



One Woman, One Hectare:
Land Reform is crucial for Food Justice!

2024

A four-part series by the



Intro:

WhyHunger's Food Justice Voices series was created to support and amplify the voices of people working to regain control of their communities' food system. This Food Justice Voices series from the Rural Women's Assembly (RWA), a self-organised network or alliance of rural women in the SADC, uplifts the stories of struggle and resilience of women on the front lines of food sovereignty, the climate crisis, land rights, feminism and seed saving. Click [here](#) to view this multi-part series.

About The Rural Women's Assembly:

The Rural Women's Assembly (RWA) is a self-organised network or alliance of national rural women's movements, assemblies, grassroots organisations and chapters of mixed peasant unions, federations and movements across ten countries in the SADC region. Since 2009, we have gathered together poor, rural women into regional Rural Women's Assemblies; into international platforms coinciding with major multi-lateral events, such as COP 17 and Rio +20; and into regional lobbying processes that have run parallel to SADC meetings, as well. National chapters of the RWA have also organised their own lobbying events and activities to coincide with important national meetings, summits and on international days, such as International Rural Women's Day and International Women's Day.

Learn more:

<https://ruralwomensassembly.wordpress.com/> and
<https://www.seeds-savers.org/>



My child, life is going to be so expensive. You must grow your own vegetables to provide for your family.”

Those are the words Reinette Heunis’ late mother Eva shared with her from a young age which ignited Reinette’s love for growing her own food.

Today, Reinette is farming full time with five women on one hectare of leased land in the small rural town of Suurbrak in the Western Cape in South Africa. “My father passed on when I was seven years old. My mother then started taking me with her to work. She was a farm worker on a nearby farm where they produced mainly vegetables. I was around 12 years old when I had to start working in the garden - we all had to,” explains Reinette.

After joining the Mawubuye Land Rights Forum, Reinette was part of collective of land reform activists who established a nursery in Suurbrak in 2014. In 2019, they launched an aquaponics site. Depending on the season, vegetables such as cabbage, sweet potatoes, broccoli, lettuce, spinach, beetroot, butternut and cauliflower are harvested. The women distribute seedlings to rural households to bolster food security, localise food production and strengthen livelihoods. They sell their surplus produce on local markets providing an alternative to the dominance of grocery retailers which inflate prices and are expensive to travel to in rural areas.



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These seeds I have in my hand, have been passed down from my late mother. It is important to learn how to save our traditional seeds. It's important to me that I pass down these seeds to my children so that they can take our seed traditions into the future.”

The site has a worm farm which produces worm tea to create organic fertiliser, ensuring no need for synthetic farming inputs. “We don't use any unnatural pesticides, only natural pesticides that we make ourselves such as garlic and chilli water.” As members of the Rural Women's Assembly (RWA) the women are active campaigners for the *One Woman, One Hectare* campaign and seed saving. Reinette explains that some of the seeds they farm with have been in her family for decades. “These seeds I have in my hand, have been passed down from my late mother. It is important to learn how to save our traditional seeds. It's important to me that I pass down these seeds to my children so that they can take our seed traditions into the future.”

2023 marks 110 years since the passing of the notorious Natives Land Act of 1913

in South Africa which “went beyond just dispossessing people of their land, it closed avenues of livelihood for Africans other than to work for white farmers and industrialists”^[1] especially for mining. Post 1994, the pace of land redistribution and reform has been sluggish, especially for women. A Presidential Panel on Land Reform and Agriculture found that between 1994 and March 2018 land redistribution “progress amounts to under 10% of all commercial farmland, over 23 years, compared to the initial target of 30% by 2014.”^[2] The report further concluded that “women are marginalised within the land redistribution programme, constituting less than a quarter”. Government's policies and funding favour commercial export-oriented farming while small-scale farmers, including those practising agroecology, receive limited to no support.

Many land and food justice activists argue that the lack of land reform and the almost exclusive emphasis on commercial export farming is contributing to food insecurity, undermining food sovereignty and forfeiting food justice. **In South Africa, about 1 in 5 households do not have enough food for their families.** Alarming, about 27% of children under the age of five suffer from stunting, a result of acute malnutrition which results in “irreversible physical and cognitive



damage caused by persistent nutritional deprivations.”^[3] Stunting levels are higher in rural areas and the cruel irony is that many of those who go hungry in rural areas are farm workers and their families, forced to survive off meagre wages from about three months of seasonal work a year.

Post 1994 has brought with it a new era of land dispossession in the form of land grabs by multinationals in cahoots with different levels of government and traditional authorities in former homeland areas. These are areas which were established as reserves for black people during Apartheid. Farming communities have been subjected to a new wave of tenure insecurity and evictions. Since 1994, more than one million farm workers, farm dwellers and other labour tenants have been evicted from largely white owned farms. These evictions have led to a growing number of rural informal settlements in farming areas characterised by unemployment, poverty, landlessness and a lack of basic services.

One such rural informal settlement is Zolani in the Western Cape. It is about 80 km away from Suurbrak and situated between two affluent rural towns, Robertson and Montague in the Langeberg Municipality, part of the famous Cape Winelands District. The district has a thriving wine and agricultural industry. Despite this, life is a daily battle for survival for most residents of rural townships in the district and with





South Africa's youth unemployment rate at a shocking 46,5%, seasonal farm work is often the only option for young people in Zolani.

But seven years ago, a collective of ten young land activists took matters into their own hands. They started a guerilla food garden on an unoccupied piece of land just outside the township. "We don't have any sort of lease. We tried to find out from the municipality whether or not this land is owned by them or somebody else. We never got an answer," explains Rural Women's Assembly member Sheriff Ramoabi. The young farmers grow various vegetables, depending on the season, such as cabbage, spinach, green beans, varieties of lettuce, tomatoes, mielies and peppers as well as various Indigenous herbs. The guerilla farming collective recently also included livestock such as cows, pigs and some chickens.

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Once we are able to harvest the produce that we have on the piece of land, we are able to go out into the location and to other neighbouring towns and sell our produce.”

The Rural Women's Assembly *One Woman, One Hectare* campaign "became an opportunity for us to use and utilise the space for something better" and the collective "created more guerilla gardens within this piece of land," she adds. The young farmers practise agroecology, making healthier options which are free from hazardous pesticides more affordable and locally accessible as an act of resistance to the growing corporate control of local food systems, "once we are able to harvest the produce that we have on the piece of land, we are able to go out into the location and to other neighbouring towns and sell our produce."

The guerilla garden has "become an inspiring space for the youth that live within Zolani, like myself," says Sheriff. She adds that the space has helped to "develop a better mindset that as young people - with the lack of jobs and high rate of unemployment - agriculture and farming is a solution..."

Land reform is crucial to ensure food justice. "For me, with the *One Woman, One Hectare*, it is key that we do a lot of education and advocacy work to make sure that women in rural communities get access to land. We also motivate women - that open piece of land - we need to use the land! We need to occupy this land so that we can make sure that we are growing vegetables," concludes Reinette. ■

[1] <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/natives-land-act-1913>

[2] https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201907/panelreportlandreform_1.pdf

[3] <https://southafrica.un.org/en/123531-slow-violence-malnutrition-south-africa#:~:text=In%20South%20Africa%2C%2027%25%20of,caused%20by%20persistent%20nutritional%20deprivations.>



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to ensure food justice.”**





Rural Women's Assembly

Guardians of Land, Life, Seed and Love.

Learn more:

<https://ruralwomensassembly.wordpress.com/>
and <https://www.seeds-savers.org/>



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