



biowatch

SOUTH AFRICA

biodiversity | food sovereignty | agroecology | social justice

bulletin

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Agroecology is best practice: a book launch and a celebration



(Above left) At the Durban launch of Biowatch's new book are, from left to right, Mpho Gumedre, Biowatch Farmer Support; Thokozile Mvubu and Rhoda Mvubu, both smallholder farmers from Ingwavuma; and Samu Zuma, Biowatch Agroecology Administrator. (Above right) Biowatch Board members Beni Williams and Thoko Makhanya paging through the book.

We launched our new book *"Agroecology is best practice: Biowatch South Africa's work with smallholder farmers"* in October at the Durban Botanic Gardens. A highlight of the event, which celebrated the dedication of the farmers as much as it launched the book, was the handing out of certificates of thanks to the many farmers whose stories are included in the book.

The 64-page book, which explores the workings of eight homestead farms in northern KwaZulu-Natal, illustrates Biowatch's agroecology best practices through the personal experiences of each of the smallholder farmers. The book showcases Biowatch's work with farmers in four key areas: diversity; soil and water; seed; and advocacy – and speaks to what agroecology is and how

it is undertaken in very challenging areas in KwaZulu-Natal. This is not to say that these best practices are only applicable in such contexts – indeed, agroecology is needed locally and globally if we are to address the calamities of climate change (drought and floods; destruction of biodiversity; and increasing global food and nutrition insecurity).

It is our hope that this inspiring book will catalyse action from farmers, policy-makers, workers in civil society, and anyone interested in how we can transform our current destructive food and agriculture systems.

To download the book or order a printed copy please visit our website at www.biowatch.org.za

Farmer representatives from Biowatch-supported project sites in northern KZN gathered



for an annual reflection, learning and planning event.

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Biowatch attended the 45th CFS in Rome. Food security guidelines that were negotiated and agreed



can be used to hold governments to account.

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Hosted by UCT, Biowatch, Cornell University and SKI, the three-day "Agroecology for the 21st Century"



Conference will take place in Cape Town in January.

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From the director

One of our high points in 2018 was the launch of our publication *"AE is Best Practice: Biowatch's work with small holder farmers in KZN"* (see page 1). The book is the culmination of many years' work and it's satisfying to have this in the public domain – something to add to the growing groundswell of support for agroecology.

As this groundswell gains momentum, so the contestation around it grows. We see this in many different contexts, but particularly in one of the processes that we have been involved in – the Committee on World Food Security's High Level Panel of Experts' (CFS's HLPE) report: *"Agroecological approaches and other innovations for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition"*. In the draft report, climate smart agriculture (CSA) is included as an "innovative" approach even though so much that is toxic, high carbon-footprint and destructive of smallholder farmers' rights hides under the CSA label. A joint submission has been made to the HLPE by 50 organisations from around the world, including Biowatch, voicing concerns about CSA (see <https://tinyurl.com/yamb2h6t>).

A further concern is that if CSA is included under agroecology in the report, this will muddy the waters – what is urgently needed now is clarity, strategic action and social justice to reduce global emissions and deal with the unprecedented global challenge of climate change. The world will not survive thinking that is under-pinned by a savage system where new ways to make profit are consistently sought, no matter what.

We continue to strengthen our work at all levels to achieve voice and scale, and a sample of the diverse activities and fora that Biowatch was involved in during the second half of 2018 is included in this Bulletin.

In 2019 we will be celebrating Biowatch's first 20 years! It has been a roller-coaster ride, but so much has been achieved and there is much to celebrate. We begin 2019 by co-hosting the "Agroecology for the 21st Century" conference (see page 4; and watch the video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XpO50YgbGcQ&feature=youtu>.)

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Policy updates

■ Bills approved despite objections

Despite over a thousand written and oral objections, the Plant Improvement and Plant Breeders' Rights Bills have been approved with two minor administrative amendments. When enacted these will exclusively protect the interests of commercial plant breeders rather than farmers who have developed our seed heritage over millennia. The extent to which smallholder farmers will be able to save, plant, exchange and sell seed will be defined in regulations that will be developed in 2019.

■ Farmers' rights need strengthening

Several organisations have called for South Africa to sign the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (the Plant Treaty) which requires the protection of farmers' rights in contrast to the protection of breeders' rights in the International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV). The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) initiated consultations on whether South Africa should complete its accession to the 1991 version of UPOV, which affords breeders stringent patent-like protections, and whether we should sign the Plant Treaty. In addition to a written submission, Biowatch attended a two-day consultation workshop in Pretoria in October where debate was heated as civil society argued against accession to UPOV '91. DAFF has committed to open engagement on this and other issues, including how farmers' rights can be strengthened in a range of policy areas.

We'll keep you updated on these and other policy issues in 2019. To join our mailing list visit www.biowatch.org.za

Meet Blessing Zama

We're very happy to introduce our readers to Blessing Zama, our Finance and Operations Manager. Blessing, who has been doing consulting work for Biowatch since September 2017, joined the staff in April. Blessing is a qualified Business Accountant in Practice, Tax Practitioner, and is a member of The Southern African Institute

for Business Accountants and The South African Institute of Tax Professionals. Before joining Biowatch, Blessing worked for Oxfam Australia (South Africa Office) for 13 years as the Chief Financial Officer and Company Secretary. He also previously worked at Health Systems Trust as an accountant.





(Top left and right) Farmer representatives from Biowatch-supported project sites in northern KwaZulu-Natal reflect on learnings, challenges and progress in 2018 and make plans for 2019.



(Right) A highlight of the two-day event was the awarding of 2018 Certificates of Agroecology Achievement to 11 more farmers. (Left to right) Mpho Gumede, Biowatch Farmer Support; Thembisile Sibiya, agroecology farmer; and Pumla Mabizela, Biowatch Programme Manager.



Farmer gathering and annual reflection

In November, 26 farmer representatives from Biowatch-supported project sites in northern KZN gathered for an annual reflection, learning and planning event. These representatives, from KwaHhohho in Mtubatuba, Tshaneni, KwaNgwanase, Pongola and Ingwavuma, included experienced agroecology farmers, young farmers and aspiring farmers.

The annual gathering is a space for knowledge sharing and for workshopping agroecology solutions for challenges farmers have been faced with during the year. In 2018 these included pest control in seed storage and the problem of livestock invading household food gardens.

The event ended on a high note, with certificates of achievement being awarded to farmers who in 2018 have successfully adopted and implemented eight of Biowatch's agroecological practices. These easy to implement yet effective practices are used to measure the extent to which individual farmers have adopted agroecology and include:

1. No synthetic fertilisers.
2. No synthetic pesticides, insecticides or herbicides.
3. No GMOs or commercial hybrids.
4. Composting.
5. Fertility beds (including deep trench beds, double-dig and single-dig beds).
6. Use of grey water.
7. Mulching.
8. Saving the seed of at least 14 traditional crops.

Biowatch at KZN Agricultural Summit

A KZN Provincial Agricultural Summit was hosted by Premier Willies Mchunu and MEC Themba Mthembu from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) in Pietermaritzburg in November. The Summit provided a concluding opportunity for stakeholders to input into the provincial Agricultural Development Master Plan.

The Plan aims to tackle stubborn poverty, unemployment and inequality, especially in rural areas, by addressing challenges identified in the KZN agricultural sector. Interventions are planned in 11 programmatic areas. These promise important interventions for the conservation and more equitable sharing of resources including identifying and preserving high value agricultural land; more efficient water use and expansion of access for smallholder producers; a strong focus on supporting smallholders especially women, youth and those with disabilities; and improving household food and nutrition security.

Biowatch was invited to make a presentation at the Summit in the commission discussing smallholders. While the presentation was enthusiastically received by some of the farmers attending, we were a lone voice for the urgent need to shift to sustainable, agroecological production. Most speakers emphasised industrialised farming methods to help smallholders produce commodities for local and export value chains. There is much work to do in sharing our evidence that agroecology is more productive and produces more nutritious food than can be bought from the industrial food system.



José Graziano da Silva, Director General of the UN FAO, gave an opening address at the CSM prior to CFS 45.

UN and governments meet to end world hunger

Vanessa Black, Biowatch's Advocacy, Research and Policy Co-ordinator, attended the 45th Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in Rome in October. The CFS is a United Nations body, hosted at the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) in Rome, that brings together world governments to identify and develop policy guidance on issues affecting food security, in support of ending hunger by 2030. CFS priorities and policy guidelines are negotiated and agreed to by consensus, and although these are not legally binding, countries are expected to implement the guidelines nationally, and therefore are tools we can use to hold governments to account. The CFS is a unique space in that non-government participation in the process is officially facilitated through the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) and the Private Sector Mechanism (PSM).

Although this year's CFS was not negotiation-heavy, much lobbying took place outside of plenary. The pro-industry World Farmers' Organisation's 60 youth delegates advocated "innovation" while private sector side-events echoed "innovation" rhetoric, gearing up around the 2019 agroecology workstream negotiations. This workstream was broadened to include "innovation" in an attempt to include climate-smart and other industry-driven agendas.

WHAT'S COMING UP?

- Agroecology for the 21st Century Conference: Cape Town, 28–30 January 2019
- Biowatch 20-year celebration: Cape Town event, 28 January 2019
- Biowatch 20-year celebration: Durban event, 12 June 2019

Biowatch Bulletin will keep you updated. If you would like to join our mailing list, please e-mail your details to info@biowatch.org.za



Along with other Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI) partners from Zimbabwe, South Africa, Zambia and Malawi, Biowatch staff members Lawrence Mkhali and Mpho Gumede attended a hands-on biofertiliser training in Zambia in September. "Revitalising the health and productivity of soils and plants through the use of fermented biofertilisers" was hosted by the Chinyika community in Gutu, and was one of two such events organised by SKI in 2018. The other took place in Zambia in August. Biofertilisers, a practice developed by smallholder farmers in Latin America and embraced by agroecology farmers around the world, are made from natural ingredients and contain living microorganisms that promote and feed healthy soil and plants.



Agroecology is increasingly recognised as a viable and innovative approach that can be scaled up with adequate policy support. As a science, a practice, and a vibrant and growing movement, agroecology presents a way of regenerating relationships between people, food and ecosystems, for reversing the damages of our colonial and industrial agricultural past, and for restoring and reclaiming arable land as a productive rather than as an extractive activity.

Against this backdrop, the University of Cape Town, Biowatch, Cornell University and the Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI) are hosting a three-day conference in Cape Town in January. The conference will bring together a wide range of contributors across disciplines and sectors to discuss the present state and future possibilities of agroecology in South Africa and beyond. For more information go to www.agroecologyconference.co.za

