dimensions of food systems in Africa. They show that agroecological practices can positively affect economic, social, environmental and food security outcomes in many contexts, reinforcing agroecology's potential contribution to Sustainable Development Goals. The multi-country review found that agroecological practices consistently improve soil health, biodiversity and climate resilience while also strengthening food security and livelihoods. Importantly, benefits are multidimensional. Environmental, social and economic gains tend to reinforce each other rather than compete.

### **What this means in practice:**

- Soil regeneration is not only an environmental intervention, it underpins income stability and nutrition.
- Farmer-led diversification reduces vulnerability to climate shocks.
- Programmes should measure multiple outcomes, not just yield.

**Implication for partners:** Support long-term, systems-based approaches rather than single-technology interventions.

[Adoyo, B. et al. \(2025\) 'Agroecology for sustainable development: evidence on transformation pathways', \*Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems\*.](#)

Adoyo et al. (2025) explores agroecology's recognition as a pathway for transforming agrifood systems toward sustainability and progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, underlining its multidimensional role in food system change. It shows that agroecology contributes to sustainable development not simply through improved practices, but by reshaping governance, markets and knowledge systems. Transformation depends on social organisation, participation and enabling policy environments.

### What this means in practice:

- Strengthening farmer organisations is as important as improving production methods.
- Policy engagement must accompany field-level interventions.
- Knowledge co-creation between farmers and researchers increases adoption.

**Implication for partners:** Invest in movement-building and policy literacy alongside technical training.

## Resources and reports

Find relevant resources for training institutions, food activists and farmers below. If you have resources to share, please [get in touch](#).

**World of Organic Agriculture 2026:** A comprehensive report on organic agriculture trends, markets, certification and area under management, with Africa-specific statistics and insights on emerging developments in organic production and trade.

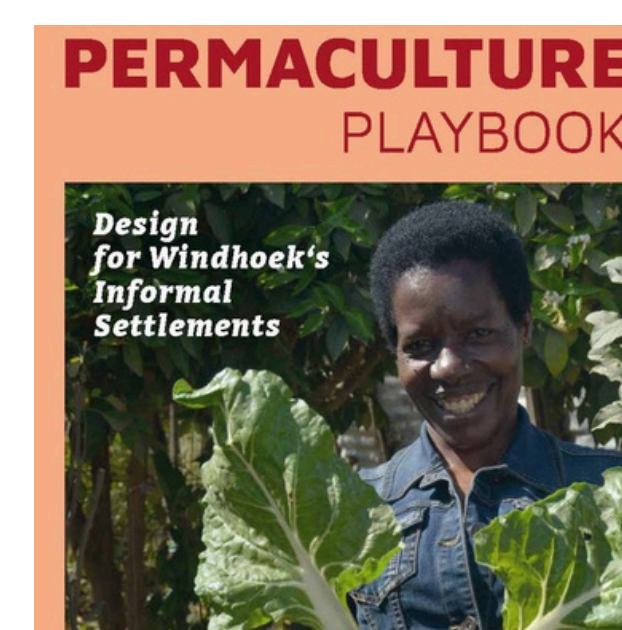
**African Union Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative Review 2025–2025:** An in-depth overview of African Union efforts to promote ecological and organic agriculture, including strategic objectives for production, market access and adoption of agroecological practices across the continent.

**Biovision’s Biopesticides beyond the hype:** An agroecologically-rooted approach emphasises local innovation, equity and ecological integrity—empowering small and medium-sized enterprises, farmers and research actors to co-create solutions adapted to local contexts.

**KHSA:** The Knowledge Hub for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Southern Africa has produced more than 200 co-created knowledge products (from posters to publications to podcasts).

See the KHSA Special Knowledge Edition [here](#).

**Kambashu Institute:** A learning centre by and for shack dwellers in Windhoek, Namibia. It released a Permaculture Playbook in February 2026 – a guide to growing permaculture food circles, with a focus on informal settlements. Download the guide [here](#).



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# MAGAZINE

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