



**“We are Facing Food Shortages”**  
Climate Justice is 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/>



### **Tropical Cyclone Freddy was particularly catastrophic for the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) region.**

Chair of the Rural Women’s Assembly (RWA) in Zimbabwe, Thandiwe Chidavarume, explains that when Cyclone Freddy hit many RWA members were still trying to “heal from the effects of Cyclone Idai, the effects of Cyclone Anna and even the effects of the storm that hit our sisters in South Africa in KwaZulu Natal. Now we are faced with Cyclone Freddy. As RWA, we depend on agriculture, we are the backbone of agriculture in our countries. We produce food but our production now has become low because of this climate change.”

Cyclone Freddy first made landfall on 21 February 2023 in Madagascar. It then furiously stormed through parts of Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe. Climate researcher Professor Guy Midgley says that **Cyclone Freddy set the record for the longest lasting tropical cyclone in recorded history** and “it did something really disastrous when it got to our Continent.” Professor Midgley explains that Cyclone Freddy “strengthened again and then it moved back onto the mainland further north. No cyclone has ever done that. That is unique behaviour. When it moved offshore we thought it was going to go away but it strengthened again and it came back.” Oxfam described Cyclone Freddy as “one of the deadliest storms to hit the continent in the last two decades” leaving over one thousand people dead, displacing thousands and decimating “over one million acres of crop land”.<sup>[1]</sup>



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In the immediate aftermath, the Southern African Rural Women’s Assembly hosted a Climate Emergency regional dialogue during March 2023 to discuss the cyclone’s impact on RWA members and how the movement could provide solidarity. Over 700 rural women farmers from eleven SADC countries including Eswantini, Namibia, Malawi, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Madagascar, Lesotho, Mozambique, Angola and Tanzania participated in the hybrid gathering.

Rural Women’s Assembly member, Clara, explained that in Zomba and Chirajuru in Malawi, “over 5 000 members have been affected by the cyclone and over 2,000 members” lost their crops. “Their houses have been demolished by the flood, even their relatives, some of them are dead. They don’t have food at the moment. People are really suffering,” she adds.

A webinar participant from Zimbabwe added that the rural women farmers were, “losing livestock like goats, rabbits - we are losing what we worked for... As rural women we survive by farming and some of our fields were destroyed, thus double loss. We buy expensive inputs, we spend our time working in the fields only to be destroyed by cyclones.”

In Madagascar’s Toliara II area, most crops were damaged and members of RWA in Madagascar and Femme en Action Rurale de Madagascar (FARM) in Madagascar were among those worst affected. In a video produced by FARM, it was narrated that the rural women farmers were anxious to be “self-sufficient in terms of food security and food sovereignty” and that “we are not food sovereign because we are not eating suitable food in order to prevent dying of starvation.”





“We have lost our seeds. We have lost our crops. We have suffered enough because of climate change,” Thandiwe concurred.

Amjad Ali, Oxfam in Southern Africa Programme Director, explains that the floods “washed away everything, leaving farmers with nothing to harvest. Families told us they have nothing to grow ahead of the winter as they lost their seeds, harvest and agricultural tools forcing them to make desperate decisions to survive.”<sup>[2]</sup>

In the regional climate crisis dialogue, Southern African RWA members resolved to set up a Climate Crisis Solidarity Fund to provide financial support to survivors in the immediate term. Each country chapter was tasked with collecting money from RWA members and a committee with representatives from each country chapter was established to distribute the funds. Alongside the fundraising, RWA members would also collect appropriate Indigenous and traditional seeds for those farmers who had lost their seeds. RWA delegations would visit some of the affected areas to hand over the money, seeds and other farming essentials.

The first Climate Crisis Solidarity delegation were members of RWA Zambia visited the affected areas in Malawi to hand over the cash, clothes, early harvest winter seeds and other farming tools. A delegation of eight RWA Zimbabwe members travelled to Boane and Zambezia in Mozambique.

Alice Kachere from the Rural Women Assembly explained that what the delegations witnessed was very distressing. The immediate humanitarian aid in terms of food and other basic supplies from SADC governments and international aid organisations, while welcomed, was simply not enough.

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**We have lost our seeds. We have lost our crops. We have suffered enough because of climate change..”**

— *Thandiwe Chidavarume*

“Cyclone Freddy victims are starving to death because they lack basic necessities like food, shelter, and other necessities. The worst part is that they have lost all of their crops,” adds Alice.

“We had many disasters in the last period, so we have a way of building solidarity, of holding hands and reaching out,” says Mercia Andrews, the Southern African Rural Women’s Assembly regional coordinator.

The responsibility of supporting survivors of climate disasters and assisting the rebuilding of lives and livelihoods should not be left to governments, international aid organisations and solidarity amongst rural women.

Wealthy polluting countries need to be held accountable and be forced to stop evading their responsibility for the climate crisis.

The demand for climate justice in the form of reparations (and not loans) from those most responsible for the crisis has never been more urgent. The climate emergency is escalating the collapse of food production and food systems across the SADC region. Climate justice reparations will help to realise food justice for rural communities who lost seeds, crops and farming tools to grow food for their households and communities. Food justice should include compensation for rural communities’ seed, crop and farming infrastructure losses. It is essential to fast track financial assistance to restart food

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production, rebuild livelihoods and local food systems to help resume food sovereignty as swiftly as possible.

The industrial agribusiness model of food production is not the answer to the climate induced hunger crisis since it is destructive to the environment and produces unhealthy as well as unaffordable food. Industrial farming practices also share responsibility for greenhouse emissions which has led to the warming of the planet and the climate crisis. Agribusiness further undermines local Food Sovereignty, displacing small-scale farmers by grabbing land, water and other resources. Climate justice funds are urgently needed to fund more climate resilient and sustainable practices such as agroecology and early warning systems.

Food Sovereignty, enabled by agroecology, is key to food and climate justice as well as a more climate resilient present and future. Polluters must pay, NOW! ■

[1] <https://www.oxfam.org.nz/news-media/media-releases/100-days-since-cyclone-freddy/>

[2] Ibid



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### **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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Food Justice **Voices**