

SKI

Seed and Knowledge Initiative

STATEMENT FROM THE SEED AND KNOWLEDGE SEMINAR SALT ROCK, KWAZULU-NATAL, SOUTH AFRICA 13-15 SEPTEMBER, 2016

A CALL TO REVIVE, RESTORE AND STRENGTHEN FARMER-LED SEED SYSTEMS

Seed is the very essence of life. It is central to our diverse cultures and spiritualities, foods, ecologies, knowledge systems and economies.

But seed is under siege. It has been colonised and commodified by elite interests that support and promote destructive industrial agriculture, which is costing the Earth.

While industrial agriculture feeds less than a third of the world's population, it monopolises our land and water. This system – with its monocultures, hybrid and genetically modified seeds, chemical inputs and high fossil fuel consumption – is a leading contributor to climate change and environmental degradation. It creates unhealthy communities, poisoning us and filling our stomachs with corrupt calories, mostly devoid of nutrients. It also undermines and marginalises the diverse smallholder farming systems that have nourished us for centuries, creating economic dependencies and locking farmers into cycles of debt. It is rapidly being viewed as an outdated approach that is unable to respond to the changes the world is facing.

Our vision, together with that of millions of farmers, consumers and citizens across the world, is for our food production systems to revive and enhance tried and tested methods that are low-carbon and low-input in nature; to preserve and regenerate resources rather than destroy them; and to support diverse and small-scale farming systems.

This movement affirms and advocates for a world where agriculture is productive and sustainable, where food is nutritious and culturally appropriate, and where farmer-led seed and knowledge systems are valued and supported. Using agroecological methods to support and enhance our heritage of diverse seed and knowledge, we can contribute towards cooling the planet and decentralising our food systems to return them to the hands of local communities. It is this world, based on food sovereignty, which embodies ecological integrity and environmental and social justice.

About 45 participants from NGOs, social movements, gene banks, universities and research institutions in South Africa, Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Peru and Switzerland gathered in Salt Rock, near Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, from 13 to 15 September 2016, to discuss these issues and the ways in which farmer-led seed and knowledge systems are being revived, restored and strengthened.

Discussions were accompanied by a vibrant visualised process – see the final page, which was captured by Sonja Niederhumer from [Graphic Harvest](#).

The meeting suggested a number of actions to affirm the centrality of seed and its meaning in our lives:

Smallholder farmers and indigenous peoples – particularly women – are the custodians of rich knowledge on cultivation methods, seed management, and the uses and preparation of food and medicine. Traditional seed management practices select and share seed in response to environmental and cultural niches, plus taste and health, and are thus critical to optimising production for food and nutrition security, as well as managing climate risk. This biocultural diversity and indigenous knowledge must be made visible, reaffirmed and valued, including in national and international policy.

We recognise that culture, like seed, is constantly adapting, and we must innovate new ways of connecting with the earth and with each other. Seed and food festivals and rituals help to reconnect communities with the spiritual basis of food plus its role in building cohesive, co-operative societies.

We believe that gene banks are vital components of a farmer-led seed system, but must be reimagined as more proactive participants in a dynamic system of seed sharing, restoration and revival which respects traditional knowledge and serves the needs of smallholder farmers first. This should include access to gene bank materials and their repatriation to farmers.

Household and community seed banks should be supported to foster seed diversification and conservation appropriate to the needs, capacities and different ecological and social contexts of farmers, recognising that seed banks are elements of dynamic systems of seed exchange, use and constant breeding.

Access to appropriate and affordable seed and knowledge is vital for smallholder farmers. We support the de-commodification of seed systems through ensuring sufficient availability of useable, quality seed at the right times. Seed should be selected by farmers and for farmers, using modern science to support where needed.

Support should be given to on-farm production and distribution, recognising the vital role played by local exchange and seed sharing in achieving food and nutrition security and affirming relationships with each other and with the soil.

Science and traditional knowledge should be recognised as complementary contributors to research and solution finding. Multi-disciplinary research teams and farmers can be more creative and innovative when co-producing knowledge and evidence in collaborative processes based on respect and support. To facilitate this, an effort must be made to translate and disseminate research and scientific evidence in formats that are accessible for farmers, and to support farmers with appropriate and relevant science.

We contend that policies, institutions and budgets at all levels (i.e. local, national, regional, global) must be reformed to support farmer-led seed systems. This must include the reallocation of hidden and overt subsidies for industrial agriculture.

The youth are vital to the reinvigoration of farmer-led seed systems. Interest in seed and local farming systems and their contemporary relevance should be stimulated through innovation in appropriate technology, product development, and communication that attracts and involves the youth. Interdisciplinary training programmes should be developed and implemented that provide the space for youth to pursue careers based on alternative, sustainable agricultural futures, enabling and stimulating a diverse array of thriving local initiatives.

Mounting evidence should be documented and effectively communicated to show that agroecological systems are highly productive, resilient, and adaptive and contribute to cooling and healing the Earth.

All sectors should work to bring their different knowledges, experiences and skills together to support and assist farmer-led seed systems practically.

The Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI) is a collaborative partnership between [Biowatch South Africa](#), the [EarthLore Foundation](#) and the [Bio-economy Research Chair](#) at the University of Cape Town. Working closely with small-scale farmers in the southern African region, SKI has strong links with the African Biodiversity Network, and partners with Ukuvuna in South Africa; the Chikukwa Ecological Land Use Community Trust (CELUCT), Towards Sustainable Use of Resources Organisation (TSURO), Zimbabwe Smallholder Organic Farmers Forum (ZIMSOF) and Participatory Organic Research Extension and Training (PORET) in Zimbabwe; the Zambia Alliance for Agro-ecology and Biodiversity Conservation (ZAABC), Community Technology Development Trust (CTDT) and ReScope in Zambia; and Soils, Food and Healthy Communities (SFHC) in Malawi.

The primary aim of SKI is to revive and enhance traditional seed and knowledge systems and to deepen understanding about their functioning, within the context of supportive agricultural, cultural and ecological practices. The initiative's long-term vision is to collaborate with communities, national and regional partners towards a future where small-holder farmers, and women in particular, are empowered to secure seed and food sovereignty on all levels.

FURTHER INFORMATION OR QUERIES: Jaci van Niekerk jaci.vn@gmail.com

Supported by:

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| African Biodiversity Network |
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| Alejandro Argumedo, Asociación ANDES |
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VISION

FARMER LED SEED & KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS ARE REVIVED & RESTORED



NEEDS & ACTIONS

CONTEXT



ACTORS