

# ISAN MAGAZINE NO.9



FEBRUARY/MARCH/APRIL 2024  
ISSUE NO.9



**YOUTH AND ANCIENT  
WISDOM**

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**PLANTING TREES IS  
EVERYBODY'S  
BUSINESS**

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**FOOD AS A GATEWAY TO  
DECOLONIZATION OF THE  
PAST AND THE FUTURE**

# ABOUT ISAN

## INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF ORGANIC MOVEMENTS (IFOAM) SOUTHERN AFRICAN NETWORK

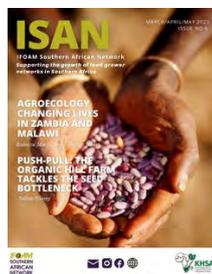
ISAN is a regional network of organisations and individuals actively supporting the development of a sustainable, ecological organic agricultural sector in southern Africa. Its values align with IFOAM–Organics International's (IFOAM\_OA) principles of Health, Fairness, Ecology and Care.

ISAN was formed during the second Africa Organic Conference held in Zambia in 2012 to represent Southern Africa Development Community countries: Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Kingdom of Eswatini, Zambia and Zimbabwe. To date, the following countries are active in ISAN: Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Madagascar, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

ISAN aims to develop and coordinate programmes and networks of common interest at the regional level working through National Organic Agriculture Movements (NOAMs), the Intercontinental Network of Organic Farmers' Organisations (INOFO) and the Network of Organic Agriculture Researchers in Africa (NOARA), all of which have chapters in the region.

For more information, contact: [chair@isan.ifoam.bio](mailto:chair@isan.ifoam.bio)

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# EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

Welcome to Issue 9 of the ISAN magazine that promotes the uptake of organic agriculture to sustain the health of soils, ecosystems and people. Organic agriculture relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and natural cycles. It combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promotes fair relationships and a good quality of life for both people and planet.

There is so much being done in Africa to promote sustainable food and farming systems and this issue provides an overview of some innovative undertakings like Project Biome's Youth Perspectives on Ancient Wisdom webinar, which was covered by a new youth citizen collective in South Africa - Citizens Relations Mzansi. We also link to webinar series run by the Namibia Organic Association in late 2023 that focuses on the relevance of organic agriculture for the future and the series hosted by Participatory Guarantee Systems South Africa (PGS SA) with Grow West Africa showcasing PGS as a suitable system for empowering smallholder farmers to enter the organic value chain, gain fairer prices and work collectively to improve local food systems.

We delve into how technological innovation is helping to increase carbon, water and nutrient cycling in the soil using earthworms and learn about the role of trees in sustaining the ecosystem. Organic agriculture is practical and possible and would go a long way towards countering the serious challenges we face today - malnutrition, soil and ecosystem degradation, biodiversity loss and climate change. It is time to take our own food systems seriously and get involved in ensuring that they can deliver nutritious and chemical-free food, to all.

And, as food is a cultural expression, we mustn't forget to celebrate our relationship with it, starting with seed. We showcase the Zambia and Zimbabwe traditional seed and food festivals that provide a platform for farmers to share their seed and knowledge of it with broader groups and to hold dialogues that open space for enhanced understanding of the importance of this indigenous wisdom in navigating the crises in which we find ourselves.

As always, we offer special appreciation to our contributors. We hope you enjoy this issue. Feel free to share with others, remember [subscription](#) is free!

Yours in organics,  
*Fortunate Nyakanda*





# CONTENTS

01	<b>Youth and Ancient Wisdom</b>
07	<b>Planting Trees is Everybody's Business</b>
09	<b>Can organics feed the world?</b>
12	<b>Recovery of Carbon, Nutrients and Water from Waste for Return to Soil Powered by Earthworms</b>
14	<b>Honouring PGS Fundamentals</b>
18	<b>World of Organics Statistics and Trends</b>
19	<b>The New EU Organic Regulations</b>
20	<b>Celebrating African Food &amp; Seed</b>
24	<b>Playlist &amp; Library</b>

# YOUTH AND ANCIENT WISDOM

*By Fortunate Nyakanda*

In December 2023, ISAN acted as a co-host to Project Biome's webinar: **Our Heritage, Our Future** featuring Youth Perspectives on Ancient Knowledge, along with co-hosts Earthrise Collective, Dzomo la Mupo and Ancient Wisdom. The goal was to give African youth a voice on how indigenous knowledge can be used to navigate increasingly complex modern life. As it would be youth voices, the webinar was co-designed with them. Project Biome's Shanti Naidoo and Mycelium Media Colab hosted a workshop with 12 African youth, including ISAN's own Odette Mavunga to design the structure of the webinar.

- **Youth are the future:** They represent a large and growing segment of the world's population, especially in low- and middle-income countries, where most of the food production and consumption takes place. They will inherit the consequences of the current food systems and climate change, and they will have to cope with the impacts and adapt to the changes. Therefore, they have a stake and a voice in shaping the food systems and climate action that they want and need for themselves and future generations.
- **Youth are the present:** They are not only passive beneficiaries or victims of food systems and climate change, but also active agents and leaders of change. They have the knowledge, skills, creativity and innovation to transform the food systems and climate action in ways that are more sustainable, equitable and inclusive. They are also the consumers, producers, and advocates of food and climate solutions, and they can influence the behaviour and choices of their peers, families, and communities.
- **Youth are the partners:** They are not only recipients or providers of information, education and services, but also collaborators and co-creators of knowledge, policies and practices. They have the right and the responsibility to participate in the decision-making and governance processes that affect their food systems and climate action, at all levels and scales. They also have the potential and the power to form partnerships and networks with other stakeholders, such as governments, civil society, private sector, and academia, to leverage their resources and capacities for collective action.

We worked with Citizens Relations Mzansi, a youth journalism collective in South Africa, to write up their impressions from the webinar series. [View the entire webinar here.](#)

## CO-DESIGNING FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

*By Shanti Naidoo-Pagé, Project Biome*

Project Biome seeks to catalyse a global social and ecological movement of human reconnection to planetary regeneration. We create and hold spaces that allow organisations and individuals working with regeneration of earth and social systems to see each other clearly, innovate pathways towards radical collaboration and discover their catalytic interdependence, which supports regeneration and syntropic systems to come into being.

We wanted to create a space for youth voices to give their perspectives on indigenous knowledge and so worked with our youth networks to co-imagine and design the webinar. The twelve youth who attended the co-design workshop determined which aspects of indigenous knowledge systems were the most important to cover, gave input to the design of the marketing and the structure of the webinar. We used speaker recordings (very creative presentations), a short movie, interactive breakout rooms and music to create an evocative and informative space for participants. Find out more about Project Biome [here](#).

**“Co-creation of a collective future is a key cornerstone of Project Biome’s work. We believe in the transformative creativity of people and the power of collaboration to rewild, regenerate and reconnect both people and planet“**



# IMPORTANCE OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN IKS

*By Thabo Molelekwa, Citizen Relations Mzansi*

*In recent years, the world has increasingly appreciated indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and their potential to address contemporary challenges. Indigenous knowledge, often rooted in generations of wisdom and practice, offers alternative perspectives on sustainability, community wellbeing, and environmental stewardship.*

The Project Biome webinar served as a beacon of hope and inspiration, mainly due to the significant representation of African youth. This notable presence not only underscores the growing interest in preserving and promoting indigenous wisdom but also highlights the vital role that young Africans play in shaping the discourse, innovation and future trajectory of their communities and the continent at large.

In my experience in journalism and participation in various conferences and webinars, it is rare to see a significant representation of youth, especially in matters that directly affect them. Despite their issues being discussed by experts and older generations, it is not helpful if the information doesn't reach the target audience effectively. This webinar had a diverse representation of African youth who contributed to a variety of perspectives, experiences, and insights.

By actively participating and sharing their unique cultural backgrounds and local knowledge, these young individuals enriched the dialogue. They challenged conventional narratives and offered new perspectives on sustainability and cultural preservation. The webinar was an excellent opportunity for these individuals to showcase their talents and share their knowledge with others. The fact that a 17-year-old chose to attend this webinar during the busy holiday season was a highlight. She preferred this webinar over anything she could do with her peers at the time.

The active involvement of African youth facilitated meaningful exchanges between generations, cultures, and disciplines. By engaging with indigenous elders, scholars and practitioners, young people had the opportunity to bridge cultural divides, foster intergenerational dialogue and cultivate mutual respect. This collaborative spirit nurtures a fertile ground for co-creation, innovation and the revitalisation of indigenous knowledge systems in contemporary contexts.

Through youth's visible participation in IKS, I gained hope that we have youth keen to be future leaders and these types of gathering can serve as a powerful catalyst for inspiring future leaders, change-makers and advocates for indigenous wisdom.

**“For African youth, partaking in IKS webinars is not merely an academic exercise but a crucial step towards preserving cultural heritage, fostering innovation and shaping a more sustainable future.”**



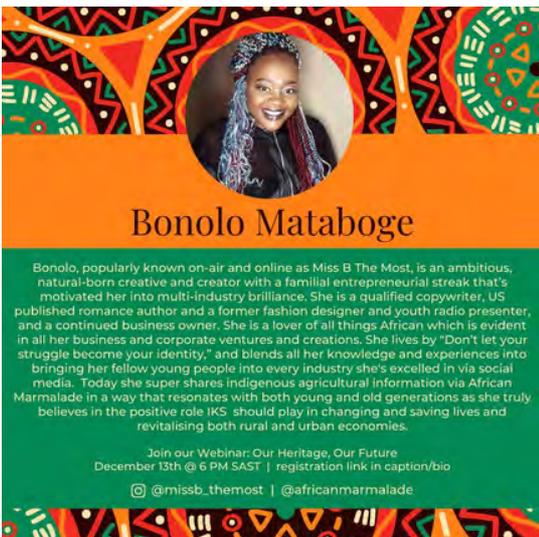
# FOOD AS GATEWAY TO DECOLONISATION OF THE PAST AND FUTURE

By Imameleng Masitha, Citizen Relations Mzansi

Youth are reclaiming food spaces through re-visiting cultural foods and supporting the content with indigenous knowledge of our grandmothers. As we create meaningful conversations and actions, nature becomes our guide into dialogues on indigenous knowledge and systems. During the December webinar on Indigenous Knowledge Systems, speakers shared their perspectives on ancient futures, weaving together indigenous knowledge systems and their lived experiences.



**“Decolonisation of food is an intergenerational topic, affecting the food grammar of communication.”**



**Watch** Bonolo Mataboge’s webinar presentation on the need to decolonise the food system.

Presenters Rutendo Ngara, Bonolo Mataboge, Keamo Rakgaoadi and Tracy Veritas encouraged participants to engage in the conversation and their talks provided a strong sense of urgency to reclaim ourselves and the natural world. Their point of view served as a reflection and a question of how we can integrate ourselves into indigenous knowledge systems, particularly in times of information overload from various sources.

Food was an important topic covered in the webinar, and it prompted me to ponder on the possibility of moving away from our current commercialized food system towards more sustainable and localized options. The conversation made me curious about how we can prioritize the environment, our health and our local communities rather than profit in the food industry. This experience has left a deep impression on me, highlighting the power of individual actions in bringing about positive change both in our personal lives and in our communities.

Decolonizing food: the speakers emphasized the criticality of this issue and provided insights on how individuals and groups could take action to improve the current food systems. One of the key aspects that was discussed was the need to shift from consuming toxic and commercialized food to integrating natural foods that nourish our bodies. This requires not only access but also the availability of such foods and the creation of spaces that enable their cultivation.

The webinar was an informative and thought-provoking session that urged attendees to rethink their food choices and encouraged them to take steps towards building a more sustainable food system. I found it notable that the speakers are also living the ideas they discussed and are already taking action to improve systems. This took me back to how food was introduced to me as a young adult by my grandmother through small explorations of sorghum porridge and sugar beans and how that memory lingers with me when I think of home and my grandmother’s teachings on preserving our indigenous foods.

# FOSTERING AFRICAN WISDOM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

By Keamogetswe Thomas, Citizen Relations Mzansi

*Many say that African universities are too focused on European ideas and traditions instead of embracing Africa's rich history of thoughts and intellectual growth. African ways of knowing, producing knowledge, languages, philosophies, and the real experiences of Africans often get overlooked. This creates a gap between what we learn and how we live, making higher education seem distant from our communities' challenges.*

Over the years, Africa has made significant contributions to history, science and civilization. Unfortunately, these contributions are often ignored. Academic excellence and theory are highly valued, even though many Africans still rely on their traditional knowledge systems for their livelihoods. People are realizing that a country's progress is not just about having money and physical resources. It's equally crucial to tap into and build upon the knowledge that exists within its communities. Learning from what people already know in local areas helps us understand their conditions better and gives essential context for any efforts aimed at assisting them.

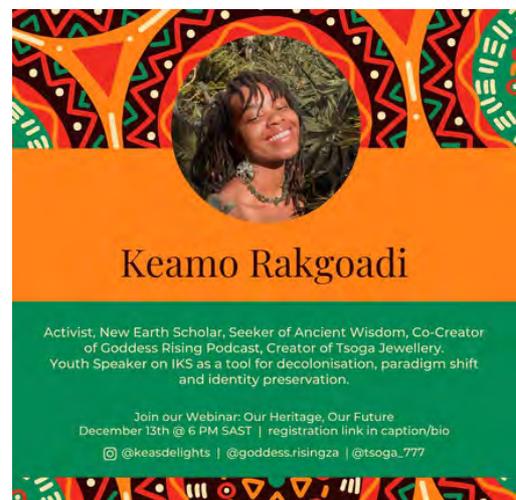
Africa's history of slavery, colonization and, in South Africa, apartheid dealt a blow to the confidence of African people. However, drawing on our rich indigenous knowledge and ideas, especially in education, fosters self-reliance and starts to rebuild this lost confidence, particularly among marginalized groups. By promoting indigenous knowledge in universities, Southern Africa and Africa as a whole can engage with the global knowledge economy on their terms rather than those imposed by others.

The institutionalisation of learning based on western values compromised both individual freedom and respect for the wisdom of communities and elders. It marginalized the role of family and community in education at all levels, including higher education. In essence, it shifted the focus from an individual's success within their own environment and community to succeeding in a broader consumer culture.

One way to approach this is by integrating the principles of Ubuntu into the fundamental operations of the university. Ubuntu is an African philosophy highlighting values like interconnectedness, compassion, tolerance, harmony, and mutual support. While various definitions exist, they all convey the idea that the individual is a vital part of a broader and more meaningful communal, societal, environmental, and spiritual context.



**“When we talk about indigenous knowledge, it is not just about sticking to 'traditional' ways. It is about embracing whatever African people (with their diverse cultures and environments) see as a true reflection of themselves. This involves recognizing the cultural realities of African societies as they are without imposing external expectations.”**



**Watch** Keamo Rakgoadi's webinar presentation on the link between IKS and cultural identity.

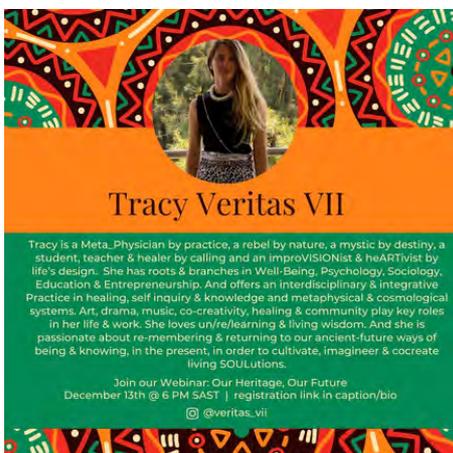
# A BRIDGE BETWEEN THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

By Kabelo Moratwe. Citizen Relations Mzansi

*In a rapidly evolving world where the allure of technological advancements and globalization often takes center stage, the relevance of indigenous knowledge cannot be overstated, especially for young minds. Project Biome's youth-designed webinar on indigenous knowledge systems was a platform for young people navigating the complexities of the 21st century, to reflect on how it has become increasingly crucial to reflect on the wisdom passed down by our ancestors, embracing the rich tapestry of indigenous knowledge that defines our cultural identity.*



**“Reflecting on past teachings is not merely an exercise in nostalgia; it is a profound acknowledgement of the resilience and ingenuity of our forefathers. The stories, proverbs, and rituals handed down through generations are not relics of a bygone era but living testaments to the enduring strength of our cultures.”**



**Watch** Tracy Veritas' webinar presentation on finding one's indigenusness.

Indigenous knowledge is a treasure trove of ancient wisdom, encompassing traditional practices, beliefs, and ways of life that have sustained communities for generations. For young people, connecting with this wealth of information serves as a bridge between the past and the present, offering invaluable insights into the cultural fabric that shapes our identities. In a world that often seems disconnected and fast-paced, the grounding force of indigenous knowledge can provide a sense of belonging and purpose.

In one of the breakaway sessions, titled “What is the overarching relevance of IKS to youth and society?” some very interesting views were given, one being the memory of self. How as people, regardless of where we are in life, we can remember things that bring peace to us, but we cannot place where the memory is from, and when we do the things that come with memory, we feel grounded. The grounding feeling serves as proof that IKS runs in our blood and can be genetic.

By delving into the teachings of our ancestors, we gain a deeper understanding of the challenges they faced and the wisdom they imparted to overcome adversity. This reflection fosters a sense of gratitude and also equips us with the tools to confront the challenges of the modern world. Another frequent thing that would come up in the webinar is what it means to be African as a young person.

Participants in the breakaway session discussed how African identity goes beyond geographical location; it is an intricate dance between tradition and innovation. As the custodians of a rich heritage, young Africans must navigate the delicate balance of preserving cultural values while embracing the opportunities that come with progress. The fusion of indigenous knowledge with contemporary thought forms a unique lens through which young people can view the world—a lens that captures the essence of Africa's past, present, and future.

Being African in the 21st century means understanding the interconnectedness of diverse cultures, languages, and histories that make up an African identity.



## CONT...

It involves celebrating the mosaic of identities while recognizing the shared threads that bind us together. Embracing indigenous knowledge allows young Africans to draw strength from the roots that anchor them, fostering a sense of pride in their heritage.

The webinar highlighted that as the world grapples with global challenges such as climate change, sustainable development, and social justice, indigenous knowledge emerges as a wellspring of solutions. The traditional ecological knowledge embedded in indigenous practices can offer sustainable approaches to environmental conservation, and the communal ethos inherent in many indigenous societies can inspire innovative solutions to contemporary social issues.

The lesson, particularly learnt, is that the relevance of indigenous knowledge to young people, particularly in the African context, is not a call to retreat into the past but an invitation to draw strength from our roots as we navigate the complexities of the present and future. It is a recognition that our ancestors left us a legacy worth cherishing—one that provides both a compass and a map for the journey ahead. As young people, we should embrace the wisdom of the past to forge a future that is both rooted in our identity and open to the possibilities of tomorrow.

# Citizen Relations Mzansi

## Amplifying Voices for Justice

We are a collective of experienced youth journalists in South Africa with a passion for social justice. We believe that everyone deserves to have their voices heard, particularly those that have been historically marginalised. Through our innovative approach to storytelling and community engagement, we shine a spotlight on the pressing issues facing our society and catalyze meaningful action for a more just and equitable future.

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# PLANTING TREES IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS

*By Gus Le Brenton, the African Plant Hunter*

*It's easy to take trees for granted, especially those of us living in countries that still have relatively large areas of woodland remaining. But what would our world be like if they weren't there? Pretty grim is the answer. We would struggle in breathing. The temperatures would be unbearably hot. There would be almost no other biodiversity (since trees are essentially the cornerstone of our ecosystems).*

There would be no soil and no crops, so we would be really hungry, thirsty and quite miserable. Although, on the positive side, we'd also be largely oblivious to this, because most of us would almost certainly be dead! The simple truth is that protecting trees is not a luxury for the few but an essential survival strategy for all of us. Our world depends on trees for its functioning. Our species has co-evolved with trees. We can't do without them, although, ironically, they can do just fine without us! Every one of us needs to do whatever we can, whenever we can, to protect trees. If we don't, we're actually just killing ourselves.



The good news is there are still a lot of trees in the world. Nearly a third of the Earth's landmass is covered in trees (over 4 billion hectares in total), 93% of which is naturally regenerating forest (with the other 7% having been planted by us). But every year we slowly chip away at the area of naturally regenerating forest. Although the rate of deforestation isn't as bad today as it was 30 years ago, it is still a huge concern. And, unfortunately, the biggest rate of net forest loss around the world is right here in Africa, where we lose nearly 4 million hectares of forest every year. That's equivalent to the landmass of Switzerland. Every year. Just gone.

It shouldn't surprise anyone to learn that agriculture is by far the biggest driver of deforestation in Africa. Converting forest and woodland into arable production is the biggest component of this, but relentless overgrazing hinders natural regeneration of forests and ultimately degrades them. As farmers, therefore, we have a bigger responsibility than most to make sure that we play our part in tree conservation. Fortunately, a lot of what needs to be done isn't that hard.

### **Simple, practical steps for farmers to help protect trees:**

1. Don't cut down any indigenous tree unless you absolutely have to. If you do, make sure to plant at least 2 new trees somewhere else on the farm to compensate.
2. Integrate trees into your farming system as much as you can. Using trees alongside crops in a simple agroforestry system, and planting trees within pastures, will help with soil conservation, water retention, biodiversity and crop yields.
3. Plant trees whenever and wherever you can on your land. These will help restore degraded areas, prevent soil erosion, provide shade, improve microclimates and create wildlife habitats. As well as providing a range of useful (and often highly nutritious!) products.
4. Protect whatever indigenous forest you have on your land and do what you can to support natural regeneration. Livestock are the biggest impediment to regrowth, as they will eat new seedlings that have emerged naturally before they are established. But identifying and protecting naturally growing seedlings is one of the quickest and easiest ways to support regeneration.
5. Using agroecological farming practices will, of course, reduce agrochemical use, foster healthier soils and therefore support tree growth and biodiversity.
6. Try to think about ways of using trees as crops themselves. There are many trees that produce high value products that can become useful sources of supplementary income.

We all instinctively know that we have to reverse the tide of deforestation in Africa. If we don't, we won't survive. Fortunately, it is fully within our power to change this. Investing in tree planting and tree conservation is incredibly rewarding, not just for the thrill of seeing a tree grow from a tiny seed, but also because it makes any farm a healthier place on multiple levels. A healthier place for the plants and animals that live on it, and a healthier place for us, the humans that survive from it.

It's hard to think of a single negative associated with trees and tree planting. Meanwhile the positives are so many that it is almost impossible to list them all. So let us all do our part as organic farmers to collectively protect and increase the number of trees on our land, so we can help shift the balance back in favour of the trees.



# CAN ORGANICS FEED THE WORLD?

By Vera Corry, Namibian Organic Association

In an endeavour to foster sustainable and environmentally conscious practices in agriculture, the Namibian Organic Association (NOA) collaborated with the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) to host a comprehensive public Guest Lecture Series on Organic Agriculture in 2023. The series brought together experts, agricultural enthusiasts and students to explore the intricacies of organic farming, its benefits and its role in shaping a sustainable future for Namibia. The series was funded by the Knowledge Hub for Organic Agriculture in Southern Africa. Below find key points from each of the webinars in the series plus links to the recordings.

## RELEVANCE OF ORGANIC FARMING FOR THE FUTURE

By Kanangwa Newlove and Mareike Voigts

Organic agriculture is relevant for human and environmental health especially in the face of climatic changes. It is an important agriculture system for sustenance of future generations. The application of the four principles of organic agriculture (Care, Health, Ecology, Fairness) is through:

- Basing agriculture on living ecological systems and cycles, working with them, emulating and helping to sustain them.
- Managing farming in a precautionary and responsible manner to protect the health and wellbeing of current and future generations and the environment.
- Farming to sustain and enhance the health of soil, plant, animal, human and planet as one and indivisible.
- Building on relationships that ensure fairness with regard to the common environment and life opportunities.

The four principles will go a long way to build the planet we need to sustain us and to cater for future generations

## THE FOOD CHALLENGE

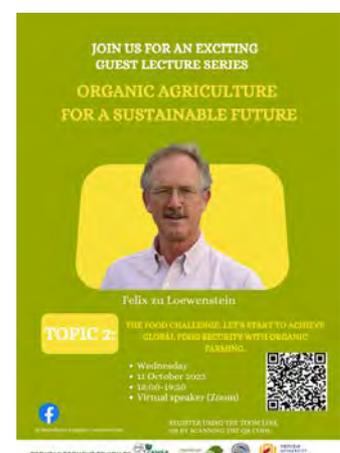
By Felix zu Lowenstein

Industrial large-scale input intensive food and agricultural system is not successfully feeding the world, given that the majority of food is produced by 70% of the world's small-scale farmers.

Conventionally grown food that we find in retail shops does not incorporate the true cost of production, such as the cost to the environment of artificial fertiliser production and use, the cost of pesticide use on our already dwindling biodiversity, the cost on our health system due to agrochemical related illnesses in humans; all of which will ultimately impact humanity's ability to produce food for billions of people in the future.



**Watch** Kanangwa Newlove & Mareike Voigts presentation.



**Watch** Felix zu Lowenstein's presentaton.

# ADDING LIFE TO SOIL: MAKING FARMING MORE PROFITABLE THROUGH ORGANIC PRACTICES

By *Jako Pieterse and Manjo Krige-Stiglingh*

Jako Pieterse is a farmer in the Western Cape and founder of EcoSoil produces; he sells compost tea for own use on fruit orchards and for farmers across the country who are interested in regenerating their farms' soil. Using compost tea, Jako has converted his fruit orchard in the Western Cape to an organic system with no chemical inputs. By producing and adding the tea to the soil in the orchards, he decreased the amount of inputs needed in terms of fertilisers and pesticides and improved the health of his orchards and harvests.

Manjo Krige-Stiglingh is a commercial conventional beetroot and carrots farmer in Botswana where her 250-hectare production is under irrigation. Being the founder of NOA, and having run an organic farm in Namibia, Manjo highlighted, through own experiences, that the transition from a conventionally farmed system to a truly organic system takes time and investment, not only financially. Investment is also needed in working out what methods and tools should be implemented to put organic principles into practice, and that make most sense given a farmer's own environmental and economic context. Manjo emphasised how building soil health on a farm is the absolute foundation of economic prosperity. With a healthy soil and thriving soil microbiota, the soil is able to supply sufficient nutrients to the crops grown, weed pressure is reduced, beneficial organisms thrive, and there is an increase in water infiltration and retention.

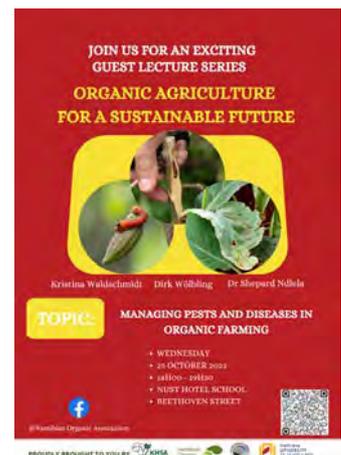
## ORGANIC PEST & DISEASE MANAGEMENT

By *Dirk Wölbling, Kristina Waldschmidt & Dr Shepard Ndlela*

There are different organic management practices to ensure optimum soil health. Kristina manages her berry and vegetable production under JADAM farming practices developed in Korea. Dirk makes use of commonly known organic farming practices and explained how he makes use of regular Brix value measurements of his crop as an indicator of plant health and a plant's ability to withstand pest and disease. They were joined by Dr Shepard Ndlela from the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE) who gave a short introduction to the work that the ICIPE does in Kenya and elsewhere with small-scale organic farmers on pest and disease management, with a focus on *Tuta absoluta*, a common pest on tomatoes throughout Africa. Dr Ndlela highlighted different control methods of the pest such as biopesticides, sanitation and mass trapping amongst others, while delving deeper into the research on the effectiveness of a parasitoid wasp as a biological control agent.



**Watch** Jako Pieterse & Manjo Krige-Stiglingh's presentation.



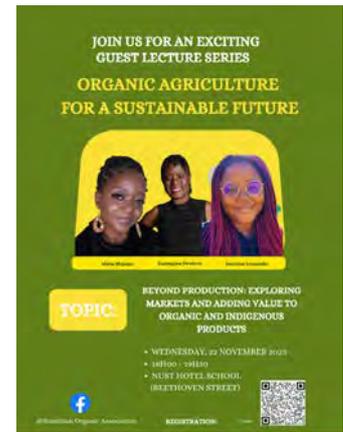
**Watch** Dirk Wölbling, Kristina Waldschmidt & Dr Shepard Ndlela's presentation.

# BEYOND PRODUCTION: MARKETING AND ADDING VALUE TO ORGANIC AND INDIGENOUS PRODUCTS

By Kanangwa Newlove, Jacobina 'Penny' Lumumba & Maria Shipapo

The series of guest lectures concluded with presentations on organic agripreneurship. Through personal journeys, the three speakers each told their stories of how they became organic farmers, be it on a 1-hectare plot or own backyard, as in the case of Kanangwa Newlove and Jacobina Lumumba, weaving in the why and their passion for organic agriculture. Maria, on the other hand, as a geoscientist and owner of a soil testing laboratory, told of her passion for indigenous foods and her mission to bring these into the market through value-chain addition and marketing. This lecture showed that organic farming can bring in good income from fresh organic production in fields and in backyards as well as with value addition from both fresh produce and wild collections.

The entire series is available for viewing on [Namibia Organic Association YouTube](#) channel.



**Watch** Kanangwa Newlove, Jacobina Lumumba & Maria Shipapo's presentation.



# RECOVERY OF CARBON, NUTRIENTS AND WATER FROM WASTE FOR RETURN TO SOIL POWERED BY EARTHWORMS

*By Dr Ephrem Whingwiri, Zim Earthworm Farms, Zimbabwe. [ewhingwiri@gmail.com](mailto:ewhingwiri@gmail.com)*

*Nature follows a cyclic path within which it recycles carbon, water, nutrients and gases to support regeneration of life and food production. All of this is climate friendly, resilient and a model for sustainability. Soil organic carbon is key to soil fertility, moisture and nutrient retention, improved chemical fertiliser use efficiency, reduced evaporation and siltation. Contemporary lifestyles have broken this cycle with consequences threatening current and future human existence.*

Current agricultural production largely uses chemical fertilisers. Nutrients in these fertilisers are used during the growth and development of plants. Some nutrients are leached into deeper levels of the soil profile, while others are stored in leaves, roots, stems and ears/cobs. When human beings eat food, the nutrients are locked in the human body for its sustenance and some are locked as human excreta in sewage at primary sewer ponds or in septic tanks for periods up to 15 or more years.

Nutrients in human excreta at present are not returned to agricultural soils. Food wastes are either burnt or deposited at landfills. Although nutrients in crop stover can be composted or fed to animals in various forms and produce manures, some stover are burnt and not made available to soils. Excess produce at markets is disposed of as waste at landfills. The nutrients which have been leached to deeper levels of soil profile are recovered by roots of trees. A considerable amount of nutrients, mainly from the imported chemical fertilisers, remain locked outside the production system i.e., at the landfill, sewage system, septic tanks, pit latrines/blair

toilets, necessitating the continued importation and use of chemical fertilisers.

If technologies exist for returning the locked carbon and nutrients to agriculture, the need for continued importation and use of chemical fertilisers is reduced making huge savings to countries; theoretically the build-up of nutrients in soils is restored. With time, less and less chemical fertilisers will be required when the right technologies to unlock the carbon and nutrients are available and nature's cyclic path is allowed to take over in the production of food.

**Zim Earthworm Farms has undertaken innovative and holistic approaches to the recycling of carbon, water and nutrients. These innovations were tested, tried and proven to make communities more climate resilient and food secure.**

It must be noted that the landfill, pit latrines and septic tanks were invented as innovations of convenience way back before climate change was an issue. But they don't conform to nature cyclic path. Leaves of trees when they die, fall on the ground processed by earthworms and microorganisms, at source into food for the tree, conforming to nature's cyclic path. Hence why trees will flourish and feed people, fauna and flora adequately without human interventions. When earthworms ingest decomposing organic matter, they unlock carbon and nutrients concentrating nutrients in available forms and generating many microbes in their gut.

## Zimbabwean patented innovations are designed to conform to nature's cyclic path

- **The Jati Decongestor Sanitation System** is an odourless integrated off-grid wastewater and solid waste treatment and recycling system, powered by earthworms (which are known to detoxify, disinfect and neutralise what they ingest). The body of the earthworms works as a bio filter. It absorbs organics & inorganic substances in wastewater through its body walls. The system allows for treatment of sewage and industrial effluent to a state that allows for the reuse of water for flushing toilets, irrigation and solids converted into a carbon rich organic fertiliser. This technology prevents underground water contamination, sewage overflows and manhole blockages. It suppresses smell, flies and vectors of water borne diseases.
- **Jati Earthworm Breeding Composter** enables the recovery of carbon and nutrients from biodegradable waste including human excreta, hence calls for redesigning of the landfill. It unlocks carbon and nutrients and valorises biodegradable waste to produce a humus rich organic fertiliser, vermicompost and earthworms. This allows plants to grow without any chemical fertilizer application while crop yields and quality are not compromised.
- **The Septic tank sludge disposal, carbon, nutrients and water recovery park** uses the decongestor sanitation system for recovering carbon, nutrients and water from septic tanks and mobile toilets sludge, producing vermicompost and reusable treated water. The system is operating at Stoneridge, Harare on a small scale. It provides a solution to local authorities, mines and cities to dislodge full sewage primary ponds at least cost without the need for heavy machinery, generating a biofertiliser and making wastewater reuseable in agriculture.

Landfills, septic tanks, pit latrines/blair toilets lock up carbon, nutrients and water (urine) creating ecological imbalances. With the innovations given above, agroecological balance can be restored for improved productivity while maintaining healthy cities and communities. To learn more on success stories, [click](#) here.



# HONOURING PGS FUNDAMENTALS

*By Participatory Guarantee System, South Africa*

*During the course of 2023, PGS South Africa and Grow West Africa, under the auspices of the Knowledge Hub for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Southern Africa, co-hosted a series of webinars addressing pertinent themes for PGS farmer groups. A summary of each in the series is given below and the link to the recordings.*

## THE SIX FUNDAMENTALS OF PGS HOLD SOLUTIONS TO CHALLENGES

*By Audrey Wainwright, PGS facilitator, mentor and trainer*

The six fundamentals of PGS are a shared vision, participation, transparency, trust, learning process and horizontality and it seemed to me that there is such a freedom that everyone can relate to these principles.

- **Shared vision:** It is vital that there is a pull and a push for a PGS group to succeed – there's a need for farmer to sell surplus produce, while the farmer needs to get organic assurance from customers – this gives rise to a shared vision.
- **Participation:** Equally important is the participation aspect and that all farmers participate in the farm visits because they see the benefit of the PGS seal and the certificate that acknowledges that they are farming organically. This also applies to the development of the rules and standard operating procedures, where you identify what standard you're going to use. When people develop processes and procedures themselves in a workshop together, they create ownership of that process, which also helps new members to align.
- **Transparency and Trust:** It is also important that farmers open their gates to each other and consumers, creating a transparent environment for knowledge sharing and trust-building. I think that in our world we have forgotten how to use trust. When are we looking in the farmer's eyes and getting to know somebody and learning to behave in a trustworthy manner – that is the best way to learn about trust.
- **Learning process:** Personal interactions, sharing stories and exchanging knowledge builds trust between people from diverse backgrounds. The learning process is the magical thing. The challenge lies in capturing and verifying the accuracy of these knowledge exchanges to ensure their value to the farming community.
- **Horizontality:** Structured groups are adaptable, dynamic and accountable. They are living organisms and the six basic elements and ten key features are the glue that holds a PGS group together.

There must be norms conceived or adopted by the stakeholders with documented management systems and procedures to verify farmer's compliance, with clear and previously defined consequences for non-compliance. There must be a farmer's pledge or something similar, and produce seals or labels.

**“I have found during my years of doing PGS that if you've got a problem in your group or with anything – go back to the six PGS fundamentals.”**

# Participatory Guarantee Systems

Local organic certification for farmers and consumers



**PGS** | SOUTH AFRICA

— 6 ELEMENTS — 10 FEATURES —



Learn more at [www.pgssa.org.za](http://www.pgssa.org.za)



# PGS AS A SOCIAL PROCESS

*By Konrad Hauptfleisch*

Konrad shared his 20 years' experience in which he conducted PGS trainings and grassroots organic sector development. Below are some of the key points made during this webinar.

- The European organic movement started through PGS before it was even called that – it was all farmer-focused and farmer-driven guarantee systems, which preceded third-party certification.
- Today, Europe, North America and East Asia have the most regulated organic markets due to their significant market size for certified organic products, and in most of them, PGS is not recognised as a valid guarantee system. Latin America is noted as a pioneer in PGS, and it is also where it is now most recognised in regulation, which sometimes results in unintended consequences such as too many rules and bureaucracy and has led some to question the initial principles.
- As PGS evolves and becomes more structured, there can be a lack of participation and then trust becomes an issue; and horizontality and transparency can become challenges. There can also be an increase in control systems, and the emergence of hierarchies, which also challenge some of the fundamental elements.
- PGS develops well where local market demand exists or has a high potential, suppliers are active with the capacity to produce surplus organically, consumers require an organic guarantee and farmers require a way to furnish it, there is an existing culture of collaboration and trust, as well as a local and short value/supply chain.
- PGS is not just about becoming a different version of third-party certification – it is a social process and a labour of love. Without love for the soil and love for your neighbour, it will not flourish. In order to be convinced that somebody is trustworthy, you have to trust them. If they break your trust, then you can respond to that, but the first step is always to say “okay I trust you” and then you honour that trust. The more you build a transparent flat structure that has participation and shared vision, the more the trust will grow.
- Participation is also crucial and delegating responsibility outside of the PGS can again lead to problems. If we lose those key PGS basic elements, it can land up in a compromised system that doesn't quite look the way we would like it to look. When we develop a PGS, we need to think about what is the true cost of PGS? How do we put the peer back in the review? Do we go for more regulation or look beyond organic? These are all questions that we need to ask and if we honour the basic principles then it is more possible to achieve what we are trying to achieve, which is a sustainable, just, healthy food system.

**“PGS groups around the world are at different stages, some are not fully implemented and have varying degrees of regulation. Africa still offers an opportunity to re-examine PGS and consider things differently.”**

# PGS ELEMENTS MARRIED TO ORGANIC PRINCIPLES

*By Olawumi Benedict*

The four principles of organic agriculture are Health, Ecology, Fairness and Care, and I find it interesting to marry these principles with the six elements of PGS and see that they are actually inseparable.

In Ghana we look at the PGS learning process as crucial to understanding and preserving soil health because it evolves, it's not static. It's something that has to happen over and over again as you can't understand the health of the soil in one day – it's a learning process.

- **The Principle of Fairness** in PGS encompasses participation and horizontality, ensuring everyone is involved without hierarchy. Fairness is about respect and justice. As a PGS team member I need to respect the farmer and the farmer needs to respect me – it's the principle of fairness that is involved. Transparency also plays a role in understanding the system and participating equitably. Nobody is above each other, whether we are male or female, we walk in harmony together. This is the PGS element of transparency.
- **The Principle of Care** requires trust within the farming community, as well as care for managing the ecosystem in a precautionary manner and ensuring the learning process and participation continue for future generations.
- **The Principle of Trust** The principle of care talks so much about managing the ecosystem in a precautionary manner and this is where the element of trust comes to play as it operates from that integrity. Also under the principle of care we have the participation and the learning process.
- **The principle of Ecology** emphasises collective responsibility for keeping the ecosystem intact. There is no PGS without "P" which is participation. Collective responsibility also falls under the principle of fairness. If you are fair to everybody, if you are facing your colleagues or farmers that you work together with in a PGS, then you are going to participate because you would not want to cheat them by not participating.

The diverse and multifaceted challenges as faced by farmers, communities, and organisations involved in PGS initiatives can be effectively tackled by adhering to the six fundamentals of PGS. By emphasising aspects such as trust and capacity building, while also ensuring horizontality, appropriate regulation, transparency, ownership, and accountability, PGS groups can effectively confront their challenges and secure success for their initiatives.

Watch the full video or view individual speaker presentations.



# WORLD OF ORGANICS

## STATISTICS AND TRENDS

### ORGANIC EXPORTS TO THE EUROPEAN UNION AND UNITED STATES OF AMERICA BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN 2021

\*Statistics from Southern Africa only.

COUNTRY	TO EU(MT)	TO USA(MT)
Lesotho	793	
Madagascar	6947	
Malawi		3566
Mauritius	1	295
Mozambique	5311	
Namibia	14	
South Africa	28139	
Zambia	1	92
Zimbabwe	314	

# THE NEW EU ORGANIC REGULATIONS

**FOR THOSE MARKETING OR ASPIRING TO MARKET ORGANIC PRODUCE TO THE EU-FULL ENFORCEMENT BY 1 JANUARY 2025**

## FROM EQUIVALENCE TO COMPLIANCE

No more certification according to equivalent organic standards but to comply with EU regulations

### Internal control systems

- More detailed ICS rules
- High expectations on ICS quality
- Strong focus on avoiding contamination and mingling of products
- High traceability expectations- detailed product flow

### Group of Operators (small holder farmers only)

- A recognized legal entity
- Maximum group size of 2000
- New farm size 5ha and below
- Annual farm turn over limit of 25 000Euro
- Minimum of 5% of members

- Geographic proximity for members of GoO is very important for a well working & efficient ICS for operational reasons
- Detailed EU crop production rules will need to be met in a “compliant way”, no longer in an equivalent way!
- The conversion of a land parcel starts with notification to a CB and once all organic production rules are met. The CB sets the official beginning of conversion.
- Production rules are met. The CB sets the official begin of conversion
- Check out for new list of authorized cleaning and disinfection substances
- Check on new list of authorized substances for plant protection

# CELEBRATING AFRICAN FOOD & SEED

## ZAMBIAN TRADITIONAL AND ORGANIC FOOD FESTIVAL: THE HARSH REALITIES OF SMALLHOLDER FARMERS IN ZAMBIA

*By Rebecca Mwila*

*As my vehicle approached Mundawanga botanical garden, I could feel my heart racing with anxiety and anticipation on whether our smallholder farmers had managed to set up their gazebos and arranged their display tables in readiness for the exhibition. Everyone in the display arena was busy and could hardly notice my presence. The interaction among the farmers was unmatched, seeing them guide each other on the set up, and in teams, working to ensure all the traditional seeds and foods were in the rightly labelled containers was inspirational and rekindled my hope in unity.*

This was at the 6th [Zambian Traditional Seed and Food Festival](#), an annual event organised by a consortium of civil society organizations and meant to promote local seeds for seed sovereignty, local foods for nutrition and income generation. PELUM Zambia under the [Knowledge Hub for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Southern Africa](#) and in collaboration with a 15-member consortium of civil society organizations advocating for environmental sustainability through organic agriculture and agroecology brought together smallholder farmers from the 10 provinces of Zambia to celebrate local seeds, share and exchange local seeds as well as knowledge for food and nutrition security in a changing climate. This year under the theme; “Celebrating Traditional Seeds and Foods for Healthy, Safe and Nutritious Food for the People, Planet and the Economy”, the farmer dialogue preceded the exhibition with more than 60 smallholder farmers participating.

Smallholder farmers in Zambia grapple with high cost of farming inputs including hybrid seed, synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, lack of transport to markets, poor roads and lack of market for their produce among many other challenges.



Government through the Farmer Input Support Program (FISP) has been selling subsidized farming inputs in form of hybrid maize and synthetic fertilizers to smallholder farmers. According to the Zambia Agriculture Status Report 2021, FISP takes over 80% of the national agriculture budget with 2021 taking 86.3 percent while 87.5 was allocated in 2022, depriving resources for other sections of agriculture such as extension, livestock and fisheries. The consequences of these actions have been devastating on the smallholder farmer as well as on the agriculture sector.

The Zambia Agriculture Status Report 2021 indicates that nationally, about 63.4 percent of the smallholder households reported using fertilizer in the 2020/2021 agricultural season, similar to that reported in the previous seasons. The majority of the farmers only grow hybrid maize, supplied by the government through the FISP, affecting the diversity of crops grown. This status quo has made them wholly dependent on the government in terms of production and may negatively affect their food and nutrition security.

“I don’t want to be waiting for seed from the government, it has made me suffer”, a woman spoke as she got local maize varieties from her sack to display on her stand. They were red in color, while others had a mixed colour of purple and white. “These are beautiful,” I said. She looked at me and with a smile said, “These are a few of the local seed varieties that farmers have saved from extinction”. “Why do you think these seeds are becoming extinct?” I asked. “Our government made us believe in the hybrid at the expense of the local seeds, she answered. It made us abandon our local seeds and traditional farming practices in preference to hybrid and industrial farming practices.

Ruth Mumba is a smallholder farmer from Chongwe district and has been participating in the festival for the last three years, a period she has used to multiply her local seed varieties including maize, millet, sorghum, bambara nuts, cowpea, groundnuts, beans and soya beans. She narrated how she felt enslaved by the dictation by government through its policy to promote the hybrid maize, which it provides market for through the Food Reserve Agency as opposed to the farmer saved seed which has not been recognised as seed but as grain. She observed that the lack of recognition of the local seed varieties by government has made farmers dependant on government, vulnerable to exploitation and poor. “I want to save my own seed from my harvest so that I don’t have to buy every year. I want to choose the crops I want to grow and not government to choose for me” she said. As I left her stand, I couldn’t help but appreciate the courage she had to speak for all concerned to hear what her preference is. It is a well-known fact that the power struggle within the seed sector does exist and that the Zambian government, like most African governments, through its policies gives recognition to hybrid seeds as opposed to the local seed varieties.



“The judges have started inspecting the display stands” I could hear the whispers among the farmers. All of them were standing beside their stands in anticipation of the judges. In the background was a sound of traditional music by Ponchiano Kaiche, a legendary guitarist known for traditional music. I watched in amazement how enthusiastic the farmers were in receiving the judges to their stands.

Listening to them explaining how diverse and nutritious the local foods are, was more thought-provoking to me. If our local foods were as diverse and nutritious as presented by our farmers, how have the farmers and all of us found ourselves in a position of vulnerability in terms of nutrition due to limited diets? If local foods such as millet, sorghum and cassava were as drought tolerant as presented by the farmers, how have we failed to adapt to climate change and maintain our food and nutrition security? According to the Zambia Annual Country Report 2020, by the World Food Programme, Zambia’s 1.5 million smallholder farmers are the producers of 80 percent of the domestic supply of food. It is therefore necessary that their voices are heard and suggestions in issues of farming and the seeds they prefer is considered. They should be accorded the opportunity to be part of the decision-makers in issues of agriculture in the country.

Government should have an open-door policy to accommodate smallholder farmers' views if they are to continue growing our food. Government and other stakeholders including the private sector should also support festivals such as the Zambian Traditional Seed and Food Festival for the promotion of culture preservation through local seeds, indigenous knowledge sharing and preservation and conservation of local seed varieties.



# ZIMBABWE GOOD SEED AND FOOD FESTIVAL 2023 HIGHLIGHTS WITH SURVEY

*By Caroline Jacque*

The 2023 Zimbabwe Good Seed and Food Festival (GSFF) took place at the end of September 2023. On Friday 29 September, 637 farmers, government officials, policymakers, researchers and representatives of civil society organisations came together at the Harare Botanical Gardens to swap an incredible variety of seeds and discuss, addressing biodiversity and climate change issues through agroecology, farmer-managed seed systems, seed and food sovereignty. On Saturday 30 September the best of Zimbabwe's food and seed was celebrated with the public. Over 2,500 visitors enjoyed 48 carefully selected exhibitors in the market section, to promote greatest diversity, a colourful, novel plants' and seeds' fair (21 stalls), 16 stalls in the food court, highlighting local dishes and a range of other cuisines preparing their traditional dishes using Zimbabwean ingredients, cooking demonstrations, lots of fun and learning at the kids' zone and great live music.

In the weeks leading up to the national festival, district mini-festivals were five districts of Chimanimani, Rushinga, Mudzi, Bikita, Mwenezi and Goromonzi.

The last decade has seen some promising shifts in the production and consumption environment in Zimbabwe. For example, the National Agriculture Policy Framework (2018–2030) puts more emphasis on reviving production of resilient, nutritious traditional small grains and legumes, crop diversification and sustainable land use practices. The Ministry of Health and the Food and Nutrition Council have revived food and nutrition security committees which promote a multisectoral “care group” approach to improving community and household nutrition. This thrust has been complemented by a growing movement through farmer groups and associations, community-based organisations, national and international NGOs which are promoting agroecology, farmer-managed seed systems and conservation, growing/harvesting, consumption and marketing of indigenous/traditional crop varieties and wild species.

For the first time in Zimbabwe's history, an increasing range of traditional food and drink products are appearing on supermarket shelves and are sold in some restaurants.



However, there are still numerous obstacles to improving consumption patterns in Zimbabwe. Apart from a century of unfavourable policies and markets, consumer demand has shifted to the detriment of nutritious traditional foods. Young people are particularly resistant to buying and eating traditional foods and farmers are still reluctant to grow them due to perception of lack of viable markets.

Through a partnership with the Markets and Seeds Access Project (MASAP) the current reach, impact and sustainability of the national and decentralised/district food and seed festivals was investigated to draw lessons and identify gaps and opportunities which can be used to enhance the festivals' contribution to raising awareness on and promoting the utilisation and consumption of local foods.

The study has shown that festival participants and supporters are generally happy with the way that the district and national festivals are run and believe that they have important benefits and some valuable long-term impacts. The main benefits of the district festivals were said to be seed exchange and increased knowledge related to more climate resilient agriculture, nutrition and recipes, and produce marketing. Similar responses were given as benefits of farmers from districts attending the national GSFF. Income and market linkages were also seen as benefits although respondents said more could be done to link farmers to markets after the festivals. Knowledge and skills gained from district and national festivals were said to be disseminated to the wider community. The main benefits mentioned by respondents at the national event was increased awareness and knowledge about, and networking around traditional food, nutrition and health, farming methods and crop varieties. Stallholders noted that interacting with potential markets and increasing their sales were important benefits as well as gained knowledge related to marketing their products.



The study has shown the critical need for food and seed festivals. There is a lack of investment in nationwide behaviour change campaigns around increasing dietary diversity, tackling overweight, obesity and non-communicable diseases and other food system issues.

Study participants made a wide range of suggestions on how the festivals could be improved. These include improvements to organisation and management of the festival, vision and goals, finance and funding, publicity, the venue and facilities. There were also suggestions on increasing and diversifying and supporting festival participants and improving festival activities. Many ideas were also proffered on outreach activities to expand and reinforce the impact of the festivals. These included wider information dissemination through different channels, policy and advocacy work, increasing the spread of the festivals nationwide in both rural and urban areas and ways to make festival products available to the market year-round.

As many of the recommendations as possible will be considered as the festival organisers start preparing for the 2024 activities. More info: [www.naturallyzimbabwean.com](http://www.naturallyzimbabwean.com) and [www.youtube.com/@GoodFoodFestivalZW](https://www.youtube.com/@GoodFoodFestivalZW).



# PLAYLIST & LIBRARY

## VIDEOS:

- [Cooking like a chef in rural Zimbabwe](#)
- [Guest lecture Series on Organic Agriculture, Nambian Organic Association](#)
- [The challenge of honouring the fundamentals of PGS, PGS SA](#)
- [Recycling organic matter for the benefit of soils](#)
- [The Power of Organic Farming](#) by Chuck Kayser, TEDxKUFS:
- [Organic Regenerative Farming is the Future of Agriculture](#) | The Future of Food, Happen Films:

## BOOKS:

- [Plenty for All](#) by Shripad A. Dabholkar
- [Regenerating the Soil](#) by Claude Bourguignon
- [A Handbook of Organic Farming](#) by Arun K. Sharma
- [Introduction to Permaculture](#) by Bill Mollison





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