



NEWSLETTER NO.1 // FEB 2017

LEARNING THROUGH PARTNERSHIP



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Brot
für die Welt



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
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Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC

EDITORIAL

It was so difficult to choose which stories to share in this first edition of our newsletter, as so many fascinating and inspiring happenings live within the loose network we call the Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI).

We wanted the first SKI newsletter to introduce all partners to each other, and to the world, and to highlight some of the key activities we have done together. The end result is only a snapshot, a peek into the *Life of SKI*.

Life of Pi is a book about an Indian boy setting off on a long sea journey in a small boat with a Bengal tiger. The heart of the story focuses on the interaction between the boy and the tiger, where the human demonstrates that he can think with great ingenuity, and that all life is interdependent. The tiger learns to coexist. Underlying the story is a philosophical debate about the modern world's favouring of reason over imagination, science over spirituality, materialism over idealism, fact over fiction or story. We need both, but it's the demise of the latter that has led to so much loss. Nature, seed, land, water, even knowledge and culture, are being commodified by science, materialism and reason.

We commodify these things by no longer valuing the intangible and deeper meaning of seed, land, culture and nature as a whole. This is a huge loss to ourselves and the children still to be born.

"THE WORLD ISN'T JUST THE WAY IT IS. IT IS HOW WE UNDERSTAND IT, NO? AND IN UNDERSTANDING SOMETHING, WE BRING SOMETHING TO IT, NO? DOESN'T THAT MAKE LIFE A STORY? "

YANN MARTEL, *LIFE OF PI*

When SKI started off on its voyage into the unknown a few years ago, we knew we wanted to weave a story of courage and transformation. We also knew that this could only be achieved with others, people and organisations with a similar vision. We looked for partners in the region to join us on the long journey towards a better world, towards a region where diversity and farmer-led, community-based seed systems are the norm, and where everyone understands that agroecology leads the way into a healthier future for all. We are just at the beginning of this voyage, and invite you to join us ... in this boat with its tiger!

We are not unaware of the adversity and many challenges we may face along the way, but have chosen instead to focus this newsletter on celebrating who we all are, on our connectedness and our stories. In this first edition, we are celebrating you, the Life of SKI!

Elfrieda Pschorn-Strauss

SKI Regional Coordinator



THE SKI STORY

The SKI seed germinated out of many years of work on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and farmers' rights by activists, who at various times worked with Biowatch South Africa, the African Biodiversity Network, GRAIN, the Gaia Foundation, the University of Cape Town, the Mupo Foundation, La Via Campesina, PELUM and many other organisations.

In 2013, Biowatch South Africa, the Mupo Foundation (now EarthLore), and the NRF Bio-economy Research Chair at the University of Cape Town (UCT), formed a partnership to develop a regional initiative in consultation with other organisations. We used an 18-month pilot phase to strengthen the seed work and knowledge of and between the three partners, and to develop a clear strategy and guiding principles. Our strategy was to look for and engage with likeminded organisations in the region, supporting them to focus their current work on seed, knowledge and agroecology; jointly identifying and planning the most strategic interventions SKI could make to strengthen and scale-up their work with farmers, researchers and

policymakers; and choosing activities through which to link effectively with others doing similar work. We also decided to use the funding we had access to, to support the practical work of partners and strengthen their organisations where needed.

In November 2013, we undertook a scoping visit to Zimbabwe, and found four partners keen to join us. From the very beginning, John Wilson brought his deep knowledge of the Zimbabwean context

to the work with SKI partners in that country. Our first exchanges, and the appointment of Gertrude Pswarayi, as PELUM coordinator, were the sparks that started the Zimbabwe Seed Sovereignty Programme (ZSSP), in 2014. In the same year, we held our first regional seminar and organised our first farmer-to-farmer exchange for farmers from South Africa and from other parts of Zimbabwe, to Chikukwa Ecological Land Use Community Trust (CELUCT) farmers in Chikukwa Valley, Eastern Zimbabwe.



In 2015, our Community of Practice (CoP) emerged. We were privileged to have seed expert Dr Regassa Feyissa, from Ethiopia, join us as our teacher, as well as Kudzai Kusena, from the Zimbabwe Gene Bank. The Community Technology Development Trust (CTDT) in Zimbabwe also shared their wealth of experience with the SKI CoP. The ongoing question guiding our discussions and learning was: *What does a seed activist, champion, expert or knowledge-holder need in order to be fully equipped in terms of knowledge, skills and attitude?*

In early 2016, we invited three organisations and two networks from Zambia and Malawi to join SKI. We are lucky to have Charles Nkhoma committed to sharing his expertise on agro-biodiversity and policy issues with SKI partners in Zambia.

Now, here we are at the beginning of 2017. In just four years we have grown into a diverse collective of thirteen partners in four countries – all of us committed to seed, knowledge and agroecology. Each country and each partner is different, and these differences contribute enormously to the depth of enquiry and breadth of ideas and practices to learn from, within SKI.

So, what are all these organisations doing together? The main focus of all SKI partners, whether focused on research, advocacy, training, or working with farmers, is to support communities towards becoming healthy and resilient. What does this mean to us? It means many things of course, but most importantly it means that communities have a robust confidence in their knowledge and ability to farm and live sustainably on their land. It

means communities have access to enough, good quality seed; are always able to grow a diversity of healthy plants; and enjoy food security. Growing this knowledge and capacity is exactly where SKI focuses its collective efforts. We are very clear that working on seed and knowledge, as important as it is itself, is also an entry point into the bigger process of rebuilding fragmented communities.

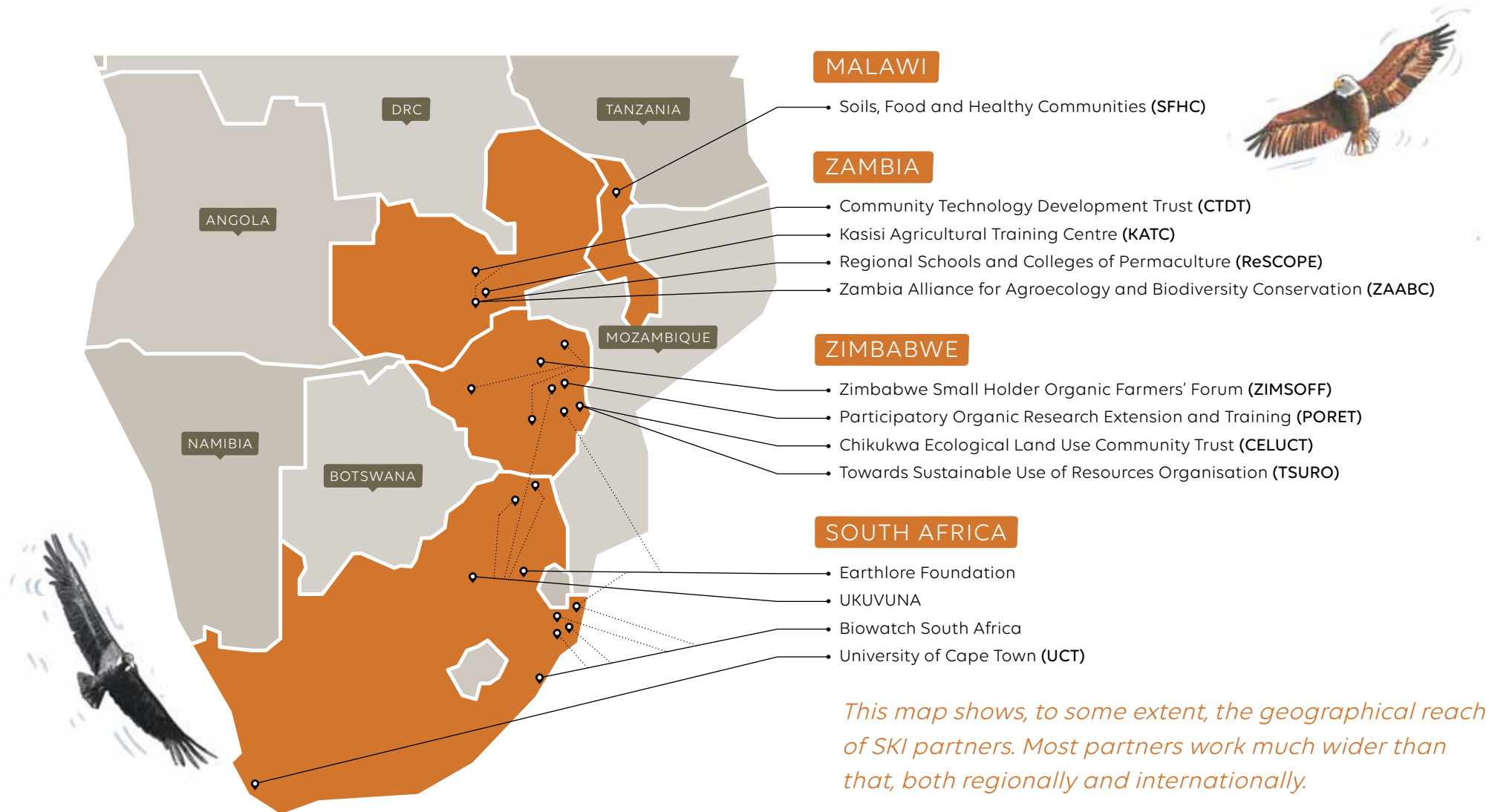
Part of our activism is to increasingly be able to tell our stories ... as farmers, women, men, and as organisations. We want to effectively document our work, for our own learning, yes, but also so that readers anywhere in the world can be changed by it. We want our stories and our writing to influence people's ways of seeing, thinking, understanding, and doing things. In this way, we believe story-telling and writing is uniquely important in the struggle for social change and justice.

Many people ask about our form or organisational structure: Are we a network, a movement, or what? The I in SKI stands for Initiative. This means we initiate spaces for learning and innovation towards change. We are not assuming to be a network or a movement yet. A network or movement is only effective if it is built step-by-step by individuals and communities with a direct interest in its purpose. We therefore have a longterm commitment towards strengthening such individuals and their communities of practice. We understand that the move towards change often starts very slowly, until it reaches a point where there are many connected individuals and communities with a similar vision. This is the point at which a social movement could emerge, the point where others have the courage to join, the point when change happens much more rapidly. This is our mission and hope for the future: to find that tipping point for transformation, where our vision becomes the norm.



SKI Vision by Graphic Harvest (from the UCT Policy Seminar Series, September 2016)

WHO IS SKI?



PARTNER SNAPSHOTS

BIOWATCH SOUTH AFRICA

Amanxusa (Ambassadors) spreading the knowledge

In northern KwaZulu-Natal, there are now 54 well-trained *amanxusa* who are determined to spread their knowledge and passion for traditional seeds and agroecology.

Biowatch's work on seed and agroecology is growing, and through our Farmer Development Programme (FDP), certificates of achievement were given to 28 farmers in August 2016. The certificates acknowledge that these farmers do not use synthetic fertilisers, pesticides, insecticides or herbicides; do not use genetically modified organisms (GMOs); make and use their own 'living' compost; prepare and plant fertility beds; collect and use grey water from their homes; use dry grass and plant material as mulching; and save the seeds of at least 14 traditional varieties. Beyond influencing their nearby farmer neighbours to become agroecology compliant, these *amanxusa* aim to spread agroecology awareness to local schools, local authorities and churches. In 2017, they will strengthen and deepen this seed work at farmer-level. Through the FDP, farmers demonstrate to



Amanxusa award ceremony with Biowatch staff seated in front (August 2016)

others that farmer-led seed systems and agroecology is a way to realise the right to food in vulnerable parts of society. At the same time, these farmers are addressing the concurrent food, ecological and energy-climate crises.

Biowatch South Africa is an environmental and social justice non-government organisation (NGO) that works at both policy level and 'on the ground' with projects

involving smallholder farmers. Biowatch works in northern KwaZulu-Natal in Ingwavuma, KwaNgwanase, Pongola, Tshaneni and Mtubatuba. This busy NGO is also the engine room of SKI—we have taken on the huge job of fiduciary responsibility for SKI, managing all the associated finances and administration tasks.

www.biowatch.org.za



Biowatch, farmers and Rachel Wynberg in Parliament

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN (UCT)

Promoting socially conscious research and collaboration

It can be hard for community-based organisations and farmers to get support for their own research and knowledge, or to access research to support their work and measure the impact of their activities. SKI's link with UCT is a unique opportunity to increase the body of knowledge on seed and knowledge systems; deepen critical thinking and understanding on these issues; inspire and train a new generation of researchers; and produce evidence to influence decision-makers. Through collaboration with other research institutions and NGOs, UCT's research focus in relation to seed and knowledge incorporates topics such as: 'spaces' for agro-diversity, such as wild crop diversity and community seedbanks; agricultural systems and the impact of genetically modified seed, for example, on local seed systems; links between seed security and food security; understanding

the resilience of local seed systems; exploring the connection between research and development and small farmers' needs; and strengthening legal understandings of farmers' rights. A strong focus is placed on 'research that matters', and on doing research in a way that is relevant and meaningful for those involved. The UCT team has included several researchers and two post doctorates, as well as three PhD students, four Masters students, and an honours student, all undertaking research in one of the themes highlighted above. A number of these researchers are doing their fieldwork with SKI partners, which has the added benefit of ensuring findings are readily contextualised and relevant.

At UCT, Associate Professor Rachel Wynberg, the Research Chair in the Department of Environmental and Geographical Science, holds the vision of SKI.

<http://bio-economy.org.za/projects/the-seed-and-knowledge-initiative-2/>

EARTHLORE FOUNDATION

Reviving indigenous knowledge systems

" SEED IS LIVING, IT HAS BOTH A BODY AND A SPIRIT AND IT DERIVES LIFE FROM THE SAME SOURCE THAT WE AS HUMANS DERIVE OUR LIFE...FROM THE GREAT SPIRIT, WHICH IN OUR VARIOUS LANGUAGES WE CALL MWARI, GOD, ALLAH, UMVELINQANGI, ETC. IT FOLLOWS THE VERY SAME LIFE CYCLE AS ALL

OTHER LIVING THINGS...TO BE BORN, GROW, DIE AND GIVE UP LIFE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION TO TAKE OVER. "

METHOD GUNDIDZA, EARTHLORE.

This quote from Method Gundidza captures the essence of EarthLore—everything we do is rooted in the deeper meaning of life. For EarthLore, our work with communities always starts with dialogue. The dialogue methodology, a slow and deepening journey facilitated by skilled field and/or community animators, inevitably reminds elders of long discarded and sometimes long forgotten traditional farming practices; the importance of traditional and/or indigenous seeds; seed selection, seed saving practices and indigenous seed storage techniques; the link of traditional seeds to sacred ceremonies and sacred sites; and, the governance systems that support and maintain these traditional ways.

Intergenerational knowledge transfer is a very important part of EarthLore's activities. The inclusion of interested younger people in our work has led to



Farmers, traditional healers, headman and youth representatives for one of EarthLore's first community dialogues through SKI (Mpumalanga province, South Africa)

a revival and reintroduction of traditional farming practices and a growing appreciation of farmer seed systems. In more rural communities, where traditional governance systems still operate, and the chiefs and leaders participated in and support the dialogues, traditional knowledge systems have been rapidly embraced and revived, resulting in increased food and seed sovereignty.

By reviving indigenous knowledge and protecting sacred natural sites, communities can become more resilient to climate change and industrial processes such as mining that threaten livelihoods and endogenous development. As a member of the African Biodiversity Network (ABN), where these methodologies were tried and tested, and as a founding partner of SKI, EarthLore takes responsibility for introducing these very important practices and methodologies to other SKI partners. We have an office in Johannesburg, and work with communities in Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, and in the Bikita district of Zimbabwe.

www.earthlorefoundation.org.za

UKUVUNA

Promoting healthy and sustainable livelihoods for communities

Established in 2005, Ukuvuna, a Zulu word that means 'abundant harvest' is a non-profit organisation dedicated to the implementation of permaculture as an optimal approach to securing sustainable



Finger millet - a miracle crop that can withstand long dry spells, the seed keeps for decades, and it is highly nutritious

livelihoods. Ukuvuna's director, John Nzira, is one of the permaculture pioneers in Africa, and as a senior permaculture trainer, uses his extensive experience to teach communities all over Southern Africa. As a SKI partner, Ukuvuna is training communities in Hamakuya and in Elim, Limpopo, South Africa.

The partnership between SKI and Ukuvuna extended into Zimbabwe in 2015 when John Nzira returned to his roots near Rusape and began working with communities there to improve farming systems and revive lost seeds and crops. As a result of his initiative and dedication, eight villages have mobilised into a vibrant community-based organisation, the Dzairo Organic Farmers Association (DOFA). DOFA farmers are engaged in a process of self-driven exploration and innovation, trying different permaculture systems on their own. Farmers experimented with diversification and replaced some of their maize



John Nzira and members of a very new DOFA a farmer-to-farmer exchange at CELUCT

fields with millet and sorghum. Agritex officers did not agree with this approach, but the farmers tried it out regardless. With the severe drought of 2015/2016, the dryland farmers who planted millet and sorghum had good harvests compared to those who only planted maize.

Ukuvuna is dedicated to creating replicable models of best practice in sustainable biodiversity management, and to empower communities with earth-care management tools that create resilience and stewardship, thereby fostering peace in communities. We have worked with other SKI partners including Biowatch in South Africa, PORET in Zimbabwe and SFHC in Malawi and we run a permaculture training centre in Midrand, just north of Johannesburg.

www.ukuvuna.org

CHIKUKWA ECOLOGICAL LAND USE COMMUNITY TRUST (CELUCT)

Building resilient communities through dialogue

CELUCT started off by demonstrating how to regenerate the landscape with permaculture, water harvesting and food forests in Chikukwa, Eastern Zimbabwe. But today we have a strong focus on rebuilding communities fragmented by conflict and other destructive, external pressures. Dialogues have proved an effective methodology for relationship building, as well as for identifying problems, solving conflict, and finding solutions. For example, a big challenge to food security in Chikukwa was the issue of roaming livestock that destroyed crops, and therefore also the communities' seed supply and food security. In an attempt to solve this problem, we held a number of dialogues around the issue, and after some time and much discussion with all those involved, a series of by-laws was issued to ensure livestock farmers managed their animals more responsibly.

CELUCT is a community-based organisation that has been working with the communities of the Chikukwa Valley in the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe for over two decades. CELUCT has built a beautiful training centre where farmers, practitioners and students from all over the world come to learn from these innovative farmers about permaculture, water harvesting, seed saving, food forests and more.



Farmers Field Day in Chikukwa.

CELUCT have hosted a number of farmer-to-farmer exchanges. Farmers as far afield as KwaZulu-Natal, Chinyika, Venda, Rusape and Masvingo have travelled to learn from the farmers in Chikukwa.

www.thechikukwaproject.com

PARTICIPATORY ORGANIC RESEARCH EXTENSION AND TRAINING (PORET)

Resilience and perseverance in action.

Promoting food security in a very dry and hot climate can be facilitated through the use of traditional and open pollinated seed varieties in combination with agroecological practices. This was a key lesson that

emerged from PORET's field day last year, hosted at a seed custodian's homestead. In addition to the knowledge shared on seed breeding, seed production, and variety ownership, another lesson learned was that seed production can bring economic benefits to households, as some farmers had begun selling significant amount of seeds to others. In addition, PORET used the dialogue process with elders to discuss seed issues as the loss of small grain seeds was identified as a main concern also affecting food security. This included discussion of cultural practices, such as rituals, and the growing disconnection between youth and traditional seed knowledge and practices. PORET hosted a local soccer tournament while displaying traditional seeds as a way of attracting and engaging young people.

PORET is rooted in the Chaseyama community of Zimbabwe and is a very new organisation. Through the partnership with SKI we have been able to focus on strengthening the organisation and also recuperating our almost lost seed community seed systems. Our purpose is to address hunger, malnutrition and poverty. PORET's aim is to support farmers in the low rainfall area of Chaseyama, to adopt techniques and skills which are essential for them, their families and the community to survive and attain a sustainable, productive and healthy life.

www.poret-zimbabwe.org

A PORET FIELD DAY

by Cephas Tsinakwadi

The trucks rumbled over rough roads before stopping at Mr Rishoni Chingore's fields. We farmers from Chakchwa, climbed out, stiff-legged from the long trip, but curious to learn from this man.

The first thing I noticed was the sweet smell of cow dung, chicken droppings and rotting compost. Then I noticed his fences. His crops were protected with barb wire and branches. Inside the fences, was a good crop despite the bad drought. He had good crops of sorghum, millet, watermelons and ground nuts. Some of us enjoyed tasting his melons and nuts so much, Mr Chingore had to stop us from eating his other crops too. We walked around his field asking questions. Mr Chingore had all the answers at his fingertips.



Three permaculture veteran trainers at a farmer-to-farmer exchange in Chikukwa

There were flamboyant and some indigenous trees at his house where we rested in the shade after touring his fields. Mr Chingore explained how he managed his crops during the drought. Agritex personnel encouraged us to grow small grains. PORET's Mr Piti, encouraged us to store our own grain so that we could avoid having to buy seed from fake seed houses. He said we should revert to our old ways of keeping seed for future planting.

Come food time, we ate, danced and ululated in encouragement. All too soon, the trucks started up their engines, and carried us back to our homes.

TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES ORGANISATION (TSURO)

Innovating strategies to increase access to seed

TSURO successfully used a seed market day last August to promote seed sovereignty and give smallholder farmers better access to open pollinated and retained seed grown by other farmers like themselves. Ninety-three farmers attended our district event, bringing different crop varieties, which they traded against vouchers. Agricultural Extension Services and the National Gene Bank also took part as seed inspectors, and assisted farmers with identifying seed varieties and standardising their local names. Their participation enabled a high level of learning about the differences between open

pollinated, hybrid, self-pollinating, cross-pollinating varieties, GMOs and fortified foods, and their advantages and disadvantages. The seed market day also gave TSURO an opportunity to compile an accurate picture of tradable quality and quantity of seeds in the district.

TSURO is a Zimbabwean community-based organisation, operating throughout the eastern district of Chimanimani. TSURO's vision is contributing to the bigger picture of SKI as we work towards a vision of empowered, peaceful and united small farming communities with well-sustained natural resources, and healthy, food-secure people. We work to empower the communities of Chimanimani, to improve their livelihoods and relationships through sustainable agriculture, natural resource management, community health, agro-processing and marketing programmes.

www.tsuro-chimanimani.org.zw

2016 SEED FAIR AND MARKET DAY AT TSURO

by Festers Morai

It was a hot Tuesday morning. My colleagues and I were busy preparing for the farmers' arrival at the 2016 Seed Fair and Market day. Baap baaaaap babaap went the passenger bus hooter: They had arrived.



Judith Bingadhadhi, a seed producer

The seed farmers disembarked and queued at the centre's gate for accreditation. Within an hour's time, the centre was a hive of activity. Some farmers were busy arranging their seed on display tables, while others were grumbling that breakfast was late. The tents filled with an appetising smell of fried eggs as the caterers set about serving food to the hungry.

Once the farmers had finished displaying their seed, Agritex staff started the judging process. It took a long time, but finally they were done and could give input and announce the winning positions. Prizes were given and everyone broke into song and dance. It was as colourful as a white wedding.

ZIMBABWE SMALL HOLDER ORGANIC FARMERS' FORUM (ZIMSOFF)

Farmers learning from farmers

As a farmers' organisation, we are a voice for smallscale farmers in Zimbabwe and the region. We have members all over Zimbabwe, all of whom strive to practice agroecology and to save their own seed. We organise our members in four clusters, and within each cluster there are a number of smallholder farmer organisations and clubs. We established an agroecology training centre at Shashe, Masvingo Province, where our members and other farmers come for agroecology, seed saving and policy-related training.

At ZIMSOFF, we promote a farmer-to-farmer training approach to empowerment. As farmers learn much more effectively from other farmers, we actively develop our members' skills as facilitators and trainers. As SKI also encourages horizontal learning processes and farmer innovation, our farmers have opportunities to learn from and share their knowledge with farmers from other countries.

Last year, ZIMSOFF organised a Dialogue Day for smallholder farmers as part of the Zimbabwe Food and Seed Festival. 2016 was declared the International Year of the Pulses, by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), hence the theme of the day was: *Overcoming the dominance of maize by bringing back pulses into prominence*. As smallholder farmers, we value legumes as they are good for the soil and for our health, but they are particularly important crops for women, as women control the production and exchange of most legumes' seed.

A member of the Eastern and Southern Africa Smallholder Farmers' Forum (ESAFF), and of La Via Campesina, ZIMSOFF is an organisation of smallscale farmers, in which farmers hold all the positions of responsibility. Our vision is to be a farmers' voice for agroecology and to empower farmers to defend their rights.

<https://www.facebook.com/zimsoff/>
www.esaff.org/Zimbabwe

COMMUNITY TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT TRUST (CTDT) ZAMBIA

Pioneering the revival of agro-biodiversity
in farmers' fields

CTDT's main focus in Zambia is to promote agro-biodiversity in association with sustainable farming in rural communities as a means to achieve food and nutrition security. We have a strong focus on gender, and are also very aware of the impact of the HIV/Aids epidemic on the farmers we work with.

CTDT is an NGO based in Lusaka, but we work with more than 2000 farmers in five sites in the districts of Chikankata (Southern province), Shibuyunji and Rufunsa (Lusaka province). Charles Nkhoma, our founding Director, has a solid background in plant genetic resources and agro-biodiversity, and is



A seed fair organised by farmers
and CTDT Zambia

committed to sharing his knowledge and experience with other Zambian organisations and SKI partners. Our partnership with SKI began in 2016.

Last year, CTDT held seed fairs in the Chikankata and Shibuyunji districts of Zambia, with the support of SKI and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). The purpose of these fairs was to showcase the diversity of farmer seeds and facilitate the exchange and sale of seeds among farmers and other stakeholders, such as staff from the district offices of the Ministry of Agriculture, traditional leaders and our fellow SKI partner, Kasisi Agricultural Training Centre (KATC). District Commissioners officiated and gave speeches, indicating official government support of and commitment to CTDT's work. Continued government involvement is something we work very hard to secure, as we believe their support of community seed systems will go a long way in helping us achieve food and nutrition security.

KASISI AGRICULTURAL TRAINING CENTRE (KATC)

Linking the practice of agroecology with
advocacy through partnerships with
government extension services

Groundnuts, cowpeas, beans, mbambara nuts and a range of local maize varieties are the crops KATC encouraged farmers to grow as part of our drive for agro-biodiversity. During the drought, farmers noticed, extension officers noticed, and we noticed the greater the diversity of crops, the more food farmers harvested.

One of our staff members, Austin Chilala, attended SKI's Community of Practice meeting in March 2016. Since then, he has been fired up to strengthen our work on community-based seed systems. Last December, KATC and CTDT organised the exchange of farmers from Sinjela and Nyangwena communities with farmers, in Rufunsa, Lusaka Province, Zambia. This exchange was an excellent opportunity for us to learn about the best way to establish Community Seed Banks, and how to set up seed adaptation trials for potential further multiplication. During the exchange, CTDT distributed sorghum and millet seed for multiplication and inclusion in demonstration plots as part of their strategy to prepare communities for climate change. Subsequently, KATC farmers also received both pearl millet and finger millet seed to experiment with in their area. This exchange built on the success of our earlier project activities, such as the Biodiversity Fair, and encouraged continued sharing between farmers from both organisations.

Based just outside Lusaka in Zambia, KATC was established back in 1974, and has been around the longest of all SKI partners, even though it is one of the newest members, joining in 2016. The Centre aims to be a leading Jesuit training institute in sustainable organic agriculture which facilitates holistic rural development. The Centre has a strong network of extension officers that work closely with government extension officers, placing us in a very good position for advocacy work that benefits smallholder farmers.

www.katczm.org



Farmer's exchange and seed fair organised by Kasisi training centre in Zambia.

RESCOPE ZAMBIA

Planting seeds of diversity in schools

ReSCOPE focuses on inspiring young people to care about land, agro-biodiversity and culture across the Southern Africa region. We use the Integrated Land Use Design (ILUD) process to facilitate, monitor and support the implementation of whole school, integrated, and sustainable land use projects. This step-by-step process supports school communities to redesign their environments in five stages: grounding, situational analysis, visioning, integrated design and action planning. Schools create food forests, access ways, educational spaces and recreational spaces through this process. Since becoming a SKI partner in 2016 we have begun to focus on community seed revival work with young people. Why? Because seeds are of utmost importance in the planting required



Farmer's exchange and seed fair organised by Kasisi training centre in Zambia.

by our work, and once communities have viable seed systems, they can supply the seeds needed by their schools. Secondly, we want to cultivate a deep interest in seed among the youth and promote intergenerational transfer of knowledge about seed so that this wealth is not lost.

ReSCOPE Zambia is a chapter of a larger regional programme that promotes permaculture in schools as a way of supporting community development. Our approach aims to address hunger and malnutrition, a theory-focused education system, and community disconnection from culture, nature and history. We use specific participatory tools involving teachers, pupils, parents, community leaders and other stakeholders to demonstrate the potential for agroecology to address these issues at community level.

<http://www.seedingschools.org/about-us>

MY GRANDMOTHER'S FARM

by Walter Mugove

The wild fruit trees which were my boyhood playground, are not there anymore. There is no shade in which to shelter, no sweet fruit to eat. What remains is just row after row of hybrid maize in neat lines. The soil beneath my feet is hard as cement. This is my grandmother's farm where I grew up - but it was different then.

My grandmother farmed in south, central Zimbabwe in the 1960s. She was a smallholder farmer using local seeds that she saved from each harvest and traditional methods both to protect the seeds from pests and to grow the crops. She used manure from the cattle pen, termite mound soil and leaf and crop residue litter to maintain the fertility of her soils. She intercropped legumes with her other crops. I remember watching her select the best seed from her harvest every year, and the many ways she had to keep them safe from pests. She would hang some of the seed above the fireplace and keep others in her sealed granary under a layer of rapoko grains.

I remember when the government extension officer came: 'You can now become Master Farmers,' he said. In order to achieve this status, farmers had to remove all trees from their arable land and plough it uniformly. Then they needed to plant maize in straight lines with uniform spacing and no other crops in between. They were encouraged to buy ox-drawn cultivators to clear the weeds in between those neat rows.

By the 1980s my grandmother had become a modern farmer. She was buying and using hybrid seeds, chemical fertilisers and chemical pesticides. She was practising monoculture, growing mostly just maize. But with this transformation came massive deforestation, soil erosion, siltation, loss of soil fertility, soil compaction, dependency on external inputs and malnutrition especially among the children. Far from solving Africa's problems, as we were taught this Green Revolution would do, things seemed only to get worse.

ZAMBIA ALLIANCE FOR AGROECOLOGY AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION (ZAABC)

Strong networks builds solidarity

On 21 May 2016, approximately 100 people, including ZAABC members, the general public, government officials and farmers, attended an awareness event in solidarity with the *Global March Against Monsanto*. The event included a keynote address by the ZAABC chairperson, Emmanuel Mutamba; a screening of the documentary, *Seeds of Freedom*; a petition launch; and the opportunity to access information and talk to experts on topics including farmer seed systems

and Zambian seed laws, agroecology and GMOs in Zambia. Public participants were enthusiastic in their engagement with the event and in their demand for more access to information. The strong support for ZAABC's work publicising and politicising seed and modern biotechnology issues in Zambia, was clear. It was also clear that there are many willing members of the public who support a GMO FREE Zambia.

Our partnership with SKI has enabled us to strengthen our network through strategic planning and capacity building workshops, and by doing a survey of members' capacity and interest in seed issues and agroecology. ZAABC has also been intensifying its

lobbying of government on seed issues and especially on GMOs, which is particularly urgent.

ZAABC is a network of 20 civil society organisations in Zambia, championing smallscale, farmer-driven agroecological farming systems and pro-poor sustainable development. By collectively advocating for agroecology, food sovereignty, and social and environmental justice in Zambia, ZAABC members have an impact at the policy level by helping shape an enabling environment for promoting and supporting these issues.

www.facebook.com/Zambia-Alliance-for-Agroecology-and-Biodiversity-Conservation-171631193172944/



Zambian and Malawi partners join the Community of Practice for a farmers' exchange in Gutu, Zimbabwe.

SOILS, FOOD AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES (SFHC)

Agroecological food systems

" In the years before 1994, we used to grow lots of local varieties and never used chemical fertilisers. When multi-party democracy arrived in Malawi, political leaders introduced the Farm Input Subsidy Programme, which promoted the use of hybrid maize seeds and chemical fertilisers. Soon afterwards, SFHC was established and started training farmers in agroecology, with the aim of growing diverse crops without chemical fertiliser and hybrid seeds. Once a year, we have a Field Day where we see how local varieties of different crops are growing without chemical fertilisers. On this day, we have drama, songs, dances and share different foods prepared from these local crops. "

MWAPI MKANDAWIRE, FARMER.

The SFHC project started in 2000 to help combat high levels of child malnutrition in the Ekwendeni community of Northern Malawi. One of our first steps was to work hand-in-hand with farmers, assisting them to incorporate legumes and small grains into their farming system because of the high nutritional value of these crops. The result is a marked improvement in child nutrition levels. We are now working with farmers to experiment with many other agroecological techniques to improve not only food

production, but also community health. Key to our success is the work we do to develop consciousness among men and women about the impact that entrenched gender roles can have on child nutrition. Awareness is the first step to changing discriminatory and harmful practices.

Ensuring a reliable source of seed is an ongoing challenge for the farmers we work with, and this is where we believe partnering with SKI will make a difference: we look forward to learn from other partners in the region who are struggling with the same issues. In exchange, we hope other SKI partners will be interested to learn about our innovative approaches to gender, and the participatory research methods we use.

SFHC is developing a training centre on the outskirts of Ekwendeni, where our offices will also be housed. The centre is situated in a peri-urban area, with the intention of being an innovative hub to address food security and sustainable living for rural and peri-urban smallholder farmers in the region. We started developing the garden around the buildings into a living training centre in early 2016. John Nzira of Ukuvuna, South Africa, provided the training and support for the permaculture design we've integrated into the centre.

<http://soilandfood.org>

SKI AND GENDER: VALUING WOMEN AND THE SEED THEY KEEP

" WE [WOMEN] MUST BE FREE TO ATTEND PROGRAMS AND WORKSHOPS, SO THAT OVER TIME WE ARE ABLE TO STAND FOR OUR COMMUNITY. IF YOU ASKED FOR A WORKSHOP-LEARN! DO NOT WASTE YOUR TIME. THINK ABOUT THE FUTURE, AND PLAN. DON'T JUST TAKE LIFE LIKE EATING WILD GUAVAS IN THE BUSH. INSTEAD, BE LIKE THE BEES. COLLECT WHAT YOU NEED FROM THE LEAVES AND FLOWERS AND MAKE HONEY. ONCE TRAINED, SHOW BY EXAMPLE. BE A LEADER IN YOUR COMMUNITY BY DOING DIFFERENT PROGRAMS, AND HELPING OTHERS AROUND YOU. STUDY YOUR COMMUNITY AND SEE WHAT THEY WANT, SO THAT AT THE END, OUR MINDS WILL GET TOGETHER TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT. I WANT TO THANK TSURO TRUST FOR INVITING ME TO THE WOMEN'S DAY FOOD FAIR. I WANT TO THANK TSURO STAFF FOR TEACHING ME AND HELPING ME CHASE AWAY POVERTY. "

TENDAI MARIJEKI, FARMER.

Most SKI partners are very aware of the impact of gender dynamics on communities, particularly on women and children. It is challenging to work with entrenched systems of discrimination on all levels of society. As part of our focus on building meaningful relationships, we will consciously work on understanding these dynamics and empowering ourselves and community members to engage with gender issues. Our Malawi partner, SFHC, has done some outstanding work on gender relationships, and SKI is planning to spread this learning to others. (See this short film narrated by Raj Patel: <http://tedmed.com/talks/show?id=529961>).

Setting the tone for SKI work into the future, Elfrieda Pschorn-Strauss (SKI Regional Coordinator) contributed an article on women and seed in Africa to the 2016 edition of Right to Food and Nutrition Watch. This article highlighted that the renewed pressure towards privatisation of land, seed and water is further threatening women's rights, and stewardship of seeds and nature. Finding ways for women to have political voice and leadership in decision-making processes concerning the life and wellbeing of their physical, social, and economic environments, is key. Ensuring continued access to seed and land means that we have to apply a gender lens to the capture and globalisation of seed and the food system. The article concludes that the current value system that prioritises seed and food for profit as opposed to seed and food for those who produce it, needs to be challenged. And women are well placed to lead in this struggle. (Download the article *African Food Sovereignty: Valuing women and the seed they keep* at <http://www.righttofoodandnutrition.org/node/96>).



SFHC Designing a eco-garden for their training centre.



Mirika Phiri with her grandchildren and field of interplanted pigeon pea and groundnuts



SFHC Designing a eco-garden for their training centre.

WHY IS SKI LEARNING?

Why is SKI so committed to learning?
Why do we plan, promote, support
and run so many learning-centred
initiatives? Why do we invite or send
people to attend field trips, seed fairs,
exchange visits, workshops, writeshops,
policy seminars, research seminars
and conferences?

Learning is the heartbeat of all we do, because we believe that the most enduring form of change in any community or society, is the kind of change that comes with learning from and acting on experience. In other words, change requires learning-centred action ... and change, at individual, community, national and global levels, is what we are all about.

So then, how do we foster learning-centred action? We try to support learning and bring about change by surfacing and sharing knowledge about seed and related issues within our partnership; by creating opportunities for experiential learning; by supporting community confidence building; and by encouraging the emergence of local seed sovereignty advocates.

Apart from ongoing learning from our direct programme work, SKI has a number of specific learning initiatives. These include: establishing a Community of Practice (CoP) for practitioners; facilitating farmer-to-farmer exchanges; creating discussion spaces for researchers and policymakers; and running writing workshops to surface stories of change and build competence in writing them. Each of these initiatives generates enormous learning, not only for the individuals involved, but also for their organisations, communities, and the partnership as a whole. One of our most exciting challenges for the new year is to document the valuable things we've learnt in a way that is useful and inspiring to others.

THE SEED AND KNOWLEDGE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE: LEARNING FROM PRACTICE

Definition: Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly¹.

Since early 2015, SKI has been gathering, training and learning from a core group of development practitioners committed to seed and agroecology.

This group has coalesced into a Community of Practice (CoP), where members debate issues, deepen their understanding, and share their ways of working (practice). We know that our understanding of the issues not only influences the quality of our work on the ground, but also the quality of research that supports advocacy work.

The CoP's most recent meeting, held in September 2016, took the form of a 'writeshop'. The word writeshop comes from combining the words writing and workshop, and is used to describe workshops where the primary purpose and method is collaborative writing. The purpose of this writeshop was to explore the idea of developing a resource manual, *The Barefoot Guide to Seed*.



1. Wenger-Trayner, E. & B. 2015. Introduction to Communities of Practice. See: <http://wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/>

WRITING WORKSHOPS: LEARNING TO WRITE AND WRITING TO LEARN

WE ARE ALL WRITERS:

A FOUND POEM²

*Writing is like carrying a bag of cement.
I am full of fear,
collecting honey while afraid of bees.
Will I learn enough to be a good writer?
I close my eyes, and
cover my face with my hands.*

*But now,
I have an appetite to write.
My magic pen dances on my paper
gently freeing ideas to flow.
Out of one word, others come.
I am a voice for the voiceless,
a light for the way.
Nothing is impossible.*

The only sound in the room was the soft scratch of pencils on paper. Twenty-one participants bent over their notebooks, completing the final exercise in an intensive five-day writing skills workshop.

In the beginning, I was just sitting hopelessly on a hard bench! Then I developed an appetite to become a writer. Now I can write to benefit readers, Festers said, during the workshop's closing reflective session.

It seemed very hard for me at first, said Saru, but I have learnt to use all my senses, and to write freely. I have learnt to write poetry, to collect phrases, to use simple words and short sentences. I have learnt the importance of sharing and revising my writing. I am now in a position to write articles and reports.

Yes, said Tendai, me too. With free writing I found it easy to write ... I just had to write what was in my head! I can stand on my own as a writer now.

The purpose of the workshop was to release and enhance participants' capacity to document their work, in a way that surfaced new insight and reminded them of things they already knew. Writing is first about exploration, discovery and learning, and then about crafting what you want to say into a form that best shares your learning with others.

I learnt that writers are not born ... anyone can learn to write, said Solomon.

POLICY-RESEARCH SEMINARS TO SHIFT THE DISCOURSE

Research, education and training to strengthen local seed and knowledge systems in Southern Africa.

Maintaining, restoring and strengthening resilient and diverse seed and knowledge systems in southern Africa.

These were the themes of SKI's most recent regional policy seminars, held in 2015 and 2016 respectively. Our annual seminars, attended by students, researchers, practitioners and policymakers from across southern Africa and internationally, aim to strengthen debate and shift discourse in favour of seed sovereignty.

The main messages distilled from presentations and debates were widely disseminated to ensure the seminar lessons are accessible to all.



SKI Context and Actors by Graphic Harvest (from the UCT Policy Seminar Series, September 2016)

2. Writing workshop facilitator, Sandra Hill, compiled this found-poem from phrases she 'found' in participants' reflective reports.



Chinyika farmers teaching visitors to make finger millet porridge. Gertrude Pswarayi



Community of Practice. Some of the participants who helped design the Barefoot Guide on Seed



Writing to learn. Solomon Mwacheza from TSURO at the writing workshop

FARMER-TO-FARMER EXCHANGES ARE AT THE HEART OF SKI

It was very cold. Showers of rain were falling on the bare red soils of Chikukwa Ward, Chimanmani, as I made my way to CELUCT's seed fair, with a heavy basket on my head. It was hard for me to move fast because the road from Matsoka was steep and slippery. But oh, it was marvellous when I finally got there. Tables were already set up for farmers to display their products. Everyone was pushing in to look for a better table. People were greeting each other, laughing, cheering and chatting about their seed while setting up their displays, empty baskets forgotten on the floor. Before long, all the tables were shinning in bright colours. Beautiful tablecloths, flowers, fruit and of course all types of traditional seed glittered on every table. But among all this noise, a quiet voice kept asking inside my heart: 'Who is going to win this serious battle?' Deep inside, I imagined, 'I'm gonna make it!'

Finally, the judges completed their work. They praised us farmers for our hard work, and explained areas of concern and how we could improve. The winners' names were then called out. I could not believe my ears when I heard my name! I was one of the top five. I won two pots, six plates, spoons and cups as my prize. I had made it. It was a wonderful feeling.

JESTINA MATSITSIRO, FARMER.

The very first big event SKI organised in 2014 was a farmer-to-farmer exchange in the Chikukwa valley. Farmers from all over Zimbabwe and from Venda and KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, visited the Chikukwa farmers. We learned about sacred sites, conflict resolution, food forests and many other important practices. On the last day, we had a seed exchange ritual and fair. Everyone left with seed, knowledge and lots of new friends.

Since then, many exchanges have happened, some very local, like the one described in the story above, and others on a more regional level. In March 2016, SKI supported farmers from eleven different communities to attend an exchange with farmers from Chinyika in the Gutu District, Zimbabwe. But the 2015/2016 season was one of the driest in years, and when the visitors arrived, the maize crop was dry and withered. Right next to the sad looking maize fields, however, were fields and fields of bright green.

How can it be? asked the visitors.

We've been planting the crops of our ancestors, the Chinyika farmers replied. Crops like this finger millet which doesn't mind such harsh conditions.

This is exactly what the visitors had come to see. They wanted to learn how a whole community had become more resilient and able to endure the long drought by shifting their agricultural practices and reintroducing traditional crops, which flourished when all others failed completely due to the drought.

But the Chinyika farmers also had something to learn from their guests, as most of the visiting farmers practiced agroecology. Conversation flowed. Farmers swapped advice, information and stories. Chinyika farmers are now looking forward to visiting CELUCT to observe and learn more about agroecology.

THE ZIMBABWE TRADITIONAL AND ORGANIC FOOD AND SEED FESTIVAL

In Harare, everyone is talking about 'going traditional', with many traditional and organic products now packaged, branded and available in supermarkets. There is a new awareness amongst people in the city that eating healthily is eating locally produced, organic foods. The Zimbabwe Traditional and Organic Food Forum (ZIMTOFF) has had a lot to do with this changing mindset.

The Forum has organised a festival at the Harare Botanical Gardens every year for the past three years. These are truly festive occasions, where good food, good friends and good music are celebrated annually.

There were dozens of stalls selling all kinds of fresh, preserved and processed products. There were stalls selling pure honey, mushrooms, quail eggs, roadrunner chickens and dried fish. There was excellent live music, dancing and fun activities for

kids. There were pop-up restaurants serving lunch. At first, I didn't know what to choose because there was such an exciting range of food on offer. Some of it was deep traditional stuff such as rupiza (roasted and crushed cowpea dish), hanga (guinea fowl) stew, mufushwa ne dovi (dried vegetables in peanut butter) and mupunga (traditional rice). But there were also new foods made from traditional ingredients such as baobab ice cream, tsenza (Livingstone potato) puffs, madhumbe (yams) chips and marula nut biscotti! I also tried lots of unusual soft drinks, my favourite being rosella iced tea. It was so refreshing.

FESTIVAL GOER.

Seeing the huge opportunity to promote seed, SKI began collaborating with the organisers in 2015. Our ambition was to mainstream seed and seed farmers into this prestigious event. Farmers have since displayed and sold traditional seeds at every festival. This gave festival goers a chance to buy a wide range of traditional seed varieties, some of which they had not seen for years.

Farmers came from all over the country with their seeds, from Binga, Bulilima, and Chimanimani. It was amazing to see so many different types of cowpeas, nyimo beans, sorghum, millet, mapudzi (squashes) and melon seeds of all different sizes, shapes and colours on display.

FESTIVAL GOER.

The festival also gave the public a chance to meet producers and processors, buy seed, and see traditional ingredients prepared in innovative ways. It was an opportunity to better link farmers and consumers in the struggle for healthier, fairer and eco-friendly food systems in Zimbabwe.

Beautifully produced publications filled with delicious recipes and interesting facts continue to help spread the word and fan interest. Check these out on their Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/TOFFZim/>

You are invited to join the fun at the 2017 Food and Seed Festival in Harare!



ZIMSOFF farmers at the Food and Seed Festival

LOOKING FORWARD

As we are putting this newsletter together, we are in the midst of a mid-term review with SKI partners.

We are also preparing for a SKI partners meeting which will be held in Scottburgh, south of Durban in South Africa, from 22-23 February 2017. This is the first opportunity for SKI partners and the coordination team to collectively take a step back and consider how it has been going. It is also a chance to envision and agree on the way forward, together.

We need to interrogate our strategies and methods and challenge these as we develop new insights. It is now important to collectively agree on how we can achieve the greatest impact, over the next two years at least. Most partners have focused on strengthening community seed systems at the point where seed originates: in farmers' fields and in household seed banks. However, if we do not also proactively shift discourse on all levels, within our education system, and on a policy level in particular, we may find the

obstacles farmers face overwhelmingly stacked against them. We all need to advocate for change, on whatever level we are able to operate. And collectively we will have a much greater impact.

What is coming up for SKI? One of the most exciting challenges in the year ahead is finding and implementing ways to build our capacity to effectively document and communicate what we are learning throughout the partnership. The processes of research and writing, as well as their end products, are important to us. We want the processes of research and writing to deepen our learning and result in compelling publications which inform and inspire others towards seed sovereignty and social justice. We have a particularly exciting collaborative writing project on the go called *The Barefoot Guide to Seed*. At UCT, a scholarly book written by both academics and activists is also in the pipeline.

In the years ahead, we will shift our focus to support participatory research in collaboration with partners. The aim will be to question and validate some of our



Juliane Ineichen and Bulisani Ncube from SDC admiring ... Thombitini Ndwandwe's seed

assumptions and also to generate data that can feed into policy debates. Good data generated through participatory processes underpins an effective monitoring and evaluation system for SKI. But most importantly, it empowers farmers to generate their own data and visualise the change they want to see in quantitative and qualitative terms.

Another exciting focus for 2017 is proactively learning more about gender issues. We plan to expose SKI partners to SFHC's approach to gender in their work in Malawi, and incorporate this more fully into the partnership. Some partners are planning to develop a deeper understanding of how the HIV/Aids epidemic impacts on communities and their approach to working with affected households.

CTDT, in Zimbabwe, has developed extensive capacity on methods such as participatory plant breeding and the establishment and running of community seed banks. We are looking forward to working with them on transferring this knowledge to a wider network of practitioners in the region through SKI partners.

Part of what SKI does is to look for new ideas, new connections, new ways of doing things, and we will continue doing this. But we will also strive to consolidate what we have started over the past two years, and to give the time needed to observe change, the anticipated and overt change, as well as the more subtle and unplanned changes.

The SKI partnership has many friends and collaborators who we've told you about in this newsletter. It would have been challenging to implement an initiative of this scale without you, and without the longterm commitment and support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). We also welcome Brot für die Welt, which came on board in 2016, supporting SKI to extend our partnership into Zambia and Malawi. We thank these funders for their support and understanding. We are also grateful to Biowatch, for taking on the enormous task of all fiduciary responsibility for SKI and for the high levels of accountability that underpins the way Biowatch works.

Our journey may not be a sea voyage, and we may not have a Bengal Tiger in our SKI-shaped boat. But nonetheless, we are on a journey into the unknown, a critical journey towards resilience. As we continue the struggle to which we are committed, as we celebrate our achievements and the harvest of our work, let us continue to value the intangible and deeper meaning of seed, land, culture and nature as a whole and share this with the world.

As the SKI coordination team, we are most grateful to be surrounded by so many diverse and dedicated colleagues, farmers and friends. Thank you for climbing on board and joining the SKI journey.

The Seed and Knowledge Initiative Facebook page is a space for information sharing :
<https://web.facebook.com/groups/1044842145575100/>

