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BULLETIN

National engagement with a failing industrialised food system

“Politics, Power and the Right to Food”, the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) national inquiry into the country’s food systems, is timeous and much-needed – this in our country where hunger, malnutrition and childhood stunting have spiralled out of control.

For the first phase of the inquiry, the Commission received evidence from a range of stakeholders, including civil society organisations and government institutions. Biowatch participated in drafting a collective submission as part of the Just Transition in the Food System Group – see <https://biowatch.org.za/download/submission-sahrc-right-to-food>. And then in March, Biowatch’s Vanessa Black and farmer Nonhlanhla Mkhize gave online testimony presenting on policy coherence, child hunger and malnutrition, and agroecology.

Additional hearings are now being held with evidence from government ministries and key stakeholders in the private sector across the food value chain, including input suppliers and agribusinesses, farmers, food processors and manufacturers, retailers and distributors, as well as industry associations and lobby groups. This sector is the mainstay of the current industrialised food system, which is failing so many.



Smallholder farmers are key to transforming the food system through agroecology.

South Africa is also nearing approval for a National Agroecology Framework (NAFSA). This holds promise for thousands of smallholder farmers left behind by current government support which prioritises high input chemical agriculture and commodity value chains. NAFSA aims to promote sustainable production to enhance food security and sovereignty and the health of people, animals and the environment; build capacity through shared knowledge and education; foster circular economies and economic viability; encourage the sustainable use of natural resources; and build resilience to climate risks. This speaks to supporting a different food system, one that addresses hunger as well as economic wellbeing, extreme climate events and ecological disintegration. It’s needed!

In 2025 and early 2026 the Agroecology Action Collective conducted the first phase of a survey of agroecology initiatives in South Africa.



See page 3

The theme of the June KZN Agroecology Platform learning exchange, hosted by Biowatch and AFRA, was “Wellbeing for all through agroecology”.



See page 3

SKI staff, SKI Board members and representatives from 15 regional partners gathered in Lilongwe, Malawi, to reflect on impact and plan the next phase.



See page 4

FROM THE DIRECTOR

The on-going focus on the food system by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) is greatly welcomed – the outcome of the current food system is one where despite producing enough food, hunger and malnutrition are systemic.

We see this in the national data – an estimated 14 million people (roughly 22% of the population) experience moderate to severe food insecurity, and at least one in four children under five (28.8%) have stunted growth. In a small study that we did in relation to the National School Nutrition Programme (see adjacent article), the reality exists of children whose only daily meal is the government school lunch provided. What about weekends? School holidays?

It was important to be part of the SAHRC hearings (through our collaboration with the Just Transition in the Food System Group) and also good to be part of the development of the National Agroecology Framework (NAFSA), through the Agroecology Action Collective. Importantly, the NAFSA approach and implementation is guided by the High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) on Food Security and Nutrition's 13 principles for "Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition". But political will is needed to support a change to the food system, and one that will speak to climate resilience, zero hunger, and sustainable, diverse ecosystems.

Not detailed in this Bulletin, but a key part of our work, have been the popular ongoing "on the ground" agroecology community-based trainings.

The Bulletin speaks to much of our collaborative work – from local, to national and continental. We remain convinced of this approach and see building solidarity as key to facing the many challenges and crises in this country and on the planet.

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Biowatch webinar

■ Examining opportunities for agroecology in South Africa's school nutrition programme

Our webinar on 11 June explored opportunities for agroecology in South Africa's National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) – including a focus on national policy, roll-out in KwaZulu-Natal, and a snapshot of children's and schools' views. As a social and environmental justice organisation critiquing the impacts of the industrial food system, what children in South Africa are eating is of great concern. We welcomed the opportunity to undertake the work we shared during the webinar.

Hunger is a growing crisis in South Africa. More than half of the people living here are food insecure. We produce more than enough food but for many people food prices are simply too high. Two government interventions that aim to address the Right to Food are the social grant system and the NSNP. While these help they do not address structural issues in the organisation of our food system, equitable access to resources, and growing corporate concentration. Through agroecology we can transform the food system and provide communities and children with fresh, nutritious food.

Watch the recording here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQdNYx4JOuA&t=54s> and download the research paper here: <https://biowatch.org.za/download/national-school-nutrition-programme/>

Meet our new intern

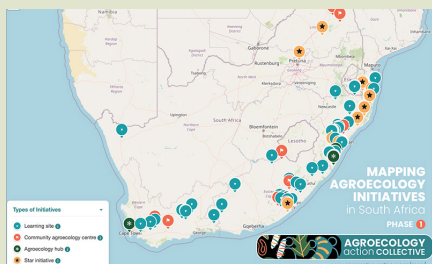
Meet Owethu Ngcobo who joined Biowatch in June as our new advocacy and communications intern. Owethu holds a Bachelor of Laws and a Master of Laws in Business Law. Coming from a legal background, she is looking forward to learning more about agroecology, food sovereignty and how to transform the food system. Through her internship, she hopes to gain a deeper understanding of the role that advocacy and communications play in supporting smallholder farmers and biodiversity on the ground and at policy level. She says: "I am looking forward to learning from the Biowatch team, its partners and the farming communities the organisation works with."



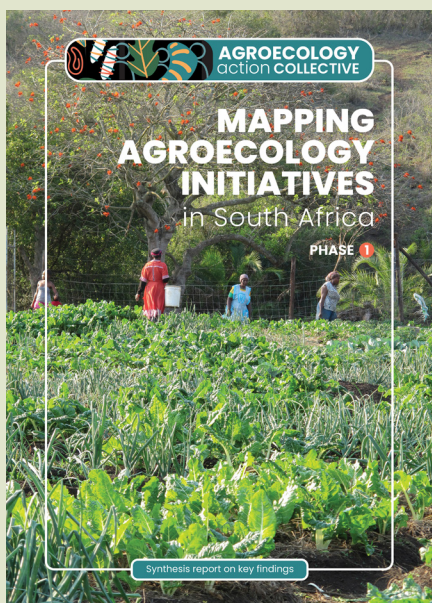
Mapping agroecology

In 2025 and early 2026 the Agroecology Action Collective, which advocates across South Africa to create spaces of power and joint action to transform the food system, conducted a survey of agroecology initiatives in South Africa. This first phase of the mapping is a pilot, to test methodologies and get an initial view of initiatives in the immediate networks of the Collective.

Agroecology Action Collective implementing partners are: Association For Rural Advancement (AFRA); Biowatch SA; Environmental Monitoring Group (EMG); Surplus People Project (SPP); and Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE).



View the interactive map at: <https://agroecologyaction.org.za/map/>



You can download the full report here: <https://tinyurl.com/48t6e3rh>



KZN agroecology platform learning exchange:

Wellbeing for all through agroecology

In June, Biowatch and the Association for Rural Advancement (AFRA) hosted the KZN Agroecology Platform Learning Exchange under the theme “Wellbeing for all through agroecology”. Farmers, researchers, activists, and civil society organisations gathered for two days of learning, reflection, and knowledge sharing.

On Day 1 participants unpacked the draft National Agroecology Framework for South Africa (NAFSA), exploring its potential to support more sustainable and resilient food systems. Discussions emphasised the knowledge farmers and civil society organisations can contribute when we organise. The day concluded with a public screening of Humane World’s documentary “*What Feeds Us*,” which sparked discussions around food quality, food systems, and the importance of understanding where our food comes from.

Day 2 built on these discussions as participants turned their attention to animal health, welfare, and wellbeing within agroecological systems. Learning began with an engaging presentation by farmers from Tourgar Biodynamic Farm, who shared practical insights on how they integrate cattle, sheep, and poultry in ways that support both animal wellbeing and sustainable farming. Learning was further enriched through presentations by Biowatch-supported agroecology farmers from northern KwaZulu-Natal who shared their knowledge of traditional remedies for animal health, which was followed by AFRA’s exploration of the Five Domains Model of Animal Welfare to promote animal wellbeing.

Agroecology in action

Agroecology Action Collective partners were glad to meet face-to-face in May, and also to meet in what was once a converted monoculture sugar plantation farm, now a thriving and biodiverse ecosystem!

Participation included the five implementing partners, (see page 3), as well as network partners from the Eastern Cape Water Caucus, Mopani Farmers Association and Sovereign Agroecology Food Empowerment (SAFE).

Although it was primarily a strategy planning meeting, there was good space for reflection on past work – the input to the National Agroecology Framework of South Africa (NAFSA), contribution to/facilitation of Agricultural Research Council (ARC) site visits, partner advocacy at provincial and national levels and the first phase of the mapping of agroecology initiatives. There are also now four provincial agroecology platforms – in Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, and a combined Northern Cape and Western Cape platform – these have been great organising and learning spaces. We're looking forward to the further integration of the work of the Collective, the work of individual partner organisations, and our joint projects.



Some of the Agroecology Action Collective partners at the strategy meeting in May.

WHAT'S COMING UP?

- 2026 Biowatch Agroecology Farmer Fair: 19–20 August, Durban
- Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSIPM) Forum, and 54th Plenary Session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS 54): 19–23 October, Rome
- KZN Agroecology Platform Learning Exchange: September

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SKI reflects on progress and impact



SKI staff and partners from Malawi, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe gather at the annual meeting in Lilongwe.

The Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI) annual meeting took place in May in Lilongwe, Malawi. SKI staff, SKI Board members and representatives from its 15 regional partners (including Biowatch) gathered to reflect on progress and impact, and plan key activities in the last six months of this phase.

Notable impacts included a powerful youth group; having greater influence in food system debates; improving the policy environment for agroecology in the region; and more and diverse food in communities.

Looking forward, as a bridge into the new strategy, SKI will focus on markets for livelihoods. For South African partners, this will support an exploration of the potential of Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) to market farmer seed.

The four-day gathering included SKI's Annual General Meeting (AGM). Million Belay from the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) provided insights on the positive progress towards an African-led agroecological transition. He noted new contextual issues including bio-digitalisation, and learnings for building a successful movement. He also emphasised the importance of telling our stories for our work and issues to be known.

A highlight of the gathering was an evening public event where powerful farmer, research and government speakers encouraged the transition to agroecology. MacPherson Nthala, Malawi's Deputy Director of Land Resources in the Department of Agriculture, announced that Malawi is putting agroecology at the centre of transforming its agricultural system. Tasty snacks catered from SCOPE Malawi's local and nutritious school meals menu punctuated the inspiring presentations.