

MIZIZI MAGAZINE

ROOTED STORIES OF FOOD, LAND AND LIFE

July–September
2026

ISSUE
17



Resilience, Resistance & Renewal

How communities across Africa are actively reshaping
their food and farming systems...

South Africa's Hunger Trials | **Youth Making Millions in Malawi** | **The Fight to Ban HHPs**

About Mizizi Magazine

Across Africa, communities are responding to climate shocks, biodiversity loss, rising food insecurity and growing corporate control of food systems. Yet many of the most important solutions remain invisible, underfunded and disconnected.

Mizizi Magazine exists to change that.

We document, connect and amplify the people building regenerative, locally rooted food systems across Africa — from farmers and seed custodians to researchers, cooks, youth leaders and social movements. We are a mobile-first digital publication focused on African stories of agroecology, food systems, biodiversity and community knowledge.

Our story

Mizizi (meaning 'roots' in Swahili) Magazine was born as ISAN Magazine in 2021 through the [Knowledge Hub for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Southern Africa](#), part of the continent-wide [Knowledge Centre for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Africa](#) funded by BMZ and implemented by GIZ and African partners.

In 2026, we shifted to Mizizi Magazine, published by [Mycelium Media Colab](#) and work 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.

info@mizizimag.africa
www.mizizimag.africa
www.myceliumcolab.com

Editor-in-Chief (Zimbabwe): Fortunate Nyakanda
Editor-in-Chief (South Africa)/ Managing Editor: Stefanie Swanepoel

Editorial Associate: Hannah Hopper

Design and Layout: Makanaka Alister Makan'a

Website: Vicki Joubert

Lead Staff Writer: Rabecca Mwila

Lead Staff Writer: Isaac Mafuel

Staff Writer: Odette Mavunga



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Editors' Notes



Every edition of *Mizizi* leaves me with the same feeling: that some of the most important stories in Africa are still the ones least often told.

This issue takes us from South Africa's Human Rights Commission hearings into hunger, to communities in East Africa challenging highly hazardous pesticides, to young entrepreneurs transforming agriculture in Malawi, farmers living alongside elephants in Zambia and smallholder farmers preparing for another El Niño. At first glance these may seem like separate stories. They are not. Together they reveal something much deeper. One theme echoes throughout these pages: resilience is not simply about surviving difficult times. It is about creating something different. It is about resisting systems that no longer serve people or the planet, while renewing the relationships between food, land, culture and community.

As journalists, our role is not only to report what is happening, but also to connect the dots between these stories. We hope *Mizizi* continues to be a place where farmers, researchers, policymakers, activists and young people can learn from one another and recognise that they are part of a much larger movement taking root across the continent.

Thank you to every writer, photographer, partner and community who trusted us with your stories. We hope they inspire conversation, collaboration and action.

Stefanie Swanepoel

Editor-in-Chief (South Africa)



As the continent navigates significant change, transforming agriculture requires innovation, resilience and collective action.

In this edition of *Mizizi*, we share inspiring stories of how farmers, communities and institutions are responding to today's challenges. Climate change is intensifying human-wildlife conflicts and making weather patterns increasingly unpredictable. As Southern Africa prepares for another El Niño season, farmers are adopting adaptation strategies while calling for greater technical, financial and knowledge support.

We also highlight Africa's growing movement to phase out Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs), which continue to threaten human and environmental health despite being banned in many parts of the world. Encouragingly, regional initiatives are promoting safer and more sustainable alternatives.

This issue celebrates the resilience of Africa's people. We also showcase inspiring progress from Madagascar and celebrate Zimbabwe's food heritage, highlighting the importance of indigenous foods, biodiversity and culture in building resilient food systems.

We invite you to explore these stories, draw inspiration from them, and join the growing movement to build healthier, more resilient and sustainable food systems in Southern Africa and beyond.

Fortunate Nyakanda

Editor-in-Chief (Zimbabwe)

S T I N T E N T C O N T E N T S

Editor's Note	1
Feature: Some feast while others starve: An update on South Africa's Human Rights Commission into Hunger	3
Profile: From the classroom to the food forest: Why Bakhusele Mathupha believes South Africa can grow a healthier future	5
Feature: The intersection of farming and wildlife: farmers seek solutions in Eastern Zambia	7
Pesticide watch	9
• Campaign against HHPs gains momentum in East Africa • Anti-HHP campaigns are growing stronger across Africa	
Climate change	12
• Preparing for the heat: South African women farmers adapt ahead of predicted El Niño • Climate change is making farming more expensive – and smallholder farmers are being left behind • Hope Beyond the Drought: How Rufunsa Farmers in Zambia Are Building Climate Resilience • Climate change exposes governance gaps in Malawi • Emergency mobile cash transfer: Rebuilding climate-resilient households in Zambia	
Voices of youth	22
• Malawian youths making millions of kwacha through agribusiness • A quiet youth farming revolution taking place in Zambia	
Mizizi Kitchen	28
• Rediscovering Zimbabwe's Food Heritage at the 2026 National Good Seed and Food Festival • How Chef Black Garlic is preserving African food stories	
Movement updates	33
• KHSa partner updates • BMZ commits to be a reliable partner in food systems transformation • From learning to leading: Africa's new agroecology champions take root • Madagascar's Organic Revolution: Connecting Farmers to the World • From visible to influential: AWOLA is fast-tracking women's leadership in agroecology	



Some feast while others starve: An update on South Africa's Human Rights Commission into Hunger

By Haidee Bartlett

There is a severe and ongoing hunger and malnutrition crisis in South Africa, often masked by the fact that South Africa is an upper-middle-income country with one of the most diversified economies in Africa. The country is formally categorised as nationally food secure and is a major agricultural exporter, with agricultural exports valued at R268.7 billion in 2025. However, the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) reports a national food insecurity rate of 63.5%. Approximately 14 million people experience hunger daily, more than 1 000 children die from malnutrition annually, and 28.8% of South African children under five are stunted, permanently affecting their development.

Behind these statistics are real families who are missing meals and alternating meals amongst family members; buying cheaper, calorie-deficit foods; and choosing between buying food or buying electricity, transport, medicines, school supplies and other essentials.

Meanwhile more than 243 000 tons of edible food end up in landfills annually and South Africa's largest food retailer reported a record trading profit of almost R15 billion in 2025. Something is profoundly wrong with a food system that simultaneously generates abundance, waste and extraordinary wealth while millions go hungry.

“We often speak about hunger as though it were an unfortunate side effect of poverty, climate shocks or global food prices. But this framing obscures the firm truth: widespread hunger persists not because the country cannot feed itself but because the way food is controlled, distributed and governed actively excludes millions of people.”

– SAHRC Commissioner, Philile Ntuli

This dire situation prompted the SAHRC to convene a National Investigative Hearing into South Africa's food systems, grounded in section 27 and 28 of the Constitution that protects the rights to sufficient food and to children's immediate basic nutrition.

Inquiry round 1: Hearing from the hungry

The Commission organised the inquiry around seven themes:

- The structural and economic drivers of hunger
- Concentration of power in the food chain
- Land access and tenure
- The indivisibility of rights
- Indigenous knowledge, traditional seed and agroecology
- Institutional and legislative failures
- Civic participation and public accountability.

This marked a shift from treating hunger as a production problem to examining power and accountability across the food system.

The first phase of hearings was held from 12 to 20 March 2026. It heard testimony from civil society organisations, academics, communities affected by hunger, farm workers, informal traders, government departments and ministers. Many testimonies laid bare the indignity and daily struggle of hunger.

"A consistent theme emerging from these proceedings was the need to further interrogate the structure of the food system, particularly market concentration and the role of private sector actors in shaping access to food, affordability, and nutritional outcomes"

- South African Human Rights Commission

South Africa's highly commercialised food system prioritises export earnings, efficiency and shareholder value, while access and nutrition are treated as secondary concerns.

The Constitution does not permit this indifference. The right to food is neither aspirational nor an abstract concept. It is enforceable. For children, it is immediate.

Inquiry round 2: Interrogating power in the food system

A second round of hearings was held from 6 to 10 July, this time focusing on private sector actors across the food value chain: input companies, farmers, manufacturers, processors, retailers and industry associations.

Scrutinising the rhetoric around food security

In this round, SAHRC counsellors scrutinised long-standing rhetoric about food security – for example, that export-oriented agriculture ensures food security, that pesticides are indispensable or that the market naturally delivers affordability.

Food sector giants, including Tiger Brands, Grain SA, AgriSA and several manufacturers gave testimony. Seed and agrochemical corporation, Syngenta, provided written evidence that was read into the record. Farmers described rising production costs and the pressure exerted by powerful buyers, with some laying responsibility for high prices and price gouging at the doors of major retailers.

Corporates no-shows

The absence of corporate retailers from the proceedings was striking. Shoprite submitted written answers but declined to appear for oral questioning. Massmart requested a postponement, SPAR asked for additional time, and Pick n Pay, Woolworths and Food Lover's Market did not appear. Representatives from the beef and poultry sector were also a no-show.

The Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa, the National Agricultural Marketing Council and the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs were also notably absent.

Shoprite's written submission crystallised the conflict. It argued that scale, logistics, discounts and competition keep food affordable; they rejected the idea of price caps and said binding undertakings to the Commission were unnecessary.

Civil society, however, has convincingly showed that corporate concentration, weak regulation, low wages and voluntary corporate initiatives have manifestly failed to prevent mass hunger.

South Africa is deeply locked into an industrial food system from seed to plate to waste and re-tooling this system will take massive political will. As long as hunger persists at current levels, our society remains a powder keg.

Have a story to share about corporate control of food systems in your country?

Get in touch: info@mizizimag.africa



From the classroom to the food forest: Why Bakhusele Mathupha believes South Africa can grow a healthier future

By Stefanie Swanepoel, Editor-in-Chief

Bakhusele Mathupha Credit: Stefanie Swanepoel

Before our conversation began, I asked Bakhusele Mathupha a simple question: How did you end up in farming? I expected to hear about crops, markets or agricultural training. Instead, he took me back to his childhood in the Transkei, to a time when every family grew its own food and neighbours shared what they harvested. By the time our interview ended, it was clear that this was not simply the story of a farmer or the newly elected Chairperson of the South African Organic Sector Organisation (SAOSO). It was the story of someone trying to restore a relationship between people, food and the land that has gradually been lost.

When Bakhusele Mathupha talks about food, he rarely begins with farming. Instead, he begins with memory. Growing up in the Transkei, food was simply part of everyday life. Families grew vegetables around their homes, kept livestock and exchanged food with neighbours.

Most households relied very little on supermarkets because they produced much of what they needed themselves. "It wasn't something we called food security," he reflects. "It was simply how people lived." Those childhood memories continue to shape the way that he thinks about agriculture today.

They also explain why, as the newly elected Chairperson of the South African Organic Sector Organisation (SAOSO), he believes rebuilding healthy food systems begins long before crops reach markets.

Watching a food system disappear

Although his father worked for the Department of Agriculture, farming was never just a profession in the Mathupha household. School holidays were spent in the garden, tending crops and caring for livestock alongside the rest of the family. Over time, however, he watched those familiar landscapes begin to change.

Commercial seed, synthetic fertilisers and mechanised farming gradually replaced many of the local farming practices that communities had relied on for generations. Growing food became more expensive. Families began buying food they had once produced themselves. Livestock disappeared from many homesteads and traditional knowledge slowly faded.

"I couldn't understand why communities that had always fed themselves were now waiting for someone else to sell them the food they used to grow themselves."

The moment everything changed

Mathupha did not immediately become a farmer. Instead, he pursued higher education and became a teacher. But it was in the classroom that his life's direction changed. Day after day he watched children arrive at school hungry. "You could see it on their faces," he says. "They were undernourished, struggling to concentrate and falling behind. As someone trained in science, I knew what I was looking at. These children weren't failing because they lacked ability. They were hungry."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, that reality became even more stark as many learners came to school primarily for the daily meal provided through the school nutrition programme. He began asking a simple question. Why were schools buying food when communities could be growing it themselves? His first attempt was to establish a school food garden. Although the idea was welcomed, he soon realised that enthusiasm alone was not enough to sustain it. "I realised I needed to think differently."

Leaving teaching to grow hope

Mathupha returned home and asked his father whether he could use part of the family land. He was given two hectares. After speaking with community leaders, he began developing what would become a community food garden and eventually a thriving food forest.

Food & Trees for Africa supported the initiative through an 18-month mentorship programme, introducing him and members of the community to permaculture. Together they transformed neglected land into productive growing spaces while building local skills and confidence.

Today, several community members work alongside him and the project continues to expand. In 2024, he made one of the biggest decisions of his life: he left teaching to focus entirely on farming and community food systems. "I realised I could have a bigger impact outside the classroom. If children have enough healthy food to eat, they arrive at school ready to learn," he says.

Farming is about more than food

Ask Mathupha what farmers need and he does not begin with finance or technology. While recognising that access to markets, infrastructure and extension support remain important, he believes the greatest challenge is rebuilding knowledge, confidence and community. "Farmers need coordination. They need training in seed saving, seed sovereignty and understanding how food systems work," he says.

For him, agriculture is not simply about producing food. It is about restoring relationships between people, land, culture and community. That philosophy also shapes the way he understands agroecology and organic farming. "I see organic farming as a way of living. Agroecology provides the science that helps us understand and strengthen that relationship," he says.

Rather than competing with industrial agriculture on its own terms, he believes communities should invest in rebuilding their own food systems based on local knowledge, local markets and local leadership: "If we strengthen these community food systems across South Africa, we can build something that truly serves our people."

A new chapter for SAOSO

As Chairperson of SAOSO, Mathupha sees the organisation as far more than an industry association. He wants it to become the national home for South Africa's organic movement.

That means bringing together smallholder farmers, commercial organic producers, researchers, NGOs, businesses and policymakers around a shared vision for healthier food systems. Most importantly, he wants farmers themselves to shape that vision. He believes smallholder farmers have carried South Africa's food system for generations, even if their contribution has often gone unrecognised. "They deserve a national voice," he says.

"I want every farmer to feel they belong. Not because they are joining someone else's organisation, but because they have knowledge, leadership and experience to contribute."

Growing the future together

Asked what message he would leave with farmers and consumers alike, Mathupha returns once again to the connection between people and the land. "We are what we eat. We are what we put into our soils. We are what we put into our rivers." For him, every decision about food is also a decision about the future. "If we stop and ask ourselves what kind of world our children and grandchildren will inherit from the way we farm today, then we begin making different choices."



The intersection of farming and wildlife: Farmers seek solutions in Eastern Zambia

By Rabecca Mwila, Mizizi Staff Writer

Farmers in Chama District of Eastern Zambia continue to suffer devastating crop losses due to increasing human-wildlife conflict, a situation that agricultural authorities say is threatening food security and rural livelihoods. Mizizi Writer Rabecca Mwila investigates.

Chama District lies largely within the Musalangu Game Management Area, a wildlife buffer zone connected to major conservation areas, including North Luangwa National Park and sections of the Malawi-Zambia Transfrontier Conservation Area.

In a recent statement to parliament, Minister of Tourism Rodney Sikumba revealed that 63 211 human-animal conflicts have occurred in the last 5 years. The impact is devastating, loss of human life, injuries, livestock loss and destruction of crops and property.

Julius Ngulube, a farmer of Mazumo village, says he lost his maize after elephants destroyed crops on his two hectare piece of land. "Every year we experience these incidents, especially during harvesting time. I am now struggling to repay the

loan I got under the Sustainable Agriculture Financing Facility because I have lost all my crop," Ngulube adds. Ngulube is appealing to authorities to urgently introduce measures aimed at protecting farmers' fields, including the installation of electric fencing and the provision of fireworks or other deterrent methods to scare away elephants.

An assessment on the extent of crop damage on Ngulube's farm conducted by the Department of Agriculture, indicates a 70% crop loss.

Ngulube is now requesting the government, through the Department of National Parks and Wildlife, to consider compensating him and other farmers whose crops have been destroyed by wild animals to mitigate hunger and income loss.

Acting District Agriculture Coordinator (DACO), Mary Nakaonga, explained that human-wildlife conflicts are directly contributing to food insecurity and negatively affecting livelihoods in many communities. "Some farmers are now discouraged from farming altogether because of this situation. We are worried that hunger will increase in communities," Nakaonga said.

To address the challenge, the government, cooperating partners and local communities are introducing sustainable and bio-agro based mitigation measures.

Nakaonga says a steering committee comprising the Community Resources Board, Community Markets for Conservation, Department of National Parks and Wildlife, Department of Agriculture and traditional leaders has been formed under the Malawi-Zambia Transfrontier Conservation Area project.

The committee is meant to scale up community-based strategies aimed at reducing human-wildlife conflict while promoting biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods.

Through the project, farmers in wildlife hotspot areas are receiving seeds for chili, ginger, garlic and onions to help diversify income sources and reduce dependence on crops frequently destroyed by animals.

Nakaonga notes that while no crop is completely wildlife-proof, certain crops are less attractive to wild animals compared to maize. "Groundnuts and cassava are often targeted less severely. We are encouraging farmers to grow cash crops such as chili, ginger, garlic and onions, which animals rarely feed on. These crops can help farmers generate income to buy staple foods while at the same time supporting biodiversity conservation and improving community livelihoods," Nakaonga said.

Communities are also using environmentally friendly approaches including chili bombs to drive elephants away from crop fields. "As a department, we are also involved in land-use planning aimed at separating conservation zones from farming zones," Nakaonga adds. All farmers in the area are urged to adopt these farming strategies as they are sustainable and harmless to both humans and wildlife.

FROM HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT TO CO-EXISTENCE STRATEGIES

FAO Sustainable Wildlife Management Programme Key Innovations for Human-Wildlife Coexistence

- Community-based monitoring: More than 200 community scouts have been trained to use digital tools, including the SMART monitoring system, human-wildlife conflict databases, GPS geo-trackers for livestock and wildlife, and real-time camera traps.
- Early warning systems: Combining GPS tracking, camera traps and local ecological knowledge (such as spoor tracking and traditional livestock management) enables communities to predict wildlife movements and shift from reactive responses to proactive conflict prevention.
- Interactive Human-Wildlife Conflict Toolkit: A role-playing simulation allows farmers, youth, traditional leaders and local authorities to test different conflict scenarios, evaluate mitigation strategies and develop collaborative land-use plans. The toolkit also includes practical mitigation factsheets and regional training programmes.
- Legal Hub for evidence-based policy: An online platform providing comparative wildlife and natural resource legislation across 16 countries helps governments develop science-based, community-inclusive policies.

Read more [here](#).

Zimbabwe: Wildlife Conservation Action with community-led innovations for coexistence

- Predator-proof bomas: Portable, reinforced livestock enclosures covered with opaque fabric prevent lions from seeing cattle.
- Lion Lights: Solar-powered automated LED lights mimic human patrols at night, deterring lions from approaching livestock enclosures.
- Raised kraals: Elevated enclosures protect smaller livestock from lions, leopards and hyenas.
- Technology-enabled early warning: GPS tracking, camera traps and the EarthRanger platform are combined with local knowledge to alert communities when wildlife approaches.
- Elephant deterrent fences: Fences lined with chili oil-soaked cloth exploit elephants' sensitive sense of smell to keep them away from crops without harming them.
- Livelihood diversification: Beekeeping, community gardens and other alternative income sources reduce dependence on livestock, lowering the economic impact of wildlife conflict.

Read more [here](#).



PESTICIDE WATCH

Tracking the movement against highly hazardous pesticides (HHPs) in Africa. HHPs are pesticides that pose exceptionally high risks to people, biodiversity and ecosystems because of their acute or long-term toxic effects.

Campaign against HHPs gains momentum in East Africa

By Rabbecca Mwila, Staff writer

Across East Africa, a growing movement is challenging the continued use of highly hazardous pesticides (HHPs) and calling for healthier, more sustainable alternatives. Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM) Association Uganda has been working with farmers, civil society, researchers and policymakers to raise awareness of the risks posed by these chemicals and advocate for stronger regulation. Mizizi spoke with PELUM Uganda Country Coordinator, Josephine Akia, about why the campaign matters, the progress being made and what it will take to accelerate the transition to safer, agroecological food systems.

For decades, millions of smallholder farmers in Africa have been using synthetic inputs including fertilisers and pesticides to grow their crops. Unknown to them, many of these pesticides are banned in European countries due to their negative effects on human and ecological health.

A coalition calling for strict HHP regulation

A coalition of civil society organisations advocating for non-use of Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs) in East Africa is gaining momentum with calls for strict regulations to limit their use in the region and the continent at large.

The 16-member coalition comprises international and local civil society organisations. Akia says “As a coalition, we are trying to see how we can bring together civil society organisations, farmer movements, environmental and consumer groups working at national, regional and global levels to support the total phase out of HHPs and lead the transition to safer and sustainable alternatives”.

HHPs are products internationally recognised as posing high risks to human health and the environment.

Akia adds that in East Africa, the concern over the use of HHPs comes with the realities of smallholder farmers including limited protective equipment, weak extension services and informal chemical markets that allow unrestricted access to HHPs.

In addition, labels on the HHPs are in English or foreign languages, which many smallholder farmers do not understand; some farmers are also semi-literate or illiterate and have no way of knowing the harms these pesticides cause.

According to Akia, weak regulatory enforcement is allowing HHPs banned in European countries to still remain available in many African countries.

“We have a list of HHPs that have been banned in Europe but are sold in Africa. This goes to show what kind of double standards that we have, because what is not safe in Europe is equally not safe for East Africa and Africa.”

– Josephine Akia, PELUM Uganda

Akia explains that PELUM Uganda is supporting evidence generation to show that HHPs are dangerous, conducting agroecology training to provide farmers with alternatives to HHPs, supporting farmers in production of bio-fertilisers and -pesticides that are less toxic to human health and the environment.

“We do a lot of policy dialogue with policymakers and relevant ministries in Uganda to see how we can monitor the uncontrolled use of HHPs, but also to ensure we have proper legislation and policies that speak to the use of hazardous pesticides and promotion of establishment of regulations that promote alternatives,” Akia says.

She emphasises the need for globally harmonised pesticide regulations, joint scientific assessment, coordinated monitoring and shared investment in agroecology. Akia is hopeful that growing public demand for safe, healthy nutritious food and the current policy focus on agroecology will support Africa’s transition to agroecology and other sustainable farming systems.

Anti-HHP campaigns are growing stronger across Africa

As evidence mounts regarding the harms caused by Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs) to both humans and the environment, more and more African civil society groups are taking action. Mizizi Magazine will continue to follow these developments.

New East African Community HHP strategy

In July 2026, the East African Community (EAC), representing Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda, adopted a regional strategy to progressively phase out HHPs over the next ten years.

The strategy commits partner states to identify and prioritise the most harmful pesticides, strengthen pesticide registration systems, update policies and legislation, improve the monitoring of pesticide-related harm, and promote the development and adoption of safer alternatives.

Significantly, it applies not only to agriculture but also to pesticides used in public health programmes, recognising that the risks posed by HHPs extend far beyond the farm. While decisions to ban individual pesticides remain the responsibility of national governments, the strategy provides a shared roadmap for countries to work together, harmonise risk assessments and build technical capacity. Read more [here](#).

In South Africa, momentum is growing

South Africa is also seeing growing momentum to reduce reliance on highly hazardous pesticides. Alongside increasing public concern following a series of pesticide poisoning incidents, civil society organisations, researchers and health experts are calling for stronger regulation, greater transparency and a faster transition to safer alternatives.

One of the leading voices is [**UnPoison**](#), a national network advocating for reform of South Africa's pesticide legislation and registration system. Since publishing the country's [first publicly accessible database of Highly Hazardous Pesticides](#) in 2023, UnPoison has highlighted that many pesticides classified as highly hazardous remain legally registered for use in South Africa, including products that have long been banned or are no longer approved in the European Union.

The organisation is also calling for the accelerated phase-out of these pesticides, stronger monitoring and enforcement, and greater public access to information about the chemicals used in food production.

At the same time, communities and farm workers are increasingly speaking out about the impacts of pesticide exposure. The [**South African People's Tribunal on Agrottoxins**](#), with support from the African Centre for Biodiversity and other leading CSOs, created a platform for farm workers, rural communities, scientists and civil society organisations to present evidence on the human and environmental costs of hazardous pesticides.

Through testimonies and scientific evidence, the tribunal has drawn attention to the experiences of those living and working alongside pesticide use, while calling for stronger protection of constitutional rights to health, a safe environment and access to information.

Gathering of CSOs in South Africa on HHPs

Convened by the Southern African Faith Communities Environmental Institute and GroundWorks, supported by the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, this meeting in May 2026 brought together CSOs already working on or concerned about the use of HHPs in South Africa's food and farming systems. Various experts presented on the harms presented by these synthetic products and the inability of South Africa's outdated pesticide legislation to adequately protect people or ecosystems. [We will continue to follow this story.](#)

Join the Global Alliance

Momentum is also building at the global level. In 2024, governments meeting at the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly endorsed the establishment of the Global Alliance on Highly Hazardous Pesticides under the Global Framework on Chemicals.

The voluntary, multi-stakeholder alliance brings together governments, United Nations agencies, researchers, civil society, farmers and the private sector to support the progressive phase-out of highly hazardous pesticides and accelerate the transition to safer and more sustainable alternatives. It is supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Development Programme.

Read more [here](#).



CLIMATE CHANGE

Stories from the farming frontlines of climate change.
Explore how communities across Africa are adapting to
shifting seasons, extreme weather and growing uncertainty
while building more resilient food systems.



Preparing for the heat: South African women farmers adapt ahead of predicted El Niño

By Marcia Moyana, Independent journalist, South Africa

*Tsakane Ngobeni in her field, Moretele
Credit: Tsakane Ngobeni*

South Africa's small-scale farmers are bracing for another El Niño as meteorologists confirm predictions for the weather phenomenon. According to the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), forecasts show an 80% likelihood of the weather phenomenon developing between June and August, and a near or above 90% chance that it will persist into November.

For women farmers like Lindi Nzwana in Evaton, Tsakane Ngobeni in Moretele and Cecelia Carolisen in Cullinan, South Africa, the WMO warning revives memories of the devastating 2023/24 El Niño, one of the strongest on record.

The South African government noted a drop of 21% in agricultural produce in that season. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that 29 million people in Southern and Eastern Africa were pushed into hunger.

Nzwana, who has farmed for a decade, grows winter staples including mustard spinach, Chinese cabbage, spinach, onions and kale. She says drought, extreme heat and heavy rainfall have become recurring threats to production.

What is El Niño?

El Niño is a natural climate pattern that occurs when parts of the Pacific Ocean become unusually warm, changing weather patterns around the world. Although it starts thousands of kilometres away, it can have major impacts across Africa.

In Southern Africa, El Niño often brings hotter and drier conditions, leading to droughts, water shortages, crop failures and livestock losses. In East Africa, El Niño can sometimes bring heavier rainfall, increasing the risk of flooding, damage to infrastructure and the spread of water-borne diseases.

Farmers face resource constraints

"With heat our crops get burned and with extreme rainfall they drown, causing damage to the crops and losses," she says. To cope with increasingly unpredictable weather, Nzwana has invested in practical adaptation measures like water tanks to store water during dry periods, mulching to retain soil moisture and a shade net to protect sensitive crops from extreme heat. Despite these efforts, she admits there are limits to what small-scale farmers can do with limited resources.

"We are not 100% prepared. Only crops that are under greenhouse and those that we have covered will at least survive but those on open land will definitely be affected."

– Linda Nzwana, smallholder farmer, Evaton

Same challenges, different locations

Several hundred kilometres away in Moretele, Tsakane Ngobeni, owner of Tsakane Agri Produce, faces similar challenges. Her five-hectare farm produces vegetables including beetroot, spinach, onions, butternut, cabbage and sweet peppers. Climate change has brought prolonged droughts, extreme heat and unpredictable rainfall patterns that affect yields and increase production costs.

During dry periods, water availability becomes a major challenge, while excessive rainfall can lead to waterlogging, disease outbreaks and delayed field operations," she says.

Ngobeni joined Solidaridad's network in 2023 and credits the organisation with providing technical training and support that has strengthened her business. The programme has also helped create employment, with 30 participants currently working on the farm.

"We diversify our crop production to reduce risk and carefully plan planting dates based on weather forecasts."

– Tsakane Ngobeni, smallholder farmer, Moretele

To prepare for another El Niño, Ngobeni has introduced drip irrigation to reduce water wastage, plans to expand the use of mulch to preserve soil moisture and continues to improve soil health through composting and the use of organic manure.

For Carolisen of Kgorang Co-operative, climate change has already left a painful mark for the co-op that has been doing livestock and crop farming since 2011. Among her livestock are cattle, sheep, goats and pigs – they also have crops like spinach, cabbage, mustard, beetroot and onions. She recalls losing an entire cabbage crop during heavy rains.

"My experience during disasters such as floods and droughts has been very challenging. I even lost my whole cabbages due to the heavy rain," she says.



Cecilia Carolisen's drip irrigation system, Cullinan
Credit: Cecilia Carolisen

Carolisen joined Solidaridad in 2024 and has already started implementing some of the skills and support she has learned through their support programmes. "Through their support, training and guidance, I have gained valuable knowledge and practical skills in farming, crop management, soil preparation, planting and caring for vegetables," she says.

Preparation must go beyond forecasts

Dr Jonathan Atkinson, newly appointed Managing Director of Solidaridad Southern Africa, says the experiences of farmers like Nzwana, Ngobeni and Carolisen reflect broader lessons from the last El Niño.

"Farmers who invested in soil health, diversified their crops and income streams, and had access to climate information generally performed better than those who did not."

– Dr Jonathan Atkinson, Managing Director
Solidaridad Southern Africa

For Atkinson, preparation must go beyond forecasts, suggesting drought-tolerant crops, water conservation and improved soil management as key priorities.

Despite the challenges ahead, the women remain committed to farming and to strengthening food security in their communities. Atkinson is optimistic because farmers across the region continue to demonstrate remarkable innovation and resilience.

He notes that collaboration between farmers, governments and private sector will ensure the region becomes a global leader in sustainable agricultural production and trade.

Climate change is making farming more expensive — and smallholder farmers are being left behind

By Thozama Dilata, South Africa

Livestock farmer Oscar Dumakude Credit: Thozama Dilata

When Oscar Dumakude bought his first goat in 2016, he did not expect climate change to become one of the biggest threats to his livelihood. From his home in Vilalisa, Vosloorus, South Africa, Dumakude has built a small livestock farming operation through determination and self-learning. What began with the sale of 10 chickens to buy his first goat has grown into a source of income and pride. Today, however, farming is becoming increasingly difficult.

Standing next to a kraal he built himself, Dumakude explains how changing weather conditions are affecting his animals. “The goats get sick when the seasons change,” he says. “I have to buy injections and vaccinations myself. The cheaper ones cost around R200, but the better ones start at R500.” His biggest concern is feed. “The feed used to cost about R40. Now it costs more than R100,” he says.

High temperatures put livestock at risk

For Dumakude, hotter temperatures and recurring dry conditions have made it harder to find affordable feed and maintain healthy livestock. Every increase in costs places additional pressure on a small operation already working with limited resources.

His experience reflects a broader challenge facing many small-scale farmers. Climate scientists have warned that rising temperatures, more frequent heatwaves and increasingly erratic rainfall patterns are likely to place growing pressure on food production and livestock farming. For livestock farmers, these changes can reduce the availability and quality of grazing, increase feed costs and create conditions that make animals more vulnerable to stress and disease.

Small-scale farmers lack support

Despite government efforts to promote climate adaptation in agriculture through Climate Smart Agriculture programmes, drought-relief initiatives and extension services, many small-scale farmers say they struggle to access support.

“When I was younger, government knew where the farmers were; there was help with things like vaccinations. Now it feels like only people with connections get help.”

– Oscar Dumakude, smallholder livestock farmer, Vilalisa

Experts caution, however, that adaptation cannot depend solely on individual farmers. Small-scale producers often require access to training, financing, technical support and climate information if they are to successfully adapt to worsening climate conditions.

For Dumakude, climate change is no longer an issue discussed only by scientists and policymakers. It is reflected in the rising cost of feed, the health of his livestock and the uncertainty that comes with every new season. Despite the challenges, he remains committed to farming. “We are trying our best,” he says. “But we need support if we are going to keep farming.”

As South Africa confronts a changing climate, the experiences of farmers like Dumakude highlight both the growing risks facing small-scale agriculture and the urgent need for adaptation support that reaches farmers on the ground.

About 30 kilometres away, in Johannesburg, farmer Solomon Mabhengeza is responding to the climate challenge differently. Mabhengeza, who runs Sun Mabhengeza Farm, has embraced permaculture principles that focus on building healthy soils, conserving water and working with natural ecosystems. His approach is based on improving soil health and water retention, making crops more resilient during periods of extreme heat and low rainfall. “We have managed to survive by observing and working with nature,” he says. Advocates of regenerative agriculture and permaculture argue that these methods can help farmers adapt to climate change by improving soil fertility, reducing water loss and strengthening resilience to drought.

Register on the [KCOA digital knowledge platform](#) to access organic, permaculture and agroecological knowledge products to support “working with nature” like farmer Solomon Mabhengeza.

Hope Beyond the Drought: How Rufunsa Farmers in Zambia Are Building Climate Resilience

By Samuel Mbewe, Zambia

Smallholder farmers, Chisunka Irrigation Scheme Credit: Samuel Mbewe

For years, the rhythm of life in Rufunsa District was dictated by the rains. When the rains came, families planted their crops with hope. When they failed, hunger and uncertainty followed.

Like many smallholder farmers across Zambia, communities in Chisunka Irrigation Scheme and Chawola Agricultural Camp depended entirely on rain-fed agriculture. But as climate change brought prolonged droughts and erratic rainfall patterns, farming became increasingly difficult, threatening both food security and livelihoods.

Today, however, a quiet transformation is taking place. At the Chisunka Irrigation Scheme, rows of green vegetables stand in sharp contrast to the dry landscape surrounding them. Here, 35 households are using a solar-powered drip irrigation system that allows them to grow crops throughout the year, regardless of rainfall.

The community cultivates crops such as maize and rape, providing both nutrition and a reliable source of income. What makes the scheme even more remarkable is its commitment to sustainable farming practices.

For Michealimba, Chairperson of the irrigation scheme, the project has been life changing.

“The irrigation system has given us food and income even during drought periods,” he says. “We no longer depend entirely on the rains. We can grow maize and vegetables throughout the year and support our families.”

– Michealimba, Chair, Chisunka Irrigation Scheme

Through support from [Community Technology Development Trust \(CTDT\)](#), farmers have been trained in producing Bokashi organic fertiliser using locally available materials. Fresh grasses, tree leaves and chicken droppings are transformed into nutrient-rich manure that improves soil fertility without the need for costly chemical fertilisers.

“We have learned that organic fertilisers protect our land while improving crop production,” Zimba explains. “It is a solution that works for both farmers and the environment.”

– Micheal Zimba, Chair of Chisunka Irrigation Scheme

A few kilometres away at Chawola Agricultural Camp, conservation farming is helping farmers withstand the effects of climate change. Among them is Joyce Mumba, whose fields remained productive during the severe drought that affected many farmers during the 2023/2024 farming season.

Using mulching, locally known as ‘Gamphani’, Joyce covers her fields with crop residues to retain soil moisture and reduce water loss. “While many farmers lost their crops because of the drought, I managed to harvest enough because of conservation farming,” she says.

Joyce has also embraced indigenous seed varieties, which are naturally adapted to local conditions and can survive with less rainfall. Combined with organic farming methods, the seeds have enabled her to achieve good yields despite challenging weather conditions.

Another farmer, Matildah Phiri, says conservation farming has provided her family with food security and additional income.

“Planting indigenous maize seed and practicing conservation farming helped me harvest enough maize for my household and for sale. These methods are helping us cope with climate change.”

– Matildah Phiri, smallholder farmer, Chawola Agricultural Camp



Smallholder farmer Joyce Mumba, Chowola Agricultural Camp Credit: Samuel Mbewe

Climate change exposes governance gaps in Malawi

By Andrew Joseph Kauwa , Malawi

On-farm input production Credit: Daniel Chinkhutha

Malawi is one of several southern African countries facing worsening food insecurity as climate change, recurring extreme weather events and the rising cost of agricultural inputs place increasing pressure on smallholder farmers.

According to Malawi's Minister of Agriculture, the country remains highly vulnerable to climate-related disasters, including cyclones and El Niño-induced droughts. The 2022/23 and 2024/25 growing seasons were both severely affected by extreme weather, leading to widespread crop failures.

With nearly 80% of Malawians relying on agriculture for their livelihoods, most farming on less than one hectare of land, these repeated shocks continue to threaten food security across the country.

While government programmes have sought to respond to these challenges, many farmers say the support has not been enough to help them recover. Across rural Malawi, families are searching for their own solutions as they rebuild their lives and adapt to a changing climate.

"As you can see, we don't have proper houses and in this month of June. We are eating maize bran, because we don't have food. We don't know how we will put food on the table for our families. Climate change really causes havoc to people in the rural areas."

– Malawian smallholder farmer

This story follows farmers from southern and central Malawi whose lives have been transformed by successive cyclones and floods. It also visits Tikondane Freedom Gardens in Lilongwe, where an innovative approach is helping restore degraded soils using processed human urine as fertiliser.

While government programmes have sought to respond to these challenges, many farmers say the support has not been enough to help them recover. Across rural Malawi, families are searching for their own solutions as they rebuild their lives and adapt to a changing climate.

"We are still struggling"

For Martha Phiri of Chiradzulu District, recovery has been painfully slow. Nearly three years after Cyclone Freddy devastated her community, she says many families are still waiting for meaningful support. Phiri lost six members of her family during the disaster and is the only survivor. Today she continues to rebuild her life while trying to farm under increasingly difficult conditions.

Rising waters, shrinking harvests

Further east, in Nankumba Village in Mangochi District along the shores of Lake Malawi, farmer Macgrey Chigalu faces a different challenge. As lake levels continue to rise following years of heavy rainfall, much of his farmland remains flooded and uncultivable. The family now depends on a small half-hectare plot that cannot produce enough food to meet their needs.

Chigalu is calling on the Malawi Government and development organisations to provide greater support to small and medium-scale farmers through starter packs of seed and other farming inputs that would help families return to productive agriculture.

Finding solutions through agroecology

Not all the stories are about loss. In Lilongwe, Tikondane Freedom Gardens is demonstrating how

locally available resources can help farmers rebuild soil fertility while reducing dependence on expensive synthetic fertilisers.

Farm manager Daniel Chikhuntha says the initiative began in 2022 after Cyclone Freddy left many fields badly eroded. The project collects and safely processes human urine for use as an organic fertiliser. Since adopting the practice, degraded soils have gradually recovered and productivity has improved. "We have been using processed human urine since 2022. Gardens that were badly eroded during the cyclone are now regaining their soil fertility," says Chikhuntha.

He believes more communities could benefit from adopting similar low-cost organic practices to restore soils damaged by climate change and reduce the financial burden of purchasing agricultural inputs.

Building resilience

For many farmers across Malawi, climate change is no longer a future threat but a daily reality. Extreme weather, rising production costs and limited support continue to undermine rural livelihoods. Yet alongside these challenges, communities are developing practical, locally led solutions that strengthen resilience and restore the land.

Their experiences highlight both the urgent need for stronger support for smallholder farmers and the important role that agroecological innovation can play in helping communities adapt to a changing climate.



On-farm input production Credit: Daniel Chikhuntha

Emergency mobile cash transfer: Rebuilding climate-resilient households in Zambia

By Misheck Nyirongo, Independent journalist, Zambia

Women in Kazembe, Lumezi District, awoke to find their homes and crops destroyed by flash floods. Credit: Patrick Soko

In the dead of night, flash floods tore through Lumezi district in Zambia's Eastern Province. For small-scale farmers, a single extreme flood erases years of development progress in hours. This is a misery reality of the devastating flash floods, due to climate change.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and Caritas – Chipata are shifting from traditional emergency aid to proactive, swift disaster-responsive support with a climate-resilient solution – an Emergency Mobile Cash Transfer to 125 households affected by the recent floods, which had a devastating impact on local food systems.

CRS's Country Manager, Katherine Overcamp emphasised the organisation's swift action to secure funding. "This is a gesture of solidarity to the people of Kazembe; we hope you will be able to build back your livelihoods," Katherine reassured.

An Emergency Mobile Cash Transfer is a rapid, non-contributory mobile cash payment distributed to the disaster-affected 125 households, providing them with liquidity to replace submerged food stocks (such as bags of

maize) and basic assets without slipping into deeper poverty. CRS's Emergency Response Coordinator, Senge Ndhlovu disclosed, "The beneficiaries are receiving an emergency mobile cash transfer of K400.00 per month for three months, totaling K1, 200.00." The total package of K1, 200.00 – equates to approximately US\$63.00.

CRS's Emergency Response Coordinator added that alongside direct liquidity, the CRS and Caritas – Chipata have continued distributing essential relief items such as washable sanitary pads, sleeping mats, mosquito nets, solar lights, chlorine and soap.

Caritas – Chipata and CRS team held community verification meetings, engaging floods-affected households to confirm eligibility details, validate beneficiary lists, and ensure accurate targeting for the Emergency Mobile Cash Transfer.

Rather than keeping these 125 affected families in highly vulnerable floodplains, Chief Kazembe of the Chewa-speaking people, has generously given elevated, safe land away from the floodplains for both residential and agricultural use. This response sets a new benchmark for humanitarian aid in Zambia.

It demonstrates that the best way to handle climate disasters is a combination of instant financial relief with long-term, structural support.

On these new, secure grounds, CRS and Caritas – Chipata are facilitating drilling of a borehole to guarantee ongoing access to safe drinking water.

As education is the only thing floods can't wash away, as such the aid allows families to keep children in schools without selling assets and to buy food rations. "I save some money for school requisites, so my children won't drop out of school," Jackson Ng'uni – the beneficiary said, "With the support, I paid off the debt I took after the floods, so my family wouldn't go hungry."

As these 125 households settle into their new, elevated homes – complete with clean, safe water and secure fields – they are not just recovering from a disaster; they are rebuilding a stronger, climate-resilient future that will withstand the storms ahead.



Top: Evidence of damage done by the flash floods in Lumezi; Bottom: Caritas – Chipata and CRS team verifying the eligibility details to validate the beneficiary lists, and ensure accurate targeting, for the Emergency Mobile Cash Transfer Credit: Patrick Soko



VOICES OF YOUTH

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20
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Malawian youths making millions of kwacha through agribusiness

By Maureen Kawerama, Malawi

Primary crop of MOYEMCO Credit: MOYEMCO

Youths in Monkey-bay, Mangochi District in eastern Malawi, have turned to agribusiness as a way of creating employment and generating income to support themselves and their families under the banner of Monkey-Bay Youth Empowerment Cooperative (MOYEMCO). Mizizi Magazine met with them to hear their story.

The youth of MOYEMCO are engaged in bird's eye chilli farming and processing in pursuit of economic independence amid limited formal job opportunities in the country. MOYEMCO Coordinator, Gift Ajibu notes that cooperative was formed in August 2021 after members grew frustrated with years of unsuccessful job searching. "We presented the idea to our ward councillor Mauka Mwalala who helped us with a piece of land where we began cultivating cash crops," he said. Chilli was chosen for higher profits.

Today, the cooperative has 60 members (26 men and 34 women) and has grown from small-scale production into a structured enterprise. Members generated more than MK2 million in 2022 with 800 kilograms of chilli. This was reinvested into buying 3.5 hectares of land and installing an irrigation system to boost year-round production.

This year the group expects to receive a MK267 million grant from the Agriculture Commercialisation programme, which will be used to purchase hand tractors, upgrade the irrigation scheme, buy fencing wire and procure seedlings and other inputs. It will also be used to construct a solar tent dryer and a storage shelter, among other facilities aimed at boosting productivity.

MOYEMCO Chair, Francis Amos Banda, said members also benefited from training sessions on chilli production organised by the Ministry of Youth and Sports in Mangochi with support from the Government of Iceland. "The knowledge and skills acquired have improved our farming practices, resulting in increased yields and higher profits. Whenever we encounter challenges, we consult agricultural experts who continue to provide us with technical guidance and support," says Banda.

One member, Ellen Divala said she uses proceeds from chilli sales to pay school fees for her siblings and support her household, noting that the cooperative has improved her livelihood and reduced financial struggles.

Another member Assan Soko, said he has used profits from the enterprise to purchase land where he plans to build a house in future, describing the initiative as life-changing.

Monkey-Bay Ward councillor, Mauka Mwalala commended the youth for embracing agribusiness, saying it is helping them stay engaged in productivity activities and away from indulging in risky behaviour.

MOYEMCO brings together members from eight youth clubs under the Monkey Bay and Kapichi Youth network, forming a collective effort aimed at strengthening youth participation in agribusiness and local economic development.

The initiative is being viewed as a model of youth empowerment in rural Malawi, demonstrating how agriculture can provide sustainable livelihoods.

“ I encourage these youth to remain committed and continue expanding the programme for the benefit of more young people.”

–Mauka Mwalala, Monkey-Bay Ward Councillor



Members of MOYEMCO Credit: MOYEMCO

A quiet youth farming revolution taking place in Zambia

By Juliet Makwama, Zambia

Hydroponic set-up Credit: Juliet Makwama

In Lusaka and Copperbelt provinces of Zambia, a quiet climate revolution is taking root through hydroponics farming and young people are leading. In Chongwe District, brothers Victor Kayombo, Kennedy Lubeka and Henry Nabende have spent the last two years proving that farmers do not need huge hectares of land to farm sustainably. That is because hydroponics enables a lot of food to be grown on even a small piece of land.

In hydroponic farming, farmers grow plants in a water-based, nutrient-rich solution without soil. The system submerges roots in water for direct delivery of essential minerals. Crops that can be grown include vegetables like kale, onion, lettuce and tomatoes, among others.

In an interview, Victor disclosed that having done hydroponic farming for two years, he would not hesitate to recommend this initiative to youths who want to grow food sustainably.

He explains that this group had been doing traditional agriculture and fish farming but were encouraged to engage in hydroponics after their interaction with farming groups enlightened them on the benefits of the technology.

Victor is of the view that youths should not use the excuse of not having land to venture into sustainable food production noting the hydroponics should stimulate young people's desire to enter agriculture as food can be grown in a small area.

"Many youths have limited access to land and to increase to full commercial capacity, one might need a big piece of land, but a backyard is a good start!

Youths will be contributing to environmental conservation while reducing reliance on buying food produced elsewhere."

- Victor Kayombo, hydroponic farmer, Zambia

Victor talks about the environmental benefits of hydroponics – reduced chemical pollution, minimal land usage and enhanced ecosystem protection. He notes that the hydroponic youth farmers are using 90% less water compared to traditional agriculture.

It also eliminates the need for soil and this prevents erosion and chemical runoff while producing much higher yields in smaller spaces," Victor highlighted. He said because the group was already doing aquaculture before embarking on hydroponics, it was easy to set up the closed loop system where water is contained and continuously recirculated in the pipes with the plants, a situation that eliminates the loss of water.

Victor had a message to youths across southern Africa and beyond as the region experiences climate change impacts on food production, with some experts already suggesting that farmers' capacity to grow more than enough food has drastically dwindled over the years.

"So for hydroponics, we also look at issues of water scarcity. Farmers just need to ensure there is water circulation through the pipes for all the plants and they don't have to worry about watering. In hydroponics, the water network is connected to the system. You have a pump down and the pipes on top connected to each other so the water will continue to circulate and all the plants will benefit," he said.

Talking about nutrition and the food produced through hydroponics, Victor said using this method, plants absorb essential elements directly from water saying the food produced is rich in nutrients such as potassium, nitrogen iron and calcium among others.

Victor sums it up by saying, "Hydroponics, sometimes referred to as farming without soil can indeed be a game changer that can increase not only food security, but also nutrition for households. It is a climate smart answer to water scarcity, soil degradation, and chemical pollution," he said.



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A person is cooking in a large, round, reddish-brown clay pot on a wooden table. Steam is rising from the pot. The table is covered with various fresh vegetables, including bunches of green leafy herbs, several red tomatoes, red chili peppers, and sweet potatoes. The scene is lit with warm, golden light, creating a cozy and inviting atmosphere.

MIZIZI KITCHEN

Step into the kitchens, stories and traditions that bring Africa's diverse food cultures to life. Through conversations with chefs, Mizizi Kitchen celebrates food as culture, memory, creativity and connection.

Rediscovering Zimbabwe's Food Heritage at the 2026 National Good Seed and Food Festival

By Zimbabwe Good Seed and Food Festival

Farmer seed Credit: Zimbabwe Good Seed and Food Festival

Across Africa, there is growing recognition that traditional foods hold the key to healthier diets, stronger rural livelihoods and more resilient farming systems. In Zimbabwe the National Good Seed and Food Festival has become a vibrant expression of this movement.

On 18–19 September 2026, the Harare Botanical Gardens will host farmers, seed custodians, chefs, food processors, researchers, entrepreneurs and consumers for a celebration of Zimbabwe's rich food heritage. Under the theme "Savouring Traditional Flavours," this year's festival will showcase indigenous ingredients, traditional recipes and the cultural knowledge that has nourished communities for generations.

The featured crop for 2026 is cowpea, one of Africa's oldest cultivated legumes

Valued for its drought tolerance, nutritional richness and versatility, cowpea is increasingly recognised as a climate resilient crop that can strengthen food and nutrition security while supporting sustainable agriculture. Festival visitors will discover many ways this resilient crop can be transformed into nutritious meals and innovative food products.

Colourful exhibition stalls will showcase locally adapted seed varieties, fresh produce and value-added products from farmers, community groups and rural enterprises across Zimbabwe. Visitors can sample authentic Zimbabwean cuisine at the food court, where traditional dishes prepared with indigenous ingredients will be served. Live cooking demonstrations will celebrate both cherished family recipes and contemporary ways of preparing local foods.

The festival also provides a platform for learning and dialogue. Farmers, researchers, nutritionists and policymakers will exchange ideas on seed sovereignty, biodiversity conservation, healthy diets and resilient food systems. Childrens' activities will inspire a new generation to value indigenous crops while music and cultural performances will create a lively atmosphere celebrating diverse traditions.

More than an annual gathering, the Good Seed and Food Festival demonstrates how agricultural biodiversity and traditional knowledge can contribute to sustainable development. By bringing together producers, consumers, researchers and businesses, the festival strengthens connections across the food system while creating opportunities for rural entrepreneurship and local markets. At a time when many African countries are seeking to build more resilient food systems and reduce dependence on imported foods, Zimbabwe's experience offers an inspiring example of how indigenous crops and local food cultures can contribute to sustainable development.

The festival reminds us that food is far more than nourishment—it embodies culture, identity, biodiversity and resilience.

Every indigenous seed conserved, every traditional recipe prepared and every farming practice passed from one generation to the next helps safeguard Africa's rich agricultural heritage.

As Zimbabwe prepares to welcome visitors this September, the National Good Seed and Food Festival offers an invitation to taste, learn and celebrate the country's remarkable food traditions.

It is a reminder that preserving traditional foods is not simply about honouring the past, but about building healthier people, stronger communities and more sustainable food systems for future generations.

Email hararefoodfestival@gmail.com or visit www.naturallyzimbabwean.com for more info.



Snapshots of the 2025 festival Credit: Zimbabwe Good Seed and Food Festival

How Chef Black Garlic is preserving African food stories

By Odette Mavunga, Curator of Mizizi Kitchen

Feature dish Credit: Clara Bwali (Chef Black Garlic)

Before a dish reaches the table, it carries a story – of land, tradition, family and identity. For Zambian food storyteller Clara Kapelembe Bwali, food is more than nourishment; it is a way of preserving culture and sharing African stories with the world.

Known as Black Garlic, Clara is a food photographer, recipe developer, content creator, and storyteller passionate about documenting and celebrating Zambian and African cuisine. Through her work, she highlights traditional dishes and ingredients that deserve recognition while creating a visual archive for future generations.

The name Black Garlic reflects both her love for food and her identity. Inspired by her favourite ingredient, garlic, and her connection to being African, Clara chose a name that represented her passion and her roots.

“My favourite ingredient in the whole wide world is garlic. I love how it brings a unique dynamic to dishes, and obviously black, because of me being Black, being African,” she explains. Her journey began after noticing a gap in how Zambian food was represented.

Before 2020, Clara saw that there were very few people documenting Zambian cuisine through food photography and storytelling. She decided to use her creativity to tell these stories and showcase the richness of her country’s culinary heritage.

For Clara, food is a bridge between generations. One dish that represents the uniqueness of Zambian cuisine is chikanda – a traditional vegetarian dish made from orchid tubers and groundnuts, known for its distinctive texture and versatility.

“I realised I was preserving culture by sharing about Zambian food and Zambian culture. I was creating a map for future generations to learn about my culture through food.”

– Clara Kapelembe Bwali (Black Garlic)

Clara believes African cuisine should be appreciated in all its diversity rather than placed under one broad label. Every country, and even different regions within countries, carry their own flavours, traditions, and cooking methods.

"I wish people would stop putting African cuisine under one umbrella," she says. "Our cuisine is diverse, it is rich, and it is unique to every country."

Her work also extends beyond storytelling to supporting stronger local food systems. Clara believes chefs, food entrepreneurs, and creators have the power to influence what people eat by promoting indigenous ingredients and supporting local farmers.

"When we choose and support local ingredients, we create demand on the market. The more we choose local ingredients, the more income there is for farmers, and the more it encourages them to grow," she explains.

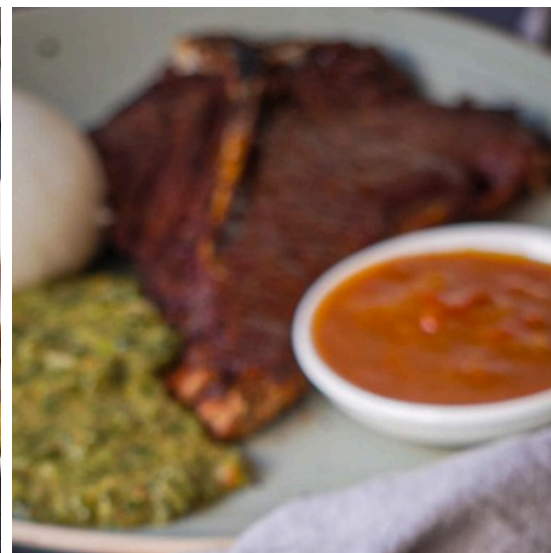
However, preserving African food traditions also means protecting the sustaining environment.

Clara has witnessed how climate change is affecting the availability and quality of local produce in Zambia, from changes in rainfall patterns to reduced harvest quality. "Too much of everything affects the taste or the quality of ingredients," she says, highlighting the need for sustainable farming practices and greater care for the environment.

Through photography and storytelling, Clara hopes to change how African food is perceived globally. She believes presentation matters because people often experience food through their eyes before they taste it. Looking ahead, Clara is hopeful about the future of African cuisine. She sees a new generation of chefs, photographers, and storytellers who are proud of their heritage and determined to share their own narratives.

"African cuisine is entering a new era, one where we define our own narrative."

- Clara Kapelembe Bwali (Black Garlic)



Left: Clara Kapelembe Bwali Credit: Mr Leon Photography Right: Selection of dishes Credit: Clara Bwali



MOVEMENT UPDATES

Catch up on network news, innovative partnerships and more.



Participants at KHSA regional knowledge exchange, Loctaguna Farm, Lusaka, March 2026 Credit: KHSA

KHSA partner updates

The Knowledge Hub for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Southern Africa (KHSA) is one of five regional hubs within the continental Knowledge Centre for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Africa (KCOA). Working through partners in Malawi, Namibia, South Africa and Zambia, KHSA's work connects farmers, trainers, civil society organisations, researchers, policymakers and communicators to strengthen skills, encourage peer learning, influence policy and increase access to approaches that can build healthier, more resilient and sustainable food systems across Southern Africa.

Read on to find out what KHSA partners have been up to over the past three months.

KHSA partners in Zambia

Over the past three months, [PELUM Zambia](#) has combined national media outreach with hands-on farmer training, promoting agroecology on national television while training farmers in post-harvest management and value addition to reduce food losses.

[Kasisi Agricultural Training Centre \(KATC\)](#) has been expanding its work on nutrition, climate-resilient crops, composting and farmer exchanges, while investing in new grain storage facilities to improve post-harvest management and strengthen local food systems.

KHSA partners in Malawi

[Soils, Food and Healthy Communities \(SFHC\)](#) returned from a regional learning exchange in Tanzania with renewed momentum to establish Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) in Malawi. Training involving farmers, government officials and standards bodies is expected to lay the foundation for farmer-led organic PGS certification and stronger local markets.

The [Kusamala Institute of Agriculture and Ecology \(KIAE\)](#) has been engaging with the Director of Land Resources Conservation, the lead institution

responsible for coordinating the development of Malawi's National Agroecology Strategy, as well as a range of other stakeholders involved in the process. At the community level, KIAE continues to demonstrate the practical benefits of agroecology through a series of BMZ-funded projects implemented over the past seven years in Dedza and Mangochi districts.

KHSA partners in Namibia

The [Namibian Organic Association \(NOA\)](#) has continued advancing agroecology through national policy processes, including work on Namibia's Agri-Food Sector Transformation Strategy and the establishment of monitoring systems for agroecology.

The organisation also expanded PGS in the country, engaged in biosafety policy discussions and showcased organic agriculture at national exhibitions and public events.

KHSA partners in South Africa

The [South African Organic Sector Organisation \(SAOSO\)](#) and [PGS SA](#) continue to strengthen South Africa's organic movement through the expansion of PGS, farmer training and community engagement.



Farmers and organisers of the PELUM Zambia training on managing post-harvest loss and value addition, Mumbwa, April 2026. Credit: PELUM Zambia



Top: NNF & NOA stand at Living Earth Expo, Windhoek. Bottom: NOA participation in the Technical Working Group on Agroecology and Organic Agriculture meeting. Credit: NOA



Establishment of large bulk grain storage facilities for soya, oat, maize and sunflower produced at KATC Credit: KATC



Launch of the Cape Peninsula PGS at Neighbourhood Farms, Cape Town, South Africa. Right: Sibz Boyce of Neighbourhood Farms showcasing earthworm farming. Credit: SAOSO



Youth gather at Mount Carmel, Eastern Cape to learn about agroecology. Credit: SAOSO

PGS groups in the Eastern Cape have been revitalised through training and public outreach, while a new Cape Peninsula PGS has strengthened urban organic networks. At the same time, SAOSO has invested in a new generation of storytellers through its Mobile Journalism programme, enabling young communicators to capture and share the stories of organic farmers and agroecological communities.

The Sustainability Institute has been exploring how digital innovation can support regenerative agriculture through a pilot project using smart soil monitoring technology. By providing real-time information on soil moisture, temperature and water use, the initiative aims to improve water efficiency, strengthen soil health and create new learning opportunities for students and community gardeners.

KHSA on the regional level

Regional Knowledge Exchange, Lusaka, Zambia
KHSA and the Research Agroecology Network (RAENS) Southern Africa project brought together country partners, civil society organisations, researchers and policymakers for a regional knowledge exchange at Loctaguna Organics in Lusaka. Alongside discussions on regional trends, advocacy and Zambia's draft National Agroecology Strategy, participants experienced KHSA's Farm Food Jam methodology, exploring practical agroecological innovations including composting, water harvesting and bio-inputs.

A multi-stakeholder policy dialogue provided valuable input on the strategy's progress, remaining priorities and the next steps towards its finalisation.

Participatory Theatre Training of Facilitators
KHSA and Content for Development (CfD) launched a pilot online Participatory Theatre Training of Facilitators for participants from all five KCOA Knowledge Hubs. The six-session course equipped 18 participants from seven African countries with participatory theatre tools to facilitate dialogue, explore community challenges and identify local solutions.

The programme culminated in the development and performance of three original plays and will inform the updated edition of KHSA's Facilitators' Guide to Participatory Theatre.

Mizizi Magazine special youth edition

On Youth Day, 16 June 2026, Mizizi Magazine launched a special youth edition produced in partnership with YPARD, ICLEI Africa's AfriFOODLinks programme, KHSA partners SAOSO and SFHC, and Green Action Week. The edition showcases stories, innovations and perspectives from young people helping to shape more sustainable and resilient food systems across Africa. Read the Mizizi Magazine Youth Edition.



KHSA

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BMZ commits to be a reliable partner in food systems transformation

Isaac Mafuel, P4C Ambassador

Aerial view of participants Credit: P4C

This past June, more than 75 advocates and policymakers from over 40 countries gathered in Berlin for the Partners for Change (P4C) Network Meeting, co-hosted by Germany's BMZ and GIZ. This was more than just a conference, it was a deeply human effort to change how we grow, share, and protect our food, ensuring everyone can live with dignity.

In her opening remarks, Constanze Neher, BMZ's Director of Global Issues, Trade, Poverty and Inequality Governance, set a collaborative tone for the days ahead, reminding partners that the scale of our global challenges is simply too vast for any one group to tackle alone. "No single actor can address climate change, hunger, and poverty," Neher shared. "It needs a joint, collaborative approach."

Affirming the Ministry's long-term dedication, she actively pledged BMZ's ongoing commitment to being a reliable partner in the global food systems transformation agenda.

At its heart, the gathering was about the people living and breathing this work on the front lines.

Mary Njeri Karanu, a social justice and rural development advocate, reminded everyone that the decisions we make today directly impact the children of tomorrow.

For Karanu, the path forward starts with basic, unifying needs like restoring soil health and providing school meals. It is about keeping human rights at the very center of our choices.

Making these big ideas work in real life requires connecting global plans with local realities. Camara Castro, a P4C Ambassador, emphasised bringing regional agreements directly into national plans to help communities withstand climate and economic shocks.

The power of local connection was especially clear to Stacia Nordin, a permaculture dietician from Malawi and a P4C Ambassador.

For her, the highlight was the final day when the Malawian delegation sat down to map out exactly how to bring these global ideas back to their home communities. It showed that real change happens when we translate high-level papers into local action plans.

As these advocates return home, the work shifts from Berlin's conference rooms to the fields, schools, and local communities where it matters most.

They return not just with strategies, but a shared commitment to feed the world with care and respect. This sense of shared humanity and collective hope was echoed by Angela Coetzee, Director of the Knowledge Hub for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Southern Africa.

"I am inspired being in this room of passionate African leaders and feel a profound sense of shared purpose. We cannot fix a broken food system alone. It takes trusted partnerships, shared learning and collective action."

– Angela Coetzee, Project Director,
Knowledge Hub for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Southern Africa



Regional hub representatives and partners of the Knowledge Centre for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Africa. From l to r: Frances Davies, Josephine Akia, Khaoula Mokrani, Isaac Mafuel, Genna Tessdal (YPARD), Angela Koetzee Credit: P4C



KCOA

Knowledge Centre for
Organic Agriculture and
Agroecology in Africa

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

Scan to discover more!



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Agroecology and Organic Leadership Course (AOLC) graduates, Cape Town, South Africa Credit: SAOSO

From learning to leading: Africa's new agroecology champions take root

By Academy of IFOAM – Organics International

Every thriving agroecological movement begins with people who dare to lead change in their own communities. Across Africa, a growing network of such leaders is emerging, equipped not only with knowledge but also with the confidence and commitment to transform their local food systems.

This vision came to life in May 2026 when 23 participants, including 12 women, graduated from the Agroecology and Organic Leadership Course (AOLC) in Cape Town, South Africa.

The nine-month programme, delivered by the Academy of IFOAM – Organics International and the Agroecology Promotion Programme (APP), with support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, was implemented in partnership with the South African Organic Sector Organisation.

The graduation ceremony marked a beginning rather than an end. Each graduate left with a Personal Development Plan to create tangible change in their communities.

Their ideas are as diverse as the landscapes they represent: expanding agroecological farming in rural areas, improving market opportunities for smallholder farmers, establishing a Bio-district pilot, and creating a community learning hub.

These are not isolated projects. They are practical solutions that contribute to South Africa's National Agroecology Framework while demonstrating the power of community-led innovation. When local people are empowered to lead, agroecology

becomes more than a farming approach; it becomes a pathway to resilient livelihoods, healthier ecosystems and stronger local economies.

The momentum is spreading across the continent. Between April and May 2026, new AOLC cohorts also celebrated their graduation in Kenya and Nigeria, adding fresh energy to a growing network of agroecology leaders committed to building sustainable and resilient food systems.

As Africa navigates the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and food insecurity, investing in people is proving to be one of the most powerful catalysts for transformation.

The Academy of IFOAM – Organics International is now inviting organisations to join this journey by hosting future AOLC cohorts.

By nurturing local leadership today, partners can help cultivate the changemakers who will shape Africa's food systems for generations to come. To learn more about becoming a member or course partner, contact academy@ifoam.bio.

Madagascar's Organic Revolution: Connecting Farmers to the World

Summary provided by Fortunate Nyakanda, Editor-in-Chief

Madagascan representatives Credit: ISSD

Madagascar's farmers have been employing natural methods to develop their land for generations. Using conventional wisdom instead of artificial insecticides and fertilisers. However, these smallholder farmers have long been unable to profit from the premium prices offered by international organic markets, even if they produce crops in ways that many international customers now appreciate most. Without formal accreditation, they had no way to provide international buyers with evidence of their sustainable practices.

That is now changing. Through a bold National Strategy for Organic Agriculture, Madagascar is transforming its organic sector into a catalyst for sustainable development. Led by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Sovereignty, with technical support from the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) and collaboration with the Syndicat Malgache de l'Agriculture Biologique (SYMABIO), the initiative is creating new opportunities for more than 60 000 farmers while protecting the country's extraordinary biodiversity.

The strategy, launched in 2021 following the adoption of a new Organic Agriculture Law, provides the policy, regulatory and institutional framework needed to expand organic farming, strengthen value chains and increase exports of high-value products such as vanilla, cocoa, spices and medicinal plants. It also recognises Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS), making organic certification more accessible and affordable for smallholder producers.

At the heart of the strategy is an innovative concept known as Territoires de l'Agriculture Biologique (TVABs) also known as organic territories where entire landscapes are managed according to organic principles.

By organising farmers into production clusters, these territories allow producers to share certification costs, access technical support, improve processing and collectively meet the quality and traceability standards demanded by international buyers.

The benefits extend far beyond trade. "These territories will contribute to inclusive local development by integrating local farmers into value chains. This will facilitate capacity building and secure sustainable income sources for them," explains Haintsoa Nirina Rakotomainty of Madagascar's Ministry of Agriculture and Food Sovereignty.

The organic territories also help protect landscapes from chemical contamination while supporting ecotourism, local markets and environmental conservation. IISD has played a pivotal role in helping translate the government's vision into action. From conducting policy and market analyses to developing implementation roadmaps and facilitating business partnerships, the organisation has supported Madagascar in positioning itself as a competitive player in the global organic marketplace.

One notable achievement was the organisation of business to business meetings between Malagasy cocoa exporters and Canadian buyers. These direct engagements created valuable commercial relationships while strengthening confidence between producers and international markets.

As one Malagasy exporter observed, "The main advantage lies in the trust and reliability they help build between buyers and suppliers. They provide a reassuring environment in which to establish an initial point of contact."

The results are already impressive. Between 2020 and 2024, Madagascar's organic farmland expanded from just over 103 000 hectares to nearly 170 000 hectares, while the number of organic producers increased from approximately 54 000 to more than 62 000. Challenges remain, including strengthening certification systems, mobilising investment and helping producers comply with evolving international regulations such as the European Union's deforestation requirements. Yet Madagascar's experience offers an inspiring lesson: when governments, farmers and development partners work together, organic agriculture can become far more than an environmental choice, it can be a powerful engine for inclusive economic growth, resilient rural livelihoods and sustainable trade.

Read more [here](#).

From visible to influential: AWOLA is fast-tracking women's leadership in agroecology

By Monica Nyaga, Gender & Youth Program Officer, PELUM Kenya



Across Africa, women are the backbone of agri-food systems, yet their leadership, innovation and enterprises often remain unseen. The Africa Women Leaders in Agroecology (AWOLA) continental initiative is changing this by empowering women to lead agroecological transformation.

The recent onboarding of AWOLA Cohort 2026 of 60 women leaders in agri-food systems brings together emerging leaders from Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Malawi, marking another milestone in building a strong continental movement. Through mentorship, peer learning and strategic networking, women from government, research, media, agroecological entrepreneurship, development organisations and grassroots communities are strengthening their leadership and influence across the sector.

The United Nations International Year of the Woman Farmer 2026 recognises the vital, yet often overlooked, contributions of women in agrifood systems. AWOLA amplifies the voices of rural women farmers and pastoralist women. These women are celebrated as custodians of land, seeds and indigenous knowledge, and recognised as frontline leaders driving resilient food systems. By connecting them with policymakers, researchers, markets and entrepreneurs, AWOLA ensures that their knowledge shapes policy and practice. Through the AWOLA Business Incubation Fund, women-led agroecological enterprises are scaling through business incubation, branding, certification and market access. Simultaneously, AWOLA is documenting women's innovations and stories of change, increasing their visibility and influence. More than a programme, AWOLA is building a vibrant movement where women mentor one another, grow businesses, inspire future leaders and accelerate Africa's transition to sustainable and inclusive food systems.

Would you like to be part of AWOLA? Join the upcoming Women in Agroecology Expo in September 2026. [Email](#) for more information.

Join Green Action Week

Be Part of the Sharing Community

Green Action Week is a global campaign that promotes sustainable consumption through sharing. Every October, communities around the world share knowledge, skills, resources and more, creating stronger communities and more sustainable ways of living.

Sharing is at the heart of Green Action Week. Every act of sharing brings people together, builds trust, encourages collaboration and helps create communities that are more connected, resilient and sustainable.

How to Get Involved

- 1 Plan a sharing community activity for sustainable consumption that connects with your existing work.
- 2 Host an activity in the first week of October
- 3 Share your activity and stories with the global community and tag:
- 4 #greenactionweek2026 #sharingcommunity @greenactionweek

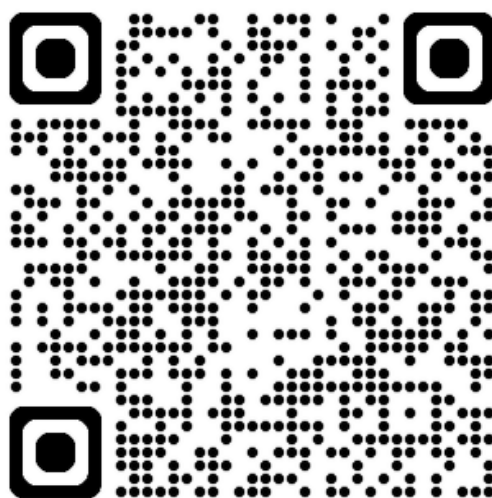
Ready to take part?
Find everything you need to get started at:
greenactionweek.org

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