



**biowatch**

**SOUTH AFRICA**

biodiversity | food sovereignty | agroecology | social justice

bulletin

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## Biowatch celebrates first 20 years!



*(Left) Rose Williams, Biowatch Director with Judge Poswa and Biowatch founding Trustees Rachel Wynberg and David Fig at the Durban celebration. (Top left) Retiring Biowatch Trustees Nombulelo Siqwana-Ndulo and Thoko Makhanya. (Top right) Justice Albie Sachs, Constitutional Court Judge (now retired) gave the keynote address at the Cape Town celebration. (Bottom right) Agroecology farmers and supporters from Biowatch's KZN project sites celebrate in Durban.*

2019 marks Biowatch South Africa's first 20 years. In January, linked to the Agroecology for the 21st Century Conference, we celebrated in Cape Town – our head office for the first 10 years. In June we celebrated in Durban, our head office since 2009.

Although a small organisation, Biowatch has had a marked and positive influence on democratic processes through our legal challenge of state secrecy in relation to genetically modified crops. Biowatch gained wide public prominence in 2009 with our victory in the Constitutional Court. Judge Justice Poswa, retired Judge of the High Court whose minority dissenting judgment opened Biowatch's

path to the Constitutional Court, gave the keynote address in Durban. Justice Albie Sachs, the Constitutional Court Judge (now retired) who ruled in the landmark case, gave the keynote address in Cape Town. "The Biowatch Case is a point of reference. Any time anyone in court is arguing about costs in constitutional matters they quote the 'Biowatch Case', which was a victory not only for Biowatch, and not just for the environment, but for all vulnerable and marginalised groups," said Justice Sachs.

Read more about what's become known internationally as the "landmark" Biowatch Case in *A Landmark Victory for Justice* (available for download at [www.biowatch.org.za](http://www.biowatch.org.za)).

Biowatch farmers learn how to make biofertilisers – Bokashi (fermented compost), "cow dung cream" and Cubokashi (fermented food scraps).



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Tsekiso Ranqhai, a PhD candidate with the SARCH Bio-economy Group at UCT, is the recipient of the first Biowatch Agroecology Scholarship.



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Lawrence Mkhalihi is recording a series of interviews with 1KZN TV on Biowatch's work, agroecology practices, and the problems with industrial agriculture.



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## From the director

Twenty years of Biowatch! A time for reflection, celebration (see front page) and thanks – thanks to the farmers and communities we work with, to our Board, our staff, our partners, our donors, our friends.

Two decades on and our work is still relevant, more urgent – we see locally and globally the destruction of biodiversity and land, and a future increasingly devastated by climate change. The time to act is now, while there is still space, hope and imperative to work towards change at a local level and at scale.

As the international groundswell of support for agroecology grows and gains momentum, we are delighted to announce the first Biowatch agroecology scholarship, which was awarded to Tsekiso Ranqhai, a PhD candidate with the SARCHI Bio-economy Group at the University of Cape Town. With thanks to a bequest left to Biowatch, we were able to take this significant step and initiate the first agroecology scholarship in South Africa!

2019 also marks the beginning of the second phase of the Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI). Biowatch will continue to be the project holder for the Southern African initiative (2019–2023), which in phase two will work towards achieving scale and impact in the region. This year, in addition to the current 13 partners, SKI will be welcoming new partners from Malawi and Zambia.

As Biowatch steps into the next phase of its life and work, our gratitude goes to retiring trustees Nombulelo Siqwana-Ndulo and Thoko Makhanya who have made great contributions to Biowatch's thinking, approach and resilience over many years. And we are delighted to welcome to our Board of Trustees Mvu Ngcoya, Senior Lecturer at the School of Built Environment and Development Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

We invite you to join us as we stand firm in our commitment to challenge the industrialised food system. Onwards to food sovereignty and climate justice!

*Rose Williams*

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## GM update

### ■ Spate of permit applications for GMOs tolerant to additional toxic herbicides

In February Dow AgroSciences Southern Africa (now Corteva Agriscience) applied for general release permits for GM maize tolerant to the herbicides 2,4-D and glufosinate ammonium. Monsanto SA has applied for a commodity clearance permit for three GM maize products with multi-stacked events. One of these is tolerant to Dicamba and glufosinate herbicides.

Biowatch has consistently spoken out against both GMOs and toxic herbicides, and the spate of applications for GM maize tolerant to ever-increasingly toxic herbicides is of great concern. The World Health Organisation's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classifies 2,4-D as possibly carcinogenic to humans based on evidence that it induces oxidative stress and causes immunosuppression. Farm-scale evaluations in the UK show that glufosinate-tolerant crops reduce the number and diversity of wild plants and the arthropods and other species dependent upon them, threatening biodiversity. EU experts conclude that there are possible long-term health risks for all mammals from glufosinate usage. Risks include damage to fertility and abnormalities in embryo development in mammals. Glufosinate is extremely toxic when swallowed, inhaled or when it comes in contact with skin, and prolonged or repeated exposure causes damage to organs. These dangers extend beyond their causal link with cancer, to potential reproductive impacts, and various impacts on aquatic life, soil organisms and insects.

## Meet Caili Forrest

We're very happy to introduce Biowatch Bulletin readers to Caili Forrest, our Monitoring and Evaluation Officer. Caili, who has a Master's in environment, society and development, Honours in geography and environmental management, and is busy with her gender studies Doctoral thesis, joined the staff in February. She will be responsible for developing and implementing M&E plans, tools and processes; programme learning to ensure the information generated improves the work and the organisation; driving critical research processes; and contributing to Biowatch's learning culture. Welcome Caili!





*Biowatch farmers learn how to make biofertilisers – Bokashi (fermented compost), “cow dung cream” and Cubokashi (fermented food scraps).*

## Knowledge sharing

### ■ Learning how to make and use biofertilisers

Last year, the Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI) supported two biofertiliser training workshops in Zambia and Zimbabwe, presented by the Columbian agroecologists and biofertiliser pioneers Juanfran Lopez and Carlos Pons. Lawrence Mkhali (Agroecology Manager), Mpho Gumede (Farmer Support Officer) and Nompilo Mkhabela, Biowatch agroecology farmer from Ingwavuma, attended the training along with other Southern Africa SKI partners.

They were excited to share learnings back home and the first Biowatch biofertiliser workshop was held in February. Biowatch farmers gathered in Ingwavuma at the homestead of Corrine Mngomezulu and learnt how biofertilisers create optimum conditions for beneficial microorganisms, which then support the soil’s natural nutrient cycle to build soil organic matter and feed crops. Everyone worked together over the course of a week to make Bokashi, native forest silage, liquid “cow dung cream”, Cubokashi (fermented food scraps), supermagro (solid cow dung pellets), seed coatings and ash brew for pest control.

### ■ Farmer learning exchanges

In April, 15 Biowatch agroecology farmers from project sites in northern KZN joined farmers from co-operative farmer groups in Nkandla, uThungulu District, to share learnings and ideas around processing and marketing food products – including planting plans, harvesting, sorting, packaging and negotiating prices. Farmers also shared knowledge about rain-fed crops, wild-grown fruit trees and vegetables, and mixed vegetable production using tunnels.

Through such knowledge exchanges, agroecology farmers can actively promote, demonstrate and advocate for sustainable agriculture that supports food sovereignty and is resilient in the face of climate change.

*Sthulile Mgwaba, a recent graduate from the Owen Sitole College of Agriculture (OSCA) began her Biowatch internship in May. She is responsible for the agroecology demonstration site at OSCA, and is working with and learning from Biowatch-supported Zimele farmers in KwaHhohho, KZN.*



*A highlight of our 20-year celebration in Cape Town in January was the announcement of the recipient of the first Biowatch Agroecology Scholarship. The scholarship for post-graduate studies, which is aimed at deepening the understanding of agroecology, including its science, practices and social movements, was awarded to Tsekiso Rانqhai (pictured above with Rose Williams, Biowatch Director).*

*Tsekiso is a PhD candidate with the SARCH Bio-economy Group at the University of Cape Town. Frustrated with the lack of food security in his rural home village, he is motivated to find solutions and will be examining the tensions between traditional smallholder farming practices and the government agricultural policies in Lesotho.*

# Climate Change Adaptation Strategy

Climate change is undoubtedly one of the greatest crises of our time, threatening all life on Earth. The devastating cyclones Idai and Kenneth, following a severe, prolonged drought, have been a forceful reminder of the impacts of climate change we can expect in our region.

Adaptation to and mitigation of climate change are inextricably intertwined, and Biowatch believes that bold and urgent action, within a framework of climate justice, is required to address these challenges. However, this is not evident in the draft National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy (NCCAS), which was published last month by the Department of Environmental Affairs.

Adaptation strategies must prioritise the conservation, protection and rehabilitation of our water as a critical resource and curtail developments that over exploit or pollute our water reserves. Agroecology must be advocated as the key objective in transforming our agriculture to realise both adaptation to and mitigation of climate change.

Read our comments on the draft NCCAS in the Biowatch submission, available in the *Publications and Documents* section on our website: [www.biowatch.org.za](http://www.biowatch.org.za)



*In April, Lawrence Mkhali (seated on the right), Biowatch's Agroecology Manager, recorded his first agroecology interview to be broadcast on 1KZN TV – a KwaZulu-Natal community-based television station. The interview covered general information about Biowatch's agroecology practices and the problems with industrial agriculture. Lawrence will delve more deeply into the components of this practice over the next few months. The interviews can be viewed on 1KZN TV, broadcasting on DSTV channel 261 and StarSat channel 486.*

## ■ Cyclone Idai – portent of more devastation to come

We wish to express deep condolences with families who lost loved ones, homes and livelihoods as a consequence of the recent, extreme weather events in the region – undoubtedly portent of more devastation to come as the world faces the calamity of climate change. Our Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI) partners in Zimbabwe – Chikukwa Ecological Land Use Community Trust (CELUCT), Participatory Organic Research Extension and Training (PORET), and Towards Sustainable Use of Resources Organisation (TSURO) – who are contributing to the enormous relief and rebuilding efforts in the cyclone-ravaged eastern region.

## First Southern African CSM meeting

In March, Vanessa Black – Biowatch's Advocacy, Research and Policy Co-ordinator – attended a gathering in Johannesburg to establish the first Civil society and indigenous people's Mechanism (CSM) for the Southern African Region. The CSM facilitates social movement and civil society input to the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), which is an intergovernmental body under the United Nations responsible for formulating policy guidelines to end hunger.

The three-day meeting agreed to regional priorities and a "plan of action". Biowatch is responsible for leading a regional working group on agroecology and for giving input to a working group on seed. The regional grouping nominated two representatives to the CSM Co-ordinating Committee – the decision-making structure of the CSM. Usiel Kandjii from the Eastern and Southern Africa Pastoralists Network (ESAPN) was elected to represent the region, and Vanessa Black was elected as the alternate Focal Point, on behalf of Biowatch and the Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI).

## WHAT'S COMING UP?

- Ingwavuma seed ritual  
– 26 July 2019
- 3-day agroecology training in Durban  
– end August 2019

**Biowatch Bulletin** will keep you updated. If you would like to join our e-mailing list, please e-mail your details to [info@biowatch.org.za](mailto:info@biowatch.org.za)