



Seed and Knowledge

TOWARDS STRENGTHENING SEED AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Building on past and on-going joint activities, a synergistic relationship between Biowatch South Africa, EarthLore Foundation and the NRF Bio-economy Research Chair at the University of Cape Town (UCT), has been galvanised into an exciting collaboration on seeds and local knowledge.

The primary aim of the Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI) is to revive and enhance traditional seed and knowledge systems and to deepen understanding about their functioning, within the context of supportive agricultural, cultural and ecological practices. The initiative's long-term vision is to collaborate with communities, national and regional partners towards a future where small-holder farmers, and women in particular, are empowered to secure seed and food sovereignty on all levels. Research, documentation, and experiential learning will be on-going processes, vital in shifting worldviews and paradigms by interrogating and challenging current assumptions in policy making and science.



AN INNOVATIVE COLLABORATION ON SEED AND KNOWLEDGE

Traditional knowledge, seed and agricultural systems form part of complex social-ecological systems in farming communities throughout Southern Africa. They are not only vital for livelihoods, but also for humankind as a whole. Together they enhance food security, strengthen social cohesion and build climate change resilience.

Such agricultural systems, however, have been eroded by decades of policies and laws that promote the interests of commercial farmers and multinational seed and agro-chemical companies and limit and undermine the rights of small-holder farmers and communities. While industrial agriculture produces only about 30% of the world's food, it is a leading contributor to climate change and environmental degradation through massive exports, use of fossil fuels, and its reliance on chemical inputs.

Our vision, together with that of millions of farmers across the world, is for our food production systems to revive and enhance tried and tested methods which are low-carbon and low-input in nature; preserving and regenerating resources rather than destroying them; and supporting small-scale farming systems. This movement affirms and advocates that agroecology and seed diversity cool the planet and create a world where agriculture is productive and sustainable and where seed and food systems are in the hands of local communities. It is this world, based on food sovereignty, which embodies ecological integrity and social justice. This is what we want to support through our work.

*Reviving and enhancing
traditional knowledge systems*





*Learning from each other to
build a sustainable future*

OBJECTIVES OF THE SEED AND KNOWLEDGE INITIATIVE

The four year (2015-2018) Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI) has four interrelated objectives, addressing and expanding the vision on multiple levels.

- The first objective of the project is to enable farmers and communities to revive and enhance traditional seed and agricultural knowledge systems. This is complemented, among other activities, by training, farmer exchanges to enable horizontal learning, and knowledge exchange between communities and across borders in the region.
- Second, community and farmer organisations are supported in building their regional and international networks for deepening and affirming their knowledge systems. Together these “communities of practice” will help build a more sustainable future, and challenge the initiatives that undermine this future.
- Our third objective is to engage nationally and regionally with key stakeholders and decision makers to advocate for policies and legislation that actively support the revival of traditional seed diversity and related knowledge systems or agroecology.
- Our fourth objective is to initiate collaborative research and knowledge building, across different sectors and different disciplines, to generate documented evidence that will feed into and support the activities related to the other three objectives, and in particular the objective of policy engagement.

THE PARTNERS

Biowatch South Africa is an environmental and social justice NGO based in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, and is the SKI secretariat. Biowatch's community work is focused on supporting small-holder farmers in agroecological practice, and affirming and building on traditional agricultural knowledge through agroecological training, farmer exchanges, and supporting seed rituals. Biowatch works in five project sites which are located in Ingwavuma, KwaNgwanase, Pongola, Mkhuze and Mtubatuba.

EarthLore Foundation works with communities in Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal, and in the Bikita district of Zimbabwe. Activities include strengthening traditional agricultural knowledge; reviving and enhancing seed diversity and related practices; and enabling the inter-generational transfer of knowledge, culture, biodiversity and livelihood strategies.

The Bio-economy SARChI Chair at the University of Cape Town (UCT) will bring research and policy expertise, postgraduate students, and also a track record of working on issues relating to traditional knowledge, biodiversity and social justice.

Regional partners include Ukuvuna in South Africa; CELUCT, TSURO, ZIMSOFF and PORET in Zimbabwe; ZAABC, CTD and ReScope in Zambia; and SFHC in Malawi. All have a track record of working with farming communities on agricultural practices and seed and they collaborate to strengthen community-based seed systems.

Biowatch, EarthLore Foundation and CELUCT have a long-term relationship with the African Biodiversity Network (ABN). As key partners they have participated in advocacy activities, capacity building workshops and regional networking activities.

Small-holder farmers in Southern Africa are rich repositories of traditional agricultural knowledge and have been selecting, saving and exchanging seed for generations, based on customary practices. As active plant breeders, farmers have been conserving traditional varieties, continuously selecting seed with characteristics such as hardiness, drought tolerance, good storage qualities and taste in mind, and using seed preservation and storage techniques which have been passed on for generations. The traditional communities involved in the project are governed by customary and living law and practices that encompass shared rules and responsibilities about how their common ancestral biodiversity heritage can be accessed, used or benefited from, including the sharing, saving and exchange of seed and crop management. SKI is respectful of these governing systems and practices and gives recognition to the fact that communities are the custodians, researchers and revivers of their own knowledge.

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