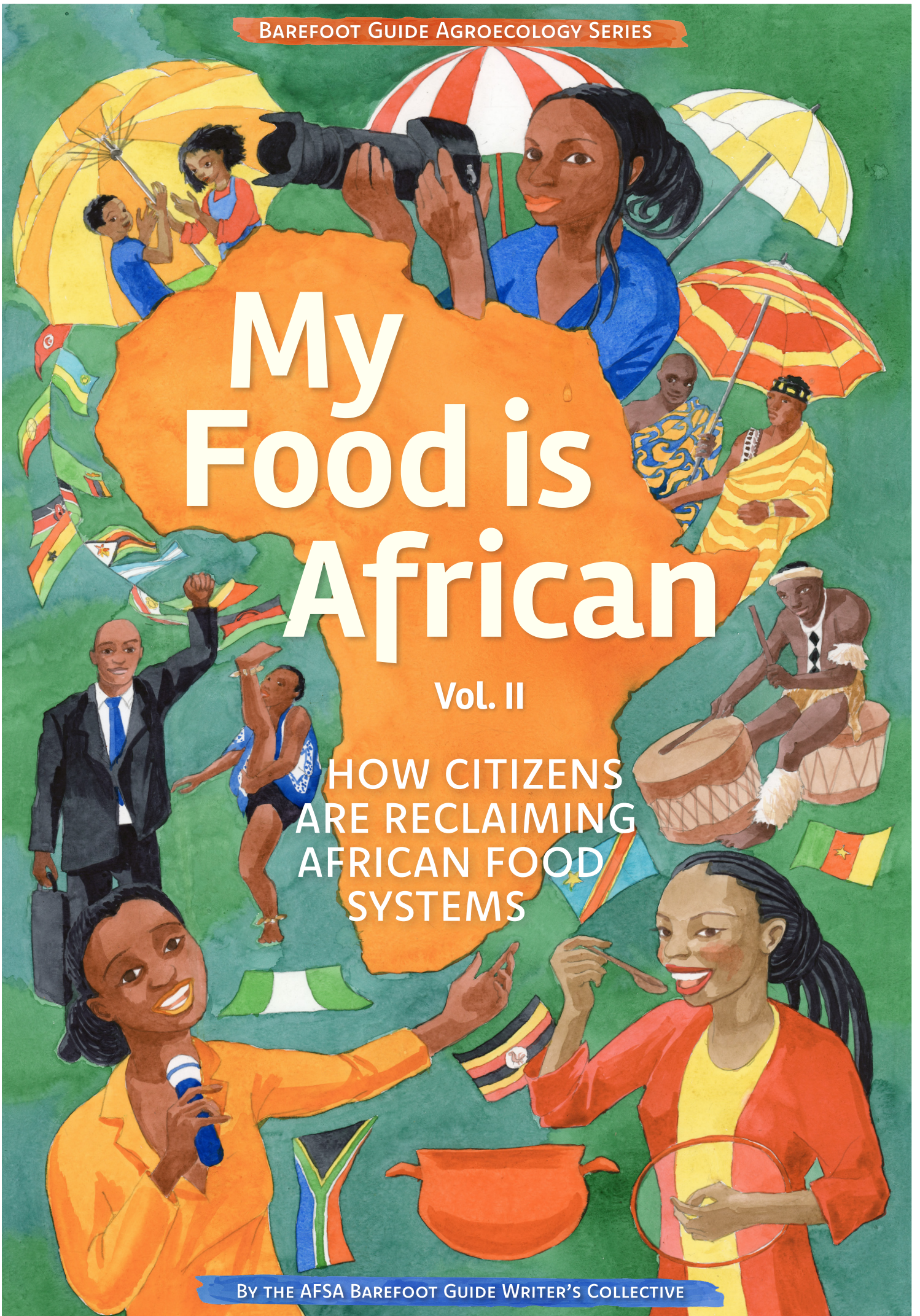


# My Food is African

Vol. II

HOW CITIZENS  
ARE RECLAIMING  
AFRICAN FOOD  
SYSTEMS



### **A PUBLICATION OF THE ALLIANCE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN AFRICA (AFSA):**

“The Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) is a broad-based alliance of different civil society actors that are part of the struggle for food sovereignty and agroecology in Africa. These include African farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk organisations, indigenous peoples’ networks, faith-based institutions, youth and women networks, African indigenous NGO networks, consumer movements in Africa, international organisations which support the stance of AFSA, and individuals. It is a network of networks and currently with 40 active members. It is the biggest civil society movement in Africa and members work in 50 of the 55 African countries.”

This publication was developed with financial support from SIDA under the Transforming African Food System to Sustainability (TAFS) Project



With support from



Barefoot Guide Agroecology Series

# My Food is African

## Volume 2

HOW CITIZENS ARE RECLAIMING  
AFRICAN FOOD SYSTEMS



By the AFSA Barefoot Guide Writer's Collective

# THE AFSA BAREFOOT GUIDE WRITER'S COLLECTIVE

## The Writers

**Abbot Ntwali**, AFSA, Uganda  
**Akeme Cyril Njume**, Kagoshima University, Japan  
**Andrew Adem**, AFSA, Uganda  
**Angela Ndereyerio**, Mavuno Seed, Kenya  
**Bertha Nherera**, PELUM, Zimbabwe  
**Caroline Kloppert**, Freelance illustrator, South Africa  
**Charity Rusere**, PLAAS, South Africa  
**Charles Dhewa**, Knowledge Transfer Africa, Zimbabwe  
**Daniel Banouku**, Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organisational Development (CIKOD), Ghana  
**Diana Namakula**, Uganda  
**Eustace Gacanja**, Kenya Organic Agriculture Network  
**Ferdinand Wafula**, Bio Gardening Innovations, BIOGI, Kenya  
**Freda Pigru**, Groundswell International, Ghana  
**Fru Wanka**, ICLEI Africa, South Africa  
**Gabriel Sheunopa Manyangadze**, Southern African Faith Communities Environment Institute (SAFCEI), Zimbabwe  
**Georgina Nkala**, Zambia Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity (ZAAB)  
**Janet Maro**, Sustainable Agriculture Tanzania  
**John Macharia**, SCOPE Kenya

## The Editorial Team

**Andrew Adem**, AFSA, Uganda  
**Charles Dhewa**, Knowledge Transfer Africa, Zimbabwe  
**Freda Pigru**, Groundswell International, Ghana  
**Georgina Nkala**, Zambia Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity (ZAAB)

### Writing process facilitation, editing and production management:

Doug Reeler and Beulah Tertiens-Reeler, Barefoot Guide Connection, South Africa

### Illustrator:

Caroline Klopperts (urbanforestregeneration@gmail.com)

### Layout/DTP Artist:

Luise Huder (luise.huder@yahoo.com) and Bronwyn Reeler (bronwynreeler@gmail.com)

**Published 2026**

### Copyright:

Creative Commons: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International

**ISBN:** 978-1-0492-6311-3

**John Wilson**, Freelance, Zimbabwe  
**Josephine Atangana**, CNOP-CAM, Cameroon  
**Joyce Brown**, HOMEF, Nigeria  
**Kizito Mwajombe**, Sustainable Agriculture Tanzania  
**Margaret Masudio**, Eastern and Southern Africa Small-scale Farmers' Forum (ESAFF Uganda)  
**Million Belay**, AFSA, Uganda  
**Mugove Walter Nyika**, ReSCOPE, Zambia  
**Mutinta Kentani**, ZAAB, Zambia  
**Naume Kalinaki**, Eastern and Southern Africa Small-scale Farmers' Forum (ESAFF Uganda)  
**Never Mujere**, University of Zimbabwe  
**Norma Rudolph**, Researcher, Tampere University, Finland  
**Peter Gubbels**, Groundswell International, Ghana  
**Rashid Raswiu**, Sustainable Agriculture Tanzania  
**Sabrina Masinjila**, Society for International Development (SID), Tanzania  
**Samuel Nyanzi**, Rural Community in Development (RUCID), Uganda  
**Sylvain Ntumba Mutuenzenzabu**, National Committee for the Promotion of Family Farming (CNPAF), DRC  
**Wanjiru Kamau**, Alliance of Bioversity International, Kenya

**John Wilson**, Freelance, Zimbabwe  
**Naume Kalinaki**, Eastern and Southern Africa Small-scale Farmers' Forum (ESAFF Uganda)  
**Peter Gubbels**, Groundswell International, Ghana

## About the Hosts of this Barefoot Guide

Please note that the hosts of this Barefoot Guide - Monica, Njabulo, Abdou, Estridah, Kamali, Ajay, Fanza and Andrew - are fictional characters, not to be confused with the real writers listed above. The other characters are all real people telling or a part of real stories.

We have created them to accompany you through this Guide. However, in many ways, they do represent the diverse and true voices of many of the members of AFSA, including the editors.

# Introduction to “My Food is African: Volume 2” ... Reclaiming What Was Never Lost

By Million Belay – General Coordinator of the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA)

“Our cuisine holds the stories of our people.”

Fatmata Binta (Sierra Leone, Fulani chef-activist)



Food is never just food. It carries memory, power, culture, and politics. In Africa, food is nourishment, medicine, ceremony, resistance, economy, and identity. And yet, for far too long, African food has been made to feel small, backward, inferior, something to be replaced.

The two “My Food is African” books have been born out of a refusal.

We refuse to accept that Africa must eat what it does not grow, grow what it does not eat, and abandon what has sustained it for generations. We refuse to accept that progress means forgetting our grandmothers, our markets, our seeds, our soils.

“My Food is African” began as a simple declaration. Four words that unlocked something many of us already knew in our bodies but had been trained to doubt. Four words that cut through jargon and policy language to say something profoundly political and deeply human.

This Barefoot Guide is about what happened next.

Across Africa, farmers, youth, journalists, cooks, chefs, market traders, teachers, activists, and policymakers began asking new questions. Why are ultra-processed foods flooding our communities while real food becomes harder to find? Why are our markets treated as problems while supermarkets are celebrated as progress? Why are our seed systems criminalised, our farmers marginalised, and our diets medicalised, while corporations shape food policy with ease? And more importantly: what happens when ordinary people organise, tell their stories, reclaim their plates, and insist on another path?

The stories in this book come from that insistence. You will read honest accounts of struggle, contradiction, experimentation, and courage. They show advocacy as lived practice, from kitchens and classrooms to radio studios and school gardens, from markets to ministries. They reveal how food systems are shaped by power, but also how power can be challenged when people act collectively.

We are definitely not arguing for a return to the past. What we argue for is continuity with dignity: the ability to adapt without erasing ourselves, to innovate without surrendering control, to feed our cities without poisoning our bodies and to engage policy without losing our soul.

At the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA), we often say that food sovereignty is about agency. About whom decides. About whose knowledge counts. About whose future is being built. My Food is African is one expression of that struggle.

This guide is an invitation to each of you to see food differently. To recognise that the fight for African food systems is central to health, climate justice, youth futures, gender equity, and true development. To join a growing movement of food citizens who refuse to be passive consumers of a system that makes us sick, dependent, and invisible.

The future of African food is already here, being defended, renewed, and reimagined every day.



# Contents



**Introduction to “My Food is African: Volume 2”...**  
**Reclaiming What Was Never Lost .....5**

**Chapter 1: “My food is African!” A growing movement ..... 9**  
 How an Email Sparked a Continental Movement ..... 10  
 Monica’s Radio Programme: Stories of Food and Sovereignty ..... 16  
 Key Debate: Surely Africa needs to modernise – Isn’t Agroecology going back? .....21

**Chapter 2: Ultra-processed foods and the fight for food sovereignty ..... 23**  
 Monica confronts reality: Facing her students’ struggle with ultra-processed foods ..... 23  
 Students grapple with the hidden impacts of industrial food systems.....26  
 Rallying for change: Connecting food sovereignty advocates across Africa .....29  
 Angela Ndereyerio’s journey to reclaim traditional food knowledge.....30  
 How can our grandmothers’ recipes be as convenient as fast foods? ..... 31  
 How do we turn our fast-food kitchens into places of resistance, not surrender? ..... 33  
 Could your grandmother’s plate hold the secret medicine you need? .....36  
 Is the fight for African food sovereignty one of the most urgent and overlooked struggles of our time? ..... 40

**Chapter 3. The Journey from Practice to Policy - When Farmers Write the Rules..... 49**  
 The Radio Interview – AFSA’s My Food is African campaign .....49  
 The Journey Begins: Shifting Systems of Power, Plate, and Planet ..... 53  
 Key Debate: Can Agroecology Feed Africa’s Cities? ..... 56  
 Nigeria: When Parliament Listens to the People..... 57  
 Key Debate: Don’t We Need Big Agriculture for Economic Growth? ..... 60  
 DR Congo & Cameroon: From Draft Laws to School Gardens..... 61  
 Cameroon: When Classrooms Become Food Sovereignty Training Grounds ..... 63  
 Key Debate: Can Africa afford agroecology?.....66  
 Kenya: From Bokashi to Policy, One Fermented Bucket at a Time..... 67  
 Zambia: When Chiefs Champion Agroecology.....69  
 The Journey’s End: A Campfire Reflection in Zimbabwe.....71  
 THE TAFS Journey Communique: Lessons from Seven Countries on Advocacy for Food Sovereignty..... 72

**Chapter 4: From Consumers to Food Citizens -Reclaiming Voice and Power .....75**  
 Training Journalists to Change the Conversation ..... 76  
 How can Radio be Used as an Organising Tool?..... 78  
 Working With Radio Stations Strategically ..... 81  
 Taro du Dimanche... How Traditional Became Trendy ..... 82  
 Can Schools Spark Community Movements? ..... 85  
 Schools as Sites for Cultural Shifts... Can One School Day Spark a Municipal Movement? ..... 87  
 Synthesis: What Makes Citizen Campaigns Work? ..... 89  
 Tool: Designing Your Grassroots Campaign ..... 92



<b>Chapter 5: African Markets are our markets .....</b>	<b>97</b>
Looking at Territorial markets with new eyes.....	97
Stepping into Mbare’s living ecosystem, where food becomes community .....	97
The Quiet Revolution of Indigenous Fruits.....	99
Key Debate: Aren’t Territorial Market Traders Inefficient Middlemen? .....	100
When Systems Overwhelm: The Municipality’s Honest Struggle .....	101
Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: From Zimbabwe to Senegal.....	103
Thiaroye’s Paradox: A Fortress Against Its Own People.....	103
The Night Market’s Wisdom: When Commerce Becomes Culture.....	104
The Family at the Market’s Heart: Rwanda’s Ubuntu in Practice .....	107
Key Debate: Isn’t modernising the economy key to the future? .....	107
The Zones of Connection: How Organisation Serves Community .....	108
Returning to Roots: Uganda’s Memory and Loss .....	109
When Borders Complicate What Should Flow: The Cross-Border Trade Challenge .....	111
The Arabic Flavour of Africa: Jedaida Market’s Identity .....	112
A Different Gender Dynamic .....	113
The Hidden Hand: Power Dynamics in Market Governance.....	114
From Witnessing to Framework: Making the Invisible Visible .....	114
Framework for Territorial Markets as Pathways for Socio-Economic Transformation .....	116
The Advocacy Agenda for Territorial Markets.....	117
One Market, One Meal, One Movement: Njabulo’s Return .....	118
Key Debate: Are Territorial Markets Unsafe? .....	118
<b>Chapter 6: Advocacy in Regional and Global Spaces - Our Voice at the Table .....</b>	<b>121</b>
Preparing Advocates for the Global Stage.....	122
AFSA’s Capacity Building Approach to Prepare for Regional and International Advocacy.....	123
Navigating the African Union.....	123
Decision Framework: Engaging with Imperfect Regional Processes .....	125
COP Conferences – Why they Matter and How to make an Impact.....	125
Making Strategic Impact in Global Forums.....	126
Key Debate: Can Agroecology Help Africa Face Climate Change?.....	128
Before, During and After Global Forums.....	129
When the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) Works (and When It Doesn’t).....	129
Key Debate: Does Africa Need Private Sector Investment?.....	130
Strategic Wins at the UN Committee on Food Security.....	130
Building Pan-African Unity in Global Spaces .....	132
Empowering the Next Generation of Continental Advocates .....	132
Advocacy as the Pathway to Transformation .....	133
<b>Chapter 7: Towards an African Food Future - The Year 2045 .....</b>	<b>135</b>
What We’ve Achieved by 2045.....	135
What Made the Difference: Responding to Climate Change.....	139
The Youth Factor: A Generation Shifts.....	141
Building Movements That Last .....	142
The Hospitality and Enterprise Revolution .....	144
The Eleven Pillars in Practice .....	145
The Eleven Pillars - 2045 Assessment .....	146
What Needs To Change By 2063? .....	149
Conclusion: Planting Seeds that Grow .....	151
Epilogue: The Next Morning .....	152
Transforming the African Food System to Sustainability (TAFS) Project and the My Food Is African Campaign.....	154
Tools for your Citizen Action Work.....	155



“We must produce what we consume and consume what we produce.”

Thomas Sankara (Burkina Faso)

“Hunger in South Africa will not be eradicated by food corporations... Food for need rather than food for profit means everybody eats... Food produced for need benefits from local indigenous knowledge...”

South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC)

“Hunger is not inevitable. It is political.”

Jose Graziano da Silva (FAO)



# “My Food is African!”

## A growing movement

### John tells us how it all started...

“My food is African” she said quietly. I could hear her clearly since I was standing nearby, but I knew others hadn’t heard.

“Please say what you’ve just said more loudly”, I suggested.

“My Food is African!” she said, loudly enough this time for all to hear.

Others in our circle of twenty-one people looked up. For the first time that day, in May 2022, in Entebbe, Uganda, the room went quiet. After a few long seconds, Kariuki, a young journalist from Kenya blurted out, “That’s it, that’s it! That’s the name we should give the campaign.”

Others nodded enthusiastically in agreement, especially the other journalists in the room. I could see a few NGO people struggling a little with it. Up until then most of the suggested names, a long list, were jargon-filled phrases talking about sustainable food systems, food sovereignty, and agroecological production.

## A Spark of Inspiration from Juliet

Juliet Nangamba, a young civil society activist from Zambia, passionate about local foods and seeds, had struck a chord with her four simple words. The campaign had found a name that said what people already held in their hearts. It had opened a door to stimulate a response in people way more effectively than any jargon might do.

Finding an effective and striking name for AFSA’s “nutrition” campaign has been a huge plus. Just the name on its own has undoubtedly opened many doors. It’s what people call a meme. It’s simple, catchy, and says a great deal. Behind it lies many stories and memories. It’s an example of what is at the heart of any campaign, finding simple and straightforward ways to communicate in everyday language. It emerged out of lots of thought and discussion over several years.



## How an Email Sparked a Continental Movement

In 2017, a call went out on email lists asking if anyone would join forces to write a book to demystify nutrition. Twelve people responded and started having regular Zoom calls. They recognised that knowing how to eat healthily isn't complicated, even if often difficult to put into practice.

They were all on the same page about the value of traditional foods and aware of how these are eroding across the continent as fast-food culture spreads, bringing growing rates of diabetes, high blood pressure, cancer.

One of the twelve was from the Barefoot Connection. Everyone could see a Barefoot Guide would be the perfect fit. Just as writing was to start, COVID struck. These guides had always been produced in-person. How could they do it online? The editorial team started with a mini-guide "Surviving COVID-19: the neglected remedy" to prove it could work. They then embarked on the full-length guide using online Writeshops.

## What began as a small, collective effort to celebrate local foods is growing into a movement that challenges systemic barriers and reclaims African food sovereignty

From the beginning, there was discussion on 'what next?' Sessions with the Centre for Story-based Strategy, which puts storytelling at the centre of campaign design, helped shape a pilot programme in five countries (Phase 1). This grew into Phase 2 with 11 countries, now underway, with plans to go continent-wide.

The journey from "My Food is African" to a continent-wide campaign underscores the power of clear, resonant messaging. What began as a small, collective effort to celebrate local foods is growing into a movement that challenges systemic barriers and reclaims African food sovereignty. The Barefoot process, adapted during COVID-19, proved that collaboration and storytelling can spark change even in adversity.

This is a rallying cry for food citizens everywhere.

## Reunion at Garuga, Uganda

The taxi drew up to an entrance below a charming arched entrance carved as a tree trunk. Below it, a sign: 'Embrace Nature'. Njabulo climbed out wearily but felt his spirits lift. He could hear many birds. A lot had changed since his time in Uganda five years ago, including his newfound love of birds.

After unpacking, Njabulo wandered to the lake's edge. The water was calm, mirror-like. He sat gazing at fishermen in dugouts.



## A surprise

Someone grabbed his shoulders from behind. He leapt up. Abdou burst out laughing. “Trust you to frighten me,” said Njabulo. Abdou laughed “But I thought you’re the hardened South African township guy who fears nothing?”

“Or fears everything and doesn’t want to show it,” Njabulo smiled back.

They hugged long. Five years since they’d seen each other. “You look like the cash is flowing in,” Njabulo said. Abdou smiled. “Not doing badly for a fisherman’s son. Things have gone well since Makerere.”

Fanza appeared. “The others are waiting on the terrace. Isn’t this a great place?”

She took Njabulo’s hand. “How’s my fellow city slicker? I always felt a bond between us, even if Yaoundé and Soweto are very different.” “I’m still a city slicker, but I’ve also changed,” Njabulo said.

As they arrived on the terrace, the four already there rose together. There were hugs all around.



## Fish farming in the Lake

Fanza noticed structures behind fishermen near the opposite shore. “What are those?” she asked Monica. “Fish farms,” Monica replied. “Industrial mindset: confine fish, give exact inputs for fast growth, harvest easily, export worldwide. Ticks all the boxes.”

“But it goes against agroecology principles,” Ajay said quietly. “And my guess is these farms are polluting the lake.”



“They claim not and have licenses,” Monica said. “But there are clear indications they’re polluting.”

“Here we are discussing issues already. You are a studious bunch! I’d love to hear what you’ve been doing since we were last together five years ago. Why don’t we start with Kamali?”

## Kamali: The new sceptic - Ethiopia

"Life can be tough," began Kamali. "I left with high hopes of contributing to people eating healthier and now I'm working in a fast-food joint! I live with the smell of cheap cooking oil.

"But where I work is a buzz. Young people in Addis love these new places. The setting is crisp, clean and modern. The food is cheap and 'smart'.

"I've concluded all of you are living in an illusion. You sit in silos of self-satisfaction, unaware of the real world. You run little projects, write indignant articles, march with placards, but have no real impact.

"Your work is funded by rich Northern foundations whose staff can afford natural living. In the South, it's run by middle-class NGOs. They're good at describing agroecology theory. But you can hardly see it in practice. An older person told me examples of advanced agroecology are tiny in number.

"With AI they'll improve processed foods. It's the only way to feed fast growing urban populations. You're dreaming if you think agroecology will feed this continent."

A long silence before Ajay spoke...

## Ajay: Navigating policy from the inside - Rwanda

"Well, Kamali, I am glad you are being frank. I hear you! But what I also hear is that fast food is addictive. Research shows these foods with chemical additives are so tasty that people eat too much and that they are not healthy.

Turning to the others, Ajay said with a smile "It's good that she has provoked us, we will certainly be discussing all this at this upcoming meeting on Ultra Processed Foods (UPFs).

"But my story is very different", continued Ajay. "I landed a job with Rwanda's Ministry of Agriculture in their nutrition department.

"Four years ago, my father joined the same Ministry. Many thought I got the job because of him, but he didn't know about my application. We don't talk much about work because we have different views. He's still 'green revolution'.

"He talks about 'conservation farming.' He's thick with AGRA. He argues farmers need chemical fertilisers on old African soils. They present case studies of farmers making good livings. They promote zero tillage. We do agree about avoiding ploughing if practical.

"I often talk to my Mum. She's become an even better food grower. She's formed a food garden club and plans to work with the Ministry of Education on 'Whole School land design.' Working with Education is easier than with Agriculture."



## Estridah: The challenges of institutional change - Malawi

“I got a job in Malawi’s Ministry of Education. The Ministry has a feeding programme I help run. It’s based in Lilongwe and has been open to sourcing healthy local food that benefits small farmers. But it’s difficult because of tendering procedures. How do schools buy from smallholder farmers who can’t submit required tenders? As with many changes, it’s about looking at whole systems. We’ve been mapping local food systems, and we’ve seen how farmers need to organise themselves to market effectively. If organised, they could submit tenders to schools.”

“We’ve been mapping local food systems, and we’ve seen how farmers need to organise themselves to market effectively. If organised, they could submit tenders to schools.”



## The Professor's garden of herbal hope

"As well as being made Professor, I'm now head of department," Monica said.  
"Lots of boring bureaucracy.

"But I manage four days each month on the farm my grandmother left me, where I've set up a herb garden I call my 'Garden of Hope.' I collect herbs wherever I go. This is my big passion now. Abdou, your turn.



## Abdou: Sënn Sa Rëd market - Senegal

"My experience has been largely positive," said Abdou. "I've learnt there are opportunities if you stick your neck out. A week after returning, my mother asked if I wanted a stall in Central Market in Thiès. A friend was retiring and I jumped at it.

"The local Wolof name is Sënn Sa Rëd, which means the market where you don't get tired. It's a typical West African urban market, a major commercial hub. You can find everything: fresh fruits, vegetables, fish, meat, spices, grains, traditional fabrics, clothing, electronics, local craft. It's vibrant, bustling, full of energy and smell, a central point of daily life.

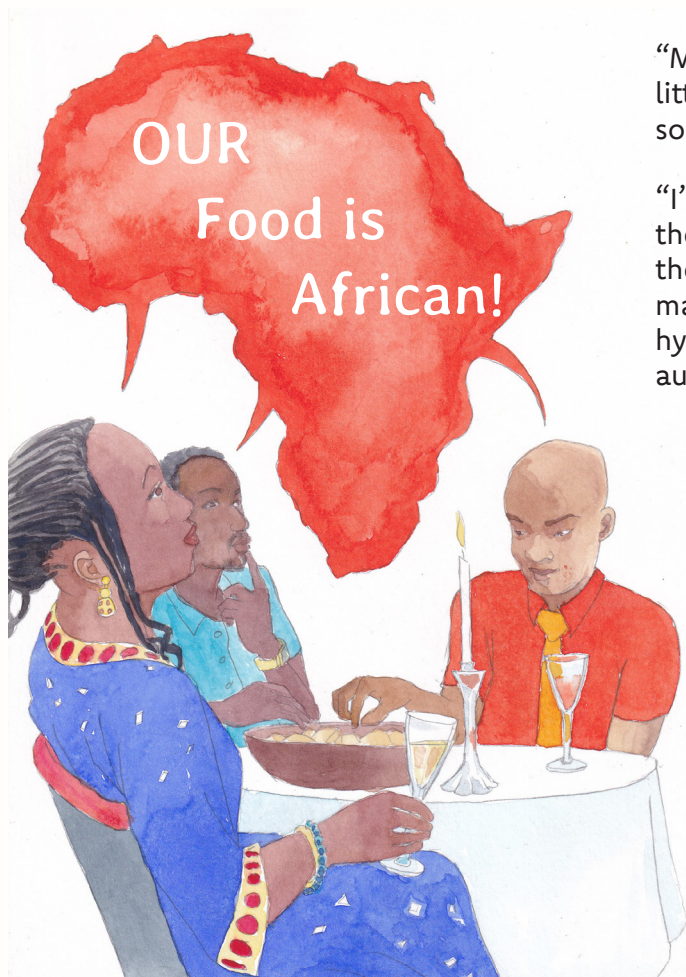
"I now have five stalls employing 11 people.

"Many consumers know I source from producers using very little chemicals, if any. They trust the produce. We have something like a Participatory Guarantee System.\*

"I've learnt the value of these African markets, but they're threatened. People in power don't appreciate their economic and social value. I was elected to the management team eight months ago. We deal with hygiene, waste, security, and getting support from local authorities.

"Governments need to believe that these markets are part of the future, not a stopgap before supermarkets take over."

**"Governments need to believe that these markets are part of the future, not a stopgap before supermarkets take over."**



## Fanza: Making tradition trendy - Cameroon

“As you know, I’m a city girl. When I returned to Yaoundé, I walked all over discovering small places serving traditional foods. I began writing on social media. There seemed to be interest.

“I decided traditional foods need to become trendy, presented in ways appealing to young people. That’s my mission. I became a social media influencer. I now have 77,000 followers. Young people often find traditional foods outdated, connecting them to grandparents. We have to change that mindset.

“Many young people now share testimonies describing their shift in attitude. The shift occurred when they realised they could carry traditional approaches forward and relate them to today’s situation.”

Monica looked at her watch: “Njabulo, before you give us your update, we must listen to this. The radio programme I mentioned is about to begin.”

“More food sovereignty propaganda,” said Kamali disparagingly. “I’ve listened a couple of times, but they don’t turn me on!”

Monica smiled at her and then connected her phone to a speaker...

### \*Participatory Guarantee Systems from FAO:

<https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/271c894c-7eb3-45fd-8f7a-e00f17133ac1/content>



# Monica's Radio Programme: Stories of Food and Sovereignty



## Radio presenter:

"Welcome to your programme all about our food. This week we hear three powerful stories from across the continent – Zambia, Zimbabwe and Tanzania. Each tells us something vital about what's happening to our food, our choices, and our heritage. After each story, we'll pause to think together. Please record this so you can use it with your Food groups for discussion.

"Our first story comes from Georgina Nkala in Zambia, who takes us back to the warm aromas of her childhood and then forward to a troubling shift."

## The Fading Flavours of Home

by Georgina Nkala

The warm, comforting aroma of frying mopane worms – ifi kimbala – defined my childhood in Zambia. These foods were threads weaving our culture together. I watched my mother prepare traditional dishes like pumpkin leaves with groundnuts, wild mushrooms, and nsima. Each recipe a story from our ancestors.

But a subtle shift occurred. National policy began favouring commercial crops like maize and soya beans. Vast monoculture fields replaced diverse farms. In the markets, exotic, imported foods began to dominate, while our cherished, protein-rich mopane worms became harder to find. Our culinary identity was being quietly erased.

This story belongs to a community witnessing the disappearance of its heritage. I ache to see children unfamiliar with the taste of our traditional foods. Losing these foods means severing a connection to our roots, our environment, and our resilience. We must advocate for balance that honours both agricultural diversity and our cultural heritage, ensuring that our meals continue to reflect the soils that nourish us.



"Losing these foods means severing a connection to our roots, our environment, and our resilience."

## Radio presenter:

"Georgina's story touches something deep, that sense of loss when foods that carried meaning simply disappear. So, let's pause here. What traditional foods from your own childhood are now becoming harder to find? What memories or values are connected to them?"

“Georgina mentions government policy as a driver. But what other forces are causing local foods to disappear? And here’s a practical question: what is one action you can take to help preserve or revive a local food tradition in your area?”

“Now let’s move south to Zimbabwe, where Bertha Nherera confronts an uncomfortable reality at a family funeral.”

## A Funeral Feast of Foreign Food by Bertha Nherera



At my niece’s funeral in rural Zimbabwe, I stood in a queue and watched plates of white imported rice, fried chicken, and potato wedges pass by. As a coordinator for the ‘My Food is African’ campaign, I was disheartened. Why was this the norm, even here?

This experience fuelled my resolve. When my church welcomed a new pastor in an affluent Harare suburb, I proposed serving traditional food. The committee agreed. We served clean, self-grown munyemba vegetables, sorghum grain with peanut butter, and homemade Rosella and Baobab drinks instead of fizzy drinks.

This success made me ponder the deeper reasons behind the trend. Is it convenience, a desire to show status, or simply a lack of access to quality local ingredients? Do event organisers consider the nutritional and economic implications of their choices? By choosing imported rice over local grains like sorghum and millet, we support foreign industries while our own farmers struggle, and our children face joblessness. Our choices at the dining table have the power to shape our economy, our health, and our food sovereignty.

“By choosing imported rice over local grains like sorghum and millet, we support foreign industries while our own farmers struggle, and our children face joblessness.”

### Radio presenter:

“Bertha asks us to look honestly at what we serve and why. So, reflect on the last community event or function you attended. What food was served, and what might those choices say about the organisers’ values or constraints?”

“Here’s Bertha’s powerful question: ‘Do they know who produces the food and that by consuming it what power they are giving to the producer?’ How does this idea change your perspective on the food you buy?”

“And the practical challenge: what challenges would you face in trying to serve predominantly local and traditional foods at a large event in your community? How could those challenges be overcome? Think about it. Talk about it in your groups.”

“Our final story today comes from Tanzania, where Sabrina Masinjila tells us about a food activist named Neema watching a very different kind of invasion.”



## The Fast-Food Invasion

by Sabrina Masinjila

Neema, a food activist in Tanzania, watched with dismay as a new international fast-food branch opened with great fanfare in a Dar es Salaam neighbourhood. The launch targeted youth with social media giveaways, even featuring children from a vulnerable centre in a PR stunt.

To Neema, this was not progress but a new wave of dietary colonisation. These restaurants sell food high in unhealthy fats, sugars, and sodium, contributing to a rise in lifestyle diseases like diabetes and obesity among Tanzanian youth. This trend threatens to replace diverse, nutritious, and culturally appropriate local cuisines with standardised, industrial junk food.

Despite Tanzania having food-based dietary guidelines that recommend reducing processed foods, the fast-food expansion continues unchecked. In response, Neema and fellow activists launched the campaign 'Fast food lies, Reclaim the Plate, Reclaim the Power!' They use podcasts and social media to expose the harmful impacts of corporate fast-food chains and to mobilise communities to support local food economies and agroecology. For them, the fight is about health, culture, and ultimately, food sovereignty.

**In response, Neema and fellow activists launched the campaign 'Fast food lies, Reclaim the Plate, Reclaim the Power!'**

### Radio presenter:

"Neema's story brings us face to face with what's happening in our cities right now. So, ask yourselves: why do you think international fast-food chains are so appealing, particularly to young people in urban areas?"

"Neema believes 'food is losing its meaning.' What do you think is the true 'meaning' of food that is being lost in this fast-food culture?"

"And finally, the campaign aims to 'reclaim the plate.' What does this phrase mean to you? What is one step you can take to reclaim your own plate?"

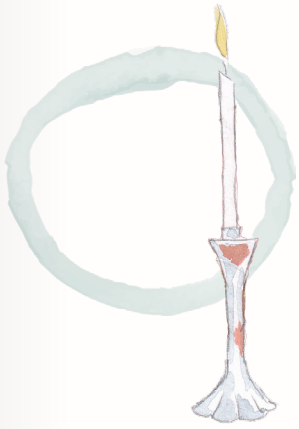


"Three stories. Three countries. One truth: our food choices matter. They shape our health, our economies, our identities. Until next week, this is your programme all about our food. Keep the conversation going in your Food Groups. Keep reclaiming the plate."

The terrace fell quiet. Fanza was staring at the lake. Abdou nodded slowly. Even Kamali looked thoughtful. "Those stories," Estridah said quietly, "they could be from Malawi too. The funeral with imported rice, the fast-food chains opening everywhere."

“In Thiès as well,” Abdou added. “I see it in the market. Young people walking past fresh produce to buy packaged snacks.”

Monica looked around at them. “This is why I wanted you to hear this. These aren’t isolated incidents. Georgina in Zambia, Bertha in Zimbabwe, Sabrina in Tanzania. The same patterns everywhere.”



“But does the radio reach lots of people?” Fanza asked. “Are you getting listeners to form these Food groups?”

“We are,” Monica said. “Slowly. People record the programme, gather to discuss the questions. Some groups are now taking action in their communities.”

“Still sounds like small steps against a massive tide,” Kamali said, but her voice carried less conviction than before.

“Small steps that are spreading,” Monica replied. She turned to Njabulo. “You were about to give us your update. After hearing those three stories, what’s been your experience in South Africa?”

## Njabulo

“What have I learnt in South Africa the last five years? Where to begin? I can understand what Kamali is saying, and I feel the same way sometimes in South Africa. The trend toward industrial food systems is so strong you can’t imagine changing it. But we have a huge health crisis around obesity and diabetes. While regrettable, it presents opportunities. The government is aware. These illnesses cost money.

“South Africa and Ethiopia are contrasting examples. We threw traditional foods out long ago. Fast food outlets have been around a long time. People my age grew up with them.

“I think we’re on the verge of getting government on our side. We’re still getting over suspicion of ‘alternative’ approaches from the AIDS pandemic when unfounded claims were made for cures. But increasing numbers of people recognise that eating healthily is critical. “What I’ve learnt is that for widespread impact, we have to get government fully on board and implementing supportive policies.”



**“But we have a huge health crisis around obesity and diabetes. While regrettable, it presents opportunities. The government is aware. These illnesses cost money.”**

A moment of silence before Monica asked:

“So, the critical role of government policies is one lesson. What else?”

“We have to avoid jargon and use everyday language,” Fanza said immediately. “I go to civil society workshops and hear jargon-filled language. We need to think carefully about content. Yes, it’s about recognising traditional foods’ value but not getting stuck there. We must appeal to young people, the huge bulk of the population going forward.”

“We need citizens’ campaigns to counter widespread advertising promoting UPFs,” added Abdou.

“You’re fighting a losing battle,” said Kamali. “You’re trying to go backwards. Embrace technology and make it shift toward healthier foods.”

## AFSA's Barefoot Guides on Nutrition and Health

AFSA produced two previous Barefoot Guides related to nutrition and health. The first, published in 2020, called 'Surviving COVID-19: the neglected remedy' is a mini guide which advocates taking COVID precautions – masks, distancing, regular washing – while strongly emphasising healthy eating. It's an excellent introduction to healthy eating, with strong emphasis on traditional foods, dishes, drinks, diets and cuisines.

AFSA then published My Food is African Volume 1 in October 2022. The focus was to help individuals learn how to eat more healthily. Here's an overview: we need live links for these two guides here.

### Monica describes My Food is African Volume Two



“ Volume One of My Food is African gave stories about how individuals and families can eat healthily, emphasising traditional foods, dishes, diets and cuisines. Volume Two focuses on the various factors influencing what people eat, from attitudes to government policies, gender dynamics, corporate power and advertising budgets.

“We share stories of how people across the continent are dealing with these ‘external’ issues. Chapter 2 looks at how Ultra Processed Foods are infiltrating lives everywhere and the battle against them. Chapter 3 examines efforts to influence government policies. Chapter 4 touches on citizens campaigns. Chapter 5

shifts to marketing, highlighting the value of local African markets that people look down on, seeing them as necessary only until supermarkets take over. We show their value and how they underpin agroecological food systems. Chapter 6 jumps to regional and global levels, and at how policy frameworks developed there can have a bearing on everyone's food choices. Chapter 7 looks to the future, outlining the African food future we want to see if the right decisions are made!”

### AFSA's My Food is African campaign

Launched in Yaoundé, Cameroon, in November 2022, the first two phases of the campaign focused at country level. A selection of countries with geographical spread around the continent have participated, each with unique activities within an overall framework:

- Increased push for adaptation and adoption of favourable food policies nationally and regionally, including advocacy for national food security policies that integrate African Food Systems and engaging with regional bodies.
- An effective network of food systems actors across the continent, facilitating establishment of country and regional networks and capacity building.
- Increased preference for healthy and culturally appropriate food produced agroecologically and supported by favourable policies.
- The programme is called 'Transforming African Food Systems' (TAFS). A number of stories in this Barefoot guide come from TAFS.

The next stage is to take the campaign continent-wide so anyone wanting to join can do so. This starts in 2026

## Key Debate: Surely Africa needs to modernise - Isn't Agroecology going back?

### **The Argument from Industrial Agriculture:**

“Agriculture needs to keep modernising. You’re asking us to go backward. Agroecology sounds like nostalgia for traditional farming that kept people poor. Development means technology, inputs, processing, value chains. That’s how Asian countries advanced. Why should Africa stay stuck in the past?”

There’s genuine belief that industrial agriculture represents progress. Officials face political pressure to show “modernisation.” The language of development agencies, agricultural colleges, and technical experts all reinforce this frame. Traditional farming carries stigma.

### **How Agroecology Advocates Respond:**

Challenge the modernisation frame itself. In Ethiopia, advocates reframe agroecology as a future-proof strategy addressing climate crisis, youth unemployment, and food insecurity, not nostalgia. They position agroecology as sophisticated agriculture requiring knowledge and skill, not a return to subsistence farming. They show how industrial agriculture’s short-term gains lead to long-term soil degradation, creating dependency rather than development. They emphasise that agroecology is knowledge-intensive and innovative, not backward. With Industrial agriculture Farmers lose control, but with agroecology farmers use technology with their own knowledge and skills in a way that keeps them much more in control.



“With Industrial agriculture farmers lose control, but with agroecology farmers use technology with their own knowledge and skills in a way that keeps them much more in control.”



“Let us protect our seeds, our land, and our knowledge.  
Let us feed ourselves with food that comes from our soil,  
our wisdom, and our love for this land.”

Chief Nalubamba, Zambia

“Our food is our identity, and identity  
cannot be imported.”

Hellen Ndagire (Uganda, Slow Food)

“Our cuisine holds the stories of  
our people.”

Fatmata Binta (Sierra Leone, Fulani chef-activist)



# Ultra-processed foods and the fight for food sovereignty



## Monica confronts reality: Facing her students' struggle with ultra-processed foods

The morning after their first evening together, Monica sits at her laptop on the resort terrace, watching the sun climb over the lake. Her fingers hover over the keyboard as she composes an email to her colleague Peter, trying to capture what unfolded the previous night. Still going round in her mind were the conversations that stretched past midnight, revelations that left some students in tears and a growing sense that this workshop might change the trajectory of all their lives.



**To: Peter Gubbels**  
**From: Monica Bakirya**  
**Subject: Before the Workshop Begins**

Dear Peter,

I'm writing from Garuga before the AFSA workshop begins. I wish you were here to help me reflect.

Yesterday's reunion with my former students left me uneasy. You'd remember them from five years ago, those bright nutrition graduates so sure they could change the world. Now they've returned, shaped by different winds: Njabulo navigating South Africa's obesity crisis; Abdou building enterprise in Senegal's still-living traditional markets; Fanza wielding social media to make ancestral foods fashionable; Ajay working within Rwanda's Ministry while quietly holding different dreams than his father; Estridah threading the needle of institutional change in Malawi's school feeding programme; and Kamali, perhaps the most honest, confronting how fast food's siren call drowns out quieter alternatives.

They carry such weight. Kamali could barely meet my eyes - I'm surprised she came! Njabulo's tired of documenting decline. Estridah's trapped between what she knows is needed and what the system allows. We gave them science, theories, frameworks, but not tools for living with contradiction. Knowledge alone doesn't change a system.

This morning, I'll push them. I've asked them to bring examples of foodstuffs from their worlds. We'll lay them out and look honestly: Would your grandmother recognise these ingredients? Did these food companies meet needs or invent them? When we call food "too time-consuming," whose time are we erasing?

I want them to see themselves as people who can still choose where to stand, despite professional setbacks. Maybe change lives inside their contradictions. Listening to them, I realised they don't need our approval. They're already on frontlines in ways we never were. That gives me hope, even as it humbles me.

Wish me wisdom and patience.  
Warmly,  
Monica

Just as she pressed 'Send', Monica's phone buzzed. Her sister Naomi's name lit up the screen.

"Hey sis, you haven't called me for days. I know you're overthinking something," her sister said without preamble. "What is it?" Naomi spoke quickly.

"I was thinking about Gogo. Making matooke in that aluminium sufuria after she moved to Kampala, frustrated it didn't taste the same as in banana leaves. But she kept trying different pots, different timing. She wasn't stuck in the past. She was asking: 'How do I make food that nourishes in this new place, with these new tools?'"

"Where are you going with this?"

"What about Auntie Lillian? Thirty years in London, came back unable to prepare mushrooms. She forgot why they mattered. Called village food 'primitive.'"

"She stopped asking the question."

"She let the river dry up." Monica pressed her palm against the window. "Living tradition isn't a museum piece, it's a river. It only stays alive by moving, carving new channels. The moment we dam it to keep it 'pure,' we kill it."

Naomi was quiet. "So, the young entrepreneurs modernising African food - they're not betraying tradition?"

"They're being tradition. Asking Gogo's question for this generation. But who's documenting the ones actually innovating within tradition? The ones who innovate while preserving what matters?"

"There must be people doing this."

**"But who's documenting the ones actually innovating within tradition? The ones who innovate while preserving what matters?"**

"They exist but they're invisible. Banks, including the African Development Bank, won't fund them. Universities don't study them. No box for the indigenous innovators."

"This is what you tell your students tomorrow."

"If I can find examples. There's no database connecting these innovators. No network." Monica's energy surged. "We need African research institutions to take this seriously. Show them that someone modernising indigenous food preparation for local and territorial markets creates more value - social, nutritional, environmental, economic - than another factory churning out instant noodles."

"They'll say it's not scalable. You'll need their language. Jobs created. Carbon sequestered."



“The poetry keeps us from losing our way while we build the spreadsheets. We need both.”

Silence. Light slanted golden across the water.

“Monica.... don’t just write about this. Push your students to find these innovators in their own contexts. Help them see each other, know they’re not isolated.”

“Ask them to document people already building alternatives.”

“Then take it to the African Development Bank (AfDB) with evidence, not just beautiful ideas.”

Monica felt her throat tighten. “When did you get so wise?”

“I learned from my big sister. The one who taught me that tradition isn’t about what our grandmothers did – it’s about asking our grandmothers’ questions with our own hands.”

## INDIGENOUS INNOVATORS. Finding those hidden in plain sight



Examples of Indigenous Innovators that Monica knows exist but can’t find in mainstream discourse:

- Mama Winnie (Jinja): Solar dehydrators preserving traditional vegetables for urban families
- Rwandan collective: Biogas equipment replicating slow cooking of traditional pots
- Tamale entrepreneur: Traditional fermented foods made shelf-stable without preservatives

The riddles they’re solving: How to achieve the smoky depth and even heat of traditional fire preparation without stripping forests bare? How to make heritage foods accessible to lunch-hour crowds? How to honour food wisdom while living in the present and mapping out the future pathways?

**How to make heritage foods accessible to lunch-hour crowds? How to honour food wisdom while living in the present and mapping out the future pathways?**

After they hung up, Monica opened her laptop. Tomorrow she would ask students to bring samples of ultra-processed food, yes. But also, stories of people walking innovating within their local cultures.

These people existed. And if her students couldn’t find them, together they would become them, carrying grandmother’s hands in theirs as they shaped new tools for new soil.

At the top of a new document, she typed: “What does nourishment look like here, now, in this soil, this season? And who is already answering this question in ways we haven’t noticed?”

Outside, the sun set the lake on fire with gold.

## Students grapple with the hidden impacts of industrial food systems

### Lunch Beneath the Weight of the Morning

Later that morning, as participants gather for lunch before the afternoon workshop sessions, Fanza and Kamali find themselves at an outdoor table. They were reflecting on the morning session with Monica.

“I’m still processing what Monica said,” Fanza murmured, pushing rice around her plate. The food was good, traditionally prepared, but neither of them had much appetite. “When she asked if my grandmother would recognise sodium phosphate or disodium inosinate as food, that hit differently than all the nutrition science we studied. Although I must say that it’s not only the grandmother.”

Yes, even the most sophisticated urban consumers may not recognise differences between foods the same way very few citizens read and understand food labels. Indigenous Knowledge Systems used in food preparation and preservation go beyond labels but teaching by doing. “Fanza added.

Kamali nodded slowly, her hands wrapped around a glass of passion fruit juice. “For me, it was when she said the companies not only met our needs but also helped create them! I’ve been defending my restaurant as serving busy professionals who need quick meals. But maybe I’ve been part of making traditional foods seem impossible for modern life. Maybe the impossibility is engineered, not inevitable.”



### The Discomfort of Seeing Clearly

“She wasn’t gentle about it,” Fanza said, half-smiling at the memory. “She called them pseudo-foods, not even real food. She said that every traditional dish I photograph for Instagram represents knowledge systems that industrial food wants to replace. Suddenly my social media work feels more political than I realised. I’m not just posting pretty pictures of ndolé and eru. I’m documenting what they’re trying to erase.”

“The whole morning felt like that. Stripping away our excuses, the things we tell ourselves to cope.” Kamali looked toward the terrace where they’d sat hours earlier, surrounded by ultra-processed food packages Monica had asked them to bring. “When Njabulo laid out all those brightly coloured snack packages from his township spaza shops and Abdou showed the instant soups flooding Dakar markets and I added the frozen chicken products I serve daily, I realised we’re all watching the same displacement happen in different places. Same strategies, same products, same promises, just different African cities.”



### The Taste of Resistance

“And Monica just kept pushing,” Fanza continued, remembering the intensity of the morning session. “She said processing isn’t the enemy. Your grandmother’s fermented injera is processed. Traditional palm oil requires processing. Smoking fish is processing. These methods preserve food and transform it into something that nourishes across seasons, across generations.

“Then she went after the shelf-life excuse. You know that story they tell about feeding the world by making food last longer. ‘A dried fish doesn’t need chemicals to outlast a packaged one,’ she said. ‘Fermented foods have survived centuries without additives that themselves expire. Properly smoked meat, sun-dried tomatoes, aged cheese laugh at calendars. The irony is rich: we’re told UPF extends shelf life, but those very preservatives have their own expiration dates.

“But industrial formulations specifically designed to hijack our taste buds while extracting profit? That’s different. That’s what we’re up against. Not preservation itself, but the lie that only corporations can keep food from spoiling. Our grandmothers have been doing exactly that for longer than anyone can remember, with nothing but salt, sun, smoke, and knowledge.”

“Properly smoked meat, sun-dried tomatoes, aged cheese laugh at calendars. The irony is rich: we’re told UPF extends shelf life, but those very preservatives have their own expiration dates.”

Kamali traced the rim of her glass, watching condensation drip down the side. “She said I’m not trapped by the system I’m in. That I could push for local ingredients, traditional preparation methods, train staff differently, change the menu gradually. But it feels overwhelming, like trying to redirect a flood with your bare hands when corporate headquarters sends the menu from abroad and measures everything by profit margins. It’s tough to change a system as an individual just as knowledge alone is not enough.”

“Maybe that’s why we’re here?” Fanza gestured toward the filling workshop hall where the afternoon session would begin soon. “Not to redirect it alone, but to connect with others doing the same work. Monica said the workshop would show us communities already fighting these battles, creating alternatives that work.”

### Learning to See the Invisible

“The NOVA classification she taught us this morning makes sense now,” Kamali said thoughtfully. “Four categories from minimally processed to ultra-processed. It’s a way to see what’s been made invisible by decades of normalization. When did we start thinking hydrogenated oils and high-fructose corn syrup were normal ingredients?”

They sat in silence as the lunch crowd swelled around them, participants from across Africa gathering for the afternoon’s formal opening. Voices mixed in English, French, Swahili, Amharic, Portuguese. Somewhere in that multilingual crowd was Angela Ndereyerio, preparing to speak about walking barefoot back to her grandmother’s wisdom.

“Monica said to think of it as putting on the right lenses before looking at the landscape,” Kamali said as they gathered their things and walked toward the hall. “I think mine just got focused. I’m seeing things I couldn’t see before, even though they were always there.”



## THE NOVA CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

**NOVA 1:** Unprocessed/Minimally Processed – fresh vegetables and fruits, dried legumes, grains like rice, maize, millet and sorghum, roots like cassava and yams, nuts, seeds, eggs, fresh fish and meat, milk, plain yoghurt, herbs and spices.

**NOVA 2:** Culinary Ingredients – salt, vegetable oils, butter, lard, sugar, honey, vinegar, starches.

**NOVA 3:** Processed Foods – freshly baked bread, canned or bottled vegetables and legumes, tinned fish, aged cheese, traditionally cured or smoked meats, simple pickles, fruit preserved in syrup.

**NOVA 4:** Ultra-Processed Foods – soft drinks, heavily refined seed oils, packaged snacks and sweets, instant noodles, mass-produced bread with multiple additives, reconstituted meat products (nuggets, sausages with long ingredient lists), packaged soups and ready meals, margarine, sweetened breakfast cereals, energy bars, meal replacement shakes.

# Rallying for change: Connecting food sovereignty advocates across Africa

## The Gathering Storm of Voices

By mid-afternoon, the resort conference hall has filled with participants from across Africa - farmers, researchers, activists, policy makers, students. The energy is palpable as people reconnect with old comrades and forge new alliances. Monica sits with her students in the middle rows, watching them take in the diversity of the crowd.

Million Belay, AFSA's General Coordinator, takes the stage. His presence commands the room through the quiet authority earned through decades of movement building, countless battles fought and won.

"Welcome, food sovereignty warriors," he begins, his voice warm yet urgent. "We gather as threads in a tapestry being woven across our continent. Each of you brings a thread of different colour, different strength, from different places. Together we create something that cannot be torn apart."

## Guardians, Traders, and Dreamers

He speaks of the My Food is African campaign's journey, from a whisper of resistance in communities tired of being told their foods were backward to a continental movement gaining strength daily. He acknowledges the Traditional Authorities Forum representatives who guard indigenous knowledge, the youth activists bringing new energy and social media savvy, the grandmother seed keepers whose work has preserved genetic diversity corporations cannot patent, and of course the leaders of farmers and market traders who feed 90% of Africa despite facing criminalisation and harassment from politicians and their corporate overseers.

"Our sister Angela Ndereyerio has walked a journey many of us recognise," Million says, his eyes sweeping the room. "From disconnection to reconnection, from city convenience to the wisdom of our grandparents, from consumer to seed keeper. She chose to walk barefoot back to the truth our grandmothers knew. Sister Angela, please share your journey with us."



## Angela Ndereyerio's journey to reclaim traditional food knowledge

### (What If Africa's Food Future Is Already Here?)

Angela Ndereyerio, founder of Mavuno Seed Company, approaches the stage and kicks off her shoes before beginning, setting them aside deliberately. The gesture draws surprised laughter from some, knowing nods from others. She smiles and begins.

"I greet you with the warmth of our African soil and the wisdom of our grandparents' hands. I stand before you today barefoot as a reminder. During school holidays as a child, I would walk barefoot through my grandmother's shamba, picking vegetables for supper with her: terere, kunde, managu, wild amaranth. My feet knew that soil, knew its richness."

### The Seduction of Convenience

"Then came the city's seduction. After university, working in Nairobi, convenience foods became my refuge, my identity even. Chips, instant noodles, packaged treats that promised energy and modernity but delivered only momentary satisfaction and an empty wallet. I was too busy, too important, too modern for grandmother's food. Or so I told myself."

"The awakening came gradually; the way dawn comes. Persistent hunger after eating full meals. Energy crashes by mid-afternoon despite breakfast. Food that filled my stomach but wasn't nourishing me, wasn't sustaining me. The breaking point came when I actually calculated my food budget. I was spending more on imported processed foods monthly than my grandmother had spent feeding her entire extended family of twelve for entire seasons. How could this be? How had I gotten so lost?"

### Reclaiming What Was Never Lost

"Recently, experimenting, I tried making vegetable lasagne with terere and managu, those vegetables from my grandmother's garden. It turned out surprisingly delicious! Each experiment taught me something profound that no nutrition course had: our traditional foods are not primitive waiting to be improved by modern science, but sophisticated nutritional systems developed over millennia through careful observation and adaptation."

"The crisis facing us is real and growing. Obesity rates in sub-Saharan Africa have nearly doubled since 2000. We have also lost many eminent Africans to food-related ailments like diabetes and high blood pressure. We've witnessed a tragic inversion where processed food engineered in distant laboratories became a status symbol in our communities, while nutrient-dense indigenous foods our ancestors cultivated were stigmatised as backward, as poverty, as shame."



“But here’s my challenge to you, and to myself daily: embrace a new thought pattern. As we adopt new foods and new technologies, we must incorporate them with our cultural, nutritious ones. This isn’t about food nationalism or rejecting everything modern. It’s about food sovereignty, about recognising that our traditional food systems contain solutions to the very problems that ultra-processed foods have created.”

“Our traditional foods are not primitive waiting to be improved by modern science, but sophisticated nutritional systems developed over millennia through careful observation and adaptation.”

### The Invitation to Imagine Again

“I imagine a future, and I invite you to imagine it with me, where children walk barefoot through their grandmother’s shamba and understand they’re walking through a pharmacy, a nutrition centre, and a climate-resilient food system all at once. Where that knowledge isn’t lost but celebrated, passed on, evolved. Where we choose what serves us rather than what serves distant corporations.”

The room erupts in sustained applause. Monica catches her students’ eyes, sees them processing what they’ve heard.

## How can our grandmothers’ recipes be as convenient as fast foods?



As applause faded, Namazzi, one of the participants, turned to the woman beside her, a stranger who’d become a conversation partner. “Interesting talk, very moving, but I work twelve-hour days with two kids. The last thing I want when I get home exhausted is spending hours preparing nakati from scratch. How is that realistic?”

Mirembe, who’d introduced herself during the morning break, smiled patiently. She had had this conversation many times. “But is KFC actually giving your children what traditional vegetables would? My aunt taught me that malewa with groundnut sauce actually takes less time than waiting for delivery, once you know the technique. Twenty minutes from start to table.”

“Where would I even find those ingredients?” Namazzi asked, genuinely curious now rather than defensive.

“That’s exactly the point AFSA members are trying to address. When millions of us choose convenience over culture because corporations have made their products accessible everywhere while traditional foods become hard to find, it changes what farmers grow, what markets stock, what our children recognise as food, what knowledge gets passed down or lost.”

Namazzi paused, a memory surfacing. Last month her daughter had asked “What’s nakati?” about a vegetable her own mother had cooked several times a week. The child had never tasted it, never seen it. “You’re right. What heritage am I passing on if my children don’t even recognise the foods I grew up with?”

### Convenience, Reimagined

“Imagine if restaurants made it as easy to order matooke with simsim sauce as ordering a burger? What if we organised community potlucks where people share quick, practical ways to prepare traditional dishes for modern life? What if markets got the same infrastructure investment as supermarkets?”



“Imagine if restaurants made it as easy to order matooke with simsim sauce as ordering a burger?”

Namazzi found herself nodding, pulling out her phone. “I’ll try making nakati this week and time myself. Maybe convenience isn’t just what corporations sell us. Maybe we need to demand that our food system actually serves us and makes our local food convenient instead of theirs.”

They exchanged contacts, already planning a first gathering.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 When we choose convenience over culture, what do we risk losing, not just nutritionally, but socially and culturally?
- 2 What does “convenience” really mean in our food systems, and who defines it: corporations, consumers, or communities? Who should define it?
- 3 How might local food vendors, cooperatives, or communities make traditional foods as easy and appealing to access as fast food?
- 4 What may be the pros and cons of using our traditional foods to mimic a fast-food culture?



# How do we turn our fast-food kitchens into places of resistance, not surrender?

## The Display of Truths

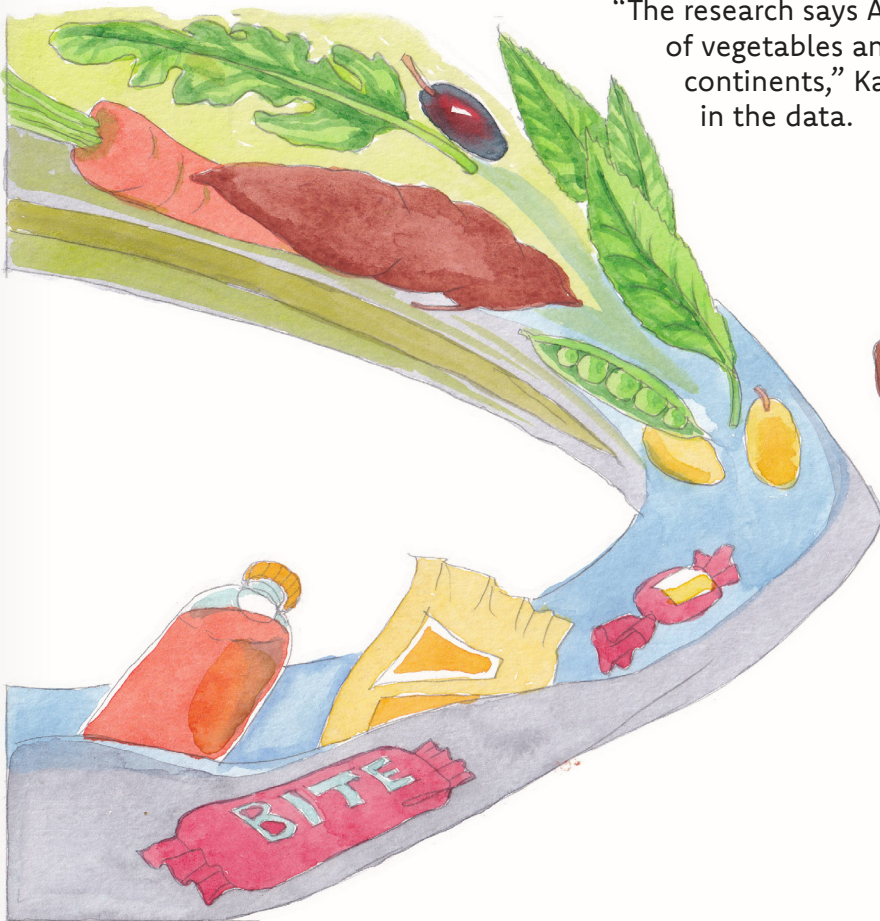
Later that afternoon, Fanza and Kamali found themselves at a colourful display from the African Centre for Biodiversity. A young woman named Shadia, a Makerere University student, was explaining research to a small crowd. Fanza and Kamali joined, reading posters showing ultra-processed food consumption spreading across urban and rural Africa since the 2000s.

The data was stark. Charts showed the invasion clearly: rising imports of packaged foods, declining consumption of traditional crops, health indicators deteriorating in lockstep with dietary changes.

“But Fanza,” Kamali said quietly after Shadia finished her presentation and the crowd dispersed, “I work at a fast-food chain in Addis. These ultra-processed foods you’re criticising? They’re paying my rent. The restaurant employs hundreds of people who need those jobs. What are we supposed to do, shut down and leave people unemployed?”

Fanza pointed to a particular poster showing consumption patterns. “Look at this research carefully. It says we’re becoming dependent on readily available, cheap, nutritionally void foods. When people work long hours for low wages, they need affordable options, I completely understand that. But we’re creating a system where highly processed food, often made up of imported, not local ingredients, becomes the only convenient option for working people. That’s structural inequality dressed up as consumer freedom.”

“The research says Africa still has higher consumption of vegetables and whole grains compared to other continents,” Kamali offered, searching for hope in the data.



**A Tipping Point in Plain Sight**

“Exactly! That’s why this matters so urgently. We haven’t completely lost our traditional food systems yet. The infrastructure still exists, the knowledge still exists, people still prefer these foods when they can access them. But there’s a clear trend toward ultra-processed dependence. We’re at a tipping point. We can still change direction, but that window won’t stay open forever.”

Kamali sighed, the weight of it settling on her shoulders. “My customers are young professionals, students, and families with kids. They come to us because we’re fast, affordable, and consistent. How do you compete with that when you’re a grandmother with a charcoal stove cooking one pot at a time?”

“But there’s a clear trend toward ultra-processed dependence. We’re at a tipping point. We can still change direction, but that window won’t stay open forever.”

**The Politics of Choice**

“What if the problem isn’t individual choices but policy?” Fanza’s voice grew more urgent, more passionate. “Maybe instead of accepting that ultra-processed foods are inevitable, we demand policies that make traditional foods accessible and convenient. Government subsidies for local vendors instead of tax breaks for multinational chains. Better infrastructure for traditional markets instead of displacing them for supermarkets. Regulations requiring chains like yours to source locally, support traditional preparation methods. Your restaurant could be part of the solution if policy demanded it.”

Kamali’s expression shifted as something clicked into place. “You know what? I’ve been noticing something. Most of our customers are urban, middle-class, and younger people. But the older ones, they always ask if we have traditional options on the menu, and they seem genuinely disappointed when we don’t. Maybe those dishes could actually be profitable too, if we marketed them properly, if we learned how to prepare them efficiently at scale.”



### Turning the Menu Around

“Now you’re thinking like Angela! Food choices that honour our heritage while meeting modern needs. Not backward, not impossible, just requiring different infrastructure and support than what corporations get. That’s food sovereignty. That is local control over what we eat!”

“I’m taking this research back to my manager,” Kamali said, gathering ACB (African Centre for Biodiversity) fact sheets, her mind already working through possibilities. “Maybe it’s time our industry started actually serving communities instead of just extracting profit from them. Actually, maybe it’s time I started turning my kitchen into a place of resistance, not surrender!”

“Maybe it’s time our industry started actually serving communities instead of just extracting profit from them. Actually, maybe it’s time I started turning my kitchen into a place of resistance, not surrender!”



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 The data shows both danger and opportunity where Africa still eats more real food than any other continent. What can be done now to prevent ultra-processed with all its negative health effects, from becoming dominant across Africa? just nutritionally, but socially and culturally?
- 2 How do we balance the need for employment in industries like fast food with the need to protect public health and food sovereignty?
- 3 What kinds of policies, incentives, or regulations could shift the balance from imported, processed foods to locally sourced and prepared foods?



## Could your grandmother's plate hold the secret medicine you need?

### Mira's personal transformation and the power of food sovereignty

During a late afternoon breakout session, a Zimbabwean farmer named Mira shared her story. She spoke quietly but with an intensity that held the room's attention.

"I lived in Harare for fifteen years, working in an office, eating what was quick and cheap like everyone else around me. Breakfast was instant porridge, easy to make before rushing to work. Lunch was takeaway sadza with processed meat from street vendors. Dinner was whatever came in packages at the supermarket, whatever I could heat up fast after a long day. For years, this seemed completely normal. Everyone I knew ate this way."

"Then I got sick. Not all at once like an accident, but gradually, insidiously. Constant fatigue that no amount of sleep relieved. Digestive problems that became my daily companion. High blood pressure diagnosed at 35, when I thought I was too young for that. The doctors gave me medications, pills to manage this, pills to manage that. But I kept getting worse, not better. More symptoms, more pills, more problems."

"My grandmother said I needed to come home. To her farm outside Masvingo where she'd lived her whole life, where she'd raised six children who'd all moved to cities. At first, I resisted. I had a career, obligations, a life in the city. I couldn't just abandon everything. But eventually, feeling desperate and diminished, I went, thinking I'd stay maybe two or three weeks before returning to my real life."



### Coming home to healing

"My grandmother fed me differently from the first day. Fresh vegetables from her garden with every single meal, varieties I'd forgotten even existed. Maize sadza, but not from a package, made from grain she'd grown and dried and ground herself. Leafy greens that appeared daily: muboora, rape, covo. Groundnuts. Cow peas. Pumpkin leaves. Sweet potatoes fresh from the earth. No meat from supermarkets with their long ingredient lists and preservatives, just an occasional chicken from her yard that had actually lived like a chicken, unlike the frozen, chemical-laced chickens imported from Europe."

"Within three months, my health transformed so completely it felt like magic, though it wasn't magic at all. Energy returned; a vitality I'd forgotten I'd lost. The digestive issues that had plagued me for years simply vanished. Blood pressure normalised without medication. I stopped all the pills the doctors had

prescribed. I could not believe that a healthy diet alone, just actual food grown in actual soil and prepared with actual care, could restore my health so completely.”

“Now I farm the way my grandmother taught me, the way her mother taught her. I supply fresh vegetables to my old neighbourhood in Harare, delivering weekly to families there. I see the same pattern everywhere, repeating like a curse we refuse to break; people eating ultra-processed foods because they’re convenient and everywhere, slowly getting sick, taking medications that don’t address the root cause, getting sicker, taking more medications. And right here, in the soil my grandmother has tended for fifty years, the solution grows. It was here all along.”

Several people in the room were wiping their eyes. Mira’s story had touched something deep.

“I see the same pattern everywhere, repeating like a curse we refuse to break; people eating ultra-processed foods because they’re convenient and everywhere, slowly getting sick, taking medications that don’t address the root cause, getting sicker, taking more medications.”



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 What does Mira’s story reveal about the link between personal health and the wider food system?
- 2 How can traditional farming, healthy, diverse diets and food preparation methods be revived and adapted for urban populations?
- 3 What would it take for health systems, nutrition education, and agricultural policy to take stories like Mira’s seriously as evidence, not just anecdote?



## What if one school meal could transform three generations?

### Seeds of nourishment: A story of schools, food, and future

Fru Wanka stood before the workshop participants, her voice carrying the weight of stories she'd gathered across Africa. She began with two children: Tifa, a boy, and Maya, a girl. Their experiences revealed the different challenges of school nutrition across the continent.

Five days before schools opened this year, Tifa Rwizi drafted his tuck list for Machira High School in Zimbabwe: nearly US\$100 worth of fizz drinks, ice cream, chocolate, sweets, and pizza. His parents debated: the father remembered the school newsletter about healthy food, but the mother felt Tifa deserved it after doing well in his exams. They bought everything on the list.

Meanwhile, eight-year-old Maya had been coming to school hungry every day until a school feeding programme finally provided her with a warm meal during break.

At Machira High, the senior boarding master searches all bags on arrival. He returned eighty per cent of the snacks to parents, challenging them: "Why are you spending money on that which is not food? At this school we promote healthy development of the whole child."

A heated debate followed. That evening, the school nutritionist explained to families that wholesome food – maputi, matemba, leafy greens – builds strong bones, sharp minds, and steady energy for learning. Ultra-processed foods provide 'empty calories' but little real nourishment. What you feed a developing body now affects their health for decades. Good food is preventive medicine.

**“That evening, the school nutritionist explained to families that wholesome food maputi, matemba, leafy greens builds strong bones, sharp minds, and steady energy for learning.”**



A WhatsApp group was created immediately. Three-quarters of members committed to traditional foods. By second term, only US\$27 worth of items were returned. One parent said it best: "We are slowly consuming wholesome foods."

Maya's story is one I encountered during my March 2025 visits to Arusha, Mbale, and Kitwe as part of School Food 4 Cities. Millions of children face either Maya's crisis or Tifa's, not enough food or the wrong kind. School meals can address both, but only if we treat them as strategic investments, not charity.



I've seen the same challenges everywhere: limited finance, procurement systems that exclude smallholder farmers, poor coordination between sectors, inadequate government support. At Paris's farm in Mbale, farmers like Herbert and Haven know agrochemicals harm health but cannot afford safer alternatives.

The solution requires sustainable financing, empowered smallholder farmers, improved procurement connecting schools to local producers, strengthened partnerships, government commitment, and community support for nutritious food production that protects soil health.

**“School feeding programmes are intervention points where policy meets practice, where nutrition education reshapes choices, where local economies strengthen, where children learn what real food is.”**

When we get this right, the effects span generations. Children thrive with healthy diverse diets. Families reconnect with traditional foods. Local farmers gain stable markets. Communities become resilient. Soils heal.

School feeding programmes are intervention points where policy meets practice, where nutrition education reshapes choices, where local economies strengthen, where children learn what real food is.

The boarding master at Machira High and the programme that reached Maya represent two necessary approaches: one teaches discernment about what nourishes, the other ensures nourishment is available. Both transform not just individual children, but entire communities.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 How can school nutrition programmes address both scarcity (Maya's experience) and abundance of the wrong foods (Tifa's experience) within the same community or country? What would an integrated approach look like?
- 2 What would help families in your community choose traditional foods over processed foods?
- 3 What stops local farmers from supplying schools with food? How can we change this?
- 4 If school meals are investments rather than charity, how should we fund and measure them differently? What would success look like for the next generation, in 25 years?

## Is the fight for African food sovereignty one of the most urgent and overlooked struggles of our time?

As the workshop's final session concludes on the third evening, Monica gathers her former students around a quiet table at the pavilion's edge. The setting sun casts long shadows across Lake Victoria, the water turning gold and amber. They've spent three intense days immersed in the My Food is African campaign, hearing from communities resisting corporate food systems, learning about both victories and ongoing struggles. Now comes the harder question: what will they do with this knowledge?

### Mapping Food System Innovations Across Africa

Monica spreads a map marked with eleven countries across the table. Small pins mark cities and rural areas where AFSA members are active. "AFSA members in each of these countries are implementing Transforming African Food Systems initiatives," she begins. "They're documenting what happens when communities take control of their food sovereignty. Seed saving, agroecological farming, market organising, traditional food revival, policy advocacy. But their stories remain invisible to policy makers, buried under corporate-funded research insisting that industrial agriculture is the only path forward."

"AFSA members need researchers who can translate community innovation into evidence that policy makers cannot ignore."



She turns to Estridah, who's been taking notes throughout the workshop. "You've been asking all week about policy gaps, about why governments ignore what's clearly working at grassroots level. AFSA members need researchers who can translate community innovation into evidence that policy makers cannot ignore."

Monica paused, seeing the questions forming in their eyes. She understood their doubt. Three years of research sounded ambitious, perhaps impossible. And even if they succeeded, would anyone in power actually listen?

"Let me tell you about a conversation I had six months ago," Monica said, settling back in her chair. "Because you need to understand what we're up against, but also what's actually possible when we approach this work strategically."



## Monica meets the Ministry: An insight into what a sympathetic government policymaker faces and how to engage them

“So, I finally met Dr. Musoke, the Permanent Secretary I’d been trying to reach for six months. At a government reception at the Sheraton.”

Kamali leaned forward. “What happened?”

“She found me at the buffet and said her mother had sent her our Barefoot Guide. Her mother grows her own food in Mbale, cooks traditionally, healthier at seventy-two than Dr. Musoke is at fifty-five. Then she said, ‘I probably agree with most of what you’d say. But I need you to understand what I’m working with.’”

“So, she agrees with us?” Fanza asked.

“That’s what I thought. But then came the real conversation. She told me she has forty-three million people to feed. Twenty million in cities, growing by half a million yearly. People working long hours, living in one room, cooking on single charcoal stoves.”

“The excuse they always use,” Njabulo said.

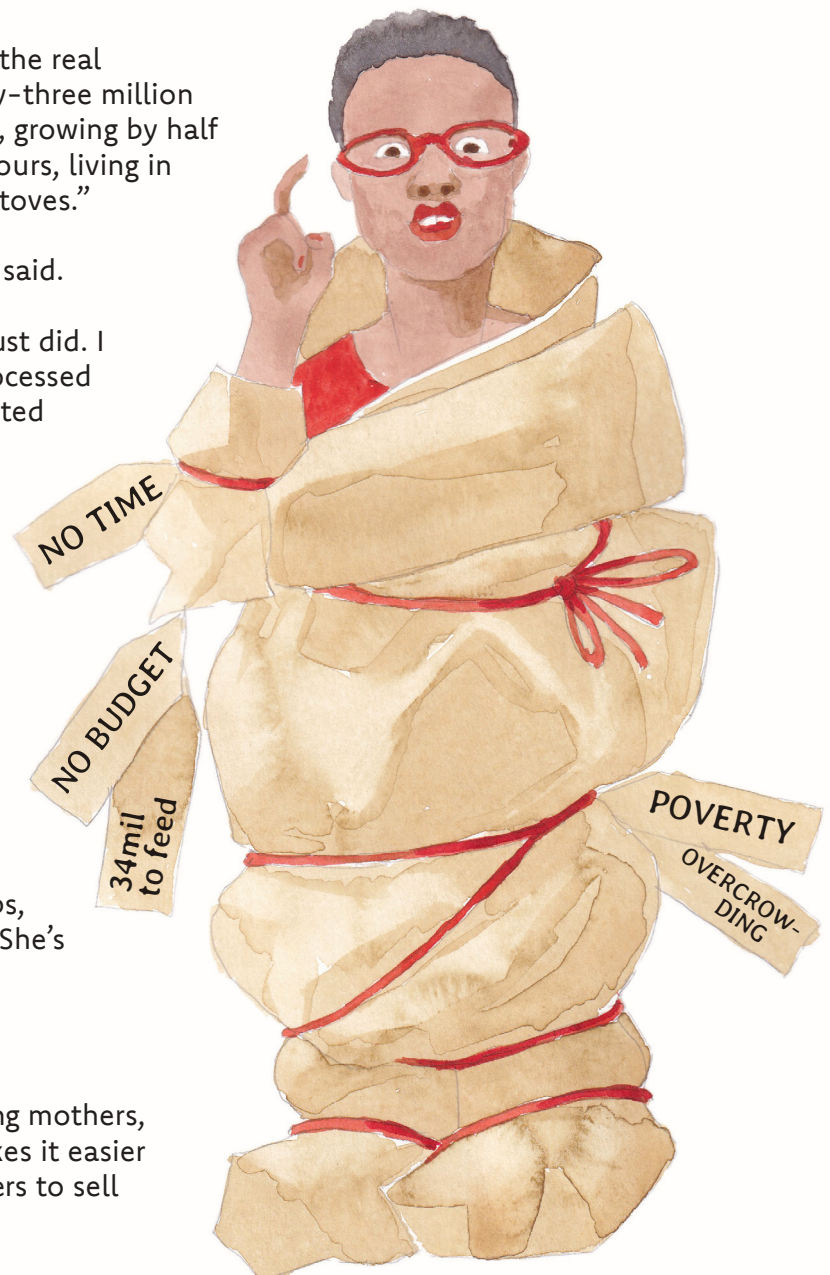
“Wait. I pushed back exactly like you just did. I said, ‘So you fill markets with ultra-processed foods that make them sick?’ She corrected me. ‘No, I fill markets with fortified foods that address documented nutritional deficiencies. Anaemia among pregnant women. Vitamin A deficiency in children. Fortified flour and oil solve real problems. We have the data.’”

Estridah frowned. “But the diabetes and obesity?”

“I said that. Her composure cracked. She told me her nephew is twelve and pre-diabetic. His mother works two jobs, buys what’s quick and what he’ll eat. ‘She’s keeping her family afloat.’”

The students went quiet.

“I shifted approach. Said I wasn’t judging mothers, I was questioning why her ministry makes it easier for corporations to sell junk than farmers to sell real food. That’s when she opened up.”



Monica counted on her fingers. “Her week: Monday, World Bank said they’ll fund fortification but not farmer seed banks. Tuesday, her Minister asked about increasing maize imports. Wednesday, Nestlé offered to train health workers at no cost. Thursday, parliament questioned why Uganda isn’t attracting food processing investment. Friday, she reviewed reports showing one agricultural officer for every five thousand farmers, none trained in agroecology because colleges don’t teach it.”

“Then she asked, ‘With the budget I have, the staff I have, the political pressures I face, how do I do what you’re asking?’”

Kamali spoke quietly. “What did you say?”

“I told her the current path has costs we’ll pay for decades. Fortification creates dependency, builds markets for corporations. She responded, ‘They also prevent blindness in children. Right now. Today. I don’t have the luxury of perfect solutions.’”

Monica leaned back. “That’s when I realised this wasn’t a hostile bureaucrat. This was someone trapped in a system she didn’t create.”

“So, what happened?” Fanza asked.

“I asked what if we helped expand what’s possible. Territorial markets feeding cities. Farmer cooperatives supplying schools. Her ministry could support scaling what works. She asked, ‘With what money?’ Fortification comes with donor funding. Supporting territorial markets means budget investment. The Finance Minister would laugh her out.”

“So, we’re stuck,” Njabulo said.

“I suggested we help her make the economic case. Every shilling on imported food leaves Uganda. Every shilling in territorial markets circulates locally. Employment. Tax revenue. Reduced health costs.”

“She went quiet, then said, ‘You’re asking me to fight battles on multiple fronts. Against donor conditionality. Corporate lobbying. Political pressure. My ministry’s limited capacity.’”

“I got frustrated and said, ‘I’m asking you to do your job.’ She smiled sadly. ‘You sound like my mother.’”

The students laughed.

**Monica leaned back. “That’s when I realised this wasn’t a hostile bureaucrat. This was someone trapped in a system she didn’t create.”**



“Then she laid it out. ‘I personally believe in food sovereignty. But I can do more inside this system than outside it.’ She explained what she could actually do. Can’t reject fortification, donors won’t allow it. But she can push for local sourcing requirements. Can’t overhaul extension overnight but can fund pilot programmes in three districts. Can’t stop Nestlé but can strengthen regulations on marketing to children.”

### **I am not the enemy**

“That’s not enough,” Estridah said.

“That’s what I told her. She agreed. ‘No, it’s not. But it’s something.’ Then she turned it around. ‘Stop treating people like me as the enemy. When you advocate publicly, you create political space for us to act. When you document alternatives, you give us evidence for sceptical ministers.’”

“What did she want specifically?” Kamali asked.

“School feeding policy review in four months. Current proposal relies on fortified imports. She asked for documented models of schools sourcing from local farmers. Costs, logistics, outcomes. She could use that evidence.”

“Can we do that?”

“Absolutely. Ethiopia, Kenya, Zambia examples. We’ll add Uganda cases.”

Monica paused. “Before she left, she said, ‘The system you’re fighting isn’t run by villains. It’s run by people like me who care but operate within constraints we didn’t create. The corporations you oppose employ thousands, pay taxes, follow regulations.’”

“So, we do nothing?” Njabulo challenged.

“Her words: ‘We do what’s strategically possible. We push boundaries gradually. But we don’t pretend it’s simple, because when advocates oversimplify, policymakers stop listening.’”

Fanza asked, “What should we learn?”

“She told me what to tell you. Officials aren’t obstacles or allies, they’re complicated. Policy change requires both outside pressure and inside champions. Learn to speak economics and evidence as fluently as justice. And some are listening, even when it doesn’t look like it.”

Kamali spoke thoughtfully. “So, we prepare better. Understand constraints. Bring solutions, not just criticism.”

“Exactly. Change happens through both pressure and cooperation. Dr. Musoke can’t do what we want alone. But she can do things we can’t from outside. We need each other.”

“Did you believe her?” Abdou asked.

Monica thought about the cracked composure discussing her pre-diabetic nephew. The weariness describing her impossible week. The genuine interest when offered evidence.

“Yes. Which makes the work harder. It would be simpler if officials were just corrupt or incompetent. But many are trapped in systems designed to serve corporate interests, donor agendas, political pressures. Our job is creating conditions where they can act differently.”

She looked around. “That’s what I learned. The conversations you’ll have with officials won’t always look like battles. Sometimes they’ll look like negotiations with people who want similar things but face different constraints. Strategic advocacy means understanding power, constraints, and possibilities. Not just shouting at walls but finding the cracks where change can enter.”

Monica looked around the table, letting the story sink in. That conversation changed how she thought about their work. Creating conditions within which trapped officials could act differently. That had become central to her understanding of strategic advocacy.

Estridah leans forward eagerly, her researcher instincts engaged. “Document the evidence that already exists but gets dismissed as merely anecdotal?”

“Exactly. Show with rigorous methodology that traditional seed systems maintain genetic diversity that industrial monocultures systematically destroy. Prove that community-managed land produces more diverse nutrition per hectare than large-scale industrial farms. Document that local food economies keep wealth circulating within communities rather than extracting it to distant corporate headquarters. The evidence exists. We need researchers who can compile it, analyse it, present it in ways that policy makers cannot dismiss.”

Monica’s gaze shifts to Njabulo. “And you, you’ve been documenting how informal traders feed 90% of Africa while facing constant harassment and criminalization from authorities who see them as problems to eliminate rather than solutions to support. AFSA members need that documentation work scaled up across multiple countries. Work with traders’ associations, street vendors, spaza shop networks. Document how they maintain food diversity, resist ultra-processed food penetration, create alternative supply chains despite every structural barrier that policymakers throw at them.”



**“That conversation changed how she thought about their work. Creating conditions within which trapped officials could act differently. That had become central to her understanding of strategic advocacy.”**

“Build evidence for policies that support rather than destroy them,” Njabulo says, understanding crystallising.

“Show that informal markets aren’t inefficiencies waiting to be replaced by supermarkets, but sophisticated systems deserving infrastructure investment.”

“Show that these aren’t problems to be solved but solutions being undermined by bad policy,” Monica affirms.

The table falls quiet as the weight of these commitments settles over them. Three years of research across eleven countries. Partnerships to build. Data to gather. Analysis to conduct. Papers to write. Policy makers to convince.



### Positioning Students to Act

Kamali breaks the silence, her voice smaller than usual. “What about those of us already inside corporate systems? I’ve spent this entire week feeling complicit in everything we’re fighting against. Where do I fit in this work?”

Monica looks at her with affection. “Kamali, you’re positioned where most academics and activists will never be. You understand how these systems operate from inside, what motivates them, what constraints they face, what might actually shift them. You can document whether transformation is possible within corporate structures. Can restaurants source locally and remain profitable? Can traditional dishes be prepared at scale and marketed successfully? Can institutional buyers support community food systems? Some TAFS initiatives are already experimenting with exactly this. You could learn from them, document what works, create pathways others might follow.”

“It’s how we’ve always maintained food knowledge across generations, how young people learn what real food tastes like, how elders pass down techniques. It’s not backward. It’s sophisticated social technology.”

Fanza pulls out her phone, scrolling through three days of photos. “I’ve been thinking about what Angela said, and what I’ve been observing. Festivals, communal cooking, the way my grandmother’s kitchen in Yaounde was always full of neighbours sharing food, everyone bringing something. Culture, tradition, and practical resilience woven together. Infrastructure for food sovereignty. Knowledge gets transmitted this way, recipes evolve, communities maintain connection to their food through these everyday acts.”

“In Dakar, every celebration still centres on communal cooking,” Abdou adds quietly, speaking up after mostly listening for three days. “Weddings, births, naming ceremonies, funerals. Everyone brings something, everyone shares. Everyone participates in the preparation. It’s how we’ve always maintained food knowledge across generations, how young people learn what real food tastes like, how elders pass down techniques. It’s not backward. It’s sophisticated social technology.”



### Strengthening a Continental Movement

Monica looks around the circle, seeing the shift that's happened. Five days ago, these were isolated individuals struggling with their own contradictions. Now they're beginning to see themselves as connected threads in a larger movement. "This is what you've learned here that most nutrition courses never teach. We have good food in Africa. Diverse, nutritious, climate-adapted, culturally meaningful food that has sustained our people for millennia. We don't need corporate saviours flying in to rescue us with their processed substitutes and patented seeds."

"But our food is under siege," Njabulo says, his voice hard with barely contained anger at the injustice of it. "Every policy decision that favours supermarkets over traditional markets. Every agricultural subsidy that goes to industrial chemicals while agroecology gets nothing. Every trade agreement that privileges imports over local production. Every advertisement telling our children that packaged snacks are modern and progressive while grandmother's cooking represents poverty and backwardness. It's systematic. It's intentional. It's working."

### From Crisis to Action: Communities Resisting Corporate Capture

"Which is exactly why this resistance work matters so critically," Monica replies. "The TAFS initiatives are quietly building transformation across the continent. Traditional seeds being saved and shared. Agroecological farming spreading farm to farm. Markets organising to resist displacement. Communities reviving food cultures. Schools rejecting junk food. It's happening. Now we need to document it, amplify it, connect it, scale it, protect it. Every meal is a choice, yes, but more importantly, every policy is a choice about what kind of food system we're building together."



### From Witnesses to Agents of Change: Connecting Personal Action to Collective Impact

As darkness settles completely over the lake, Monica looks at her former students, now colleagues in a continental struggle she's been part of for decades. "I want each of you to think deeply about how your work connects to this larger movement. This isn't just about research or documentation or social media or market vending. It's about every one of us using whatever position we hold, whatever skills we have, whatever access we've been granted, to amplify food sovereignty and resist corporate capture of our food systems."

Nobody moves to leave, even though it's late and they're all exhausted. The weight of commitment hangs in the air, heavy but not oppressive. Mixed with something else: hope, perhaps. Or determination. Or both.

"We have good food in Africa," Estridah says softly into the darkness. "We just need to fight for the right to keep it, to evolve it on our own terms, to pass it to our children."

"And we will," Njabulo replies with quiet certainty. "One market, one meal, one community, one policy at a time. Starting with these TAFS initiatives, learning from them, documenting them, connecting them."

### **One Meal, One Market, One Movement**

They gather their things slowly, reluctant to end this moment. Tomorrow they'll scatter again to their different countries, different contexts, different struggles. But something has shifted. They're not isolated anymore. They're part of something larger, ancient and of the future, revolutionary and practical. The fight for African food sovereignty, happening one grandmother's garden, one market stall, one school meal, one policy victory at a time.

Monica's students stand at the threshold of transformation. They've spent three days understanding both threat and resistance: ultra-processed foods backed by corporate billions and enabling policies, but also communities quietly reviving traditional crops, schools boldly rejecting junk food contracts, farmers returning to agroecological methods, markets maintaining diversity against constant pressure. In the chapters ahead, we'll explore how this resistance takes shape through policy change battles, citizen campaign strategies, market system organising, and continental advocacy platforms.

As Angela taught them, as their grandmothers knew, Africa's food wisdom isn't backward. It's the foundation for a transformation to agroecology, territorial markets and healthy diverse diets. And they're learning that transformation happens one meal at a time, amplified through mobilising and organising, promoted and protected by policies, spread through communities.

**And they're learning that transformation happens one meal at a time, amplified through mobilising and organising, promoted and protected by policies, spread through communities.**





“Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.”

La Via Campesina

“When you control the seed,  
you control life.”

Vandana Shiva

“People are fed by the food industry, which pays no attention to health, and by the health industry, which pays no attention to food.”

Wendell Berry



# The Journey from Practice to Policy

## When Farmers Write the Rules

# 3

Monica turns off the lights and walks to her car, Angela's questions still ringing in her mind. How do individual choices connect to systemic change? She knows her students don't only need nutrition facts, but they also need to see how their food decisions fit into larger movements, how personal health connects to political power.

On the drive home, she tunes the radio to Community FM, catching the tail end of the evening news. The announcer's voice cuts through: "Coming up next is our weekly programme "My Food, My Heritage". This week we feature an interview with Andrew Adem, food sovereignty advocate with the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa, discussing the Transformation of African Food Systems initiative and what it takes to shift policy across the continent."

Monica turns up the volume.

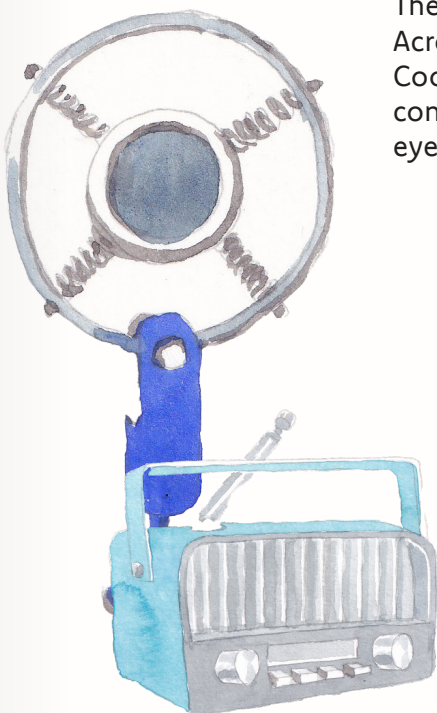
### The Radio Interview - AFSA's My Food is African campaign

The traditional music fades as Freda leans toward her microphone. Across the studio table sits Andrew Adem, AFSA's Food Systems Coordinator, just returned from six weeks traveling across the continent. There's dust on his backpack in the corner, stories in his eyes.

**Freda:** Hello, and welcome to Community FM. I'm your host Freda, and today we have a very special guest. Andrew, welcome. You are the Programmes Coordinator for Food Systems at AFSA, is that right?

**Andrew:** That's right, thank you, Freda. I'm a big fan of this show, so I'm excited to be on this side of the microphone.

**Freda:** We're honoured. Let's start at the beginning. Why did AFSA launch the My Food is African campaign?



**Andrew:** We reached a point where we really needed to step our work up and start reaching large numbers of people. Across Africa, we were seeing our children choosing processed snacks over traditional meals, our farmers abandoning indigenous crops for export commodities, and our food cultures slowly disappearing. The statistics were alarming.



But what really drove us was hearing from communities themselves. From Mali to Kenya, people were saying: We've lost pride in our own food. That hit hard. How do you lose pride in foods that sustained people for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years?

**Freda:**

A powerful realisation. How is the campaign working on the ground?

**Andrew:** We've built it on four interconnected pillars - African food celebrations, sharing knowledge and information, policy influencing and building strong local food actors' networks.

Firstly, we're looking at media. We're creating documentaries that celebrate the nutritional value of indigenous foods found in African markets, training journalists to counter the narrative that Western food is superior.

Then there's community engagement, where the magic happens. We establish school clubs where kids learn about indigenous crops through gardening. We mobilise chefs reimagining traditional recipes. I've seen a chef in Lagos turn millet into a fine-dining experience with people queuing for hours.

**Freda:** Amazing. I imagine the policy side is the harder battle.

**Andrew:** Yes, policy advocacy is our third pillar, but where we're seeing surprising progress. When policymakers see evidence that traditional diets address malnutrition more effectively than imported solutions, and that local food systems create more jobs, they listen. In West Africa, we documented how promoting indigenous grains reduced import bills by 30% in participating communities while improving child nutrition. Numbers like that get attention in ministries of finance.

**Freda:** The campaign sounds broad. Who actually benefits?

**Andrew:** It is intentionally broad. Small-scale farmers gain access to markets for their indigenous crops. Youth and women become central players. But the real winners are African citizens generally. They get access to foods that are healthier, more affordable, and culturally relevant. Families rediscover meals their grandmothers prepared, now understanding the nutritional science behind why those foods kept communities healthy for generations.

**Freda:** How does technology play out? Our agricultural sector has continually advanced technology to advance agricultural production. Will that all be thrown away?

“When policymakers see evidence that traditional diets address malnutrition more effectively than imported solutions, and that local food systems create more jobs, they listen.”



**Andrew:** First, we need to define technology; the innovations that farmers are already doing in communities are equally technological. We're talking about turning investment towards community-led development of new practices. Transitioning and focusing on the technology that farmers themselves are innovating is a worthwhile agenda.

Will that mean throwing all that away? No, I don't think so. We need to start investing in harnessing indigenous knowledge, and community led innovation to develop appropriate technology for our African traditional farming systems that will be more sustainable and reduce labour burdens in an environmentally friendly way.

**Freda:** An interesting perspective. Do you have a specific example of how this is unfolding?

**Andrew:** Absolutely. This shows our fourth pillar, capacity building. In northern Ghana, we worked with a women's cooperative struggling to sell their indigenous vegetables. We connected them with urban restaurants in Accra that wanted authentic ingredients. We trained the women in post-harvest handling and branding. Within six months, they had orders exceeding their production capacity.

The urban consumers bought vegetables, but they also reconnected with their heritage. One restaurant owner told us customers brought their children to try dishes they hadn't eaten since visiting rural relatives. Food became a bridge.

**Freda:** I like this bit. What challenges do you face?

**Andrew:** The convenience factor is huge. Through the use of chemicals processed foods are designed to be addictive and convenient. A packet of instant noodles seems easier than preparing a traditional meal. We're competing against massive marketing budgets from multinational food companies.

There's also the perception that traditional foods are backward or poor people's food. We're working to shift that narrative by showing that indigenous foods are sophisticated, nutrient-dense solutions that modern science is only beginning to understand.

**Freda:**

Where do you see this campaign in five years?



**Andrew:** By 2030, we want fundamental shifts. Like policy frameworks that support agroecology and educational curricula that include African food heritage. Most importantly, we want young Africans proud of their food heritage. When a child in Dakar chooses baobab fruit over a candy bar because they know it's a superfood, that's victory. When farmers in rural Uganda can send their children to university on income from indigenous crops, that's transformation.

**Freda:** That's a big dream.

**Andrew:** And that is a possible dream.

**Freda:** Any final thoughts?

**Andrew:** This campaign recognises that food is never just about nutrition. It's about identity, economics, environment, and dignity. When we say, My Food Is African, we're reclaiming power over our bodies, our communities, and our future. This is about who we choose to be as a continent.



“When we say, My Food Is African, we're reclaiming power over our bodies, our communities, and our future. This is about who we choose to be as a continent.”

**Freda:** Thank you, Andrew. Before you go, any upcoming campaign activities?

**Andrew:** We plan to tour AFSA members in various countries to monitor the campaign's progress, assess outcomes in policy advocacy, and provide support. We'll visit Ghana, Senegal, DR Congo, Cameroon, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Nigeria.

**Freda:** Say hi to all our African brothers and sisters and come back to share your experiences. It was nice having you.

This is where we end today's programme... be sure to tune in next week for our focus on Climate Smart Agriculture: is it a magic bullet or are the agri-chemical companies up to their tricks again?

# The Journey Begins: Shifting Systems of Power, Plate, and Planet



## How can the Kitchens, Street Corners and Markets be the Frontlines in the Battle for Our Planet's Future?

The My Food Is African campaign is fundamentally about shifting systems from the ground up, to produce the right policies, practices, and attitudes that decide how Africans grow, trade, and eat their food.

When Andrew joined AFSA as Food Systems Coordinator, there was no time for orientation as most first timers would anticipate. His first assignment was to join his colleague Abbot, on a journey across Africa. In what sounds like an adventure of exploring Africa, they would be joined by two recent graduates in Nutrition from Makerere University, Njabulo, a resilient change fighter from South Africa, and Estridah, a young educationist from Malawi, trying to find a new purpose. Together, they set out to hunt for outcomes, for proof that this campaign was changing lives, institutions, and policies.

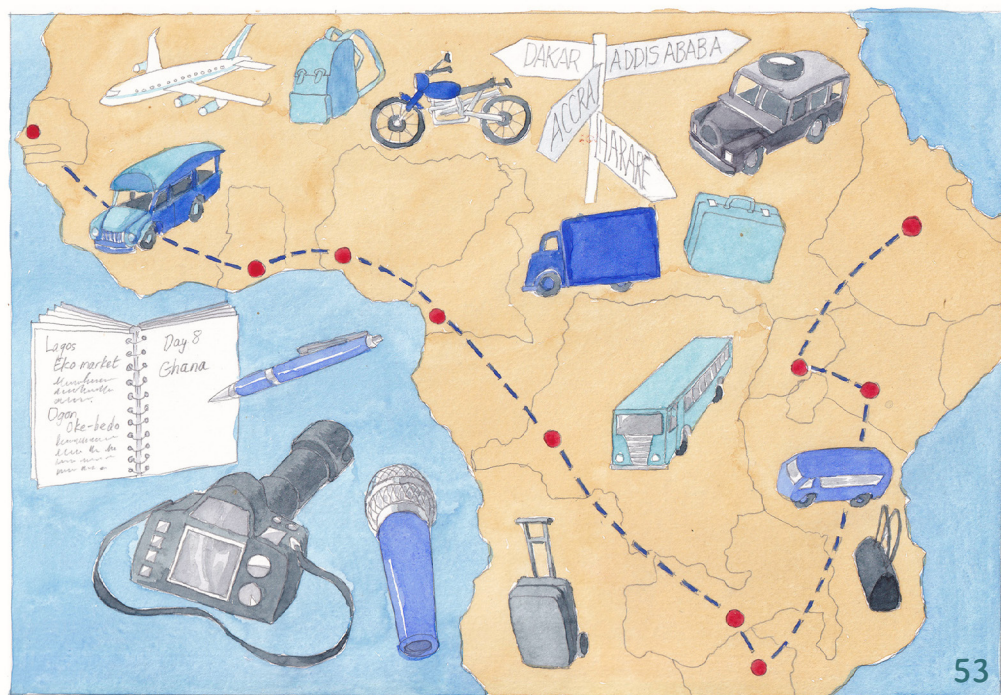
## A Map and a Mission

After weeks of planning, they finally converged in Accra's humid evening heat. Jet-lagged but energised, they claimed a corner table at the hotel café, where ceiling fans spun lazily overhead, doing little against the humidity. The table quickly became cluttered with maps, notebooks, recording devices, and chilled glasses of bissap, the red hibiscus drink sweet and tart against their tongues.

Abbot spread a map wide. "Here's our route," he said, tracing his finger. "Ghana, Senegal, DRC, Cameroon, Kenya, Zambia, Ethiopia, Uganda, Nigeria, and finally Zimbabwe where we will climax by joining the African Food Festival."

Estridah raised her eyebrows. "That's a whole continent," she laughed. "And a whole lot of flights," Njabulo added dryly. Andrew leaned in. "True. Every stop will show us whether Africans are reclaiming their food systems, in schools, parliaments, markets, and kitchens." Abbot lifted his glass. "To the journey." Echoes of their voices and clinging of glasses faded into the air.

"The My Food Is African campaign is fundamentally about shifting systems from the ground up, to produce the right policies, practices, and attitudes that decide how Africans grow, trade, and eat their food."



## Ghana: The Currency of Culture, the Power of a Plate

### How can a minister ignore a plate of food that tastes like home?

The next day, they travelled to meet CIKOD, an AFSA member in Ghana, spending the day in fields and communities where the campaign comes alive.

In the fields, farmers, women's groups, and youth proudly showcased indigenous seeds and foods at a local festival. Energising dances to xylophones and drums, melodic voices, stories turning culture itself into policy influence. Chiefs, queen mothers, municipal executives, Ministry of Food and Agriculture directors, and nutrition officers all attended. CIKOD's strategy places Indigenous People at the centre of transforming a food system that doesn't serve them.

But does this mean policies no longer matter? As Estridah sat wondering, Dery's voice interrupted, as if reading her mind. He recounted how crucial it is that policies resonate with ancestral culture and traditions.

"How will the Dagara people perform funeral rites if they lose traditional guinea corn to mono-cropped white maize? Do they replace the Kajim?" He explained that Kajim is a bunch of guinea corn woven together, provided by every family head when a male member dies, placed by the palanquin to showcase the deceased's relationship with the land.

"Such an important rite will be lost. My children and grandchildren will only learn about it in history class," Dery added in despair. Others nodded in agreement. Later, as night fell, they gathered around a campfire, air filled with roasting maize. Local activists spoke passionately about how food festivals influence ministers.

"Culture is our entry point," one said. "No minister can ignore a plate of food that tastes like home." Njabulo scribbled in his notebook. "Policy through pride." Estridah photographed firelight dancing on the maize. "Storytelling food," she whispered.

"Culture is our entry point," one said. "No minister can ignore a plate of food that tastes like home."



“Policy is like soil,” she said. “If it’s healthy, everything else can grow.”



## Senegal: Sowing the Seeds of Systemic Change

### How can good policy be the soil for healthy farming practices?

From Ghana, the team rushed to the airport on a cool morning, tired but eager, catching a flight to Dakar’s sun-soaked streets.

At a busy corner café in Thiès, they met Aissatou, volunteering with Agrecole Afrique, AFSA’s local partner and member of DyTAES, Dynamic for an Agro-Ecological Transition in Senegal. Through DyTAES, Agrecole had achieved something remarkable: instituting local markets connecting agroecological farmers with market women, food processors, and buyers. This network became leverage for engaging local government, resulting in policy that allocated hectares of land for prison farms, transforming them into healthy organic operations where inmates grow food that nourishes communities.

Over the clatter of Thiès traffic, Aissatou explained their five-year strategy to embed agroecology into national law. “Policy is like soil,” she said. “If it’s healthy, everything else can grow.”

Both Ghana and Senegal energised them but also revealed that even strong movements face persistent challenges: funding gaps, political pushback, the slow grind of institutional change.

## Key Debate: Can Agroecology Feed Africa's Cities?

### **The Argument from Industrial Agriculture:**

“Small-scale agroecology works for pilot projects and research papers. But African cities are growing fast. Lagos needs millions of tons of food weekly. Hybrid seeds and fertilisers applied with the new technologies of ‘precision farming’ deliver predictable yields in a sustainable way that will feed cities. Show us agroecology feeding ten million people, not just a few hundred farmers in a demonstration plot.”

Policymakers face real pressure. Urban food shortages spark protests. Voters blame governments when maize prices spike. Industrial agriculture promises certainty backed by corporate guarantees and decades of research data. Agroecology is far too big a gamble.

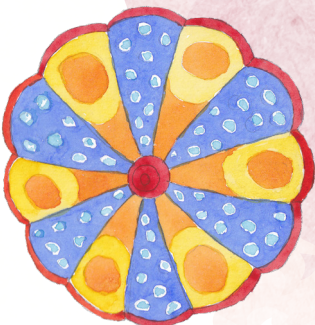
### **How Agroecology Advocates Respond:**

Agroecology is about transition to a lasting solution. Small scale farmers already produce 70% of the continent's food and many use some agroecological practices such as intercropping, use of compost and manure, integrated pest management, local seeds. Many also use various chemicals, particularly in horticulture. But given the right support – research funding, favourable policies, infrastructure investment, agroecology training – it would be possible for them to gradually transition towards increasing use of agroecology on their farms.

In Ethiopia, researchers documented 12,000 farmers across five regions over ten years. Agroecological farms matched hybrid maize yields in good years and exceeded them in drought years by 30-40%, with no purchased inputs.

“The real question isn't “Can agroecology scale?” It's “What happens when we finally invest in what already works?”

“The real question isn't “Can agroecology scale?” It's “What happens when we finally invest in what already works?”



# Nigeria: When Parliament Listens to the People

## Can sustained advocacy actually suspend corporate agendas?

From Senegal's territorial markets, the team flew east to Nigeria, where a different kind of market battle was being won. Tandoh from Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) welcomed the team with visible joy. After months of virtual conversations, meeting face-to-face felt significant.

"We're meeting the Agriculture Minister first," Tandoh explained. "He knows AFSA's work well."

Andrew asked if they needed suits. Tandoh laughed. "He's our AFSA associate, a simple man from a farming background. Just be yourselves."

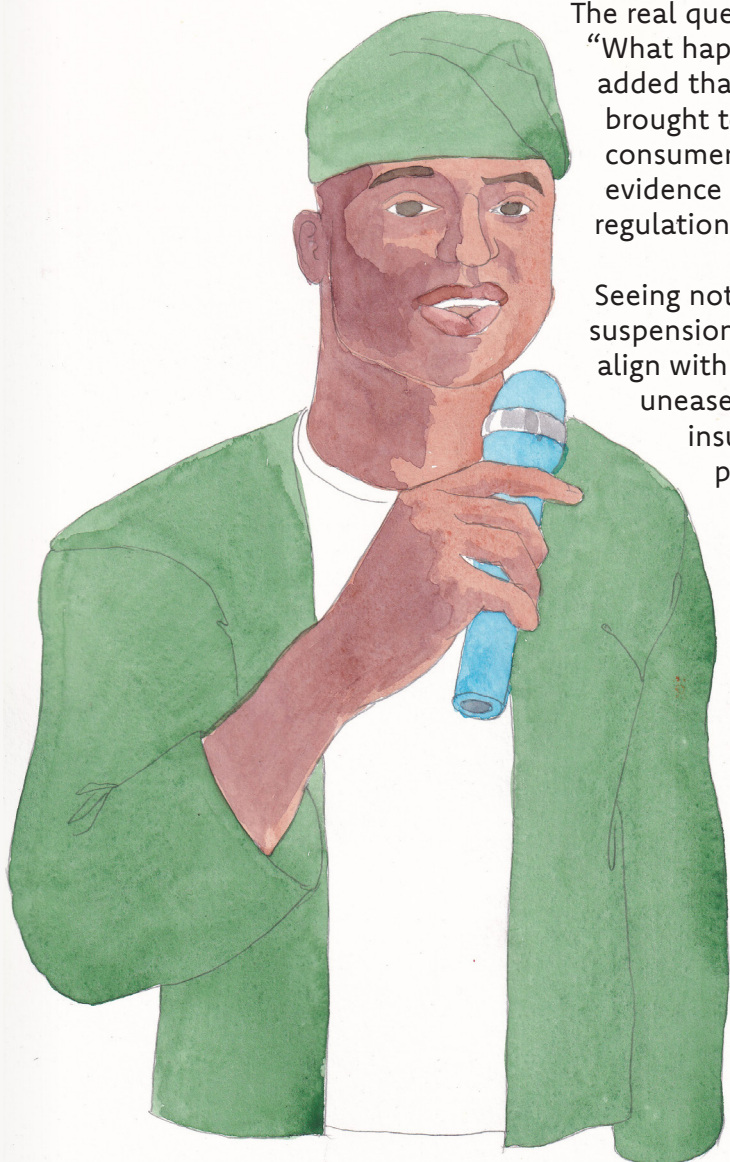
In the minister's office, the welcome was warm. He recounted Nigeria's landmark decision: on May 16, 2024, the National Assembly officially suspended approval of new genetically modified organisms (GMOs), launching a formal investigation into approval processes. A major milestone in Nigeria's journey toward transparent, accountable food governance.

The real question isn't "Can agroecology scale?" It's "What happens when we finally invest in what Tandoh added that a public hearing on November 19, 2024, brought together scientists, farmers, civil society, consumer advocates, and legal experts to share evidence and demand safer, more inclusive food regulation.

Seeing notebooks emerge, the minister continued. "The suspension marks a rare moment when institutions align with public concern. For years, citizens expressed unease over unchecked GMO proliferation, citing insufficient risk assessments, lack of consultation, potential environmental and health impacts." He paused. "So, we listened to our people. This is what governments should do."

The Assembly's action brought these concerns to the national policy forefront, reflecting growing awareness that decisions about what Nigerians grow, eat, and trade must be based on rigorous science, democratic engagement, and commitment to food sovereignty.

As conversation turned passionate and patriotic, Njabulo made a mental note: how exactly did HOMEF's campaign achieve this?



“This policy shift wasn’t spontaneous. It resulted from sustained advocacy by a coalition of civil society organisations, researchers, and media practitioners.”

### The Strategy Behind the Victory

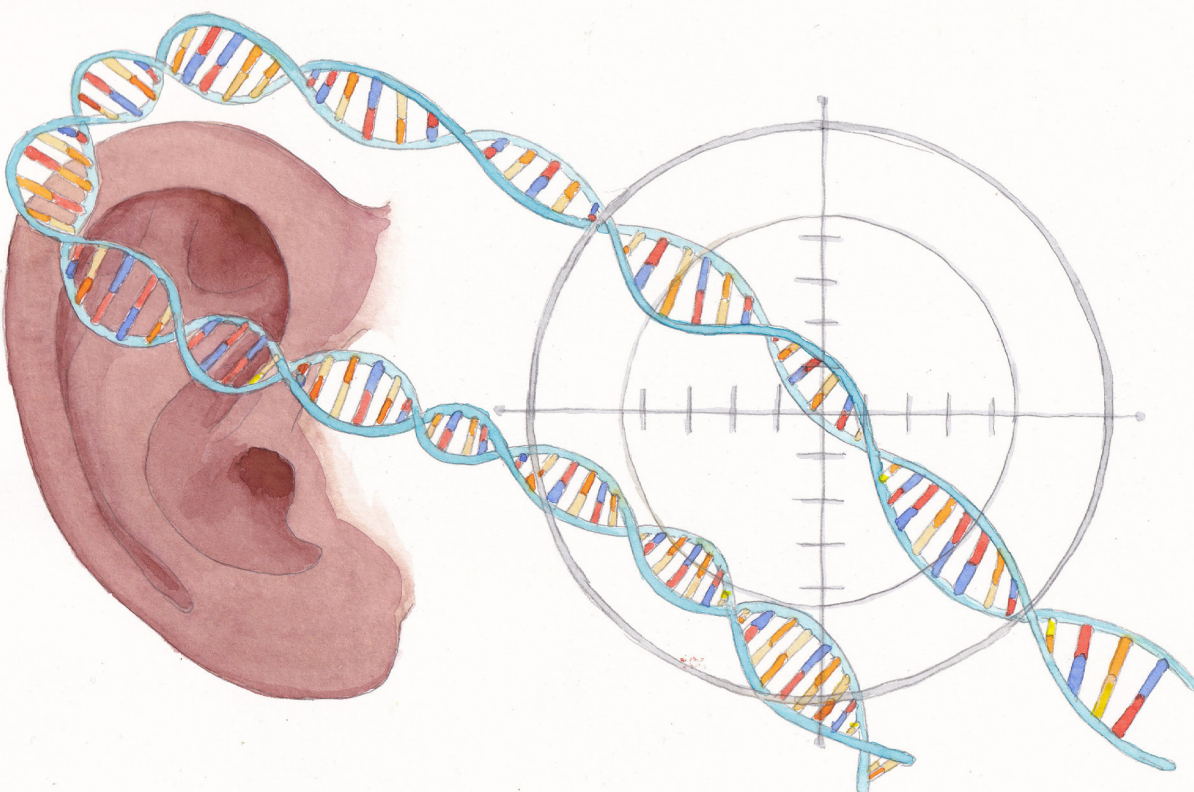
Back at their hotel after lunch, Njabulo asked directly: “What’s the secret to getting government to act in your favour?”

Tandoh, drawing circles on his chair’s armrest, gave a chronological account. “It hasn’t been easy, you know.”

This policy shift wasn’t spontaneous. It resulted from sustained advocacy by a coalition of civil society organisations, researchers, and media practitioners coordinated by HOMEAF, who mobilised strategically to reach the highest government levels.

In months before suspension, advocacy groups made targeted visits to legislators, providing detailed briefings and urging pause on GMO approvals until robust safety checks and transparent systems were established. Public awareness campaigns complemented this: rallies, press briefings, radio and TV interviews, community programmes demystifying GMOs and promoting citizen involvement in food policy debates.

Researchers and allied experts prepared memoranda for the House Committee on Agriculture, detailing regulatory gaps and outlining alternatives prioritising ecological sustainability and farmers’ rights.

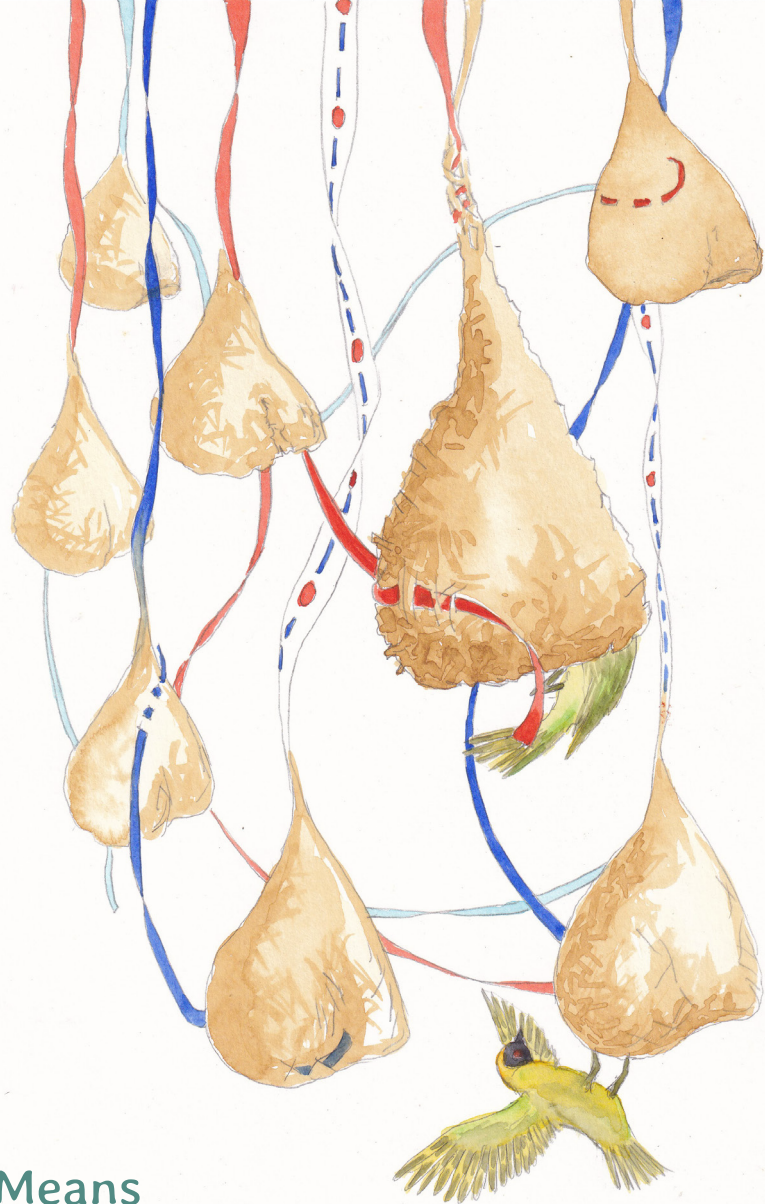


## The Public Hearing

The November 2024 hearing served as a pivotal moment. Speakers presented technical critiques and personal testimonies, offering diverse perspectives on how GMO proliferation affected local food systems, seed diversity, and consumer trust.

The event provided democratic platform for citizens to demand oversight, highlighting needs for improved biosafety protocols, clearer labelling regulations, and more investment in traditional agricultural systems and agroecology.

Stakeholders emphasised that while technological innovation has a role, it must not come at the expense of indigenous knowledge, local seed systems, or smallholder farmer autonomy.



## What This Means

Nigeria's suspension doesn't ban GMOs outright. Rather, it opens a window for comprehensive review and reform of how such technologies are introduced and monitored. It's a call for science with accountability, innovation with precaution, and policy rooted in Nigerian community needs.

Promising developments in Nigeria have been various government initiatives, most recently in September 2025, to promote a 20% inclusion of local cassava flour in all wheat-based products, coupled with levies on imported wheat flour to fund a Cassava Bread Development Fund. The aims were to reduce costly imports of wheat flour, create local cassava processing enterprises, and improve the incomes of small-scale farmers.

These experiences in Nigeria reinforce broader continental efforts like the My Food is African campaign, emphasising the protection of Africa's traditional food systems, promotion of local seed diversity, and ensuring agricultural policies respond to those who depend on them most.

The team nodded and scribbled until Tandoh finished recounting it all.

## Key Debate: Don't We Need Big Agriculture for Economic Growth?

### **The Argument from Industrial Agriculture:**

“Agricultural corporations, corporate food processors and supermarkets employ thousands of people, pay significant taxes, and invest in local infrastructure. They meet international standards. If we restrict them or change policies, we risk unemployment, reduced revenue, and economic disruption. We can't ignore economic realities for ideological positions.”

Corporate lobbying is sophisticated and persistent. Companies fund research supporting their positions, sponsor conferences, provide technical experts to ministries, and frame themselves as development partners. Officials face real pressure from employment concerns and tax revenue needs.

### **How Agroecology Advocates Respond:**

The economic argument cuts both ways. In Nigeria, advocates showed diabetes treatment costs now exceed tax revenue from processed food sales. The economic case for policies that favour corporate food systems collapses when health costs enter the calculation.

Rather than demanding immediate bans on agricultural corporations, advocates propose policy shifts with better incentives. Mandatory clear labelling. Using food company taxes to fund nutrition education. Supporting small and medium food enterprises. They build coalitions with health professionals who can quantify economic costs of current policies. They propose gradual phase-outs starting with the most harmful products.

The jobs argument also misleads. Widespread investment in upscaling the number of agroecological enterprises creates employment. As agroecology is upscaled so numerous enterprises would be created right across the food web (sometimes referred to as value chains), from small plants producing biofertilisers to a range of processing and marketing enterprises.

“In Nigeria, advocates showed diabetes treatment costs now exceed tax revenue from processed food sales. The economic case for policies that favour corporate food systems collapses when health costs enter the calculation.”



# DR Congo & Cameroon: From Draft Laws to School Gardens

## Can media shape policy? Can students safeguard food sovereignty? DR Congo shows how...

In DR Congo, the team gathered in a crowded hotel restaurant, clatter of cups mixing with animated voices. Young journalists described how their radio shows challenged corporate food narratives. But the most impactful story was this: Congo had succeeded in drafting a national law on nutrition and food security, bringing relief and hope to concerned citizens and advocates.

The team was familiar with CNPAF-RDC's work (National Committee for the Promotion of Family Farming in DRC). Members took turns sharing the experience, with Jeanne translating skilfully between French and English.

### The Build-Up

In 2024, a quiet political revolution began in DRC. Facing growing public health concerns, pressure on food systems, and cultural erosion of traditional diets, CNPAF-RDC committed itself to promoting food and nutritional sovereignty.

Through persistent advocacy based on meticulous research and government engagement, a bill on nutrition and food security was drafted. A major step toward transforming how the state governs food systems.

This legislative process marks a historic step in DRC's journey toward food sovereignty, offering legal protections for indigenous foods and improved safety standards for consumers. referred to as value chains), from small plants producing biofertilisers to a range of processing and marketing enterprises.



### The Research That Triggered Action

CNPAF-RDC began with exhaustive review of current nutrition and food safety regulations, conducting a study on “the current state of laws relating to food and nutritional security and their application in DRC.” The report revealed critical gaps: insufficient protection of local food systems, inadequate regulation of processed foods, and absence of clear national nutrition guidelines.

Armed with these findings, CNPAF-RDC presented conclusions to civil society and government through official letters, consultative meetings, and sustained advocacy. They recommended a national legal framework prioritising nutritional and food security, with particular attention to local and traditional food systems.

In response, the government, through the Ministry of Agriculture, accelerated the process of amending and adopting the new bill. “It was a moment of validation,” said a CNPAF-RDC official. “Our work didn’t just stay on paper. It influenced real government action.”

### What the Bill Proposes

DRC's food system is complex and rich, with diverse cultures, culinary traditions, and agricultural practices. Yet like many African countries, it faces challenges from ultra-processed imports, unsafe food handling, and nutrition-related diseases.

The bill proposes: national nutrition guidelines promoting nutrient-rich local foods; clear food safety standards protecting consumers from contamination and substandard products; legal recognition and protection of local and traditional foods as cultural and ecological heritage; promotion of nutrition education in schools, markets, and media; and support, not criminalization, for small-scale food producers under new regulations.

"Food is a human right, but it must also be safe, culturally appropriate, and accessible," said CNPAF-RDC's Technical Secretary. "This bill ensures Congolese can feed themselves with confidence, pride, and security."

**"Armed with these findings, CNPAF-RDC presented conclusions to civil society and government through official letters, consultative meetings, and sustained advocacy."**

#### Connection to "My Food is African"

The bill resulted directly from CNPAF-RDC's participation in AFSA's "My Food is African" campaign. CNPAF-RDC championed the campaign in DRC, working to revive local food traditions, promote agroecology, and reshape food policies through grassroots mobilization.

Their strategy included community dialogues, media engagements, school awareness programmes, and two editions of the Festival of Traditional and Local Foods in 2023 and 2024. The bill now provides legal basis for these activities, giving the campaign greater political weight and long-term impact.

"This is what food sovereignty looks like," said an AFSA regional representative. "Communities generate solutions, backed by strong institutions and supported by national legislation." "Media is policy too," Abbot explained. "It shapes demand, and demand shapes law." Njabulo nodded thoughtfully. "Information is seed. Once planted, and well-nourished, it grows everywhere."

**"This is what food sovereignty looks like," said an AFSA regional representative. "Communities generate solutions, backed by strong institutions and supported by national legislation."**



## Cameroon: When Classrooms Become Food Sovereignty Training Grounds

Crossing into Cameroon, the team reflected on how much they'd already witnessed and how much more lay ahead.

The Cameroon experience centred on schools. Students proudly exhibited their school gardens. Estridah, who had worked with schools before, had never seen anything like this.

At one school, representatives from CNOP-CAM (National Platform of Farmers' Organisations in Cameroon), who lead campaign work in Cameroon, presented their strategies and results. Their work with schools reiterates the underestimated value of engaging youth in social reform.

Students were learning about traditional foods and also growing them, cooking them, celebrating them, defending them. The next generation already mobilised.

"If children grow indigenous crops with their own hands," one teacher explained, "they won't easily abandon them for processed foods when they're older." The team watched students harvest leafy greens, explain nutritional benefits, and serve traditional dishes to visiting officials. Policy advocacy starting in soil, taking root in young minds.

Investigating further this is what they discovered:

### What happens when agroecology becomes homework?

In September 2024, Cameroon's classrooms opened with something new in the timetable: agriculture, with particular focus on agroecological practices. At Lycée Technique de Mfou in the Central Region, teachers trained to teach agroecology welcomed student clubs promoting sustainable agriculture and local food systems. This innovation marks a decisive step toward an environmentally friendly, healthier future for Cameroon's youth.



#### A Cultural Shift, Not Just Curriculum Change

The integration of agroecology into education signals a shift in national priorities.

Madame Messanga Marie-Louise, Director of CES Obala noted, "Our focus is cultural change, not just technical skills. We're teaching children to farm in ways that preserve our land, traditions, and health."

Students learn practical skills: composting, crop rotation, soil health, seed saving, water conservation. The curriculum emphasises local consumption, biodiversity, and food sovereignty, grounding pupils in both science and self-reliance.

#### Student Clubs Develop Leaders

Alongside official curriculum, agroecology clubs have emerged in schools nationwide. These student-led groups promote healthy eating, organise school gardens, and host food fairs featuring traditional dishes made from local ingredients.

At Essazock's Government High School in the Western region, the club's "No More Fast Food on Fridays" campaign encouraged pupils to swap packaged snacks for homemade dishes: Ndolé, Okok, roasted plantains. The movement reached parents, who now send children to school with healthier, home-cooked meals.

"We're learning how to protect our culture," explains Monique, a 14-year-old club member, with excitement in her eyes.

"I want to be a chef one day, and I now know that our traditional foods are powerful."



### **CNOP-CAM: The Catalyst**

This historic integration didn't happen overnight. It resulted from years of advocacy, awareness campaigns, and commitment by CNOP-CAM (National Platform of Farmers' Organisations in Cameroon).

CNOP-CAM's school awareness programmes laid foundations for this policy victory. Through culinary competitions, open days, agricultural exhibitions, and cooking demonstrations, they brought agroecology into hearts and minds of pupils, teachers, and parents. Working closely with Ministries of Education and Agriculture, CNOP-CAM provided essential support: developing teaching materials, training teachers, evaluating pilot programmes. Their message was clear: young Cameroonians deserve education preparing them for climate change, food insecurity, and cultural erosion.

"We believe education is one of the most powerful tools for reclaiming our food systems," said Mr. Bini Michel, CNOP-CAM program manager. "Now our children are learning how to grow food, and at the same time they are discovering why it matters."

**"Through culinary competitions, open days, agricultural exhibitions, and cooking demonstrations, they brought agroecology into hearts and minds of pupils, teachers, and parents."**



### **Reversing the Fast-Food Trend**

One underlying reason for reform is growing concern about fast food's impact on young Cameroonians' health. With democratization and mass marketing of processed, imported snacks, traditional diets rich in local vegetables, legumes, and cereals are disappearing.

By encouraging students to grow and eat local food, the agroecology programme acts as counterbalance, restoring healthy eating habits and cultural pride.

"Obesity and malnutrition are two sides of the same coin," explains Madam Onabele, Director of Primary School Nkolmefou. "Through agroecology education, we combat both problems while giving pupils tools to build sustainable futures."

### **Ripple Effects Beyond Classrooms**

Benefits extend far beyond school walls. Pupils share knowledge at home. Families adopt agroecological practices, creating vegetable gardens, composting food waste, supporting local markets.

The ripple effect reaches political circles, where discussions are underway to strengthen school canteen programmes by using food grown in school gardens. This would improve student nutrition, provide stable markets for local farmers, and reduce transportation emissions.

Facing climate change threats to traditional agriculture, investing in youth agroecology education proves one of Cameroon's most visionary strategies.

Schools integrating agroecology turn national commitments to resilience, health, and heritage into educational practice. In these agroecological laboratories, pupils grow food while becoming ambassadors for their culture.

The future of Cameroonian agriculture is developing now, in every lesson, lunchbox and young mind.

## Key Debate: Can Africa afford agroecology?

### **The Argument from Industrial Agriculture:**

“Your agroecology strategy sounds good on paper, but who pays for implementation? Donors fund fertilizer programmes and fortification initiatives. They want measurable outcomes within project cycles. Without donor funding, this policy stays in a drawer gathering dust.”

Government budgets are constrained. Officials can't reject donor-funded programmes that employ staff, reach farmers, and produce visible results, even if they recognise limitations. The infrastructure for conventional agriculture already exists.

### **How Agroecology Advocates Respond:**

The funding question assumes agroecology costs more than industrial agriculture. In Ethiopia, advocates showed that farmer-to-farmer training reduces extension costs compared to conventional programmes. Agroecological methods can eliminate or significantly reduce purchased input costs for farmers, freeing household budgets for food and school fees. The economic case justifies domestic budget allocation once officials see the numbers.

Advocates helped connect ministries with alternative funding sources. For example, they worked with the African Development Bank to draft funding proposals. They proposed starting with pilot programmes in three regions with active farmer groups, building evidence before expanding. They documented cost savings from reduced input subsidies and health improvements from better nutrition.

The real donor dependency issue runs the other direction. Industrial agriculture programmes lock countries into perpetual input purchases and technical assistance contracts. Agroecology builds domestic capacity and farmer independence.

**“Industrial agriculture programmes lock countries into perpetual input purchases and technical assistance contracts. Agroecology builds domestic capacity and farmer independence.”**

# Kenya: From Bokashi to Policy, One Fermented Bucket at a Time

## Can farmers become their own fertiliser factories?

From Cameroon, the team flew to Kenya, landing in Nairobi before driving west to Vihiga County's green hills. There, children performed songs and dramas about healthy soils in a dusty schoolyard. Afterward, everyone sat on grass eating kale and cowpeas grown in the school garden.

They had heard about Kenya's famous Bokashi Policy. Now it was time to hear the story first-hand.

Ferdinand Wafula from Bio Gardening Innovations (BIOGI) welcomed them to his demonstration plot. As they walked between raised beds bursting with vegetables, he began explaining.

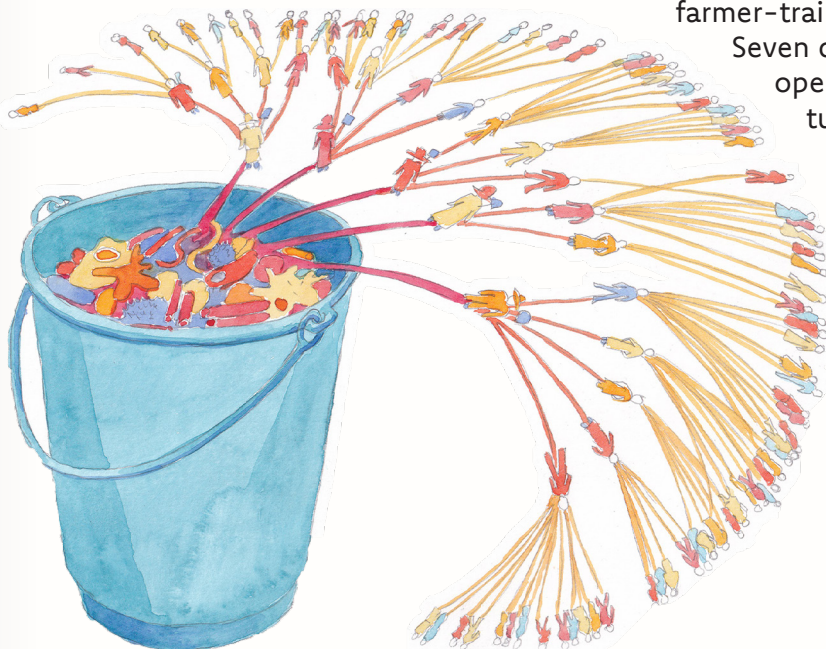
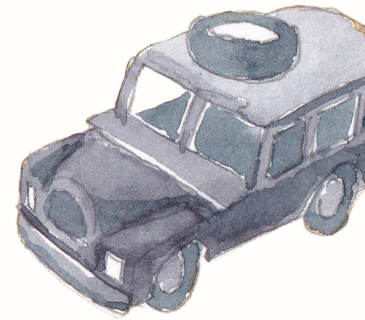
"In Vihiga County, farmers have long struggled with poor soils, small land parcels, and growing dependence on chemical fertilisers. But something is changing. Farmers are using local knowledge and biofertilisers to bring life back to their soils. And it works." Andrew interrupted. "When did this shift start?"

"The turning point came in 2021," Ferdinand explained, "when BIOGI joined AFSA's Healthy Soil Healthy Food initiative. We went to Thika for training with Colombian agroecologist Jairo Restrepo. We learned to make bokashi, a fermented organic fertiliser, plus plant extracts, lactic acid bacteria, and natural minerals."

He paused, picking up a handful of dark, crumbly material. "These skills gave farmers power to move from expensive chemical dependency to self-reliance." Estridah leaned forward. "But how did you scale this? One training seems small." "We started with fifteen farmers testing bokashi on maize, beans, and local vegetables," Ferdinand continued. "The results were clear. Bokashi outperformed both compost and chemical fertilisers. Farmers quickly adapted the recipes using what they had: goat urine, ashes, local minerals."

He smiled. "The idea spread fast. Today we have 75 farmer-trainers reaching more than 600 farmers. Seven community biofertiliser units are operating. Farmers like Simon Amoyo turned skills into businesses, selling bokashi and molasses in affordable portions."

Njabulo was taking notes rapidly. "What about policy? You mentioned a Bokashi Policy?"



“That’s where it gets interesting,” Ferdinand said, leading them to a shaded area where they could sit. “The impact went beyond farms. We presented our work at the East Africa Agroecology Conference and the AU Fertiliser & Soil Health Summit. In Vihiga County, even the Governor visited our agroecology fair.”

He paused for emphasis. “Our persistence paid off. Biofertiliser are now included in the county’s draft agroecology policy. A huge step forward.”

Abbot, who had been quiet, spoke up. “What’s been the biggest challenge?”

“But we keep going with honesty, consistency, and trust. Our work proves that agroecology isn’t just theory. It’s a living solution that grows from farmers, communities, and policies.”

Ferdinand didn’t hesitate. “Some farmer-trainers face challenges with reading and writing, making it harder to explain technical concepts. Producing biofertilisers requires time and group effort, which not every community can manage. And big fertiliser companies continue to push against farmer-led solutions in policy spaces.”

“But we keep going with honesty, consistency, and trust. Our work proves that agroecology isn’t just theory. It’s a living solution that grows from farmers, communities, and policies.”

Later, watching sunset paint the hills golden, the team reflected on what they’d witnessed. From school curricula in Cameroon to biofertiliser policies in Kenya, the pattern was clear: knowledge becomes practice, practice becomes proof, proof becomes policy.

Andrew turned to the others. “It all sounds like a living curriculum.”  
Estridah nodded, photographing farmers working in the evening light.



### Question for Reflection:

Can big fertiliser companies invest in setting up local companies that produce biofertiliser to serve community interests?



# Zambia: When Chiefs Champion Agroecology

## Can traditional authority be the strongest ally for food sovereignty?

The last stretch began in Zambia, where chiefs welcomed them into a traditional ceremony showcasing vibrant African culture, thick air of drumming filling the space. The topic: seeds, soil, and the role of traditional authority.

This story was different. A chief exhibiting true leadership through community mobilization, demystifying perceptions that African chiefs are disconnected from modern challenges.

Njabulo leaned forward with particular interest. In most cases so far, civil society organisations, government actors, and scholars had led advocacy. But a traditional chief championing agroecology? That was something quite rare. Only in Ghana had he seen significant involvement of traditional leaders promoting local foods and dishes.

## When Tradition Meets Transformation

In June 2024, deep in Namwala District, a new chapter began in Zambia's agricultural story. Chief Nalubamba of the Ila people have been writing it.

After attending the National Agroecology Conference in Lusaka, Chief Nalubamba made an unprecedented move. He invited the Zambia Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity (ZAAB) and other civil society organisations to participate in the Ikubi Lya BanaMunyati traditional ceremony, held September 26-29, 2024.

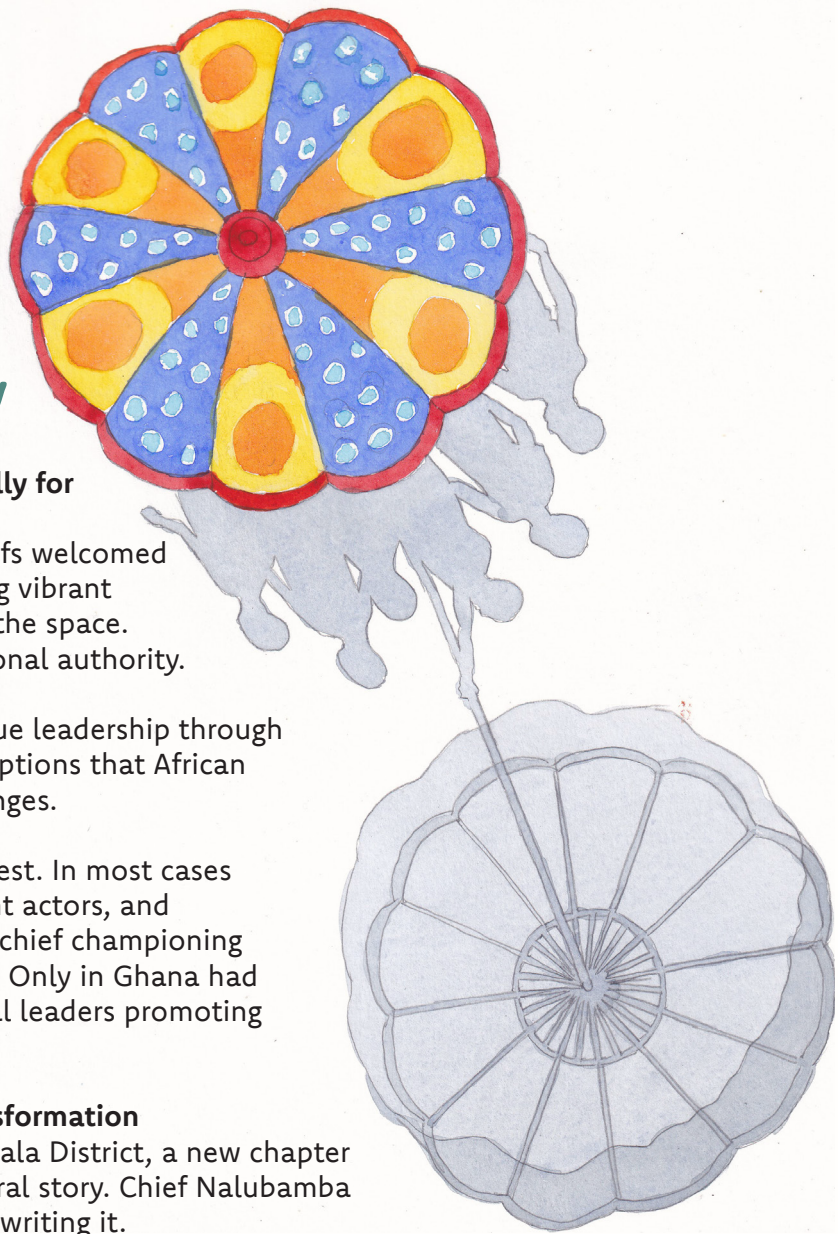
His message was clear: agroecology belongs in the heart of Zambian cultural life as much as in conferences and policy papers.

## Revolutionary Opening

The Ikubi Lya BanaMunyati ceremony is one of the Ila people's most significant annual gatherings. Traditionally, it has been a space for celebration, dance, ancestral remembrance, and in recent years, for commercial agricultural companies showcasing seeds, agrochemicals, and industrial farming inputs.

But in 2024, for the first time ever, the space opened to agroecology-focused organisations, seed custodians, and traditional food advocates.

"We were honoured and humbled," said a ZAAB representative. "Being given a platform at such a prestigious cultural event means we're seen as part of society's fabric, as protectors of heritage"



### The Influence of a Leader


In Zambia, traditional leaders wield immense influence within their chiefdoms and in national conversations on land use, agriculture, and governance. Chiefs sit at the intersection of tradition, policy, and community. When a chief speaks, people listen.

By endorsing agroecology and local seed systems, Chief Nalubamba sent a powerful message: Zambia's agricultural future must honour both indigenous knowledge and environmental stewardship.

His decision was shaped by months of engagement with agroecology champions. The National Agroecology Conference, organised with support from AFSA and ZAAB, showcased science, success stories, and cultural alignment of agroecological practices with African values.

ZAAB's consistent lobbying against restrictive seed laws and international protocols by organisations like the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants - UPOV (which limit farmers' rights to save and share seeds) played a crucial role in shifting perspectives among traditional leaders.

Following the conference, ZAAB engaged with the House of Chiefs, Zambia's formal body of traditional leaders. A compelling video statement from the House Chairperson soon circulated, affirming their commitment to supporting local seed systems and resisting oppressive seed regimes.

A stylized illustration of a human hand, rendered in shades of brown and tan, with fingers slightly spread. It is positioned on the left side of the page, partially overlapping the large quote.

“By endorsing agroecology and local seed systems, Chief Nalubamba sent a powerful message: Zambia's agricultural future must honour both indigenous knowledge and environmental stewardship.”

### Seeds, Stories, and Sovereignty

During Ikubi Lya BanaMunyati (a traditional ceremony of the Ila-Lundwe people in the Namwala District of Zambia), the agroecology exhibition drew curiosity and admiration. Community members viewed displays of local seed varieties (millet, sorghum, cowpeas, groundnuts) alongside traditional food preparation demonstrations and agroecology education materials.

Storytellers and farmers shared how these seeds, passed down through generations, were adapted to local soils and climates, required fewer external inputs, and held cultural and spiritual significance.

Young people learned that seeds are a living heritage.

Visitors engaged with the My Food is African campaign, an initiative promoting traditional diets, biodiversity, and food sovereignty. Elders, women farmers, and youth spoke about reclaiming food systems from industrial control and reconnecting with ancestral farming wisdom.

“What we saw was convergence,” said one participant. “Modern ecological science merging with timeless cultural practice.”

## A Cultural Shift with Policy Potential

Chief Nalubamba's support has sparked conversations beyond Namwala. Several other traditional leaders have expressed interest in agroecology. ZAAB has been invited to facilitate workshops in other chiefdoms, building a network of traditional champions for seed sovereignty.

This growing alliance is significant for Zambia's political future. With government under pressure to align with global seed corporations and UPOV-compliant legislation, grassroots resistance anchored by traditional authority may be the strongest counterweight.

**“What we saw was convergence,” said one participant. “Modern ecological science merging with timeless cultural practice.”**

Integrating agroecology into cultural spaces reinforces its relevance, framing it as homegrown solution rooted in African values of respect for nature, community interdependence, and generational continuity.

“Let us protect our seeds, our land, and our knowledge,” Chief Nalubamba said at the closing ceremony. “Let us feed ourselves with food that comes from our soil, our wisdom, and our love for this land.”



## The Journey's End: A Campfire Reflection in Zimbabwe

Finally, they landed in Zimbabwe, where a festival of African foods awaited them. Stalls overflowed with dishes, music rang through the air, and joy spilled everywhere. People sharing pleasantries, catching up after years of lost contact. Some recounted transformations happening in their campaigns. Others shared challenges in the journey.

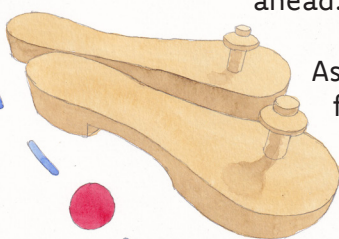


That evening, they all sat around a fire, joined by three colleagues from Senegal, Cameroon, and Kenya. The seven advocates had travelled different paths but arrived at the same festival, the same questions about what they'd witnessed.

One by one, they shared what they'd learned: policy gaps and implementation challenges, the power of storytelling and cultural entry points, the role of traditional authority, the persistence of corporate lobbies, the promise of youth engagement. The conversation continued late into the night, moving from celebration to strategy, from stories to analysis, from victories to challenges still ahead.

As the fire burned low, they agreed someone needed to capture these lessons for other advocates walking similar paths. Andrew volunteered.

Over the next two days, between festival sessions, he drafted what became known as the Zimbabwe Communique/Declaration.



# THE TAFS Journey Communique: Lessons from Seven Countries on Advocacy for Food Sovereignty

Drafted by the AFSA My Food is African Campaign Monitoring Team October 2024, Harare, Zimbabwe

After visiting Ghana, Senegal, DR Congo, Cameroon, Kenya, Zambia, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe over six weeks, documenting policy advocacy outcomes, we offer these reflections for advocates working toward food sovereignty across Africa.

## What We Witnessed

Policy change is happening across the continent:

Nigeria's Parliament suspended GMO approvals and launched investigations. Kenya's Ministry withdrew seventy-seven pesticide products, restricted 202 more, and reviews 151 additional chemicals. DR Congo drafted comprehensive legislation on food and nutritional security. Cameroon incorporated agroecology into school curricula. Kenya's Vihiga County included biofertilisers in draft policy, and its Supreme Court has declared illegal a seed law that criminalised farmers for sharing and exchanging seeds. Chiefs in Zambia championed agroecology through cultural ceremonies and the House of Chiefs.

These represent organised advocacy producing measurable policy shifts.

## Key Lessons

### 1 Multiple Entry Points Work

No single advocacy approach works everywhere. Ghana used cultural festivals and traditional authority. Cameroon combined school education with Ministry engagement. Kenya paired health documentation with legislative pressure and media. Nigeria coordinated legislative visits, public campaigns, expert research, and media strategy. Ethiopia built alliances vertically with government and horizontally across civil society. Use whatever entry points your context provides and combine them.

### 2 Evidence Must Be Local and Accessible

Every policy shift was built on farmer testimonies, community health data, economic analysis, pilot demonstrations, traditional knowledge documentation, and success stories from similar contexts. Present evidence in forms decision-makers understand.

### 3 Relationships Matter as Much as Arguments

Technical correctness alone doesn't shift policy. Every victory involved advocates building relationships over time with sympathetic officials, progressive parliamentarians, champions at the local and national levels, open-minded traditional leaders, and reform-minded bureaucrats. These relationships allowed advocates to be partners rather than opponents.

### 4 Youth Are Powerful Messengers

Young people appeared as critical actors in multiple countries. Ghanaian students demanded traditional foods in school canteens. Cameroonian school clubs challenged fast food culture. Kenyan children performed dramas about soil health. Congolese youth journalists challenged corporate narratives. Youth bring energy, creativity, social media reach, and moral authority.

**5 Traditional Authority Can Be Game-Changing**  
Chief Nalubamba's championing of agroecology reveals the potential power of traditional leadership. Traditional authorities hold cultural legitimacy, moral authority, direct connection to rural communities, and formal governance roles. When they endorse agroecology and seed sovereignty, these issues become culturally important, not just technically correct.

**6 Cultural Framing Amplifies Arguments**  
The most effective advocacy connected policy change to cultural identity, heritage, and dignity. Ghana's food festivals made policy personal. Zambia's ceremony integration made agroecology sacred. Cameroon's school programmes made traditional knowledge relevant for youth.

**7 Media Shapes the Terrain**  
Media appeared as a critical factor in nearly every victory. Nigeria's GMO suspension followed sustained media coverage. Kenya's pesticide bans gained momentum after investigative journalism. DR Congo's journalists transformed agroecology into regular public conversation.

**8 Implementation Is Where Policy Wins or Loses**  
Having a policy adopted is not the end. Implementation determines whether paper commitments become real change. Advocacy must continue after victory, shifting from "adopt this policy" to "implement correctly" to "improve based on experience."

## Recommendations

- Start local with community organising and pilot demonstrations.
- Build coalitions early.
- Invest in relationships with decision-makers.
- Frame culturally, not just technically.
- Engage youth strategically.
- Work with traditional authority where appropriate.
- Develop media strategy with sympathetic journalists.
- Document everything for evidence.
- Plan for implementation before adoption.
- Connect nationally and regionally to learn from others.
- Celebrate wins publicly to build momentum.
- Be patient and persistent.
- Policy change takes years.

## What This Means

The policy victories documented here prove that advocacy for food sovereignty produces measurable results. Governments can be moved. Policies can be changed. Corporate agendas can be challenged. But victories are uneven, incomplete, and reversible. Implementation lags. Resources remain inadequate. Corporate power persists. Climate change accelerates.

What we witnessed across ten countries is a movement in motion, gaining strength, learning from experience, building infrastructure for sustained struggle.

## Moving Forward

- **For those beginning advocacy work:** these stories prove it can be done. Study them. Adapt them to your context. Connect with others.
- **For those deep in struggle:** you are not alone. Across this continent, others fight similar battles.
- **For funders:** policy advocacy deserves sustained, flexible, long-term support. Short project cycles undermine the patient relationship-building that effective advocacy requires.
- **For policymakers:** civil society brings evidence and solutions. Engage them as partners, not obstacles.

The My Food is African campaign has demonstrated that changing food systems requires changing policies, and changing policies requires organised, strategic, persistent advocacy.

Policy change is possible. Food sovereignty is achievable. The movement is winning. One country at a time. One policy at a time. One victory at a time.



**“The corporate dream is a nightmare  
for the poor.”**

Arundhati Roy (India)

**“Local food cultures are  
guardians of biodiversity.”**

Selina Wamucii statement  
(Kenyan smallholder network)

**“Rural people are  
guardians of the earth.”**

Jose Graziano da Silva (FAO)



# From Consumers to Food Citizens

# 4

## Reclaiming Voice and Power



### Opening: A Zoom Call Across Africa

The screen divided into four windows. Njabulo in Johannesburg, Estridah in Lilongwe, Fanza in Yaoundé, and Andrew in Kampala. It was late afternoon for all of them, that precious hour after work when the day's urgencies had passed but energy remained for thinking.

"Thanks for making time," Andrew said, adjusting his camera. As AFSA's Programmes Coordinator Food Systems, he'd been collecting stories from across the continent about how ordinary people were organising campaigns for food system change. "I've been thinking about Chapter 4. We've covered understanding barriers, changing policies, but now we need to show how citizens themselves create the pressure and cultural shift that makes policy change possible."

Fanza leaned into her screen. "You mean like what I've been doing in Yaoundé? Using social media to make traditional food trendy?"

"Exactly," Andrew replied. "But bigger than individual influencers. I'm talking about organised campaigns using media, festivals, cultural spaces to mobilise people. We have these incredible stories from the campaign countries, but I want us to think through them together. What actually works? What can others learn?"

"I've been hearing amazing things from DRC," Njabulo said. "Thérèse, that journalist I met in Kinshasa, sent me a detailed account of how CNPAF trained twenty journalists to become food sovereignty advocates. It completely changed media coverage there."

"And I've got the Zambia community radio story," Andrew added. "Free radio slots turning into a powerful organising tool for farmers."

Estridah nodded. "From what I've seen working with schools in Malawi, the Ghana student campaign is remarkable. They actually got a school to change its food policy through education and organising."

"So, let's do this," Andrew suggested. "Each of us shares a story we've collected, we discuss what made it work, and we see what patterns emerge. These aren't professional advocacy organisations with big budgets. They're farmers, students, journalists, community leaders using whatever they have to create change. That's what citizens campaigning looks like."

"Where should we start?" Fanza asked.

"Njabulo, you mentioned Thérèse's story from Congo. Why don't you tell us about the journalist training programme?"

## Training Journalists to Change the Conversation

Njabulo pulled up notes on his screen. “Okay, so this is what Thérèse told me about how everything started in Kinshasa.” Why don’t you tell us about the journalist training programme?”

### Waking up the listeners

Thérèse’s first radio programme was clumsy. She interviewed a farmer but didn’t know which questions would draw out compelling stories. But she kept trying. By the fourth episode, she’d found her rhythm, structuring each programme around questions listeners actually asked. Why are traditional vegetables so expensive now? How can I feed my family when prices keep rising?

Other trained journalists created their own approaches. Jean-Paul produced mini-documentaries showing traditional food preparation. Marie-Claire hosted call-in shows where farmers shared practical tips. André investigated misleading food industry marketing.

The turning point came when Thérèse’s programme featured a live debate about GMO crops. She invited a farmer, a nutritionist, a student activist, and a government official who privately supported local food systems. Callers flooded the switchboard. The station director asked Thérèse to make it a monthly feature.

### Reclaiming the narrative

The most significant impact came from challenging corporate narratives. When billboards across Kinshasa advertised fortified instant noodles as nutritious family meals, trained journalists investigated and exposed the minimal fortification versus marketing claims, health impacts of regular ultra-processed food consumption, and how traditional Congolese meals provided better and cheaper nutrition.

“Before, food companies controlled the message,” Thérèse explained. “They had money, professional PR firms, sponsored studies. But we had truth and persistence. When five different radio programmes question the same corporate claim using evidence, people start paying attention.”

By late 2024, twenty trained journalists had produced hundreds of programmes reaching an estimated two million people across DRC. Young journalism students requested assignments on food systems. Radio stations created permanent slots for agriculture and nutrition programming.



## The Threats That Didn't Work

When CNPAF presented their draft food sovereignty law to government, they had media allies ready to explain why it mattered. The bill became a public conversation about dignity, health, and who controls Congo's food future.

Looking back, the journalists identified what made their work effective. Training built confidence and knowledge. A peer support network let journalists share challenges and solutions. Connection to CNPAF's larger campaign meant they weren't alone. Focus on human stories made policy personal.

"The training gave us permission to see food as newsworthy," Thérèse reflected. "Once we started covering it seriously, listeners responded."



Njabulo finished and looked at the others on screen. "What strikes me is how the training created a multiplier effect. Twenty journalists reached millions of people and changed an entire media ecosystem."

"It's strategic," Fanza observed. "They didn't try to do all the communication themselves. They equipped journalists who already had audiences and credibility."

Estridah added, "Did you notice that they handed journalists information and worked with them, rather than just sending them off? They built relationships, provided ongoing support, created a network. The peer support was crucial when journalists faced pressure."

Andrew nodded. "What I find powerful is the balance. They maintained journalistic independence while being clearly aligned with food sovereignty. Thérèse wasn't a CNPAF spokesperson, but she was an informed journalist asking hard questions that served the movement's goals."

**"Estridah added, "Did you notice that they handed journalists information and worked with them, rather than just sending them off? They built relationships, provided ongoing support, created a network. The peer support was crucial when journalists faced pressure."**

"Could this work elsewhere?" Fanza wondered.

"I think the principles could," Njabulo replied. "Not every country has twenty journalists ready for training, but the idea of equipping communicators rather than trying to be the sole voice makes sense. In South Africa, we have dozens of community radio stations. What if we did something similar?"

"The key seems to be respecting journalism while providing resources and building relationships," Estridah said. "You may think you have to buy coverage or controlling the message, but a better way is to help journalists tell important stories well."

Andrew smiled. "Okay, that's one model for citizen campaigning. Media as organising tool. Let me share what I learned about how Zambia used community radio differently. This story comes from Kalomo District in southern Zambia.



## How can Radio be Used as an Organising Tool?

When Kalomo Community Radio Station offered ZASHO, the Zambia Smallholder Farmers Organisation, ten free radio slots, it might have seemed like a small gesture. But for farmers facing soil depletion, deforestation, and climate change, those radio programmes became a lifeline.

Kalomo District is a key food-producing region where farmers faced mounting pressures. Soil exhausted from years of chemical fertilisers.

Climate change bringing unpredictable rains. Rising input costs while crop prices remained stagnant. Many farmers knew something was wrong but didn't see alternatives.



### What Credibility Sounds Like

ZASHO and ZAAB designed the programmes strategically. Weekly thirty-minute programmes mixed farmer testimonies with expert explanations, call-in segments, and traditional music. They started with problems farmers recognised, showed practical alternatives like composting and natural pest control, used local language rather than academic concepts, and featured farmers from the listening area.

The key was credibility. Programmes featured farmers listeners might know, from villages they could visit. When Farmer Mwape from nearby Choma explained how composting restored his soil, listeners thought if he can do it, maybe I can too.

Call-in segments transformed programmes from broadcasting to conversation. Listeners asked where to get seeds that don't require chemicals, how to make compost without enough material, whether agroecology could really produce enough to feed families. ZASHO adapted future programmes based on listener questions.

## Preparing the soil

Before broadcasting began, ZASHO held meetings with traditional leaders and district officials explaining the programmes' purpose. This preparation paid off. When a local chief discussed indigenous seed varieties on air, his endorsement carried weight.

Within months, evidence of impact emerged. Farmers contacted ZASHO asking for training. Community groups formed to share seeds and knowledge. Extension workers reported farmers asking about compost and natural pest control.

One farmer explained, "I heard Farmer Mwape talking about bokashi on the radio. I knew him, he farms near my cousin. So, I visited him. Now ten of us are making it together."



## Starting conversations and planting ideas

The campaign faced real obstacles. Not all farmers had radios, and signal didn't cover all areas. Commercial stations broadcast advertisements for chemical fertilisers competing with their message. Producing quality content required time and money despite free slots.

Despite challenges, the campaign succeeded because partnership with a trusted radio station provided existing audience, content grounded in local reality helped farmers recognise their own experiences, interactive format let listeners shape conversation, and follow-through with in-person training served interested farmers.

"Radio can't do everything," the ZASHO coordinator admitted to Andrew. "But it starts conversations, plants ideas, shows alternatives exist. Then when we offer training, people are ready."

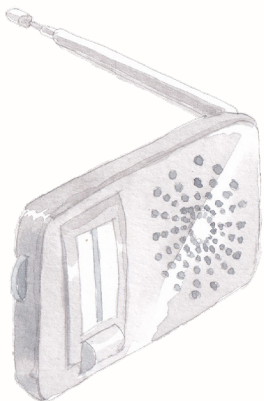
“That’s a different model from Congo,” Estridah observed. “Congo trained journalists to be independent advocates. Zambia created their own programming but partnered with existing radio infrastructure.”

“Both worked,” Fanza noted. “What they share is using media that already reaches people rather than trying to create new communication channels from scratch.”

“The interactive element seems crucial,” Njabulo added. “Call-in segments, listener questions shaping content. Creating dialogue rather than just broadcasting at people.”

Andrew agreed. “And notice the preparation work. Meeting with traditional leaders and officials before launching. Building relationships with the radio station. None of this was just showing up and talking on air.”

“What I find interesting,” Estridah said, “is how radio became the entry point but not the only tactic. Radio programmes led to training requests, which led to farmer groups forming, which led to peer learning. The radio sparked organising that then happened face to face.”



**“Radio programmes led to training requests, which led to farmer groups forming, which led to peer learning. The radio sparked organising that then happened face to face.”**

“So, media creates awareness and interest,” Fanza summarised, “but it has to connect to opportunities for people to actually do something. Otherwise, it’s just information without action.”

“Exactly,” Andrew replied. “Which brings us to a different kind of campaigning. Not media, but cultural celebration. Fanza, you’ve been following what’s happening with restaurants in Cameroon, right?”

“I have,” Fanza said, sitting forward. “Let me tell you about Taro du Dimanche and the Je Mange Camerounais movement.”

# Working with Radio Stations Strategically

Radio stations are catalysts for campaigns and campaign messages. But understanding how to use them efficiently is key. The point is not just to involve them only in disseminating messages or covering events.

## Radio has unique advantages:

- Reaches remote rural areas where internet is limited
- Speaks in local languages, not just official languages
- Creates conversation, not just broadcast
- Allows call-ins and community participation
- Builds trust through familiar voices and regular programming

Includes people who can hear although they may be blind.

## Strategic radio use means:

- Co-creating programmes, not just being interviewed
- Training journalists on food sovereignty issues
- Providing ongoing story ideas and sources
- Supporting community radio financially when possible
- Creating serialised content that keeps audiences engaged over time

## Remember:

One well-placed radio programme can reach thousands of people in their own language, in their own homes, creating conversations that continue long after the broadcast ends.



## Taro du Dimanche... How Traditional Became Trendy

“The restaurant Taro du Dimanche in Yaoundé doesn’t look revolutionary,” Fanza began. “Traditional Cameroonian art on the walls, dishes your grandmother might have made, local music playing. But step inside on a Sunday afternoon and you see something remarkable. Young professionals waiting for tables, families celebrating milestones with indigenous cuisine, food bloggers photographing beautifully plated eru and ndolé.”

For years, traditional Cameroonian dishes were disappearing from urban tables. Young people associated pizza and burgers with modernity and success. Indigenous foods were considered backward, fit only for villages. The consequences were severe: rising obesity and diabetes, lost agricultural biodiversity, broken intergenerational knowledge transmission, and economic drain. The deeper loss was cultural.

### When Instagram Met Grandmother’s Kitchen

CNOP-CAM created a movement with multiple dimensions through their Je Mange Camerounais campaign. The restaurant movement worked with chefs and restaurant owners to reimagine traditional cuisine through modern plating making indigenous dishes Instagram-worthy, contemporary restaurant spaces comfortable for young professionals, and storytelling about dishes explaining their history and nutritional value.

Restaurants like Taro du Dimanche, O Village, and O Terroir became destinations. Eating there meant you appreciated culture, quality, and authenticity. Traditional food became trendy.

### When Okok Becomes Cool Again

Bi-weekly cooking competitions across Cameroon’s regions brought communities together. Amateur cooks and professional chefs competed making traditional dishes with local agroecological ingredients. Events featured music, dance, and storytelling. Winners received media coverage and prizes.

CNOP-CAM organised culinary workshops in schools, community centres, and markets where elders taught young people traditional food preparation, nutritionists explained health benefits, and farmers showed where ingredients come from. One workshop participant, sixteen-year-old Marie, explained her transformation. “I used to think our traditional foods were boring. But when I learned to make okok myself, understood its nutritional value, and saw how beautiful it could look when well prepared, I started seeing it differently. Now I’m teaching my friends.”



## What Sixteen-Year-Olds Are Learning to Cook

The movement generated constant media attention through food bloggers, TV cooking shows, social media campaigns with hashtags like Je Mange Camerounais, and interviews with chefs, farmers, and nutritionists.

Within a year, evidence of cultural transformation emerged. Business registration data showed notable increase in restaurants featuring traditional themes. Consumer surveys revealed growing interest in nutritious minimally processed dishes. School cafeterias began introducing traditional dishes regularly.

“The shift happened faster than we expected,” Elisabeth Atangana, CNOP-CAM President, told Fanza. “Once traditional food became fashionable among young people, it created momentum.”

The cultural shift had economic consequences. Farmers growing traditional crops reported increased demand. Market vendors stocking indigenous vegetables saw rising sales. Women’s cooperatives supplying spices to restaurants generated more stable incomes. Traditional food became a growth sector creating jobs.

“The movement generated constant media attention through food bloggers, TV cooking shows, social media campaigns with hashtags like Je Mange Camerounais, and interviews with chefs, farmers, and nutritionists.”



## “Food is culture, and culture is power”

Key factors in the campaign’s success included appealing to cultural pride rather than lecturing about nutrition, making traditional food fashionable among youth, creating multiple entry points through restaurants, competitions, workshops and media, aligning economic incentives so chefs, farmers and vendors all benefited, and long-term commitment because cultural change requires patience.

“Food is culture, and culture is power,” Elisabeth reflected. “By celebrating our recipes, we celebrate our people. We’re creating opportunities for farmers, cooks, entrepreneurs. This isn’t nostalgia. It’s reclaiming our future.”

“That’s brilliant,” Estridah said. “They made advocacy delicious. Literally.”

Njabulo laughed. “Right? You’re not asking people to sacrifice or accept something less appealing. You’re showing them that their own food heritage can be as desirable as anything imported.”

“The economic dimension is smart too,” Andrew observed. “When chefs and farmers and vendors all benefit economically from traditional food systems, they have reasons beyond ideology to sustain it. Self-interest and values align.”

Fanza nodded enthusiastically. “And it works because they attacked the core problem, which was cultural. Young people thought traditional food was backward. The campaign flipped that perception. Once it’s trendy, everything else follows.”

“Multiple entry points again,” Estridah noted. “Restaurants for people who want to dine out, competitions for people who like events, workshops for people who want to learn, media for people who engage online. You can participate in whatever way suits you.”

**“Fanza nodded enthusiastically. And it works because they attacked the core problem, which was cultural. Young people thought traditional food was backward. The campaign flipped that perception. Once it’s trendy, everything else follows.”**

#### **Involving elders**

“What about the authenticity tensions?” Njabulo asked. “That seems tricky. How do you modernise without losing what makes it meaningful?”

“By involving elders in the process,” Fanza replied. “CNOP-CAM brought traditional knowledge holders into planning. That gave permission to innovate while maintaining cultural integrity.”

Andrew smiled. “Okay, one more story. Estridah, you mentioned the Ghana school campaign. Tell us about that.”

“Okay, one more dimension,” Andrew said. “Estridah, you mentioned school-based organising. Tell us about that.”

“Actually, I have two stories that show different approaches to the same idea,” Estridah replied. “Both use schools as organising spaces, but one focuses on production and community organising while the other focuses on cultural shift and student leadership. Let me start with Kenya because it shows how one school sparked organising across a whole community.”



# Can Schools Spark Community Movements?

In the heart of Makueni County, Kenya, at Kivai Comprehensive School, the sound of morning bells now blends with the rustle of leaves, the rhythm of hoes hitting soil, and the laughter of students tending rows of amaranth, cowpeas, and kale.

## From Vacant Land to Daily Meals

What began in July 2024 as a simple school policy to use vacant land for growing indigenous crops has blossomed into a vibrant initiative reshaping how communities think about food, education, and sustainability. With support from SCOPE Kenya and Katoloni Mission CBO, Kivai Comprehensive has become a model of how school-based gardening can nourish both minds and bodies.

The shift began after the My Food is African campaign was introduced to the school. Inspired by the campaign's emphasis on agroecology and food sovereignty, Kivai Comprehensive's administration embraced school gardening with a focus on indigenous, drought-resistant varieties.

Today, those gardens provide daily meals for 120 learners. "We've gone from importing vegetables from the market to harvesting them from our backyard," a school staff member explained.

## Empowerment, Not Charity

But the gardens are also learning laboratories. Students participate in planting, watering, and weeding as part of a hands-on agroecology curriculum teaching them about soil health, composting, biodiversity, and the value of traditional crops. Teachers integrated gardens into science, home economics, and environmental studies.

This approach sparked behavioural changes among students. "When children are involved in growing their food, they're more likely to appreciate and eat it," one teacher noted. "The impact on discipline and attendance has also been notable. We have reduced cases of absenteeism as learners become more involved in garden routines."

The success at Kivai spread quickly. Two neighbouring schools adopted similar gardening practices influenced by Kivai's model. Inspired by what they saw during exchange visits, their administrations carved out land for cultivation and initiated feeding programmes using the produce.

SCOPE Kenya's August 2024 sensitization campaign played a key role in scaling this movement. Through interactive workshops with teachers, learners, and parents, the organisation showcased benefits of organic food production.

"This is empowerment, not charity," the SCOPE Kenya National Coordinator emphasised. "We're building capacity for schools and communities to sustain themselves."



## Learning from the children

Perhaps the most remarkable effect of the school gardens is how they bridged generations and connected communities. Parents, many of whom had abandoned traditional farming techniques, now visit the school to learn from their children. Some started home gardens using indigenous seeds shared by the school. Others formed local self-help groups to exchange farming tips and preserve heirloom crop varieties.

In a region often affected by erratic rainfall and food insecurity, these gardens are lifelines. They promote climate-resilient agriculture, reduce dependency on imported seeds, and revive long-neglected food cultures.

The school management's decision to institutionalise indigenous gardening is now viewed as a pioneering policy model in the region. County education officers who visited expressed interest in promoting similar initiatives across other schools in Makeni.

For students, it's education that feeds both body and mind. For the community, it's a return to resilience. For Kenya, it's a growing movement rooted in soil, tradition, and hope.

Estridah paused and the others leaned in, processing what they'd heard.

"That's beautiful," Fanza said. "The gardens became organising hubs for the whole community, not just the school."

"Right," Njabulo added. "Parents forming self-help groups, learning from their children, sharing seeds. The school sparked organising that spread beyond its walls."

"And notice the ripple effect," Andrew observed. "One school succeeds, neighbouring schools visit and adopt the model, then SCOPE organises sensitization campaigns reaching more schools. It scales organically through peer influence."

Estridah nodded. "That's what I find powerful about school-based organising. Schools are natural gathering points for communities. When schools change, families notice. But let me share another school story that shows a different approach. This one is from Ghana, and it focuses less on production and more on cultural transformation through student leadership."

**"Parents, many of whom had abandoned traditional farming techniques, now visit the school to learn from their children. Some started home gardens using indigenous seeds shared by the school."**



# Schools as Sites for Cultural Shifts... Can One School Day Spark a Municipal Movement?

At Dan-Ibu International School in Wa Municipality, Ghana, Wednesday mornings look different from other days. No packaged snacks, no instant noodles, no imported biscuits. Just traditional Ghanaian foods including koose, tubani, wakye, and boiled yam with palava sauce.

It was deliberate policy introduced by the headteacher in October 2024 after months of advocacy by CIKOD, the Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Organisational Development, as part of the My Food is African campaign. Remarkably, students were embracing it, parents were adapting, and other schools were watching with interest.

Like teenagers across Ghana's urban areas, Dan-Ibu students gravitated toward instant noodles, fried rice, and sugary snacks marketed as modern and convenient. Traditional Ghanaian meals felt old-fashioned, associated with poverty rather than progress. The consequences mounted through rising childhood obesity and malnutrition, lost connection to food heritage, and broken transmission of cooking knowledge between generations.

## When Koose Stopped Being Shameful

CIKOD began with education, bringing food sovereignty into the school through workshops where students learned about cultural and nutritional value of indigenous foods, how foods travel from farm to plate, and stories associated with Ghanaian dishes. Food exhibitions displayed ingredient diversity, cooking demonstrations, tastings, and elder storytelling about food history.

After months of education, the headteacher made a decision. One day a week, Wednesday, only indigenous foods would be permitted on school premises.

Some students resisted initially. Fifteen-year-old Adisa admitted, "I used to be embarrassed bringing koose to school. But after our local food day, everyone wanted to taste mine. Now it feels special, not shameful."

Implementation required coordination. Food vendors started preparing fresh traditional meals. The school shared recipes and hosted cooking demonstrations. School canteen workers learned to prepare traditional dishes appealing to young people.



Students became ambassadors through a Local Food Ambassadors Club that met weekly to share recipes, plan awareness events, and mentor younger students. The club organised a school-wide Food Fair inviting parents and local chefs to showcase indigenous dishes and cooking techniques.

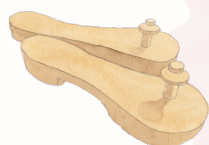
## From “backward” to bold

Within months, remarkable changes emerged. Peer pressure flipped from worrying that eating traditional food seemed backward to eating traditional dishes becoming bold, a badge of cultural pride. Food became identity as students explained stories behind dishes to each other. Family conversations changed as many students asked parents and grandparents about traditional foods and recipes.

Teachers began weaving indigenous food into their lessons. In science classes, students studied fermentation and nutrition. Social studies took up food systems and cultural identity, while math classes worked through the economics, comparing what traditional and processed foods actually cost families.

The success at Dan-Ibu drew attention from the Wa Municipal Education Directorate, whose officials came to observe what was happening. Neighbouring schools wanted pilot programmes of their own. Soon there were discussions about establishing a municipal Local Food Day across all schools in the area.

## Supporting the youth to lead



Perhaps most powerful were students’ own reflections. “When I grow up,” fifteen-year-old Halimah said, “I want to be a chef who cooks only local foods. Because I’ve learned that our food isn’t just healthy, it tells our story.”

Key factors in success included education before enforcement where CIKOD spent months building understanding, student ownership through the Local Food Ambassadors Club, whole ecosystem approach involving vendors, parents, kitchen staff and teachers, cultural framing positioned as reclaiming heritage, and celebration rather than deprivation.

“Two very different models,” Andrew said thoughtfully. “Kenya focused on production, hands-on agriculture, community organising. Ghana focused on consumption, cultural attitudes, student-led advocacy.”

“But both worked,” Fanza observed. “Kenya created food security and sparked community organising. Ghana created cultural shift and student empowerment.”

**“Two very different models,” Andrew said thoughtfully. “Kenya focused on production, hands-on agriculture, community organising. Ghana focused on consumption, cultural attitudes, student-led advocacy.”**

### Two Routes, One Destination

Njabulo nodded. “Kenya shows how schools can become hubs for community food production and organising. Parents formed self-help groups, neighbours replicated the model, whole communities changed farming practices. Ghana shows how schools can transform food culture through education and student leadership.”

“What I find interesting,” Estridah said, “is that both started with education and built toward policy. Kenya began with sensitization campaigns teaching about indigenous crops and agroecology, then schools adopted gardening policies. Ghana began with workshops teaching about traditional food value, then the school adopted the Wednesday policy. Neither just imposed rules from above.”

### Building Systems That Last

“And both created structures for sustainability,” Andrew added. “Kenya has the gardens themselves producing food, plus the self-help groups and seed sharing networks. Ghana has the Local Food Ambassadors Club and curriculum integration. These establish ongoing systems rather than single events.”

“Student agency matters in both,” Fanza noted. “In Kenya, students grow the food, learn agriculture, take responsibility for the meals they eat. In Ghana, students educate themselves, organise peers, become ambassadors. Young people have ownership.”

### When Students Lead

“The intergenerational dynamics are fascinating too,” Njabulo said. “In Kenya, parents learning from children who know how to grow indigenous crops. In Ghana, students asking grandparents about recipes. Both reverse the usual direction of knowledge transfer.”

Estridah smiled. “Schools are powerful organising spaces precisely because they bring together students, teachers, parents, vendors, communities. When schools change, ripples spread everywhere. Kenya and Ghana prove that whether you focus on production or consumption, agriculture or culture, the school can be the catalyst.”

“So, what connects all four stories we’ve shared?” Andrew asked. “The Congo journalists, Zambia radio, Cameroon restaurants, Kenya and Ghana schools. What are we seeing?”

## Synthesis: What Makes Citizen Campaigns Work?

Njabulo spoke first. “They all start where people are. The Congo journalists started with farmers’ real experiences. The Cameroon restaurant movement tapped into existing cultural pride. The Ghana school program educated before implementing policy. Nobody began by lecturing people or assuming they’d immediately understand food sovereignty concepts.”

“They use existing structures and resources,” Estridah added. “Congo used radio stations already reaching communities. Zambia used community radio with existing audiences. Cameroon used restaurants and cultural celebrations. Ghana used schools. Nobody tried to create everything from scratch.”

**“What strikes me is how they all made it cultural, not just political.”**

Fanza leaned forward. “What strikes me is how they all made it cultural, not just political. The Cameroon movement made traditional food fashionable. Ghana students learned their food heritage. Even the radio programmes in Zambia and Congo were connecting to identity and belonging.”



### Making Food Sovereignty Feel Like Home

“Multiple entry points,” Andrew observed. “Look at Cameroon with restaurants, competitions, workshops, and media. Ghana had education sessions, food fairs, ambassador clubs, curriculum integration. None relied on just one tactic. Different people respond to different approaches, so multiple entry points mean you reach more people and create momentum from various directions.”

“They let stories and evidence speak,” Njabulo said. “The most effective advocacy wasn’t people giving speeches. It was farmers telling their experiences on radio, students sharing what they learned, chefs serving delicious traditional meals. When people experience something directly, taste the food, hear the farmer’s voice, it becomes powerful.”

“And they built for sustainability, not just events,” Estridah noted. “The journalist network in Congo, the Local Food Ambassadors Club in Ghana, creating economic incentives in Cameroon where vendors and farmers and chefs all benefit. These structures can continue beyond initial enthusiasm.”



### Structures that Last, Authentic Relationships that Count

“Something else,” Fanza added. “They all acknowledged challenges honestly. The Congo journalists talked about pressure from advertisers. Zambia admitted radio can’t reach everyone. Cameroon discussed authenticity tensions. Ghana addressed student resistance. They didn’t pretend everything was easy, which builds trust.”

Andrew nodded slowly. “But underneath all these patterns is something harder to quantify. Every campaign built authentic relationships. The journalists in Congo connected to farmers. CIKOD built relationships with schools, parents, students. ZASHO spent time building trust with traditional leaders and radio stations. You can’t manufacture that. It takes time, respect, patience.”

### From Patterns to Principles

“So, what does this mean for others wanting to organise campaigns?” Njabulo asked.

“Start with what exists rather than trying to create everything new,” Andrew said. “Here they are in point form:”

- Connect to culture and identity, not just rational arguments.
- Use multiple tactics to reach different people.
- Show through stories and experience, don’t just tell.
- Build structures that can sustain beyond initial enthusiasm.
- Create economic incentives aligned with your goals.
- Acknowledge challenges and work through them honestly.
- Invest in authentic relationships even when it’s slow.
- Let people lead their own change rather than imposing solutions.
- Be patient because cultural shifts take time.”

“Estridah reflected. “These are key principles for building movements that respect people’s agency, connect to their lives, and create change that lasts.”



“From consumers to food citizens,” Fanza said. “That’s what all these campaigns are about. Helping people recognise their own power and use it.”

Andrew smiled. “Exactly. Which brings us to the practical question. How do others actually design and organise their own campaigns? We need a tool that helps people think through this for their specific contexts.”

“Something simple,” Njabulo said. “A practical guide they can actually use.”

“Let me draft something,” Andrew offered. “Based on what we’ve learned from these stories, what would help someone in a village or township or market or school start organising their own campaign?”

“Make it conversational,” Fanza suggested. “The way we’d actually walk someone through thinking about this.”



**“And remember John’s point about not being propagandist. The tool should help people organise effectively but respect their own judgment about what makes sense in their context.”**

“Agreed,” Estridah said. “And remember John’s point about not being propagandist. The tool should help people organise effectively but respect their own judgment about what makes sense in their context.”

“I’ll work on it,” Andrew said. “Let’s reconnect next week and see if it captures what we’ve learned.”

The screen showed four people, tired but energised, scattered across Africa but connected by conversation and commitment. Around them, in their cities and countries, thousands of other conversations were happening. People organising, learning from each other, building the movement story by story, campaign by campaign.

## Tool: Designing Your Grassroots Campaign

Food sovereignty campaigns need both discipline and adaptability. Clear goals guide action, but flexibility lets you learn from what actually happens and adjust accordingly. The best campaigns treat plans as working hypotheses, not fixed scripts. This tool helps you design campaigns that are both rigorous and realistic.

### STEP 1: UNDERSTAND YOUR CONTEXT

**Before planning what you will do, understand what you are working with.** What are people already doing around food? What existing groups, events, or relationships could your campaign build on? Who holds influence, both formal leaders and informal ones that people actually listen to? What recent attempts at change succeeded or failed, and why? What are the opportunities at either the local or national level, where change in policies and practices is most feasible?

**Spend time listening before deciding.** Talk with farmers, elders, youth, vendors, teachers. Not to sell your idea but to understand their reality. What do they care about? What constraints do they face? What would make their lives better?

**List three to five things about your context that should shape your approach,** including both opportunities and constraints.

### STEP 2: DEFINE YOUR PURPOSE AND EARLY GOALS

**Why does this campaign matter?** Be specific about the problem and who experiences it. Your purpose should guide decisions but allow different paths. For example, “young people reclaiming pride in traditional foods” is a purpose. “Train 50 youth in traditional cooking by December” is one possible goal serving that purpose.

**Start with a goal you can achieve in three to six months.** By what date will who do what resulting in what outcome? Make it specific, measurable, achievable, and relevant. But hold it lightly. You will learn whether the timeline makes sense and whether you chose the right target.

**Write your initial goal, then note one or two assumptions you are making** that could turn out wrong.

### STEP 3: CHOOSE STARTING TACTICS

**Based on the stories you have read, what approaches fit your context?** Media tactics like radio programmes. Cultural tactics like food festivals. Educational tactics like school programmes. Organising tactics like building coalitions. Economic tactics like supporting local food businesses.

**Choose two to four tactics to start with.** Pick tactics that fit your resources, reach your target audience, can be sustained, and build on existing structures.

**For each tactic, note what you expect it will achieve and what you will watch for to know if that expectation is valid.** For example, “We expect a school garden will increase interest in traditional crops. We will watch whether students participate beyond the first weeks and whether they talk about it at home.”



## STEP 4: BUILD YOUR CORE TEAM

**You need three to five people genuinely committed to leading this work.** Choose people for their commitment and reliability, not just enthusiasm or credentials.

**Also identify champions with credibility who can publicly support the campaign and potential partners.** But focus early energy on getting the core team working well. Agree on how you will make decisions, meet, handle disagreements, and share responsibilities.

Many campaigns fail not because strategy was wrong but because the team could not work through challenges together.

List your core team and why you chose each person. Note how you will make decisions and how often you will meet.

## STEP 5: PLAN YOUR FIRST THREE MONTHS

**What will you do in the first three months to build momentum and start learning?** Be specific about activities, who leads each one, resources needed, and timing.

**Build in learning points.** Meet regularly to reflect on what is happening. What is working or not? After two months or so, check whether you are reaching intended people and achieving hoped results. After three months, do a substantial reflection to decide what to continue, adjust, or stop.

These check-ins are not optional. They keep you connected to reality rather than pushing ahead with a plan that might not be working.

Create a simple three-month timeline showing activities and learning check-ins.



## STEP 6: CRAFT YOUR CORE MESSAGES

**What two to three things do you want people to remember and repeat?** Keep messages simple, positive, and connected to what your audience cares about. Use stories, not jargon.

**Decide who should deliver messages for credibility.**

Farmers convincing farmers.  
Youth reaching youth. Different messengers for different audiences.

**Your messages will evolve as you learn what resonates.** Start with your best understanding and adjust.

List two to three core messages and who should deliver them.





## STEP 7: SET UP LEARNING SYSTEMS

**How will you know what is actually happening?** Identify three to five simple indicators. Attendance. Media coverage. Behaviour changes. Participant feedback. Keep it simple.

**More important than numbers is interpreting what you learn.** Weekly, your core team should ask what is working and why, what is not working and why, what surprises you, and what you might do differently. Do not skip these sessions when busy. They keep you strategic rather than reactive.

**Keep simple documentation.** Photos, attendance lists, participant comments, reflection notes. This helps you learn, report to supporters, and remember your thinking.

Decide how you will monitor progress and when you will reflect.

## STEP 8: PREPARE FOR THE UNEXPECTED

**Your plan reflects current understanding, but campaigns unfold in living communities where things rarely go as planned.** Officials change. Resources appear or disappear. Unexpected allies emerge. Some activities fall flat while others take off.

**Stay alert.** Talk with people who will tell you the truth. Notice who shows up, what generates energy, what feels forced. Many campaigns fail because organisers only talk to each other and assume their plans are working.

**When something unexpected happens,** distinguish between developments that move you closer to your purpose even if they diverge from your plan, and developments that match your plan but do not serve your purpose. Embrace the first. Question the second.

**Every two to three months, step back and ask deeper questions.** What assumptions were wrong? What is working unexpectedly? What does this tell us about our community and approach? What might we need to change even though it is uncomfortable?

**But distinguish adaptation from mission drift.** Your core values around food sovereignty, your commitment to certain communities, your fundamental principles should remain steady. Specific activities, timeline, even some goals can evolve as you learn.

**Note what is negotiable** in your campaign and what is not.



## STEP 9: LOOK AHEAD WHILE STAYING GROUNDED

**If your initial three months go well, what would the next nine months look like?** How would you sustain engagement, deepen impact, and build lasting structures? Looking ahead helps you make strategic choices now about relationships and foundations.

**But do not plan too far ahead.** After three months of learning, you will revisit and likely revise longer-term plans.

**Think about sustainability from the start.** How will this continue beyond initial funding? Consider economic incentives, institutional changes, developing new leadership, and building structures that can persist.

**Sketch what months four through twelve might include.** Note that this is provisional.



## STEP 10: SUMMARISE YOUR DESIGN

Campaign name. Issue and why it matters. Initial goal for first three to six months. Starting tactics. First three-month plan. Core team. Resources needed. Key messages. How you will monitor and learn. What is negotiable and what is not. Provisional longer-term direction.

### WORKING WITH PLANS

Your structure gives you something to organise around and learn from. But successful campaigns treat plans as hypotheses to test, not scripts to follow. They balance determination about purpose with flexibility about tactics.

Start with what you can do now. Learn from experience. Build on what exists. Respect people's agency. Stay connected with other campaigns. Face challenges honestly.

**Think of your campaign less like implementing a blueprint and more like cultivating a garden.** You prepare soil, plant seeds, provide care. But you cannot control exactly how things grow. You respond to conditions, learn which approaches thrive, adjust your practices. The result, if you are attentive and adaptive, is abundant but not exactly what you initially envisioned.

Your job is not to force a predetermined outcome but to work skilfully with conditions you find, staying true to your purpose while remaining open to how that purpose gets achieved.

The stories in this chapter show this is possible. This tool gives you a framework. Now it is your turn. What campaign will you organise?





“A community that loses its food traditions loses part of its soul.”

Carlo Petrini (Italy, Slow Food founder)

“Informal food markets are a key part of the African Development story and one we really need to take advantage of if we wish to develop as a continent. You will find that, even when there are global financial crises, these informal markets keep going, and this is because resilience has become a key part of how they function.”

Charles Dhewa (Knowledge Transfer Africa, Zimbabwe)



# African Markets are our Markets

# 5

## Looking at Territorial markets with new eyes

The morning after the AFSA convening in Zimbabwe, Njabulo Zondo stared at his research proposal – six territorial markets across six African countries – and felt more apprentice than researcher. Born in Soweto, trained in nutrition at Makerere, he used to believe that textbooks held all the answers. But three days of listening had shifted something in him:

The markets wouldn't reveal themselves through questionnaires. They demanded humility – the courage to see what development discourse had rendered invisible by calling these places “informal,” “inefficient,” “traditional.” Words that really meant “not modern enough to matter.”

He thought of Soweto's spaza shops, those bright packages of ultra-processed snacks drowning out his grandmother's vegetable garden. What if territorial markets were the counterweight? Places where Africa's food sovereignty was still practiced, defended, evolving daily in the hands of traders close to the communities they served and who woke before dawn to move food from farmers to families.

Njabulo closed his laptop. Kampala was waking below his window, streets filling with life. Somewhere, Nakawa market already pulsed with morning energy. But first, Zimbabwe. First, Mbare. First, learning to see what his education had trained him not to notice.



**“Stepping into Mbare’s living ecosystem, where food becomes community.”**

In the pre-dawn darkness of Mbare, a silent rhythm begins. The air is thick with the chill of night and the faint, earthy scent of produce. This is the farmers' market, a place that exists between two worlds – the formal and informal. It's supposed to open at 5 a.m., but the old section, ever the early bird, is already stirring by 4:30 a.m. This is where the struggle for customers is most visible; the pull toward fresh produce is so strong that the market becomes a human magnet.

Njabulo arrived as the sun was just beginning to touch the horizon, introduced by AFSA colleagues to the market Chairman, Mr. Erasmus Fofu. The handshake was warm, welcoming, but Mr. Fofu's eyes held a question: another researcher come to study us, or someone willing to learn?

"You'll want to understand how we're structured, I suppose," Mr. Fofu began, gesturing around the sprawling complex as his committee members gathered. "But structure is just the skeleton. The life is in how everything connects."

One of the committee members, Gladys Dube, stepped forward with a knowing smile. "We can talk while we walk. You can't understand Mbare sitting still."

### **A Market That Breathes: Understanding Mbare's Anatomy**

As they moved through the awakening market, Mr. Fofu's description flowed like someone reading a beloved map. "We're many markets living together. Two Farmer's Markets. A Wholesale Market. Retail. Poultry. A Banana Wholesale Market with a quasi-ripening facility. Potatoes. Grains. Eggs. Grocery retail. Tuck-shops. Each one has its own rhythm, its own relationships."

"The Farmer's and Wholesale Markets are the heart," he continued, stopping to let a laden cart pass. "Everything else connects to them. About 80 food commodities traded here by at least 3,500 traders. We source from farmers across Zimbabwe - Masvingo, Manicaland, Mashonaland - and when we need to, from South Africa, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania."

Gladys pointed toward the massive bus station visible beyond the market's edge. "That's our convening power right there. Mbare long-distance bus station connects Harare with every production area, every city, half of Southern Africa. When people ask why Mbare matters, I tell them: follow the buses. They'll show you how food moves, how money moves, how relationships move."



"The market's systems interact differently depending on commodity, season, space," Gladys continued as they navigated narrow pathways between stalls. "See that trader from Masvingo? She's here because she knows there's a bus leaving at 5 a.m. She spent yesterday buying, selecting, negotiating. She'll sleep with her commodities here, catch that first bus tomorrow, be back in Masvingo selling by midday. The transporters, especially buses, they're making serious money from food-related luggage. Food moves people. People move food. It's a system that keeps breathing."



# The Quiet Revolution of Indigenous Fruits

Turning a corner, Njabulo stopped abruptly. Before him stretched a display that made his researcher's heart skip: indigenous fruits he hadn't seen since childhood. Baobab. Mazhanje. Masawu. Tons of them, commanding prime market space.

His surprise must have shown, because Gladys laughed. "You're thinking of your South African markets where these would still be in the wild, yes? Here's what formal research and institutions don't want to see: territorial markets are showing huge silent demand for indigenous fruits. When these are in season, Mbare is the only place you can find them in tons. We're quietly advancing food sovereignty and the Africanness of African food systems, most of which grow naturally without chemicals, just by providing space for them."

Mr. Fofu led them to a particular stall where two women, Mai Chenai and Mai Jaison, were arranging pyramids of a fruit Njabulo hadn't seen in years: Snot Apple, called Matohwe in Shona, Uxakuxaku in Ndebele.

"These ladies have become specialists," Mr. Fofu said with evident pride. "They've turned what communities thought was just a wild fruit into an urban food system revolution."

Mai Chenai looked up from her work, her hands moving with the efficiency of long practice. "I make my living from trading indigenous fruits like Matohwe. I source from Buhera district, Gutu district, Nyanga district, Nkayi district, Gokwe North district. Not the whole district because the fruit doesn't grow everywhere. In Gutu, there's an area called Chin'ai that's the production zone. Local communities there have become masters in preserving the fruit tree using indigenous knowledge systems."

**"Here's what formal research and institutions don't want to see: territorial markets are showing huge silent demand for indigenous fruits."**

"In Gokwe North, the main source is Masakadza," Mai Jaison added, warming to the story. "During droughts, local farmers use the fruit tree to feed and protect their cattle from drought-related deaths. The tree saves lives - human and animal."

Njabulo knelt down, examining the fruits, his mind racing with questions about nutrition, market chains, indigenous knowledge preservation. But Mai Chenai wasn't finished.



## Key Debate: Aren't Territorial Market Traders Inefficient Middlemen?

### **The Argument from Industrial Agriculture:**

“Informal markets are inefficient. Too many middlemen, no economies of scale, high wastage. Modern supply chains with centralized distribution are more efficient and hygienic.”

### **How Agroecology Advocates Respond:**

The efficiency argument measures the wrong things. Market traders know their territory, adjust to seasonal variations, respond to local demand, and move perishable goods quickly through personal networks. Supermarket supply chains optimize for shelf-stable products and standardized varieties. They excel at moving packaged goods but fail at indigenous fruits, leafy vegetables, and the diversity that builds nutrition and resilience. Markets also distribute income across hundreds of traders rather than concentrating it in corporate hands. And if ‘hygiene’ includes lack of chemicals and harmful pesticides then Agroecology always wins.





“Traditional leaders guide sustainable harvesting. The trees aren’t completely stripped because wildlife depends on them, like baboons, monkeys, birds, bees. Everyone eats. That’s the African way. The tree provides for all.”

Njabulo knelt down, examining the fruits, his mind racing with questions about nutrition, market chains, indigenous knowledge preservation. But Mai Chenai wasn’t finished.

“The fruit doesn’t ripen all at once in different districts. Buhera starts in March, continues until August. Gokwe North begins April or May, goes until end of September. Gutu starts late August and continues until December, with some fruits staying on trees until the rains come. We’ve learned the calendar of the land.”

“And the communities?” Njabulo asked. “How do they manage the harvest?”

Mai Jaison’s response carried a quiet pride. “Traditional leaders guide sustainable harvesting. The trees aren’t completely stripped because wildlife depends on them, like baboons, monkeys, birds, bees. Everyone eats. That’s the African way. The tree provides for all.”

## When Systems Overwhelm: The Municipality’s Honest Struggle

Later that morning, Mr. Fofu brought Njabulo to meet Mr. John Chiwawa, the head of markets under Harare City Council. His office was modest, the desk piled with papers, the walls covered with maps of Harare’s market system.

“You want to know how we handle an ecosystem with more than 100 commodities and different types of small enterprises?” Mr. Chiwawa asked, gesturing for Njabulo to sit. His tone wasn’t defensive, just honest. “The truth? We’re overwhelmed.”

“We have market officers who work with the committee, allocating trading space, trying to maintain some order. But the market functions 24/7 while our officers work eight hours. Most of the market organises itself because it has to.”

“Then there are the practical challenges,” he continued. “Traders need proper shelter, clean water points, waste management systems. We struggle to maintain basic infrastructure. During rains, some sections become muddy. Storage facilities are inadequate, so traders lose produce to spoilage. And transport access, getting trucks in and out efficiently, that requires investment we don’t have.”

He pulled out a document, clearly something he’d been thinking about for a while. “Another challenge is that our officers aren’t specialists in particular commodities. Ideally, we should have experts in horticulture, crops, livestock, logistics. That would let us properly arrange market sections, monitor over-supplies before they become losses, allocate dedicated space for agroecological and organic commodities.”

“I’ve written a proposal to the Mayor,” he continued, and Njabulo could hear both hope and weariness in his voice. “Asking for a committee that brings together ministry of agriculture, industry and commerce, finance, so we that can work together supporting Mbare. Because whether we acknowledge it or not, this has become a vital national institution.”

As they walked back toward the taxi rank, Mr. Fofu offered one final observation. “Territorial markets connect to everything: public transport, clothing shops, input suppliers, hardware, money changers. For farmers, it’s one-stop shopping. And because we can pull together huge volumes, we compete directly with large-scale processing companies who go out to source from the same farming areas we do. They have trucks and contracts. We have relationships and rhythm. Sometimes, rhythm wins.”

“And because we can pull together huge volumes, we compete directly with large-scale processing companies who go out to source from the same farming areas we do. They have trucks and contracts. We have relationships and rhythm. Sometimes, rhythm wins.”

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 What does it mean that indigenous fruits, dismissed by formal research, thrive in territorial markets, commanding tons of space rather than apologetic corners?
- 2 When a market operates 24/7 but municipal support works only 8 hours, who is really managing the food system? What does this reveal about where expertise actually lives?
- 3 Mai Chenai and Mai Jaison have built businesses around reading the ripening calendar of different districts. How does this kind of knowledge compare to formal supply chain management?



# Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: From Zimbabwe to Senegal

As Njabulo prepared for his flight to Dakar, the weight of Mbare still clung to him. The weight of recognition. The dust of the market on his shoes felt like a consecration of sorts. He was no longer just collecting data. He was witnessing something his education had trained him to overlook: the sophisticated intelligence of systems that formal development called “informal.”

The flight gave him time to reflect. Monica’s voice echoed in his memory from the convening: “Knowledge alone doesn’t change a system.” But knowledge that recognises what’s already working, knowledge that honours rather than dismisses, knowledge that asks “how does this succeed?” instead of “why hasn’t this modernised?” Maybe that kind of knowledge could shift something.

Dakar’s air was different when he landed. It was humid, salty, carried by the winds off the Atlantic. His friend Abdou Camara met him at arrivals. His embrace was a bridge between worlds; between the market he’d left and the market he was about to enter.

“Marché Thiaroye tomorrow,” Abdou said as they drove through Dakar’s evening traffic. “But tonight, rest. And prepare yourself. Thiaroye will test everything you think you know about how food moves through cities.”

## Thiaroye’s Paradox: A Fortress Against Its Own People

The next morning, standing at the edge of Thiaroye market’s seven hectares, Njabulo understood what Abdou meant. The market Chairman, Mr. Abdou Diouf, spread his arms in a gesture that encompassed both pride and frustration.

“Marché Thiaroye is a living, breathing entity,” he began, his voice carrying the poetry that Njabulo was learning to listen for. “Culture and relationships underlie everything you see here. These are the veins connecting this market to other great markets of Dakar, creating a resilient network of commerce and life.”

But as they walked the market’s perimeter, Njabulo saw the paradox. The market was built like a fortress against its own potential customers. Highways and structures ringed it, creating barriers that made access difficult.



“Why?” Njabulo asked. “Why would urban planners make it so hard for people to reach the market?”

Mr. Diouf’s laugh was bitter. “If they’d taken time to understand the market’s operations, its significance in ordinary people’s lives, they wouldn’t have built these obstacles. But across Africa, we see this pattern: governments ignore infrastructure for the majority – rural roads, public markets, preferring elite infrastructure. Airports for tourists. Export facilities for foreign trade. It’s systematic bias against inclusive development.”



**“Yet within this struggle, fierce, defiant life persisted. Thiaroye operated day and night, a tireless heart sustaining the city.”**

Abdou Camara, who’d been listening quietly, added his own observation. “It’s as if serving 90% of the population is somehow less important than serving the 10% who fly or export. Thiaroye feeds Dakar. But highways get more investment than market access paths.”

Yet within this struggle, fierce, defiant life persisted. Thiaroye operated day and night, a tireless heart sustaining the city. Its rhythm was set by women – the majority of traders – buying for families and small businesses, moving food from source to table through networks of relationship and trust.

## The Night Market’s Wisdom: When Commerce Becomes Culture

They found Madam Ndoye in the vegetable section, her hands moving expertly through produce, assessing quality with touches too quick for Njabulo’s untrained eye to follow. Abdou translated as she spoke, her Wolof carrying a conviction that needed no translation.

“The Thiaroye market is the main vegetable market in Dakar because we’re close to the Niayes, Saint Louis, Fouta, Walo – all major food sources. But our position in the suburbs means we accommodate many other enterprises: tailors, cereal and peanut mills, hardware stores. And transport is everything here: horse-drawn carriages, clandos, taxis, buses, trucks, specialised vehicles. Farmers find their needs met too – input shops everywhere.”

“The market never sleeps,” Njabulo observed, watching late-night transactions happening around them. “What kind of support should a market that operates 24 hours receive?”

“But the real governance comes from the college of market delegates, elected from among traders.”

Madam Ndoye’s response came swift and passionate. “Government and municipalities should provide infrastructure and pricing guidance for fair trading. But look what happens: government obsesses over prices of maize, cooking oil, sugar – processed products. Meanwhile, prices of horticulture commodities like onions, tomatoes, potatoes, cassava are negotiated directly between trader, intermediary, and farmer. How can government know this market’s contribution to national development if they don’t even collect data on how we work?”

Her voice carried sadness now. “Traders who import set their own prices for rare products, but government is supposedly managing imports at national level. The disconnect is complete. We’re invisible to policy even as we feed the nation.”



Later, as they sat in a small café near the market, Abdou explained the governance structure. “The municipality provides administrative support – a manager, tax collectors, security, technicians. But the real governance comes from the college of market delegates, elected from among traders. They maintain services, report problems, defend trader interests, mediate between market and authorities.”

“Two systems operating side by side,” Njabulo mused. “Formal and informal, but both necessary. Neither sufficient alone.”

“That’s Thiaroye,” Abdou agreed. “That’s Africa. We’ve perfected the art of making things work despite systems that weren’t designed for us.”




## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 When urban planning creates barriers between markets and communities, whose interests are really being served? What would planning for the 90% rather than the 10% look like?
- 2 Madam Ndoye asks how government can know the market's economic contribution if they don't collect data on its operations. Why do you think this data gap exists? Is it accidental or structural?
- 3 What does it mean that traders have created their own governance systems because formal systems are insufficient? What can this teach about indigenous institution-building?



While in Senegal, Njabulo sent an email to his Rwandan colleague, Ajay Bizimana, asking for connections in nearby DR Congo. He wanted to understand how territorial markets function in a country perpetually gripped by conflict. Eric Jemba, based in Bukavu City, responded with a letter that arrived while Njabulo was still in Dakar:



Dear Njabulo,

**DR Congo always faces internal conflicts that disrupt food production. Without territorial markets, hunger and starvation would be far worse, especially for displaced populations. In Bukavu, most people depend on Kadutu territorial market, the city's largest. Agricultural products sold there are produced locally by farmers, whilst some natural foods must be harvested from forests. Most commodities come from Kabare, Walungu, and Idjwi.**

**By mobilising food from diverse areas, Kadutu enables residents from Panzi, Bagira, Nyamugo, Kadutu, Kamagama, and Bondeko to access food without venturing into conflict zones. Many traders aren't farmers themselves but intermediaries who buy from farmers unable to move around residential areas safely. These relationships move food to displaced populations and people in transit, ensuring access despite conflict.**

**In zones where formal systems collapse, territorial markets become lifelines, feeding people through ongoing conflict. Adapting as conditions shift and persisting through chaos, they keep communities fed.**

**I will gladly respond to any further questions.**

**Yours faithfully,  
Eric Jemba**



# The Family at the Market's Heart: Rwanda's Ubuntu in Practice

From Senegal, Njabulo flew to Kigali, where Ajay had arranged his visit to Kimironko market – Rwanda's largest territorial market, located 15 to 20 minutes from the central business district. The market served as a critical port for goods from Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, evidence of its role in regional trade.

Walking through Kimironko with the market Chairman, Njabulo immediately noticed a difference from Mbare and Thiaroye. The organisation was more visible: clear zones for different products, a warehouse structure rather than open-air sprawl. But beneath the physical order, the same relational logic operated.

“What makes African territorial markets unique and sustainable,” the Chairman explained, “is that most aren't just individual businesses but family enterprises. When the husband works elsewhere, the family – mother, children, extended members – keeps the business alive.” They paused at a vegetable stall where a woman and her teenage daughter worked side by side, the teaching and learning happening through gesture and rhythm more than words. A vendor named John Kizimana, overhearing the conversation, added his perspective with evident passion.

“Western notions of gender try to categorise everything: women-owned businesses, male-owned businesses, youth-owned businesses, as if all these people don't belong to households! African enterprises can't be called sole proprietors because no one runs a business alone as a sole individual. We are family. We are community. The business belongs to all of us.”

## Key Debate: Isn't modernising the economy key to the future?



### **The Argument from Industrial Agriculture:**

“Formal sector employment with contracts, benefits, and taxes is superior to informal market trading. Economic development means moving people from informal to formal work.”

### **How Agroecology Advocates Respond:**

This represents a different form of economic organization, one that employs thousands, distributes wealth more equitably, and allows families to participate in feeding their community without formal hiring. Market trading provides flexible income that adapts to household needs, supports school fees, and maintains food security even when formal wages fail. The development question becomes: why destroy functioning economic systems to impose a model that concentrates wealth into the hands of a few and creates dependency?

“The development question becomes: why destroy functioning economic systems to impose a model that concentrates wealth into the hands of a few and creates dependency?”

## The Zones of Connection: How Organisation Serves Community

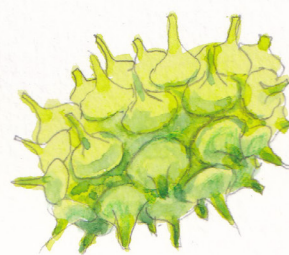
The Chairman led Njabulo through Kimironko's zones, each revealing a different aspect of how territorial markets balance structure with fluidity. At the main entrance, household goods: plates, baskets, cooking utensils. To the right, the fabric market where tailors and seamstresses could produce clothes on demand. To the left, butcheries selling fresh meat and fish. In the central area, a vast array of produce: tomatoes, avocados, oranges, mangoes, tree tomatoes, multiple varieties of green vegetables, potatoes, onions, indigenous produce he couldn't name. Behind the produce section, grains, flours, and legumes.

"Each zone has a chief who reports to me or the Vice Chairman," the Chairman explained. "These chiefs address issues with consumers, sellers, market conditions. They gather feedback, and we make decisions together about operations and improvements - drainage systems, roof repairs, walkways. It's democratic management, not top-down."

**"We've mastered anticipating demand, matching supply and demand. We've created collaborative rather than competitive communication based on relationships, not contracts."**

But challenges remained visible. "Infrastructure for transportation and storage is severely lacking across Rwanda. Transportation creates jobs around markets, but limited tarmac roads connecting to business centres and markets restrict rural access. This creates situations where informal settlements develop because people can't reach markets directly. Especially in Gasabo district, rural farmers struggle to get goods to Kimironko."

He paused, his gaze sweeping the market's organised chaos. "Yet we remain inclusive, family-driven. We function as equitable food distributors. Even without cooling facilities, we handle tons of fresh produce, moving commodities where needed at the right time to targeted consumers. We've mastered anticipating demand, matching supply and demand. We've created collaborative rather than competitive communication based on relationships, not contracts."



“If we wanted to be monopolists, we could be,” he continued. “Kimironko could dominate. But Ubuntu principles keep us conscious that territorial markets are public food systems. We’re distributors, not extractors. That’s the difference between us and supermarkets. They want market capture. We want market service.”



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 John Kizimana rejects Western categories that separate individual businesses from family and community. What gets lost when we impose these categories on African commerce? What gets revealed when we see through African eyes?
- 2 The Chairman says territorial markets could become monopolies but choose not to because of Ubuntu principles. What does this suggest about the relationship between cultural values and economic structures?
- 3 In what ways do territorial markets “distribute” rather than “extract”? How might this principle reshape our understanding of what successful food systems look like?

## Returning to Roots: Uganda’s Memory and Loss

After a week in Rwanda visiting towns like Musanze, Njabulo took a short trip to Kampala coming full circle to Uganda, where his African market journey had begun through his studies at Makerere. Nakawa market welcomed him the next day through its executive committee, but the welcome carried an undercurrent of melancholy.

Walking through the market’s sections, the Chairperson, Mr. Ngaingai, stopped suddenly, his gaze distant, seeing something beyond the present moment. When he spoke, his voice carried the weight of witnessing an erasure.

“The scent of smoked tilapia and sun-dried wild mushrooms, obutiko obubaala, used to welcome visitors to this section, connecting them with ancestors. The pyramids of oyster nuts, pigeon peas, ebitungulu, cherry tomatoes, yellow bananas. These were foods but also stories passed from grandmother to grandchild, recipes whispered across generations.”





“Look at the stalls, filled with processed foods and sugary drinks. Not only have we lost our food, but we’ve also lost pieces of our soul.”

He turned to face Njabulo, and the researcher saw real grief in the older man’s eyes. “But this lives only in memory now. The younger generation will never experience that embrace because foreign produce driven by modern diets has replaced our tradition. We’re forced to trade our heritage for a cheap, unfulfilling present. Look at the stalls, filled with processed foods and sugary drinks. Not only have we lost our food, but we’ve also lost pieces of our soul. This market, once a vibrant testament to our identity, now stands as a quiet monument to what we’ve sacrificed.”

The silence that followed felt sacred, a moment of mourning for something precious slipping away whilst everyone watched, helpless or complicit or simply too tired to resist.

## Layers and Foundations

But Mr. Ngaingai wasn’t finished. After the grief came history, the long view that contextualised the loss. “Nakawa market started back in 1976 through vendors’ own organisation. We requested land from government, received it in 1982. We operated in open space with temporal structures until KCCA came with construction plans in 1995.”

Ms. Tufumba Susan, a market executive member, picked up the thread. “We started with 5,000 vendors in 1995. Now we have over 30,000, though daily numbers fluctuate between 6,000 and 8,000 depending on season and what’s available. Seventy percent are women. KCCA administers the market, but we have executive committees, zonal leadership, sectional and departmental structures. We mostly deal in foodstuffs: fruits, vegetables, dried foods.”

“In colonial times,” Mr. Ngaingai added, “Nakawa was zoned as African quarters, outside the city. As Kampala grew, the boundaries shifted past us. Now we’re on the Kampala-Jinja Highway, the second-largest food market after Owino. We’re a major distribution point for Eastern Uganda, supplying smaller markets throughout Kampala and Wakiso: Naalya, Kiwatule, Ntinda, Bweyogerere, Kititiantale, Bugolobi, Kasokoso, Kibuli, Banda.”



# When Borders Complicate What Should Flow: The Cross-Border Trade Challenge

That morning, arriving early, Njabulo had witnessed something that captured his researcher's attention: large trucks from Kenya loading commodities from Uganda whilst simultaneously bringing goods Uganda needed. Regional trade happening in real time, mostly unrecorded, facilitated entirely through market relationships.

He found Ms. Badru, a cereals trader from Busia, overseeing her goods. She spoke with the exhaustion of someone who'd fought too many bureaucratic battles.

"Kenyans now buy directly from Ugandan farmers, flooding deep into communities with trucks, offering good prices at farm gate. They expect Busia prices to match farm gate prices. This breaks the trade chain, transporters, border loaders excluded. And because neighbouring countries make formal trade complicated, huge volumes get smuggled through porous routes. It's risky for traders, and it's massive revenue loss for governments who could be earning from legitimate trade."

**"But until these policies integrate agroecological products into formal regional trade, we'll keep smuggling the food Africa grows, losing revenue whilst criminalising the people feeding the continent."**

"The challenges are everywhere," she continued, warming to a subject clearly close to her heart. "Different currency values that need harmonisation: Kenyan Shilling, Uganda Shilling, Tanzania Shilling, all different exchange rates. Multiple taxations across borders. Adulteration concerns. These all undermine cross-border trade."

Njabulo mentioned the recent AFSA study he'd heard about, examining intra-EAC cross-border trade in agroecological products, focusing on Uganda's relationships with Kenya and DRC. Based on observations at Busia (Kenya/Uganda) and Mpondwe (DRC/Uganda), the study confirmed significant trade in agroecological products, though official data didn't disaggregate them from conventional produce.

"The policy framework offers both support and bias," Ms. Badru explained. "There's a National Agroecology Strategy under development, but it conflicts with the Agro-Industrialisation Programme that favours large-scale industrial agriculture and monocultures. The EAC Common External Tariff caps food imports at 35%, protecting the domestic market, but the National Food and Nutrition Strategy emphasises production increase through modern farming techniques with limited agroecology integration. Everything contradicts everything else."

Her frustration crystallised into a vision: "Addressing these challenges requires solutions that prioritise human and trade rights over profits for governments and a few individuals. Streamline customs. Sponsor regional agroecology policies. The East African Legislative Assembly recently moved to promote a dedicated EAC Agroecology Policy for sustainable, resilient, equitable food systems. But until these policies integrate agroecological products into formal regional trade, we'll keep smuggling the food Africa grows, losing revenue whilst criminalising the people feeding the continent."



At a recent AFSA multistakeholder dialogue in Jinja, actors from different countries shared similar experiences hindering cross-border agroecological trade. The meeting advocated for a digital platform as an information collection centre to facilitate smooth trade and bridge knowledge gaps amongst different agroecology trade actors.

“Technology could help,” Ms. Badru conceded. “But first, policy has to stop treating territorial markets like problems and start treating us like the solutions we’ve always been.”

**“Technology could help,” Ms. Badru conceded. “But first, policy has to stop treating territorial markets like problems and start treating us like the solutions we’ve always been.”**

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Mr. Ngaingai describes Nakawa market as “a quiet monument to what we’ve sacrificed.” What are the mechanisms, economic, cultural, political, that drive this sacrifice? Can they be reversed?
- 2 Ms. Badru reveals how policy contradictions create impossible situations for traders: agroecology strategies that conflict with industrialisation programmes, protective tariffs that ignore agroecological products. Whose interests do these contradictions serve?
- 3 When massive food trade happens “informally” because formal systems are too complicated, who is really informal - the traders or the policy frameworks that fail to accommodate how food actually moves?



## The Arabic Flavour of Africa: Jedaida Market’s Identity

Before returning to South Africa to consolidate his research, Njabulo flew from Entebbe to Tunis, determined to experience the Arabic dimension of African territorial markets. Jedaida market, located in what locals called “Jedaida Souri” (French Jedaida), didn’t disappoint.

Mr. Selime, one of the market leaders, met him at the entrance to the long street called Habib Bourguiba where vendors displayed their goods. Less than two kilometres away, a Carrefour supermarket stood as visible competition, yet Jedaida thrived.

“In Tunisia, territorial markets are called ‘popular markets’ in opposition to corporate national and international markets,” Mr. Selime explained as they walked.

“The term ‘popular’ designates non-institutional, less ‘modern’ spaces, popular neighbourhoods, popular coffee shops, popular restaurants where products are cheaper, purchased by working-class consumers. But these popular markets are products of long evolution, anterior and ulterior to current forms.”

He gestured broadly. “Although modern markets have invaded every corner of Tunisia, many territorial markets still function. Weekly markets are most known. Many regions have a specific day for their market. Some regions are even named after their markets - ‘Souk Lerbâa’ (Wednesday’s Market) is the pre-independence name of Jendouba in Northwest Tunisia. This is identity expressed through food commerce.”

“Jedaida is also called ‘The Sunday’s Market,’” Mr. Selime continued. “Vendors come Saturday evening to occupy spots, pay taxes to the municipal agent. Commodities come from nearby farms of Northwest Tunisia, brought Saturday evening, sold until Sunday evening. Only a few imported fruits like bananas come from Central Markets where importers sell them.”



## A Different Gender Dynamic

One thing struck Njabulo immediately: unlike Mbare, Nakawa, or Thiaroye where women dominated, Jedaida’s vendors were mostly men between 20 and 60 years old, with low formal education levels but deep practical knowledge.

A 55-year-old vendor, showing Njabulo fresh fennel, carrot, onion, and parsley, explained his sourcing network. “My farmers are located within a 20-kilometre radius around Jedaida. I prefer dealing with them instead of the wholesale market of Bir El-Kasâa because it’s far from here and its products aren’t very fresh. Plus, wholesale market prices fluctuate too much. My network gives me stability, quality, relationships.”



**“I think supermarket products are dangerous because of conservation chemicals. I trust this market. I trust these farmers. That trust is worth more than convenience.”**

A female consumer in her 40s, who worked in public health services, was selecting vegetables nearby. When Njabulo asked about her shopping preferences, her answer was immediate: “The food here is fresh, unlike the frozen products of Carrefour. I think supermarket products are dangerous because of conservation chemicals. I trust this market. I trust these farmers. That trust is worth more than convenience.”

## The Hidden Hand: Power Dynamics in Market Governance

When Njabulo asked about governance, a 50-year-old vendor specialising in tomatoes, potatoes, and peppers spoke with barely concealed frustration. “The market is municipal property. Every three years, one person rents the place from the municipality, supposedly whoever gives the best offer. Then vendors pay rent for their spots to this market agent. But the agent collects far more money than the actual rental fees.”

His voice hardened. “It would be better if we vendors self-organised to pay rent directly to the municipality without intermediaries. This system favours the agent, not us, not the customers, not even the municipality in the long run. It’s extraction dressed up as management.”

Yet despite this exploitative governance structure, social bonds amongst vendors remained strong. They shared tools, advised customers to buy from other vendors when appropriate, strengthened relationships through weekly meetings. No clear hierarchy existed amongst vendors. Each occupied a spot, sold their products directly to clients, built their own customer base through quality and relationship.

“The governance is problematic,” Mr. Selime admitted as they concluded the tour. “But the community persists. That’s the lesson Jedaida teaches: even imperfect systems can’t destroy the fundamental human impulse to trade fairly, connect genuinely, feed each other well.”

## From Witnessing to Framework: Making the Invisible Visible

Back in Johannesburg, surrounded by notes, photos, recordings from six markets across six countries, Njabulo sat down to make sense of patterns. But he had been changed by the journey. The markets had given him a new way of seeing. Sophistication where he had been taught to see informality. Intelligence where he had been trained to see inefficiency. Solutions where development discourse saw only problems.

He thought of Mr. Fofu at Mbare, Gladys walking him through the pre-dawn market, Mai Chenai explaining the ripening calendar of indigenous fruits. He remembered Madam Ndoye’s frustration at government’s data gaps, Ms. Badru’s exhaustion with policy contradictions, Mr. Ngaingai’s grief over lost food memories.

Each market was unique. Mbare’s sprawling complexity. Thiaroye’s fortified resilience. Kadutu’s conflict-zone adaptation. Yet threads connected them all: family-based enterprise, relationship-driven commerce, indigenous knowledge systems, resistance to corporate capture, sophisticated self-organisation, equitable distribution.

These markets represented working models of alternative food systems, feeding 90% of Africa despite receiving almost none of the infrastructure investment, policy support, or recognition lavished on supermarkets and export agriculture.





These markets represented working models of alternative food systems, feeding 90% of Africa despite receiving almost none of the infrastructure investment, policy support, or recognition lavished on supermarkets and export agriculture.

The framework he would build needed to capture this. Translate market wisdom into language that could challenge the development paradigm dismissing them. It needed to show what these markets were building, protecting, evolving every single day. And what would be lost if they disappeared.

After visiting six territorial markets across Africa, Njabulo developed a framework for profiling these markets, so they get the recognition, support, and protection they deserve. The framework helps us understand an underground economy that drives visible development but remains poorly understood. Sometimes when things are everywhere, we stop seeing their value.

This framework draws primarily from markets serving major African cities, where corporate food systems most directly threaten territorial market systems. The hundreds of smaller rural territorial markets in each country across Africa face different conditions: less infrastructure, less policy attention, less immediate corporate competition. While both urban and rural markets embody food sovereignty principles, they require different support strategies. Urban-adjacent markets need protection from displacement and investment to compete with supermarket expansion. Rural markets need basic infrastructure and municipal capacity-building where local governments lack resources and technical knowledge to recognise markets as development priorities.

African territorial markets have their own governance systems. Traders from different backgrounds run individual businesses under one roof. This is not a cooperative. Not a private company with bosses and hierarchies. Not a parastatal mixing government and private ownership. It is something else entirely. Understanding how this governance works can help African countries build systems that actually fit how we organise ourselves.



# Framework for Territorial Markets as Pathways for Socio-Economic Transformation

## TERRITORIAL MARKETS BUILD AND NURTURE COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Markets turn farmers into businesspeople. Every day, farmers learn what customers want: which crops, varieties, timing, quantities. The biggest impact? Market income sends children to school. Those children grow up, get jobs in cities or abroad, and send money home. That cycle started at the market. Markets also opened people's eyes to earning from things they walked past daily: wild fruits, mushrooms, insects.

## TERRITORIAL MARKETS EMBODY ALTERNATIVE INDIGENOUS COMMERCE

Selling natural resources for foreign currency, then importing rice and wheat makes no sense. It is based on an extractive neo-liberal economic model. Investing in our own food systems and markets gives us strength and dignity. It enhances a local economy in which profits circulate within a territory, multiplying benefits for all livelihoods. When territorial markets grow strong enough to export on their own terms, we will not need foreign companies extracting value from producers. Instead of meeting standards like GlobalGAP designed elsewhere, we can use what territorial markets teach us to create trading conditions fitting how we do business.

## TERRITORIAL MARKETS FUNCTION AS EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTORS

Territorial markets move mountains of fresh food without cold storage. They get produce where it needs to go, when, and to whom. They read demand and match supply through relationships built on collaboration, not competition. Because food flows to many markets, farmers get better returns overall. Big markets like Mbare or Nakawa could become monopolies squeezing everyone else out. But Ubuntu principles keep them functioning as distributors, not extractors.

## TERRITORIAL MARKETS DEMONSTRATE CONNECTIVITY PRINCIPLES

Markets sit at the centre of the food chain, connecting farmers and processors, gathering produce so farmers need not chase every buyer. Markets support smaller roadside stalls and local businesses in communities where people live, unlike supermarkets locating where most struggle to reach. When food moves well, everyone grows: transporters, vendors, processors all build income to send their children to school. Governments pour money into state-owned enterprises that collapse, but a single market can have over 2,000 entrepreneurs doing business without government support.

## TERRITORIAL MARKETS EXEMPLIFY INDIGENOUS EMBEDDED FINANCE

Territorial markets run on Ubuntu principles: sharing, relationships, trust. Modern banking has never figured out how to work with market practices, some dating to barter and commodity exchange. Banks want invoices, but markets operate on trust without paperwork. Where banks demand collateral and risk assessments, markets say trust and relationships suffice. This makes markets part of social fabric. People are not clocking in and out. They are living and doing business as human beings together.

## TERRITORIAL MARKETS BUILD VALUE CHAIN EXPERTISE

Market traders become specialists understanding business rhythms. They learn not to bail when times get tough, because opportunistic behaviour kills long-term growth. When there is surplus, markets direct it to processors. They encourage farmers to dry food so supply stays steady year-round. Markets know which products can be processed, when, and in what forms customers prefer.

## TERRITORIAL MARKETS HELP BUILD BUSINESS MODELS

When individual farmers produce small amounts, markets show the power of pooling together. Markets see when a few women making peanut butter need connection to larger distribution. This reveals the need for community-level investment so many local entrepreneurs benefit from economies of scale. That is how you move from pilot projects to real businesses where food is grown.

# The Advocacy Agenda for Territorial Markets

Recognizing the value of territorial markets is not enough. Transformation requires concrete changes in policy, investment, and institutional support:

**Policy and Regulation:** Different government levels must play distinct roles. National governments should recognise territorial markets as essential food security infrastructure in national development plans, create policies that strengthen rather than formalize existing market systems, and provide municipalities with guidelines, funding mechanisms, and technical support for market development. Regional and provincial governments should coordinate market systems across municipalities and ensure markets connect effectively to processing and distribution networks. Municipal governments manage day-to-day operations, vendor relations, and local regulation, but cannot do this effectively without resources and guidance from national level. Adapting food safety regulations to market realities rather than imposing supermarket standards requires national policy frameworks that municipalities can implement locally.

**Financial Infrastructure:** Banking systems must adapt to how markets actually operate. This requires financial products built on relationship-based trust rather than paperwork and collateral. Governments should support credit guarantee schemes that recognise market trading records as valid business history.

**Physical Infrastructure:** Markets need investment in shelter, clean water, waste management, cold storage, and transport access. National governments should fund market infrastructure as agricultural development priority, not leave it to under-resourced municipalities. Provincial governments should coordinate infrastructure development across market networks. Municipalities implement and maintain facilities but need national budget allocations to do so. Markets move billions of dollars of food annually. Infrastructure investment is economic development, not charity.

**Institutional Support:** Agricultural ministries must include territorial markets in national food systems planning. Markets need commodity specialists, market information systems, and connections to processing facilities. When governments invest in agriculture, market infrastructure should be a priority alongside farm production.

**Research and Documentation:** Universities and research institutions should study how territorial markets function, document innovations, and share learning across regions. The knowledge exists in markets but remains invisible to policymakers.

**The ask is simple:** Stop trying to replace territorial markets with corporate alternatives. Instead, invest in making existing systems work better. Change the vision from modernization that destroys to development that strengthens what already feeds millions.



## One Market, One Meal, One Movement: Njabulo's Return

Six months after his return to South Africa, Njabulo presented his findings at an AFSA continental gathering. The room was full. There were farmers, traders, researchers, activists, policy makers, many of the same faces from the convening that had launched his journey.

He'd prepared slides, statistics, the framework document. But standing at the podium, looking out at these faces, he found himself putting aside his notes.

### Key Debate: Are Territorial Markets Unsafe?

#### The Argument from Industrial Agriculture:

"Territorial markets lack food safety standards and regulation. Supermarkets provide consistent, safe, traceable food through cold chains and quality control."

#### How Agroecology Advocates Respond:

Food safety audits measure the wrong things. The woman in Jedaida choosing fresh vegetables over Carrefour's frozen products said, "I think supermarket products are dangerous because of conservation chemicals. I trust this market. I trust these farmers." Her trust comes from direct relationships with farmers, visible food origins, and immediate accountability.

Territorial markets police themselves through reputation. A vendor who sells spoiled food loses customers permanently. Madam Ndoye's hands assess quality faster than any laboratory test, drawing on decades of daily practice. She knows which produce came from where, when it was harvested, how it was stored. Laboratory tests arrive days later. Her assessment happens at point of sale.

Supermarket food safety systems are there to protect corporate liability rather than consumer health. They excel at preventing contamination scandals in processed foods but allow chemical residues, artificial preservatives, and ultra-processing that create long-term health damage. Market food is fresh, minimally processed, and traceable through direct human relationships.

**"Supermarket food safety systems are there to protect corporate liability rather than consumer health."**

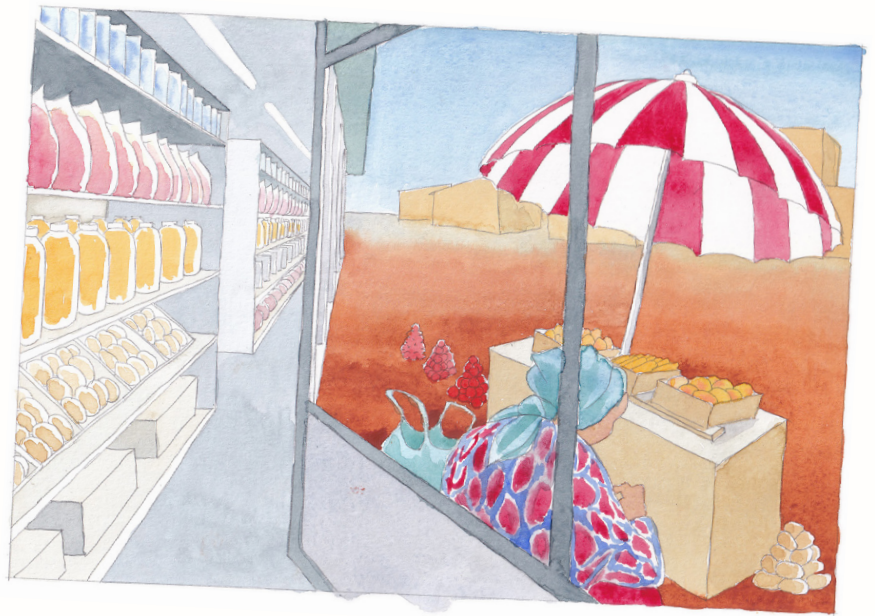
#### When the Studied Become the Teachers

"I went to study six markets," he began. "I came back having been studied by them. They taught me to see what my education had trained me not to notice: that the most sophisticated food distribution systems on our continent aren't the ones with refrigerated trucks and barcode scanners, but the ones built on relationships older than any supply chain manual."

He told them about Mai Chenai's ripening calendar, about Madam Ndoye's invisible contribution to Dakar's food security, about Mr. Ngaingai's grief over lost food memories, about the Kimironko Chairman's choice to distribute rather than extract. He showed them the framework, but he framed it differently than he'd originally planned.

“This is a tool for fixing our vision, for correcting the developmental myopia that calls these markets ‘informal’ when they’re more formally organised than most corporations, that calls them ‘inefficient’ when they feed 90% of Africa, that calls them ‘traditional’ as if that’s an insult rather than a testament to their adaptive resilience.

“Do territorial markets need improvements? Yes. Better infrastructure, waste management, storage, transport access, appropriate regulation. But there is a fundamental difference between improvements that strengthen existing systems and ‘modernization’ that destroys them. The real problem is how we see these markets. Policymakers view them as problems requiring replacement rather than assets requiring investment. Fix the vision first. Once we recognise territorial markets as sophisticated economic institutions, the right interventions become obvious.”



Monica sat in the front row, and when their eyes met, she nodded. Her student had learned what she’d hoped he would: that research, at its best, is an act of recognition, not just documentation.

### Research as Recognition

“Every meal moved through territorial markets is an act of food sovereignty,” Njabulo concluded. “Every trader resisting supermarket displacement is defending African food futures. Every market governance system self-organising despite policy neglect is building indigenous institutions. We don’t need to transform territorial markets. We need to let them transform how we think about food systems, about commerce, about development itself.”

The applause that followed felt different from typical academic response. It carried recognition, validation, hope. The people who kept these markets alive – those who woke before dawn, who negotiated fair prices, who preserved indigenous fruits, who fed cities despite every structural barrier – they were being seen. Finally. Truly. Completely.

Njabulo thought of the dust from Mbare still on those shoes in his closet back home, the salt-air memory of Thiaroye, the organised beauty of Kimironko, the grief and pride of Nakawa. Each market had given him something beyond data: a vocabulary for naming what persists despite attempts to erase it, a framework for recognising sophistication in what development discourse dismisses.



**“We don’t need to transform territorial markets. We need to let them transform how we think about food systems, about commerce, about development itself.”**

As people came forward after his presentation, traders and farmers among them, he understood that his research would only matter if it served their work. The framework wasn’t an endpoint but a tool they could use, to demand infrastructure, to challenge discriminatory policy, to claim their rightful place at the centre of African food sovereignty.

One market at a time. One relationship at a time. One act of recognition at a time. The revolution was already happening. His research was simply learning to see it clearly enough to help others see it too. And perhaps that’s all research should ever be: a way of seeing more truly, more fully, more justly what has always been there, waiting to be recognised, honoured, and defended.



# Advocacy in Regional and Global Spaces



## Our Voice at the Table

Million Belay welcomed Estridah and Njabulo into the AFSA offices in Kampala, a modest space whose walls were covered with photos from conferences, farmer gatherings, and protests across the continent. He gestured toward a small round table where tea was already waiting. Proper Ugandan chai with ginger and milk.

“Sit, sit,” he said warmly, pouring tea into three mismatched cups. “Andrew tells me you’re ready to understand how community organising connects to the bigger picture.”

Estridah settled into her chair, wrapping her hands around the warm cup. “We’ve been learning about organising communities, but how do we take those voices to places like COP30 in Brazil or the Committee on World Food Security in Rome?”



### Who Controls the Narrative?

Million leaned back thoughtfully, steam rising from his tea. “Before I answer that question, I want to touch on a key point that should underlie any conversation about advocacy work. Corporations invest heavily in controlling narratives. Industrial agriculture gets positioned as modern, scientific, necessary to feed the world. Agroecology gets framed as nostalgic, unscientific, incapable of scale.

“Countering this false narrative, and fighting against false solutions, requires good arguments,” Million emphasized. “But it also needs coordinated advocacy across multiple countries, sustained engagement over years, and ability to present credible grounded evidence and inspiring alternative visions.”

“Keep this in mind if you want to ensure that when farmers speak at these global forums, they’re powerful advocates who wake delegates up by shifting the narrative to one that focuses on the reality and the possibilities on the ground.”



**“Keep this in mind if you want to ensure that when farmers speak at these global forums, they’re powerful advocates who wake delegates up by shifting the narrative to one that focuses on the reality and the possibilities on the ground.”**

## Preparing Advocates for the Global Stage

Million set down his cup and pulled out a folder. “Now your question about taking community to regional and global forums... Let me tell you about Fatoumata Ba at Mali’s International Conference on Agroecology and Nutrition in Bamako in 2024 and how she brought the true grassroots voice into that international space. Fatoumata is one of the most respected women leaders of the Tominian Farmers Cooperative and a member of the Malian NGO “Sahel Eco”. Their story grew from two years of steady, local experimentation: combining agroecology with nutrition education, working with mothers’ groups, traditional healers, and youth to shift how families grow and eat food.

When Fatoumata Ba from the National Federation of Peasant Farmers Organizations presented their case study at the conference, her colleagues were worried that her frank criticism of government failures and the “Scaling up Nutrition” (SUN) approach would offend officials. But she refused to retreat. “If we only change words on paper,” she said, “we are doing advocacy wrong.” Her voice carried authority because it came from somewhere real: from seasons of trial, success, and loss; from the respect she had earned in her community long before she entered the conference hall.

Their session became the talk of the conference, drawing so many people that organisers had to move it to a larger room. Fatoumata spoke with clarity and courage. She described how the women had persuaded men to diversify crops, how they used theatre and role play to expose the absurdity of gender exclusion, and how they negotiated with chiefs for land to establish agroecological gardens that fed their families and generated income from nutritious baobab leaves. Her testimony, grounded in video clips and data collected by the cooperative’s youth team, turned abstract advocacy into lived evidence.



### The Path to Confident Voice

But what few delegates saw was the pathway that made her voice possible. She had been a shy speaker at first, reluctant to challenge men in public. It was in the cooperative’s reflection circles, small, regular spaces for women to discuss, analyse, and plan, that her confidence grew. Mentoring from other women leaders, exposure visits to neighbouring cooperatives, and training in participatory research all helped her find language for what she already knew. By the time she spoke in Bamako, her words carried the weight of a community that had already listened to her.

**“Mentoring from other women leaders, exposure visits to neighbouring cooperatives, and training in participatory research all helped her find language for what she already knew.”**

When the National Federation later reshaped its advocacy strategy for the AU and national policy arenas, it was this grounded confidence, rooted in community legitimacy, not just eloquence, that gave their message credibility.”

“That’s a powerful story!” Estridah exclaimed. “There’s something essential about how she came to own her voice and how the community itself helped her find it.”

## AFSA’s Capacity Building Approach to Prepare for Regional and International Advocacy

- **Evidence gathering from communities** – Supporting advocates to document concrete examples and data from the ground.
- **Understanding forum dynamics** – Teaching how decisions are actually made at AU summits, COP conferences, and UN bodies.
- **Strategic messaging** – Helping advocates translate farmer concerns into policy language while maintaining authenticity.
- **Building confidence** – Creating safe spaces for advocates to practice presentations and receive feedback.
- **Ongoing mentorship** – Experienced advocates like Million accompanying newer ones to major forums.

“We don’t send people into these spaces unprepared,” Million emphasised. “The corporate lobbyists and government officials have professional training and years of experience. Our advocates need similar preparation, rooted in grassroots legitimacy.”

## Navigating the African Union

Estridah leaned forward, setting her empty cup down. “What’s it actually like at an African Union summit? How do you even get your voice heard?”

Million smiled, a hint of weariness in his expression. He stood and walked to the window overlooking Kampala’s busy streets. “My first CAADP review conference at AU headquarters in Addis Ababa – I walked into meetings dominated by agribusiness executives, international development organisations, and African government officials who seemed more interested in impressing donors than listening to their own citizens.”

He turned back to face them. “The language was different too. Complex technical discussions about ‘nutrition-sensitive agriculture,’ ‘climate-smart farming,’ and ‘sustainable intensification’ – terms that sounded progressive but often masked approaches undermining food sovereignty.”

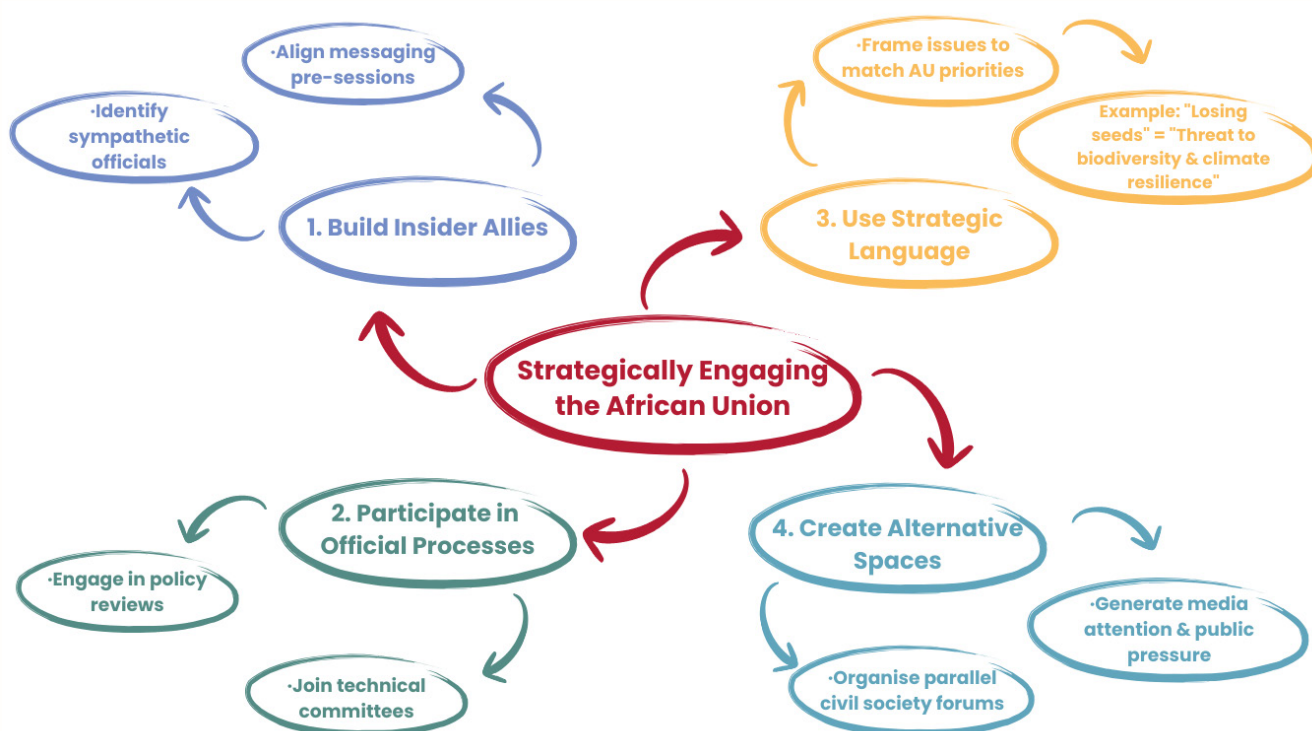


Returning to the table, Million picked up a marker and began sketching on a flip chart in the corner. “I realised that continental forums operate with their own rules, vocabulary, and assumptions. If you don’t understand those rules, you can’t effectively challenge them.”



“I realised that continental forums operate with their own rules, vocabulary, and assumptions. If you don’t understand those rules, you can’t effectively challenge them.”

Million drew a simple mind map on the flip chart as he talked. “Here’s how AFSA engages with African Union processes:”



Million capped his marker and sat back down. “The breakthrough came when the African Union’s CAADP review included commitments to ‘promote sustainable and climate-resilient agricultural practices, including agroecological approaches’ and ‘strengthen indigenous knowledge systems.’ Perfect? No. Progress? Yes. And it gave us official language to hold governments accountable.”

How do we know whether we should participate in Regional Processes?

“How do you decide whether Regional Processes or Forums are worth participating in, so that you don’t compromise your values or get used by others?”

“Good question, Njabulo! Take a look at this guideline that we have developed, out of experience.”

# Decision Framework: Engaging with Imperfect Regional Processes

Four key questions when deciding whether AFSA should participate in regional forums:

## Legitimacy Analysis

- Will our participation legitimise a fundamentally flawed process?
- Can we maintain our independence and critical voice while participating?

## Opportunity Evaluation

- Are there meaningful opportunities to influence outcomes?
- Could our absence leave important spaces entirely to corporate interests?

## Resource Consideration

- Do we have capacity for meaningful engagement without compromising other work?
- Could resources spent here be more effective elsewhere?

## Movement Impact

- How will this decision affect our relationships with member organisations?
- What precedent does this set for future engagement decisions?

“The UN Food Systems Summit in 2021 tested these principles,” Million explained. “Many organisations boycotted entirely, arguing corporate sponsorship made meaningful participation impossible. AFSA chose limited engagement – participating in some processes while maintaining public criticism. We used platforms we could access to amplify African farmer voices while refusing to endorse the summit’s corporate-friendly outcomes.”

# COP Conferences - Why they Matter and How to make an Impact

Njabulo looked up from his notes. “What about COP conferences? I’ve heard those are massive events with tens of thousands of participants. Why do they matter and how do you make any impact there?”

Million opened his hands. “The primary purpose of COPs is to halt the greenhouse gas effect and save our planet from the worsening climate crisis. In that light, AFSA’s activities may seem secondary or even opportunistic. However, we see these conferences as vital spaces to reject false solutions and advocate for pragmatic, sustainable alternatives.

“Agroecology and food sovereignty are central to addressing the climate crisis. While COP29 outcomes may not have met global expectations, AFSA’s focused engagement ensured that agroecology remains part of the climate conversation. By building relationships, influencing negotiations, and strengthening networks, we contribute to a healthier, more sustainable food system for Africa.

“So, was it worth it? For AFSA, yes. But there is much work to do, both within and beyond the COP process, to ensure these efforts translate into tangible progress.”

Returning to the table, Million picked up a marker and began sketching on a flip chart in the corner. “I realised that continental forums operate with their own rules, vocabulary, and assumptions. If you don’t understand those rules, y Million’s expression shifted. He got up to refill the teapot. “COP is where you really learn about the gap between access and influence. I’ve attended COP26 in Glasgow, COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh, and COP28 in Dubai.” He poured fresh tea. “Each had over 60,000 registered participants. African civil society organisations fight for maybe a hundred badges. Meanwhile, fossil fuel companies and agribusiness corporations had thousands of delegates.” ou can’t effectively challenge them.”

“African civil society organisations fight for maybe a hundred badges. Meanwhile, fossil fuel companies and agribusiness corporations had thousands of delegates.”



## Making Strategic Impact in Global Forums

Despite these challenges, Million outlined tactics that have worked:

- **Preparation before arrival** – AFSA coordinates with other African organisations months before COP to align messaging, share research, and divide responsibilities for covering different negotiation tracks.
- **Media strategy** – Rather than hoping policymakers will attend side events, focus on attracting journalists. Media coverage of civil society positions can influence negotiations indirectly.
- **Coalition building** – Connecting with organisations from other continents who share concerns creates collective pressure. The voices of farmers from Asia, Latin America, and Africa together carry more weight.
- **Targeting strategic moments** – Instead of trying to influence every session, identify key decisions where civil society pressure might tip the balance, then concentrate efforts there.
- **Documentation and accountability** – Recording commitments governments make, then using these in follow-up advocacy at national level where civil society has more influence.

Estridah had a puzzled frown, “But how can you possibly make an impact at a place as massive and frustrating as a COP?”

Million laughed, “Of course, it looks impossible, and you have to go in with your eyes open. But most importantly we go in with a plan. We don’t just show up and hope to be noticed. At COP29 in Baku, for instance, we had five clear goals that kept us focused amidst the chaos.

“**First, and most importantly, we were there to influence the negotiations.** We worked with the African Group of Negotiators, meeting with ministers and technical advisors. Our mission was to get the word ‘agroecology’ into the official agricultural text. Those words become the policies that trickle down to farmers. And we had wins where powerful people not only listened but promised to carry our agenda forward.

“**Second, we were strategically mobilising resources.** We’d identify and have quiet conversations with potential funders. These aren’t meetings where you walk out with a cheque, but where you plant a seed. I remember one representative from the DRC who was so impressed by our side event that he committed on the spot to connecting us with funders for our work in his country.



“Our mission was to get the word ‘agroecology’ into the official agricultural text. Those words become the policies that trickle down to farmers.”



“**Third, we used the countless side events for learning and sharing knowledge.** We exchange stories with other organisations, hear what’s working in Latin America or Asia, and build relationships that turn into powerful alliances later. It’s in these spaces that you find you’re not alone in this fight.

“**And the fourth goal was: strengthening our networks.** We worked deeply with allies like the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA). They have 2,000 members across Africa. Their long history in climate advocacy combined with our grassroots legitimacy makes us far stronger together. In these global spaces, that unity is our greatest asset.

“**Finally, we were there to raise AFSA’s visibility.** Every time we spoke at an event, every exhibition we mounted, we showcased the powerful work of our members and partners to a global audience. We put a face to the agroecology movement in Africa and ensured it couldn’t be ignored.

## Key Debate: Can Agroecology Help Africa Face Climate Change?

### The Argument from Industrial Agriculture:

“Climate change requires innovative solutions. Climate-smart agriculture uses technology, data, and modern inputs to help farmers adapt. Precision agriculture, drought-resistant GMOs, and digital platforms are the future. Traditional farming methods can’t address 21st-century challenges. Africa should embrace agricultural innovation, not resist it based on ideology.”

### How Agroecology Advocates Respond:

Farmers have been innovating for millennia, developing drought-resistant varieties, soil conservation practices, integrated pest management, and climate-adapted systems. Agroecology represents knowledge-intensive innovation rather than technology rejection. The critical issue: who controls innovation and who benefits?

Corporate “climate-smart” solutions often increase farmer dependency on expensive inputs while extracting profits. Farmer-led innovation builds resilience and keeps knowledge and resources in communities. Diverse cropping systems, soil management practices, and locally-adapted seeds outperform corporate solutions when climate stress hit hardest.

The innovation debate assumes farmers lack capacity to adapt. Evidence shows the opposite. Given research support and policy backing, farmer innovation responds to climate challenges more effectively than corporate patents.

Successful agroecology is an effective climate strategy in itself as it helps farmers both adapt to the changes and, in the longer term, to mitigate against climate change.

**“The innovation debate assumes farmers lack capacity to adapt. Evidence shows the opposite.”**

“So, you see,” Million concluded, setting his cup down with a definitive click, “even when the big negotiations feel stuck, we are moving our own agenda forward, piece by piece. That is how we make it worth it. This focused approach ensured that even within a flawed process, our participation was targeted and purposeful.”



# Before, During and After Global Forums

“Now, let me show you a checklist to guide advocates entering global spaces.”

## Before the Forum

Research the agenda thoroughly and identify strategic sessions. Connect with sympathetic government delegates from your country before they leave, as they may share information from closed meetings. Coordinate with allied organisations to divide coverage responsibilities. Prepare key messages in multiple formats, including full presentations, 2-minute summaries, and one-page briefs. Arrange meetings in advance with target delegates rather than hoping for hallway conversations.

## During the Forum

Attend daily civil society coordination meetings to share intelligence. Focus on quality interactions over quantity, remembering that three substantive conversations matter more than thirty brief ones. Take detailed notes on government positions for follow-up advocacy. Use social media strategically to amplify messages beyond the physical space. Balance formal sessions with informal conversations in common areas.

**“Focus on quality interactions over quantity, remembering that three substantive conversations matter more than thirty brief ones.”**

## After the Forum

Share detailed report-backs with member organisations immediately while information is fresh. Translate global commitments into national advocacy tools. Maintain relationships built during the forum for ongoing coordination. Evaluate what worked and what didn't to improve future engagement. Conduct a formal debrief, honestly assessing what worked and what didn't across all objectives. After COP29, for instance, we identified needs for better pre-planning and sharper visibility tactics to improve our impact at the next conference.

## When the UN Committee on World Food Security Works (and When It Doesn't)

Estridah reached for one of the biscuits on the table. “What about the Committee on World Food Security? Is that any different?” Million stood and pulled down a document from the shelf behind him, showing them the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) organisational chart. “The CFS is different from COP. It was reformed in 2009 specifically to include civil society, including small-scale farmers, as full participants alongside governments. We helped shape that reform.”

The CFS meets annually at FAO headquarters in Rome, bringing together government delegations, UN agencies, civil society, private sector, and research institutions to develop policy guidance on food security and nutrition.

He sat back down, tracing his finger along the chart. “On paper, the CFS is the most democratic global food policy space. Civil society has a permanent seat at the table, not just observer status. We can speak directly in plenary sessions, participate in drafting policy guidelines, and challenge governments publicly.”



## Key Debate: Does Africa Need Private Sector Investment?

### The Argument from Industrial Agriculture:

“Africa needs massive investment in agriculture. There are millions of hectares of unused, empty land that can be put into production. Governments lack resources. Private sector can bring capital, expertise, infrastructure, and market access. Public-private partnerships are essential for agricultural transformation. Restricting corporate involvement means rejecting billions in potential investment. Countries that welcome agribusiness investment develop faster.”

### How Agroecology Advocates Respond:

The investment question assumes all capital creates equal value. Corporate investment often extracts more wealth than it creates, taking land from farmers and communities, exploiting labour, exporting profits, creating dependencies, degrading ecosystems. The “unused land” narrative ignores pastoralists, seasonal users, and customary rights holders already managing those territories.



“Real agricultural investment supports farmer-controlled systems, strengthens local markets, builds public infrastructure, and keeps value in communities.”

Real agricultural investment supports farmer-controlled systems, strengthens local markets, builds public infrastructure, and keeps value in communities. Public investment in agroecology creates more jobs and distributes benefits more equitably than corporate plantations. Ethiopia’s farmer-to-farmer training programmes required minimal external capital but transformed thousands of hectares. Kenya’s territorial market infrastructure investments generated income for hundreds of traders rather than concentrating profits in corporate accounts.

The choice isn’t between corporate investment or no investment. The choice is between extractive models that impoverish communities and supportive models that build local capacity and wealth.

## Strategic Wins at the UN Committee on Food Security

Million pulled out another folder bulging with documents. “In 2014, Committee on Food Security, (CFS) one of the few intergovernmental bodies within the United Nations with Civil Society representation, adopted the Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems. This included strong language on land rights and community consultation. Civil society was central to developing those principles. In 2021, CFS adopted guidelines on food systems and nutrition that explicitly recognise agroecology.”

### The Limitations

“However,” Million’s tone shifted, “CFS has no enforcement power. Governments can adopt progressive guidelines then ignore them completely. And CFS influence at the UN has gradually weakened as powerful governments and corporations increasingly bypass it, preferring forums they control more directly.”

### Corporate Capture: Understanding the Opposition

“You need to understand what we’re really up against,” Million said. “Corporate influence in global food policy shapes the entire framework of how problems and solutions for the global food system and climate are discussed.”

He described attending meetings where the same multinational companies that control seed markets present themselves as partners in achieving food security. “They fund research that supports their positions. They provide ‘technical experts’ to draft key documents. They sponsor events bringing government officials to their conferences. They shape which solutions even get considered.”



## Strategic Compromise vs. Unprincipled Accommodation

Njabulo leaned forward. “But how do you know?” he asked. “How do you decide when working with these imperfect systems stops being a smart strategy and starts becoming complicity?”

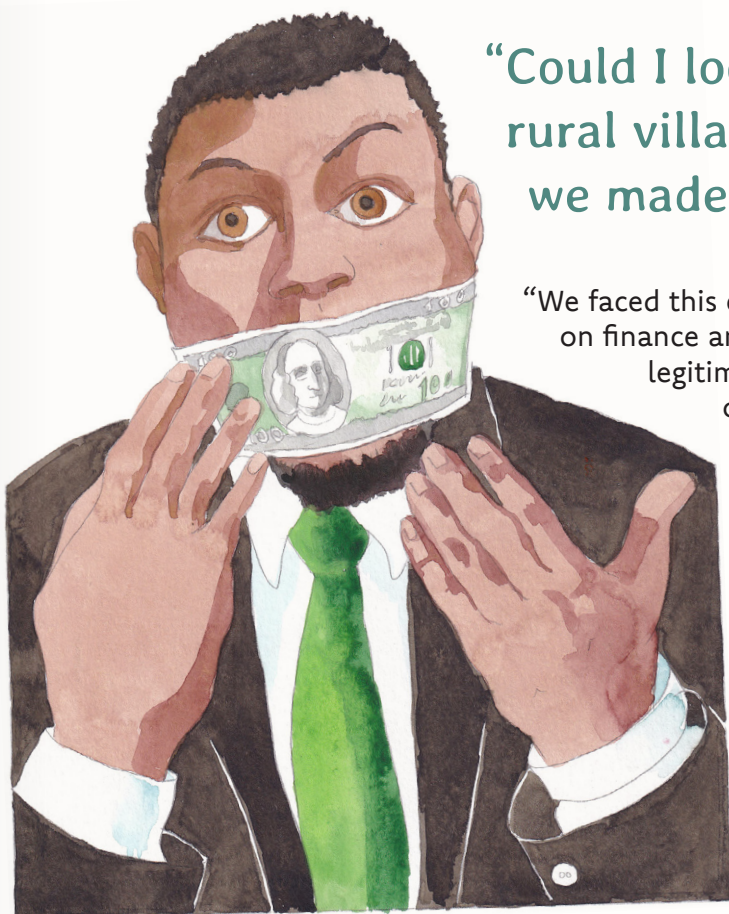
Million didn’t answer immediately. He looked into his teacup as if searching for the words. “That is the question we carry with us every time,” he said quietly. “It’s a tightrope walk. But over the years, I’ve found a few guiding lights.”

He held up one hand. “**Strategic compromise** means you can still hold two truths at once. You can accept a small step forward without abandoning your core belief in the giant leap we need. You can support a policy while still loudly pointing out everything wrong with the bigger system. Most importantly, you can sit at their table without ever letting them silence your criticism.”

“Now, **unprincipled accommodation**...” Million’s tone darkened. “That’s what happens when that balance breaks. It’s when you trade your principles for a seat at the table. It’s staying quiet about a harmful policy because you don’t want to upset a donor. It’s endorsing a corporate-driven initiative because it comes with a cheque attached.”

He looked directly at Njabulo and Estridah. “When I’m torn, I ask myself three things: First, is this moving us toward our ultimate goal, or creating the illusion of progress? Second, could I look a farmer in the eye in a rural village and clearly explain why we made this choice? And third, am I still free to speak the truth to those in power?”

“Could I look a farmer in the eye in a rural village and clearly explain why we made this choice?”



“We faced this exact test after Baku. The summit failed on finance and fossil fuels. Many asked if we were just legitimising a broken process. But our answer was clear: our participation was a strategic compromise. We used their platform without endorsing their outcomes. We pushed our agenda, built our alliances, and made sure agroecology was heard, all while never softening our critique of the summit’s failures.”

“The line is difficult,” he admitted. “We don’t always get it right. What matters is that we keep having this debate and remain accountable to the people on the ground we are fighting for.”

## Building Pan-African Unity in Global Spaces

“How do you build unity among AFSA members from such different countries when you’re at these international forums?” Estridah asked.

“Unity doesn’t mean uniformity,” Million emphasised. “A pastoralist advocate from Kenya and a rice farmer from Mali will have different immediate concerns. But we find unity in shared principles - food as a human right, farmer autonomy, ecological sustainability, cultural identity.”

What builds unity is shared struggle against common threats. “When we’re at COP and see how climate finance gets channelled to industrial agriculture that harms all our communities. When we’re at FAO and watch how the same corporate interests push identical failed solutions across our different countries. These shared experiences create solidarity.”

Million described AFSA’s coordination practices: “Before major conferences, we hold preparatory meetings where members share their priorities. We identify where these align and where they differ. We assign roles - who will focus on which negotiation tracks, who will handle media, who will coordinate with other regional organisations.”

During forums, AFSA holds daily debriefing sessions. “We share what we heard in different meetings, discuss implications, adjust strategy. This coordination makes our small numbers more effective.”

## Empowering the Next Generation of Continental Advocates

The afternoon light was shifting. Million glanced at his watch, then back at his visitors. “What advice do you have for us?” Estridah asked. “We’re starting our careers. These spaces seem overwhelming.”

Million leaned forward intently. “The next generation needs to be bolder than we have been. My generation has spent too much time trying to work within systems designed to exclude us. We’ve been too polite, too willing to accept incremental progress while communities suffer.”

He urged them to learn from previous experience - the importance of evidence, strategic alliances, understanding policy processes. “But don’t accept the constraints we’ve internalised. Challenge fundamental assumptions about how change happens.”

**“The next generation needs to be bolder than we have been. My generation has spent too much time trying to work within systems designed to exclude us.”**



Million stood and walked back to the flip chart, starting a fresh page. “Let me give you some concrete advice. Start by building expertise in a specific area – whether it’s climate finance, seed policies, trade agreements. Become the person others turn to for insight on that issue. This gives you authority in global spaces that personality alone cannot.

“Use technology creatively. Social media allows you to amplify messages beyond physical forums and connect with advocates worldwide. Create content that makes complex policy issues accessible to your communities back home.

“The moment advocacy becomes disconnected from grassroots struggles, it becomes just another form of elite politics. Your legitimacy comes from representing real people, not from mastering technical jargon.”

“Most critically,” he said, turning back to face them, “maintain your connection to communities while developing policy expertise. The moment advocacy becomes disconnected from grassroots struggles, it becomes just another form of elite politics. Your legitimacy comes from representing real people, not from mastering technical jargon.”

## Advocacy as the Pathway to Transformation

The tea had gone cold in their cups. Outside the window, Kampala’s evening traffic was building. Estridah and Njabulo gathered their notes, both feeling they had glimpsed a world that was both more accessible and more challenging than they had imagined.

Million walked them to the door. “Remember,” he said, “these spaces aren’t separate from grassroots work. They’re extensions of it. The power comes from being rooted in communities, not from clever arguments.”

Njabulo nodded as they stepped into the hallway. “But I also see why so few people operate at this level. It requires skills, resources, and stamina that most organisations don’t have.”

As they made their way down the stairs and out into Kampala’s humid evening air, they reflected on what they had learned. Effective advocacy at regional and global levels required both technical competence to navigate complex policy processes and moral authority rooted in grassroots experience. It demanded strategic patience balanced with urgency about current suffering. It meant accepting incremental progress while never abandoning transformative vision.

Million’s challenge to be bolder than previous generations resonated. The policy spaces he described were sites of struggle where Africa’s food future was being contested. Having voices from the continent in those rooms, prepared to speak truth to power while building strategic alliances, could shift trajectories that affected millions.

The advocacy frameworks they had learned created possibilities for influencing regional and global policies. But as Million emphasised, real transformation required not only policy victories but also building movements powerful enough to implement and defend those victories against powerful opposing forces.

Chapter 7 explores what that transformative vision could look like in reality... the African food future worth fighting for in these global policy spaces.



“Food sovereignty begins with respecting how our communities eat and farm.”

Elizabeth Mpofu (Zimbabwe, La Via Campesina Africa)

“When the roots are deep,  
there is no reason  
to fear the wind.”

African Proverb



“A community that loses its food traditions loses part of its soul.”

Carlo Petrini (Italy, Slow Food founder)



# Towards an African Food Future

## The Year 2045

### THE REUNION: 2045

It is April 2045, and five former nutrition students gather at Lake Victoria for the first time in two decades. They are now elders and some bring their family members to enjoy the quiet beauty of Garuga. Monica Bakirya, now 75, has invited them back to the same resort where they attended the My Food is African workshop twenty years ago. They arrive from different corners of Africa, excited to reconnect with their friends.

Fanza arrives first from Yaounde, where she runs a network of thirty traditional restaurants. Njabulo comes from Johannesburg, carrying research documenting South Africa's territorial market transformation. Estridah flies in from Lilongwe, fresh from a Ministry of Agriculture meeting about the AU's 2063 agenda. Kamali flies in from Addis Ababa, where she manages an agroecological food processing cooperative. Andrew coordinates from AFSA headquarters, now a continental institution with offices in every region.

Monica embraces each of them. "Twenty years," she says. "Let's walk through what we've built. What succeeded. What failed. What we learned."

They settle on the same terrace, looking out at the same lake. But they are different people now, and the continent they inhabit has changed.

## What We've Achieved by 2045

### Monica: Kampala 2045

"Let me start where we are," Monica says. "Because Kampala shows both our victories and our ongoing struggles."

She describes driving into the city that morning. The welcome sign proclaiming Kampala as part of the My Food is African Movement. The agroecological farms at the outskirts, the edible landscapes, the billboards celebrating traditional foods, the Ministry of Agriculture's bold initiatives supporting food sovereignty.

"Nakawa Market thrives," she continues. "Women vendors sell indigenous vegetables with pride. The restaurants serving traditional foods outnumber foreign chains two to one. School gardens produce food for students. The Kampiringisa Youth Agroecology Cooperative, started in 2027, now employs 200 young people processing millet, sorghum, and cassava into convenient products.

"But," Monica adds, her voice careful, "we haven't won everywhere. The northern districts still struggle with land conflicts. Chemical fertiliser subsidies persist in some regions despite evidence they damage soil. And ultra-processed foods, while reduced, still reach children through creative marketing. We've made tremendous progress, but it's uneven. And the fish farms that are seen from the lake shore at Garuga have continued if not multiplied."

**Fanza: The Restaurant Revolution**

Fanza pulls out her tablet, scrolling through photos. “The restaurant movement exceeded what I imagined in 2025. Let me show you Yaounde.”

She describes O Terroir, now a chain with twelve locations across Cameroon. Chef Nathalie Djike became a household name, her cooking show reaching 5 million viewers weekly. The African Culinary Institute in Douala trains 300 chefs annually in traditional food preparation using modern techniques.

“The Taste of the Sahel Festival in Bamako attracts 50,000 people every November,” Fanza continues. “Chefs compete to create innovative dishes from fonio, baobab, shea nuts, and sorghum. Winners get seed funding for restaurants. Last year’s winner, a 28-year-old woman from Mopti, opened Fonio House in Bamako. It’s booked three months ahead.

“In Dakar, the coastal food forests I mentioned? They’re real. The Niayes Women’s Cooperative manages 2,000 hectares of cashew, mango, and baobab trees intercropped with vegetables. Their community kitchens serve 10,000 meals daily at prices working families can afford.

“But we lost battles too. Lagos rejected the traditional food policy three times. Corporate chains adapted faster than we expected, co-opting our language while still serving ultra-processed products. And some restaurants claiming to be traditional use shortcuts that compromise authenticity. We’re still fighting those battles.”

**Njabulo: Markets and Documentation**

“I spent twenty years making territorial markets visible,” Njabulo says. “And it worked, but not everywhere.”

He describes the Soweto Food Hub, launched in 2028, connecting 500 township spaza shops with farmers growing traditional crops. Mbare Market in Harare received government infrastructure investment in 2035. The East African Territorial Markets Association now advocates regionally for vendor rights.

“Thiaroye Market in Dakar withstood the supermarket invasion,” Njabulo continues. “Madam Ndoye, who I interviewed in 2025, trained her daughter who now runs a vendor cooperative serving 2,000 members. Kadutu Market in Goma rebuilt after the 2032 conflict using community-led design.



“But Kimironko Market in Kigali? The government relocated it in 2038 despite protests. Vendors lost their customer base. Many went bankrupt. That taught us that documentation alone doesn’t protect markets. You need legal frameworks, political allies, and organised vendor power.

“The Johannesburg Metropolitan Council adopted the Territorial Markets Recognition Act in 2040, giving markets legal status and infrastructure investment. That came from fifteen years of organising, research, legal advocacy, and coalition-building. It’s a model other cities are studying.”

“That taught us that documentation alone doesn’t protect markets. You need legal frameworks, political allies, and organised vendor power.”



#### **Estridah: Policy Victories and Defeats**

“Policy work aged me,” Estridah says with chuckle. “But we won important battles.”

She lists achievements: Malawi’s Smallholder Procurement Act (2031), guaranteeing 30% of government food purchases from smallholder cooperatives. The East African Community Agroecological Standards (2036), making it easier to trade traditional foods across borders. Kenya’s ban on highly hazardous pesticides (2034).

“The Southern African Seed Network, formed in 2029, defended farmer seed rights in seven countries. Women now hold 42% of customary land rights in Malawi, up from 18% in 2025. The Pastoralist Corridors Protection Act (2037) secured mobility rights in six countries.

“But losses hurt. Zimbabwe’s Fast Track Industrial Agriculture Programme (2038) displaced 50,000 smallholders. The AU’s 2040 Agricultural Transformation Summit nearly endorsed corporate seed systems until civil society mobilised massive protests. Nigeria’s Agroecology Bill died in committee three times.

“What I learned: policy victories require constant defending. What you win one year can be reversed the next if you’re not vigilant. That’s why movement-building matters more than any single policy.”

#### **Kamali: From Fast Food to Food Sovereignty**

“I left the fast-food industry in 2029,” Kamali says quietly. “It took me four years to get there. But I want to tell you what I learned inside.”

She describes working within corporate structures, documenting what prevented change. Supply chain rigidity. Franchise agreements penalising local sourcing. Marketing budgets dwarfing any traditional food initiative. Quarterly profit pressures crushing long-term thinking.

“In 2028, I piloted a locally-sourced menu at three Addis Ababa locations. Injera, shiro, kitfo prepared consistently, priced competitively. It worked. Customers loved it. But corporate headquarters killed the project because it couldn’t scale profitably across all Ethiopian locations.

“That failure taught me something crucial: incremental reform inside corporate food systems has limits. Real transformation requires alternative institutions.”



“That failure taught me something crucial: incremental reform inside corporate food systems has limits. Real transformation requires alternative institutions.”

“So, I joined Mama’s Kitchen Cooperative in Addis. We’re 85 women processing traditional crops into school meals, hospital food, and retail products. Last year we grossed \$2.3 million. We own the enterprise collectively. Profits fund members’ children’s education. We source from 300 smallholder farmers. It may not be perfect, but it’s ours.”

**Andrew: Continental Connections**

“My job has been weaving,” Andrew says. “Connecting Fanza’s restaurant work with Njabulo’s market research. Linking Estridah’s policy wins with Kamali’s cooperative model. Scaling local successes continentally.”

He describes AFSA’s growth: 200 member organizations across 55 countries. The African Food Policy Framework, adopted by the AU in 2031 despite corporate opposition. The Agroecological Products Trade Protocol (2035), opening borders to traditional foods within the framework of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

“Mali’s millet flour now reaches Cape Town. Uganda’s cassava chips sell in Cairo. Kenya’s dried vegetables supply Dakar’s community kitchens. Nigeria continues to ensure that 20% of flour used for bread is made from locally grown cassava. Last year, intra-African trade in agroecological products reached \$8 billion, up from less than \$1 billion in 2025.

“The Africa Indigenous Knowledge Institute, launched in 2033, has documented farming practices, recipes, and seed varieties from 10,000 communities. That knowledge base informs policy, research, and education across the continent.

“But continental work moves slowly. The African Continental Free Trade Area benefitted large corporations more than smallholders for its first decade. We’re still fighting to rebalance that. And political instability in several regions disrupted networks we’d spent years building.”

# What Made the Difference: Responding to Climate Change

“We need to talk about climate,” Njabulo says. “Because that changed everything.”

Monica nods. “Climate change has been our most powerful argument. We don’t have to give moral arguments about food sovereignty, but practical demonstrations of how agroecology builds resilience to the threat of climate chaos.”

“Climate change has been our most powerful argument. We don’t have to give moral arguments about food sovereignty, but practical demonstrations of how agroecology builds resilience to the threat of climate chaos.”

“Climate change justified everything we’d been saying for decades,” Estridah adds. “Soil health prevents erosion. Seed diversity provides options when conditions change. Local food systems reduce transport vulnerability. Traditional knowledge contains centuries of adaptation strategies.”

“The 2039 Sahel Crisis made this concrete. Industrial farms collapsed during the three-year drought. Agroecological farms struggled but survived. That created political will for policy change faster than twenty years of advocacy.”



## AGROECOLOGY AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Between 2025 and 2045, climate impacts intensified across Africa. Droughts lengthened in the Sahel. Extreme temperatures and heat waves reduced crop yields. Floods increased in East Africa. Cyclones battered coastal regions. Temperature extremes disrupted planting seasons. Communities practicing agroecology weathered these shocks better than those dependent on industrial agriculture.

The evidence became undeniable:

In Makueni County, Kenya, farmers using agroecological methods maintained yields during the 2037 drought while industrial farms failed. The key? Diversified crops, water harvesting, soil rich in organic matter that retained moisture.

Zambian farmers practicing intercropping and crop rotation adapted to erratic rainfall patterns that devastated monocultures. Their diverse plantings spread risk: if one crop failed, others survived.

Sahelian communities integrating trees into farming systems coped with temperature extremes. Trees moderated microclimates, reduced wind erosion, provided backup food sources during grain shortfalls.

Coastal communities in Senegal and Tanzania using mangrove restoration and mixed crop-livestock systems survived cyclones that destroyed industrial shrimp farms and cash crop plantations.

By 2040, even sceptical policymakers recognised: agroecology isn't idealistic, it's pragmatic climate adaptation. Governments started redirecting agricultural investment from chemicals toward soil building, seed diversity, water management, and farmer knowledge systems.

The climate argument worked where moral arguments hadn't. When farmers told ministers, "Your industrial policies left us vulnerable and my agroecological practices saved my family," that changed minds.



"Climate change justified everything we'd been saying for decades," Estridah adds. "Soil health prevents erosion. Seed diversity provides options when conditions change. Local food systems reduce transport vulnerability. Traditional knowledge contains centuries of adaptation strategies."

"Over decades, across Africa, industrial agricultural practices to increase yields through monoculture and expensive seeds failed time and time again. Costs of external inputs like chemical fertilizers and pesticides rose dramatically, placing many farmers into debt when hit by the effects of climate change and soil degradation. Agroecological farms struggled but survived. That created political will for policy change faster than twenty years of advocacy."

# The Youth Factor: A Generation Shifts

Fanza leans forward. “Can we talk about what surprised us most? Youth uptake.”

Monica smiles. “Tell them about your daughter.”

“Adele is 22,” Fanza says. “She and her friends never knew a time when African food wasn’t cool. For them, eating traditional is normal. Taking dates to African restaurants is default. Cooking with millet is trendy.”

“They started the #OurGrandmothersKnew social media movement in 2041. Within six months, 10 million young Africans were posting recipes, farming techniques, and food stories their grandparents taught them. It became the highest-trending hashtag on African social media.”

“That generation doesn’t need convincing. They grew up seeing climate disasters, non-communicable disease epidemics, and food system failures. They’re pragmatic. Agroecology makes sense to them economically, environmentally, and culturally.”

## YOUTH AND THE FOOD TRANSFORMATION

Between 2025 and 2045, young people became the driving force of food system transformation. This happened through several pathways:

**Urban Agriculture:** Youth-led collectives transformed unused urban spaces into productive gardens. The Kampala Urban Farmers Network, started by five university students in 2026, now includes 300 rooftop gardens, 50 community plots, and 20 school farms. They supply 15% of Kampala’s fresh vegetables.

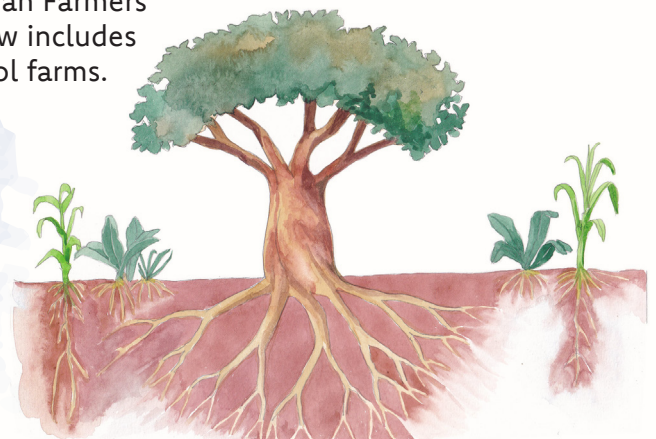
**Food Processing Enterprises:** Young entrepreneurs created businesses processing traditional crops. Millet Makers in Accra employs 45 youth making convenience foods from local grains. Ghana Hibiscus Works turns bissap into beverages competing with soft drinks. These enterprises make traditional foods convenient for urban lifestyles while creating youth employment.

**Digital Storytelling:** Food bloggers, YouTubers, and TikTok creators made African food culture viral. Chef Kwame in Lagos has 8 million followers. His videos showing traditional Nigerian dishes reach audiences no government campaign could access. This cultural work normalised what policy advocacy struggled to achieve.

**Agroecology Training:** Youth participation in farmer field schools exploded after 2030 when young people saw peers creating profitable agroecological businesses. Tanzania’s SAT programme trained 5,000 young extension workers between 2030–2040. They’re now spreading agroecological practices farm to farm.

**Political Organising:** Youth food sovereignty movements in fifteen countries pushed for policy change. The East African Youth Food Network lobbied successfully for the 2036 Regional Agroecological Standards. They understood digital organising, grassroots mobilisation, and policy advocacy in ways previous generations didn’t.

**The lesson:** youth aren’t just future leaders, they’re current changemakers. When you give them economic opportunities, cultural pride, and political voice in food systems, they transform those systems faster than any top-down intervention.



“What about younger children?” Kamali asks. “We’re reaching youth 15–35, but what about the 5–14 age group?”

Monica nods. “That’s our current frontier. School feeding programmes matter because they shape taste preferences early. The Uganda School Gardens Initiative reaches 2,000 primary schools. Children learn farming, cooking, and nutrition from age six. They’re growing up with hands in soil, understanding where food comes from.

“The Tanzania Food Education Curriculum, implemented in 2040, integrates food knowledge into primary education, woven through science, social studies, arts, rather than as separate subject. Children study seed biology in science, food trade history in social studies, traditional recipes in home economics, and cook together in practicals.

“But we’re uneven. Some countries excel at school-based food education. Others still serve ultra-processed foods in school feeding programmes and teach nothing about agriculture. That gap needs closing.”



## Building Movements That Last

“I want to raise something difficult,” Estridah says. “We’re celebrating twenty years of success. But we’re also aging. What happens when we retire? Will this work continue?”

Andrew nods slowly. “That’s the movement-building question. Campaigns are time-bound. Movements persist across generations. We’ve learned the difference.”



“Million Belay taught me this,” Andrew says. “Movements are tapestries with many threads. Individual threads break, but the weaving holds. We’ve built strong enough institutional infrastructure that this work will continue when we’re gone.”

Njabulo looks sceptical. “Have we? Or are we still too dependent on a few key leaders?”

“Both,” Monica admits. “We’ve made progress but have further to go. That’s honest assessment.”

“Movements are tapestries with many threads. Individual threads break, but the weaving holds. We’ve built strong enough institutional infrastructure that this work will continue when we’re gone.”

# WHAT IT TAKES TO BUILD LONG-TERM MOVEMENTS

Building broad based movements of farmer organizations, women's cooperatives, food citizen associations, social enterprise groups, NGOs, researchers, networks and alliances that outlast individual leaders or organizations requires:

## 1 Institutional Infrastructure

Create organisations that don't depend on single personalities. AFSA's strength comes from 200 member organisations. When one leader leaves, the network persists. The territorial markets associations, seed networks, women's cooperatives, and youth collectives built since 2025 provide institutional anchors.

## 2 Knowledge Transmission Systems

Document what you learn and pass it on deliberately. The Africa Indigenous Knowledge Institute archives practices, recipes, and farming techniques. The Barefoot Guide series makes complex advocacy accessible. Farmer field schools teach person-to-person. Apprenticeship programmes transfer skills. Knowledge must flow across generations or movements die when elders do.

## 3 Economic Sustainability

Movements need funding, but dependency on donors creates vulnerability. Successful movements developed earned income: membership fees, product sales, service provision. Mama's Kitchen Cooperative's profits fund organising. The Tanzania Organic Agriculture Movement charges for certification. Economic sustainability enables political independence.

## 4 Intergenerational Leadership

Deliberately cultivate younger leaders while honouring elder wisdom. The AFSA Youth Assembly, created in 2032, ensures young voices shape continental strategy. Mentorship programmes pair experienced organisers with youth. Leadership doesn't transfer automatically; it requires intentional succession planning.

## 5 Adaptive Learning

Movements must learn from failures and adapt strategies. The Territorial Markets Network restructured after Kimironko Market's forced relocation. The seed networks changed legal tactics after early court losses. Successful movements practice collective reflection, honest assessment, and strategic adjustment.

## 6 Coalition Building

Connect diverse struggles rather than remaining siloed. Food sovereignty movements allied with climate activists, health advocates, women's rights organisations, traditional authorities, and labour unions. Broader coalitions withstand repression better and achieve bigger victories.

## 7 Cultural Resonance

Root movement work in cultural values people already hold. The Ubuntu principles underlying territorial markets. The intergenerational respect in knowledge transmission. The community solidarity in farmer cooperatives. Movements succeed when they connect to deeper cultural currents, not impose external ideologies.

## 8 Long-Term Vision with Short-Term Wins

Balance multi-decade vision with immediate victories. The 2063 agenda provides direction. But communities need to see results now: a policy won, a market protected, a cooperative thriving. Short-term wins sustain long-term commitment.



## The Hospitality and Enterprise Revolution

“Let’s talk about what’s working economically,” Fanza says. “Because the enterprise side exceeded expectations.”

She describes the transformation in Africa’s hospitality sector. Hotels serving traditional breakfasts. Airlines offering indigenous meal options. Conference centres showcasing regional cuisines. This shift created massive demand for agroecological products.

“The Pan-African Restaurant Association, formed in 2034, has 5,000 member establishments committed to sourcing locally. They created standards, training programmes, and supplier networks. Last year they published the African Cuisine Excellence Guide, rating restaurants on authenticity, local sourcing, and cultural integrity.



“Young people see opportunity here. You can make a good living running an African restaurant, catering business, or food processing enterprise. That economic incentive pulls people into food sovereignty work who’d never attend a policy advocacy meeting.”

“In Nairobi, the Kibera Food Hub connects 200 restaurants with smallholder farmers. Daily delivery of fresh vegetables, herbs, and fruits. Restaurants get quality produce, farmers get reliable markets, the community gets jobs in logistics and processing.



“Food tourism became a major industry. The Ghana Culinary Tourism Circuit attracts 100,000 visitors annually. The Ethiopia Coffee and Cuisine Trail generated \$50 million last year. Ethiopian airlines is now serving indigenous food. Morocco’s Traditional Food Heritage Sites are UNESCO-recognised.

“We are not only talking about restaurants. It’s hotels, tour operators, cooking schools, food equipment manufacturers, packaging companies, logistics providers. The African food hospitality sector employs 2 million people and generates \$15 billion annually.

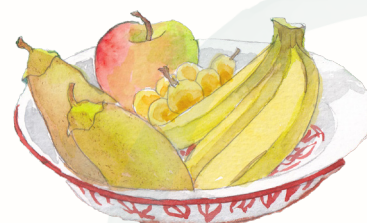
“Young people see opportunity here. You can make a good living running an African restaurant, catering business, or food processing enterprise. That economic incentive pulls people into food sovereignty work who’d never attend a policy advocacy meeting.”

Kamali adds, “The cooperative model scaled too. Across Africa, there are now 50,000 food processing cooperatives, most owned by women. They produce convenience products from traditional crops: millet porridge packets, cassava chips, dried vegetable mixes, fermented drink concentrates.

“These cooperatives bridge the gap between smallholder production and urban consumption. They create employment, especially for women. They make traditional foods accessible to busy urban families. And they keep profits in communities rather than extracting them to multinational headquarters.

“Mama’s Kitchen Cooperative is one of 200 in Addis alone. Together we’re a significant economic force. We lobby government, negotiate with buyers, share knowledge, and support each other. That’s movement-building through enterprise.”

“The cooperative model scaled too. Across Africa, there are now 50,000 food processing cooperatives, most owned by women.”



## The Eleven Pillars in Practice

“Let’s be systematic,” Monica says, pulling out a document. “Twenty years ago, we articulated eleven pillars for food sovereignty. Let’s assess: where has each pillar advanced? Where are we stuck?”

Andrew nods. “These pillars came from multiple AFSA platforms. The Maputo Declaration on Agroecology (2028). The Dakar Seed Sovereignty Statement (2030). The Nairobi Food Policy Framework (2032). The Kigali Climate and Food Resolution (2035). Over a decade, we built consensus on what food sovereignty requires.”

# The Eleven Pillars - 2045 Assessment

## 1 Seeds: Farmers in Control

**Progress:** Community seed banks now number 5,000 across Africa, up from less than 500 in 2025. Seed saving and exchange is legal in 35 African countries, up from 18. Schools in twelve countries teach seed selection and saving.

**Challenges:** Sixteen countries still restrict farmer seed systems. Corporate lobbying continues. Seed diversity still declining despite preservation efforts.

**Example:** The Tanzania Seed Keepers Network, started by three villages in 2026, now spans 200 communities maintaining 300 indigenous varieties. When corporate drought-tolerant seeds failed in 2037, farmers saved crops using resilient seeds these communities had preserved.

## 2 Land: Secure Community Rights

**Progress:** Women's land rights improved in Malawi, Tanzania, Kenya, and Ghana. Pastoralist corridors received legal recognition in six countries. Community land rights laws passed in nine countries.

**Challenges:** Land grabbing persists. Implementation of land laws remains weak. Urban expansion encroaches on farmland.

**Example:** The Maasai Pastoralist Association secured the Pastoralist Corridors Protection Act in Kenya (2037), recognising 12 traditional migration routes. The model spread to Tanzania and Uganda.

## 3 Soil Health: Living Earth at the Centre

**Progress:** Organic fertiliser use increased 400% between 2025-2045. Highly hazardous pesticides banned in eighteen countries. Soil health recognised as public health priority in national policies.

**Challenges:** Chemical fertiliser subsidies persist. Soil erosion accelerated in some regions despite conservation efforts.

**Example:** The Kigali Composting Revolution (2030-2045) transformed urban waste management. Every neighbourhood has composting stations. The city processes waste into fertiliser for urban farmers. The model spread to twenty African cities.

## 4 Climate: Agroecology as Adaptation

**Progress:** Agroecology recognised as primary climate adaptation strategy in AU frameworks. Government investment increased 800% between 2030-2040. Community-based adaptation reached 10 million farm families.

**Challenges:** Climate impacts intensified faster than adaptation could scale. Some regions experienced catastrophic harvest failures. Climate refugees strained food systems.

**Example:** The Sahel Resilience Initiative (2032-2042), led by farmer organisations in seven countries, restored degraded lands through agroforestry and water harvesting. These communities maintained food security during the 2037-2039 drought when industrial farms collapsed.



## 5 Agroecology: Mainstream Practice

**Progress:** Agroecology taught in 40 African universities. Youth agroecology entrepreneurs number in tens of thousands. Government extension services in eight countries prioritise agroecological methods.

**Challenges:** Chemical agriculture still receives majority of agricultural investment. Agroecology yields sometimes lower in short term. Extension worker training remains limited.

**Example:** Tanzania's SAT trained 5,000 extension workers in agroecological methods between 2030–2040, reaching 850,000 farmers. The peer-to-peer training model proved more effective than top-down extension.

## 6 Continental Food Policy

**Progress:** The African Food Policy Framework, adopted by AU in 2038, harmonises approaches across regions. The Agroecological Products Trade Protocol (2042) facilitates cross-border trade. AFSA's 200 member organisations create policy coherence across 52 countries.

**Challenges:** Implementation varies dramatically by country. Corporate lobbying at AU level remains intense. Enforcement of continental agreements weak.

**Example:** The Agroecological Products Trade Protocol, passed in 2042, standardised certification and reduced tariffs. Intra-African trade in agroecological products quintupled in three years.

## 7 Cross-Border Trade

**Progress:** Regional trade in agroecological products reached \$8 billion in 2044, up from under \$1 billion in 2025. Trade barriers reduced significantly.

**Challenges:** Infrastructure bottlenecks limit trade expansion. Quality standards not harmonised in all regions.

**Example:** The West Africa Millet Corridor (2036–present) connects producers in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger with coastal consumers. Annual trade: 200,000 tons, creating reliable income for 100,000 Sahelian farmers.



## 8 Woman and Youth Leadership

**Progress:** Women now hold 42% of customary land rights in countries with reformed laws. Women's cooperatives number 30,000 across Africa. Youth-led food enterprises employ hundreds of thousands.

**Challenges:** Patriarchal structures persist. Women still face barriers to credit and market access. Youth unemployment remains high.

**Example:** Mama's Kitchen Cooperative, started by 12 women in Kampala in 2029, now has 85 members and grosses \$2.3 million annually. The model inspired 200 similar cooperatives across Uganda.

## 9 Markets: Local Food Systems

**Progress:** Government procurement from smallholders increased dramatically. Local food labelling systems help consumers identify agroecological products. Public institution procurement preferences created stable markets.

**Challenges:** Supermarket expansion continues. Corporate control of food retail remains powerful. Procurement policies implemented unevenly.

**Example:** The Malawi Smallholder Procurement Act (2031) requires government institutions to purchase 30% of food from smallholder cooperatives. This created reliable markets for 50,000 farmers. By 2045, twelve countries had similar policies.

## 10 Pastoralists, Fisherfolk, Indigenous Communities

**Progress:** Pastoralist mobility rights legally recognised in six countries. Indigenous territories protected in Ethiopia, Kenya, Cameroon. Traditional authorities included in natural resource governance.

**Challenges:** Resource conflicts intensified. Climate change stressed traditional production systems. Land grabbing for conservation sometimes displaced indigenous peoples.

**Example:** The Lake Victoria Fisherfolk Association, organising since 2027, secured representation on national fisheries committees in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. They successfully advocated for banning destructive industrial fishing practices.

## 11 Funding and Investment

**Progress:** Government investment in agroecology increased significantly in twelve countries. Community seed bank funding became available from multiple sources. Private sector investment in African food enterprises grew.

**Challenges:** Agricultural budgets still favour industrial approaches. Donor funding often short-term and project-based. Bureaucratic processes prevent resources reaching communities efficiently.

**Example:** The Africa Agroecology Fund, launched by the AU in 2035 with \$500 million, provides long-term, flexible funding to farmer organisations and food sovereignty networks. Unlike traditional donors, it funds movements, not just projects.



# What Needs To Change By 2063?

They've been talking for hours. The sun sets over Lake Victoria, painting the sky orange and purple.

"Let's do something different now," Monica suggests. "Instead of assessing the past, let's look forward. It's 2045. We have eighteen years until the AU's 2063 target. What needs to change?"

## Georgina's Question

Estridah pulls out notes from a recent meeting. "My colleague Georgina asks the right question: what actually needs to change, not just what we want to see. Let me be specific about land."

She speaks clearly, as if presenting to ministers:

- "By 2063, land tenure systems must change fundamentally. Actual practice, not just policies on paper. This means:
- "Women hold legally recognised land rights equal to men in all 55 African countries. 100% legal equality, not 42% of customary rights. The legal frameworks exist in some countries; now they need universal implementation.
- "Community land rights supersede individual or corporate claims in indigenous and pastoralist territories. Communities control decisions about land use. Large-scale land acquisitions require free, prior, informed community consent, genuinely practiced not just claimed.
- "Urban agriculture receives legal protection. Cities zone land for food production. Farmers cultivating urban spaces have secure tenure, not threat of eviction.
- "That's what land transformation means by 2063. Measurable changes in who controls land and how decisions are made."

## Making Agroecology the Norm

Njabulo takes up the thread. "For agroecology, the change needed is making it default agricultural practice, not alternative. By 2063:

- "Agricultural extension services teach agroecological methods as primary approach. Chemical agriculture is the exception requiring justification, not the norm.
- "Agricultural research budgets prioritise agroecology. Not 10% or 20%, but majority funding toward soil health, seed diversity, water conservation, integrated pest management, and traditional knowledge.
- "University agriculture programmes centre on agroecology. Graduates understand soil as living ecosystem, farming as relationship with nature, seed as commons.
- "Government subsidies shift from chemicals to compost. Instead of fertiliser subsidies undermining soil health, governments invest in composting infrastructure, organic fertiliser production, and soil regeneration.
- "That's system change. A fundamental reorientation of agricultural institutions. Not just the odd project or pilot."



### Food in Cities

Fanza addresses urbanisation. “By 2063, Africa will be predominantly urban. How people in cities eat determines the future. What needs to change:

- “Every major African city has robust territorial markets receiving infrastructure investment, legal protection, and integration into urban planning. Markets aren’t afterthoughts or informal nuisances, but recognised food system anchors.
- “Urban agriculture is normalised. Rooftop gardens, community plots, school farms, edible public landscapes. Cities produce meaningful percentage of vegetables they consume.
- “Traditional African restaurants outnumber foreign chains three to one. This requires policy incentives, business support, and continued cultural shift.
- “School feeding programmes source from agroecological producers. This creates markets for farmers while ensuring children eat nutritious, culturally appropriate food.
- “Food waste composting is standard urban infrastructure, closing nutrient loops.
- “That’s the urban transformation needed.”



### The Youth Imperative

Kamali speaks about youth. “We’re reaching current youth effectively. But every year, new young people need engaging. By 2063:

- “Every African child, urban and rural, learns food production basics in primary school. As core curriculum. This means teacher training, school garden requirements, and curriculum integration.
- “Youth see profitable futures in agroecological enterprises. This requires access to land, credit, training, markets, and technology. Youth shouldn’t need to abandon agriculture for cities; rural areas should offer dignified livelihoods.
- “Young people understand food as cultural heritage, not just nutrition. Schools teach food history, traditional recipes, and cultural significance. This connects youth to ancestors’ wisdom while making it relevant to modern lives.
- “Social media amplifies food sovereignty messages as effectively as corporations amplify ultra-processed products. This needs resources for content creation, influencer partnerships, and platform strategies.
- “The youth piece isn’t just about young people participating in our movements. It’s about ensuring each generation sees food sovereignty as obvious, necessary, and personally relevant.”

## CONCLUSION: PLANTING SEEDS THAT GROW

The evening has stretched into night. Stars fill the sky above Lake Victoria.

“Twenty years,” Fanza says softly. “We’ve built so much. And there’s so much still to do.” Monica nods. “Each generation adds their chapter to the story.”

“What gives me hope,” Andrew says, “is that we’re not alone anymore. Food sovereignty has moved from marginal to recognised, with institutional presence and economic viability.”

“We didn’t win everywhere,” Njabulo acknowledges. “Corporate power persists. Climate disasters intensify. But we’ve proven alternatives work. We’ve built infrastructure that can scale.”



Estridah speaks quietly. “The question now isn’t whether food sovereignty is possible. We’ve demonstrated it is. The question is how fast we can scale before climate change and corporate consolidation create irreversible damage.” “I think about my children,” Kamali says. “They’re growing up in a food system dramatically different from what I knew at their age. More just. More sustainable. More rooted in African identity. That’s what we pass to the next generation.”

Monica raises her teacup. “To twenty more years of work. To the next generation taking up the struggle. To food sovereignty planted by millions of hands, growing despite obstacles, bearing fruit that nourishes body, culture, and dignity.”

They drink together as the night deepens, five people who’ve devoted their lives to transforming how Africa grows, distributes, and eats food. Tomorrow they return to their work across the continent. Tonight, they honour what they’ve built and imagine what still might grow.

## CLOSING VISION

Africa’s food future is no longer distant aspiration. It’s emerging reality, visible in farms practicing agroecology, markets buzzing with local produce, restaurants celebrating traditional cuisines, schools teaching children to grow and cook, policies protecting farmer seed rights, cooperatives owned by women creating dignified livelihoods, and youth building enterprises rooted in cultural heritage.

The transformation is uneven, incomplete, and contested. Corporate power remains strong. Climate disasters threaten progress. Political reversals set back hard-won gains. But the movement for food sovereignty has built institutional infrastructure, demonstrated practical viability, gained political legitimacy, and created economic opportunity that makes it resilient.

**As one farmer said twenty years ago and as her granddaughter echoes today:  
“We do not wait for the future to arrive. We plant it.” GROW**

Africa’s food future is no longer distant aspiration. It’s emerging reality, visible in farms practicing agroecology, markets buzzing with local produce, restaurants celebrating traditional cuisines, schools teaching children to grow and cook, policies protecting farmer seed rights, cooperatives owned by women creating dignified livelihoods, and youth building enterprises rooted in cultural heritage.

The transformation is uneven, incomplete, and contested. Corporate power remains strong. Climate disasters threaten progress. Political reversals set back hard-won gains. But the movement for food sovereignty has built institutional infrastructure, demonstrated practical viability, gained political legitimacy, and created economic opportunity that makes it resilient.

## Epilogue: The Next Morning

The next morning, before departing, they gather for breakfast. There's something different in how they sit together now, a recognition of shared history and ongoing commitment.

"I've been thinking about what we do with this conversation," Andrew says. "It should be written down for others doing this work. Let them see honest assessment, not propaganda."

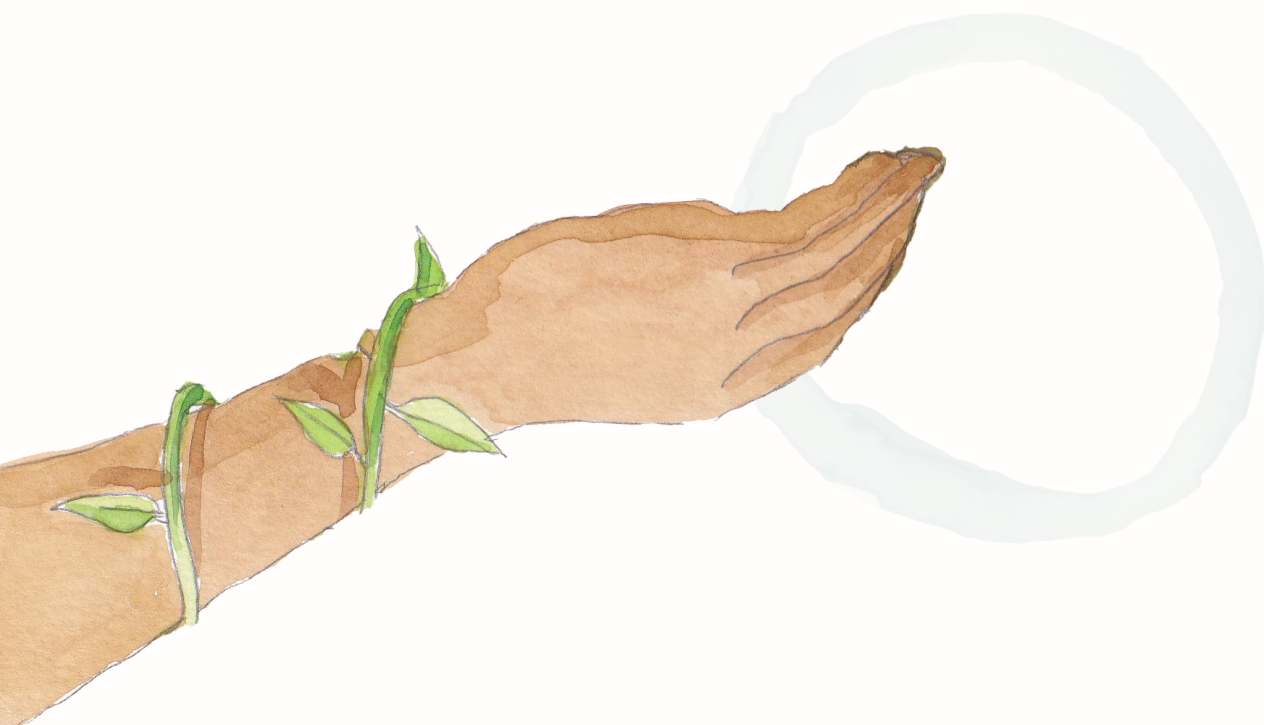
"Including our failures," Estridah adds. "That's important. People need to know transformation is messy, uneven, and full of setbacks. Otherwise, they'll give up when they hit obstacles."

"And the tools," Fanza says. "Make those very practical. People should be able to extract them, use them immediately."

Monica nods. "This becomes Chapter 7 of the Guide. Our collective reflection on twenty years of work, offered to others beginning their own journeys."

They exchange final embraces, promises to stay connected, commitments to continue the work. Then they scatter to airports and bus stations, carrying this conversation back to their communities, networks, and movements.

The work continues.  
The movement grows.  
The future unfolds.





# Transforming the African Food System to Sustainability (TAFS) Project and the My Food Is African Campaign

The Transforming the African Food System to Sustainability (TAFS) project is a pan-African initiative led by the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) with support from Sida. TAFS responds to structural challenges facing African food systems: rising food insecurity, loss of food sovereignty, ecological degradation, and marginalisation of small-scale food producers. The project advances food systems that are socially just, environmentally sound, and economically viable, grounded in agroecology and African knowledge systems.

Working across national, regional, and continental levels, TAFS strengthens civil society coordination, empowers consumers, influences policy processes, and amplifies evidence-based alternatives to industrial food models. Through partnerships with farmer organisations, women's movements, youth groups, researchers, and cultural actors, TAFS supports collective action to shift food system narratives, policies, and practices. Key work areas include policy advocacy, movement building, research and knowledge generation, capacity strengthening, and strategic engagement with the African Union, Regional Economic Communities, and national governments.

This Barefoot Guide forms part of the My Food Is African (MFIA) campaign, a flagship public-facing initiative under TAFS that reclaims African food cultures, indigenous crops, and traditional knowledge as central pillars of food sovereignty, nutrition, identity, and resilience. The campaign challenges imported, ultra-processed, culturally disconnected foods while celebrating Africa's diverse food heritage through storytelling, media engagement, festivals, chef-led initiatives, school clubs, and community events. Chefs, journalists, farmers, researchers, and cultural practitioners translate policy and agroecology debates into accessible messages, document indigenous foods and recipes, and create spaces for intergenerational knowledge exchange.

All this work operates within the Citizens Working Group on Agroecology (CWGA), a citizen-led continental platform providing political direction and collective voice on food sovereignty in Africa. CWGA brings together civil society organisations, farmers' movements, and allied actors to shape positions and engage policy processes, ensuring that policy engagement remains accountable to citizens and cultural mobilisation feeds directly into sustained, African-led food systems change.



# Tools for your Citizen Action Work

Throughout this guide, you've encountered citizens organizing campaigns, mapping food systems, building coalitions, and challenging policies. The stories show what's possible. The tools help you do similar work in your own context.

We've gathered seven practical tools that address challenges organizers face repeatedly:

- Mapping Your Food System – Understanding the terrain before you try to change it
- Telling Food Sovereignty Stories – Collecting and sharing narratives that inspire action
- Visioning Our Food Future – Building shared direction for campaigns and movements
- Identifying Policy Spaces and Opportunities – Finding strategic entry points for influence
- Designing Your Grassroots Campaign – Creating campaigns that learn and adapt
- Mobilizing Resources for Food Sovereignty Work – Reducing dependence on external donors
- How Can Radio Be Used as an Organizing Tool? – Using community radio strategically

These tools come from work with food sovereignty movements across multiple African countries. They reflect what actually works in practice, including the messy parts where plans meet reality and need adjusting.

You can use them at any scale. A village cooperative, a regional network, a national movement. Adapt them to your situation. Skip steps that don't fit. Add elements your context requires.



Download the tools booklet



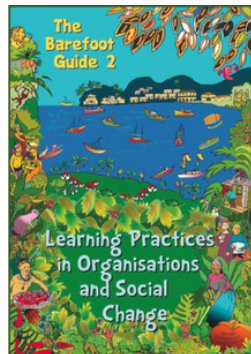
The guide and the tools belong together.  
The guide shows the path.  
The tools help you walk it.

[https://www.barefootguide.org/uploads/1/1/1/6/111664/my\\_food\\_is\\_african\\_-\\_tools\\_for\\_citizen\\_action.pdf](https://www.barefootguide.org/uploads/1/1/1/6/111664/my_food_is_african_-_tools_for_citizen_action.pdf)

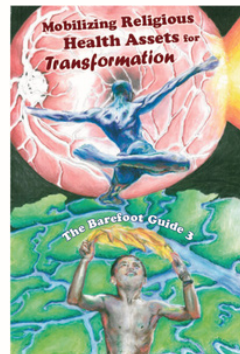
# Published Barefoot Guides



Kiswahili • Español Bahasa  
English • Français • 漢語 • Português



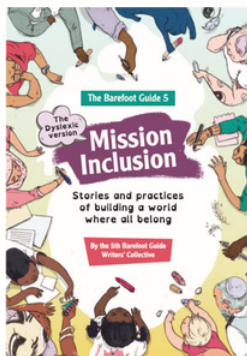
Kiswahili • Español • English  
Français • Việt



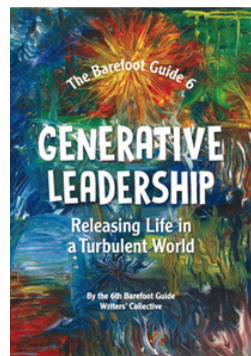
English



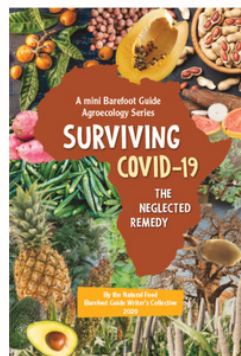
English • Français



Kiswahili • English • Français



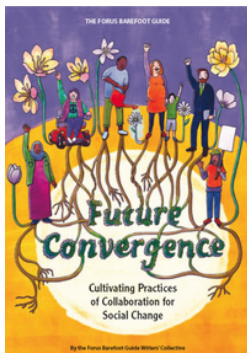
English



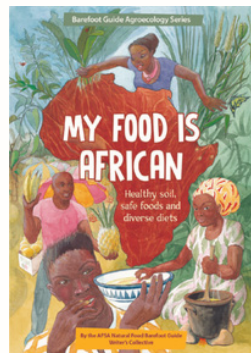
English • Français • Español



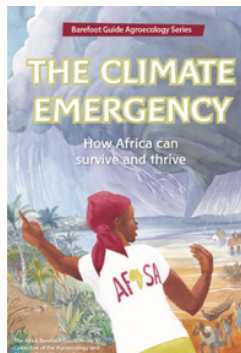
English



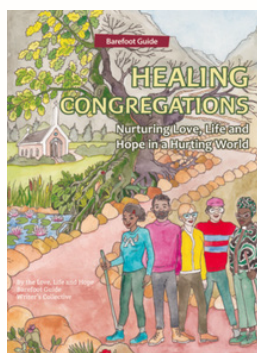
English • Français • Español



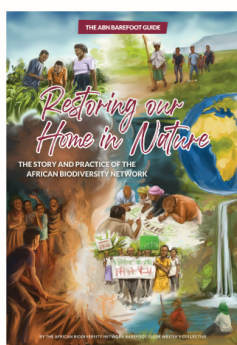
English • Français



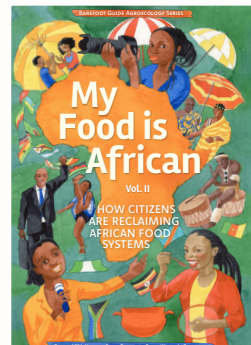
English



English



English



English • Français



Download these and other resources from  
[www.barefootguide.org](http://www.barefootguide.org)



**AF SA**

ALLIANCE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN AFRICA

**The Barefoot  
Guide Connection**

[www.barefootguide.org](http://www.barefootguide.org)

