



bio watch

SOUTH AFRICA

biodiversity | food sovereignty | biosafety | social justice

bulletin

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Securing a sovereign future for seed and food in Southern Africa ... what could be more important?

An innovative regional project, launched this month in South Africa, aims to revive, enhance and deepen understanding of traditional seed and knowledge systems. Building on past and on-going joint activities, a synergistic relationship between Biowatch South Africa, the Mupo Foundation and the NRF Bio-economy Research Chair and Environmental Evaluation Unit at the University of Cape Town, has been cemented into an exciting, long-term collaboration: the Seed and Knowledge Project.

The project will work with communities, national and regional partners towards a future where local

communities and small-holder farmers, and women in particular, are empowered to secure seed and food sovereignty on all levels. The project will support small-scale farming systems and will work to revive and enhance tried and tested food production methods



which are low-carbon and low-input in nature and which preserve and regenerate resources.

Agro-ecology and seed diversity can cool the planet and create a world where agriculture is productive and sustainable, and seed and food systems are in the hands of local communities.



The "ABN Tree" at Nanyuki, Kenya where the African Biodiversity Network held its biennial meeting in September. Biowatch joined 28 participants from the different ABN partner organisations for the inspiring meeting and celebration of 10 years of ABN.

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our country. We thank you Tata Madiba. Rest in peace.

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Worldwide, the past year has seen an exceptional thrust to amend and implement policy and legal documents on intellectual property on seeds, plant variety protection and seed certification. But Civil Society has not been idle.

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Three-day Agro-Ecology, Seed and Knowledge Systems exchange was a first step in establishing both a



community of collaborators and a community of practice.

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From the director

I write this while South Africa and the world are mourning the death of Nelson Mandela, our much loved and respected leader. We take strength and inspiration from his life in our struggle for social and environmental justice.

As an organisation we recently have had much time to reflect on our work with a three-year organisation evaluation as well as an in-depth strategy planning process. But we have also had time to celebrate with an occasion marking Lawrence Mkhali's 10 productive and inspiring years at Biowatch – Lawrence is Biowatch's Agro-Ecology Manager.

We have experienced the development and strengthening of a powerful community of practice with our partner organisations – in particular, at the biennial African Biodiversity Network meeting in September which was then followed by the Biowatch Agro-Ecology, Seed and Knowledge workshop.

Participation in the World Committee on Food Security meeting in Rome in October was significant. Having a civil society mechanism (CSM) made a fundamental difference to civil society's participation in the process and makes it very different from United Nations processes such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change! The two "tracks" that we followed were those on "Responsible Agricultural Investment" and "Biofuels".

We have also made submissions on the draft Plant Breeders' Amendment Bill, the Plant Improvement Amendment Bill and the draft national Agro-Ecology Strategy.

Rose Williams

P.S. In 2014, we will be keeping watch on "Climate Smart Agriculture" – or not-so-smart agriculture!

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Thank you Madiba Rest in Peace

It is an emotional time for us as Tata Mandela – Madiba – means so much to us, and from the outpouring of grief and support from around the globe, we know that the world shares our profound sense of loss.

Madiba was the embodiment of our hopes and aspirations, not only for ourselves as individuals but for our country, particularly the powerless and downtrodden. He did all in his power in his lifetime to start the process of liberating us and all of humanity from all forms of injustice. Even as he retired from an active public life, his mere presence among us inspired and encouraged us and we secretly wished he could live for ever. But as Maya Angelou in her powerful tribute to this icon put it, "Mandela's day is done." The work of liberating all of our people from oppression, poverty and injustice now remains with us. He could not be here forever, a reality that was hard for us to accept but now the task remains with us. We have the light and inspiration his extraordinary life provided to guide us. As Tata Madiba said: "Poverty is not an accident ... it is man-made and can be removed by the activities of human beings."

Tata Madiba, your belief in justice, your humility and moral courage that allowed you to value every living being will continue to encourage us in Biowatch to confront the conditions that create poverty, deprivation and perpetuate injustices in our country. We shall continue to draw strength and inspiration from your example and lessons as we strive, through our work, to contribute to the attainment of a more just world. Your treatment of all as equally deserving of respect, decency and dignity will continue to be our guiding light in the task ahead. We are fortunate to have lived in your lifetime and for the opportunity to learn these lessons. Madiba will live forever. May his soul rest in peace.

Dr Nombulelo Siqwana-Ndulo, Biowatch Trustee



Priscilla Hon of the Gaia Foundation (centre), who visited Biowatch in October, with Lawrence Mkhaliphi (Biowatch) and Tholakele Mfekayi and Khalesakhe Mkhwanazi (Biowatch farmers) in KwaHhohho.



Officials from the national Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) visited Biowatch in June. They saw agro-ecology in practice and meet with representatives of the five Biowatch farmer projects.

Seed laws – take note!

Worldwide, the past year has seen an exceptional thrust to amend and implement policy and legal documents on intellectual property on seeds, plant variety protection and seed certification. These all have a direct impact on the rights and legality of farmers to use, save, exchange and sell the seeds of their harvest. Civil society has not been idle and the year has also seen many activities in resistance to these unjust agreements and policies, culminating in the launch of a Seed Sovereignty Campaign by La Via Campesina in Zimbabwe in November.

The African Regional Intellectual Property Organisation (ARIPO) drafted a Regional Policy and Legal Framework for Plant Variety Protection (PVP) that was endorsed by its members in November and is expected to be adopted in March next year by the Minister's Council. The Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA) developed Seed Trade Laws that will make the sale of uncertified seeds illegal within member countries. The SADC Harmonised Seed Regulatory System came into force in July and a PVP Protocol is still in the pipeline. In June, South Africans had the opportunity to comment on changes to the Plant Breeders Rights Act (PBR) and the Plant Improvement Policy and Act. Later in the year a Draft Policy on Intellectual Property was published for comment.

PBR, PVP and Seed Certification and Trade laws reinforce each other and create a legal environment that protects and promotes the exclusive ownership of seeds by multinational seed companies. The laws give no recognition to the status of farmers' varieties, or the importance of commonly held genetic resources. For this to work, the same laws must exclude and even criminalise the customary activities of farmers to re-use and share their seeds. At Biowatch we strongly believe that preceding any consideration of a law that gives private ownership to what used to be commonly held, is the recognition that private commercial rights can never override the rights of farmers and humankind to save seed and to grow food which feeds communities.



Lawrence Mkhaliphi, Agro-Ecology Manager (right), recently visited a number of projects and community seed banks in Zimbabwe. Here he is pictured at the Mazoya Family Orchard with a group from CELUCT (Chikukwa Ecological Land Use Community Trust) and Mr and Mrs Mazoya.

GM update:

Insect resistance in GM maize

"Pest resistance to Cry1Ab Bt maize: Field resistance, contributing factors and lessons from South Africa" by Johnnie Van den Berg (North-West University), Angelika Hilbeck (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology) and Thomas Bøhn (GenØk – Centre for Biosafety in Norway) has just been released.

This is a highly significant paper and needs to be taken into account, especially by farmers who are planting or thinking to plant GM crops, and by government regulators of GM crops. Pest resistance is a reality!



Small-holder farmers from Zimele (Mtubatuba) and Impisethunjini (Pongola) enacted a "record keeping process" role play during the October report back meeting on record keeping.



Record keeping pilot an "enthusiastic" success

Farmers from two Biowatch project sites (Zimele, Mtubatuba and Impisethunjini, Pongola) recently participated in a record-keeping exercise to identify and develop the best methods for collecting and analysing data.



One of the main objectives of the exercise was to determine the relative volume and value of sales to local and informal markets, and the domestic retail and formal market, as well as that of produce consumed in the household.

Results from this study will inform Biowatch's record keeping training and processes with small-holder farmers.

In September, Biowatch hosted a three-day Agro-Ecology, Seed and Knowledge Systems exchange in Mtunzini, KZN. By exploring ideas for common engagement, the workshop was a first step in establishing both a community of collaborators and a community of practice. (Top) Participants from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Swaziland and the United States visit the Zimele market garden near Mtubatuba; (bottom left) display at the Zimele community seed blessing; (bottom right) Ndandu Nevhutanda, Mupo Foundation, presenting on "Seasons and Seeds" using eco-calenders.



Pictured at the World Committee on Food Security (CFS), which took place in Rome in October, are Sheelu Francis (Tamil Nadu Women's Collective), Shiney Varghese (IATP) and Rose Williams (Biowatch). Civil society had a key role to play in the CFS, particularly with respect to issues around small-holder farmers and the negative impact of biofuels on food security. The Tamil Nadu Women's Collective was one of the winners of the 2013 Food Sovereignty Prize awarded by the US Food Sovereignty Alliance.

WHAT'S COMING UP?

- Biowatch farmers' exchange with Mupo Foundation: March 2014
- Biowatch national seed workshop: May 2014
- 14th Congress of the International Society of Ethnobiology in Bhutan: June 2014

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