



biowatch
SOUTH AFRICA

bulletin

JANUARY 2024

biodiversity | food sovereignty | agroecology | social justice

Agroecology Farmer Fair revives interest in ancient grains

The much-anticipated and well-attended 2023 Biowatch Agroecology Farmer Fair took place in October at the Siyazisiza Agri Support Centre near Mtunzini in northern KwaZulu-Natal.

Gathering at this year's event were agroecology farmers from Biowatch-supported farming groups in KwaZulu-Natal, as well as farmers from Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI) partners who had travelled from Mpumalanga, Limpopo and the Eastern Cape.

The vibrant agroecology event included much celebration with information and seed exchanges, demonstrations and discussions, and sharing of learnings and recipes.

During the Agroecology Farmer Fair, Biowatch launched a campaign to revive interest in millet and sorghum, encouraging farmers to grow, harvest, process, eat and share these important, climate resilient small grains. People have collected, eaten and domesticated the seed from wild grasses over millennia to develop the cereals we know today. Since the Green Revolution a handful of staple grains have been developed as commodity crops by multinationals profiting from their breeding, trading and processing for convenience foods. Our locally adapted and nutritious grains have been side-lined and stigmatised.



Celebrating Farmers' Rights at the 2023 Biowatch Agroecology Farmer Fair. See page 3 for more photos, and you can watch a highlights video here: www.biowatch.org.za/2023-agroecology-farmer-fair/

Climate change is projected to threaten food security in Africa and to increase the risk of malnutrition, particularly in children. The nutritional and health benefits of millet and sorghum, and their suitability for cultivation under adverse and changing climatic conditions, are reasons why we are encouraging smallholder agroecology farmers to revive, grow and utilise these traditional crops. Biowatch commits to supporting farmers on this journey.

You can download the Biowatch Ancient Grains Info Sheet from our website at: www.biowatch.org.za/download/crop-information-sheet-our-ancient-grains/

More photos from the 2023 Biowatch Agroecology Farmer Fair where elders shared their



traditional knowledge about millets and sorghum.

See page 3

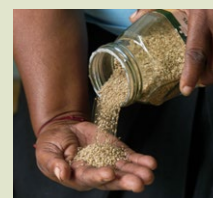
During the November "Come and See" agroecology exchange visit, guests explored the KwaThwala



homestead's flourishing home food garden and fields.

See page 3

An update on the stakeholder-government consultations focusing on contentious aspects of the



draft June 2022 Regulations to the PI and PBR Acts.

See page 4

From the director

In 2024 Biowatch will be celebrating our 25th anniversary! This milestone feels momentous and celebratory, but also bitter-sweet considering the context of exacerbating inequality, climate crises, increased corporate power, unrelenting extractivism and biodiversity loss.

But there is much to celebrate including some recent events such as the Biowatch Agroecology Farmer Fair. This was an inspiring and joyous affair (see pages 1 and 3), affirming the power of people and the power of life.

Reflecting back on the past six months, it has been inspiring being involved in many collaborative processes – the ones that are picked up in this *Bulletin* range from smallholder agroecology farmers availing their homesteads for “*Come and See*”, the Just Transition dialogues with civil society partners, and the award-winning documentary, *The Last Seed*, co-produced with the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA), and PELUM Tanzania – powerful evidence of the connections across Africa.

We also welcomed the election of the South African Ambassador Nosipho Nausca-Jean Jezile, Head of Mission of the South African Embassy in Rome, as incoming Committee on World Food Security (CFS) Chair. This is a most influential and prestigious position and with the food security and climate crisis facing southern Africa, her election is most opportune.

2024 is also the 20-year anniversary of the Right to Food Guidelines (see page 4) – this right is recognised in the South African Constitution, namely that everyone has the right of access to sufficient food and that every child has the right to basic nutrition. Our campaign with farmers to revive interest in millet and sorghum speaks to some of our work towards achieving this.

Also in 2024 we'll be focusing on realising Farmers' Rights, policy supporting farmer-led seed systems, and continuing our work from the local to the national to the international.

Rose Williams

Biowatch Durban office:

222 Evans Road, Glenwood, Durban 4001
Telephone: 031 206 2954
E-mail: info@biowatch.org.za
Web: www.biowatch.org.za
www.facebook.com/biowatchsa

Biowatch Mtubatuba office:

Aloe Business Centre, Aloe Ave, Mtubatuba 3935
Telephone: 035 550 3148
E-mail: samu@biowatch.org.za

A just transition in SA's food system

Biowatch was one of 10 civil society organisations that co-hosted the National Policy Dialogue on a Just Transition and Adaptation in the South African Food System, which took place in Johannesburg in September. The event was hosted by Adaptation Network, African Centre for Biodiversity (ACB), Alliance for Rural Advancement (AFRA), Biowatch South Africa, Climate Champions for Adaptation, Environmental Monitoring Group (EMG), Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ), LandNESS, National Labour and Economic Development Institute (NALEDI), and Tshintsha Amakhaya.

The aim of the National Policy Dialogue was to begin building a co-ordinated understanding and policy approach to a just transition in the South African food system across sectors. The event provided a chance for government officials to communicate their policy positions on agriculture, food and climate, and for the different constituencies to engage (and challenge!) them. The National Policy Dialogue laid the groundwork for ongoing policy discussions.

South Africa experiences a persistent hunger and food insecurity crisis, while the food system in South Africa is a significant contributor to the country's emissions that cause climate change. This necessitates a just transition in the food system that lowers emissions (mitigation); ensures resilience to climate impacts (adaptation); and achieves the right to food.

To inform the Dialogue, and pre-Dialogue consultations across provinces, a **series of six fact sheets on key elements for a just transition in the food system** was co-developed and produced in five languages – Afrikaans, English, Sepedi, Xhosa, and Zulu.



You can download the series of fact sheets from our website: www.biowatch.org.za/fact-sheets-just-transition-and-adaptation-in-the-south-african-food-system/



"Come and See" agroecology

The Biowatch Mtubatuba office regularly hosts exchange visits to the household food gardens and fields of the agroecology smallholder farmers we work with. These visits are an opportunity for anyone who is interested in agroecology – but not sure what is involved – to find out more, and to see agroecology in practice.

If you would like to find out more and join us on a "Come and See" visit in 2024, you can email Samu Zuma at samu@biowatch.org.za or call our Mtubatuba office on 035 550 3148.



In November, with Nombuso Thwala, an agroecology demonstrator, we hosted a "Come and See" exchange visit in EMngamazini. Visitors explored the KwaThwala homestead's flourishing household food garden and fields. They could see the benefits of agroecology, and they learnt more about veggie garden design, field crops for family food security, and the importance of seed bulking plots. They also visited the household seed bank. After attending a "Come and See", farmers interested in taking their exploration of agroecology further can apply to attend a Biowatch AE Qalisa "Basic introduction to agroecology" practical training.



See page 1: Agroecology Farmer Fair revives interest in ancient grains

(Top row) The 2023 Biowatch Agroecology Farmer Fair included launching a campaign to encourage growing and utilising millet and sorghum. Elders shared their traditional knowledge especially in relation to harvesting, processing and utilising these climate resilient and nutritious small grains.

(Bottom row) A whole day of the Farmer Fair was dedicated to discussing important issues affecting farmers, including markets, access to seed, new seed regulations and involving more youth in agroecology. The farmers also offered cooking demonstrations and the staff and interns at Siyaziswa Trust showcased innovations to support smallholder farmers at the Zululand Agri Support Centre.



Scenes from Biowatch's Durban screening of *The Last Seed*, the award-winning documentary we co-produced with Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA), and PELUM Tanzania. For more info see www.biowatch.org.za/the-last-seed/



The CSIPM Forum in Rome in preparation for CFS 51.

Committee on World Food Security

Biowatch participates in the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism (CSIPM) to the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) to bring experiences from southern Africa into the global policy space on food security and nutrition and to learn from participating social movements and bring this knowledge and solidarity into our own regional, national and local work.

In October, Vanessa Black (Biowatch's Advocacy and Research Co-ordinator) attended the 51st plenary session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS 51) and the CSIPM's Annual Forum which prepares for the CFS. Both were held in Rome at the head office of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). While the South African government was represented by a high-level delegation including the Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), Vanessa was the only CSIPM representative from South Africa and the southern African region at CFS 51 and in the CSIPM Forum.

Highlights at this year's proceedings included the election of the popular South African Ambassador, Nosipho Nausca-Jean Jezile, as incoming CFS Chair; the special event on the Right to Food ahead of the 20th anniversary of the Right to Food Guidelines in 2024; and the plenary approval of the Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment in the Context of Food Security and Nutrition – an important first step towards achieving gender equality.

The full list of documents discussed during CFS 51 sessions can be accessed at: www.fao.org/about/meetings/cfs/cfs51/list-of-documents/en/

CFS Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPow) 2024–2027 can be accessed at: www.fao.org/3/nn204en/nn204en.pdf

Update on Government's seed regulations

In October and November last year, the Directorate of Genetic Resources in the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) invited stakeholders to consultations focusing on contentious aspects of the June 2022 draft Regulations to the Plant Improvement and Plant Breeders' Rights Acts.

Biowatch's Advocacy and Research Co-ordinator, Vanessa Black, and farmer advocacy representative, Phindokuhle Phakathi, attended the consultations in Pretoria in October. They noted that both the Pretoria and Cape Town consultations were dominated by the seed industry. The few civil society representatives that were able to attend split up to defend Farmers' Rights in parallel break-away discussions. These included which categories of farmers would be exempt from the laws, and the specific crops and quantities of seed that exempted farmers would be allowed to save, exchange and sell. The seed industry argued that only vulnerable and subsistence farmers be allowed to save and exchange seed, excluding smallholders who sell the surplus they don't use at home; and the South African National Seed Organisation (SANSOR) and Grain SA wanted to exclude sale of seed completely from exemptions in any category. Claiming a majority agreement, industry attempted to limit the quantities of seed that may be exchanged or sold to mere grams per year.

Government has a great responsibility to ensure that the rights of smallholder farmers are protected. We are hopeful that the final Regulations will provide sufficient exemptions to allow for the development of meaningful policy and support of farmer-led seed systems to ensure Farmers' Rights as well as the long-term conservation of our plant genetic resources for food and agriculture.

* Biowatch's latest comments on the seed regulations can be found on our website: <https://shorturl.at/yzCJ2>

WHAT'S COMING UP?

- KZN AE Platform | Farmers' Rights workshop: 13–14 March 2024
- AE Qalisa "Basic introduction to agroecology": June 2024

Biowatch Bulletin will keep you updated.

If you would like to join our mailing list, please sign up at www.biowatch.org.za or e-mail your details to info@biowatch.org.za