

Food Justice Voices



## Towards a Feminist Agroecological Practice

2024

A four-part series by the



Rural Women's Assembly

# 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/>



**All over the world, there are countless farmers, peasants, artisanal fishers, and more mobilising and organising around agroecology to realise food justice and oppose agri-business' control and takeover of our food system.**

**The Southern African Rural Women's Assembly (RWA) joins global radical farmers who participate in the Agroecology movement.**

As rural women farmers, we know that Feminist Agroecology is integral to our struggles to achieve food justice. Rural women farmers are the guardians of Indigenous knowledge and practices. It is common knowledge that rural women have already been practising agroecology, without necessarily naming it as such, and a lot of the innovations done by women in agroecology are not recognised. Despite this, through learning and exchanging knowledge, rural women continue the task of transferring their knowledge about agroecology to future generations.



**There is much still to do to advance Feminist Agroecology in Southern Africa, but as the women Rural Women's Assembly of Southern Africa remain resolute in our role as the, "Guardians of Land, Life, Seed and Love" and will continue to forge firmly ahead.**

— *Guardians of Land, Life, Seed and Love*

Who produces food, how food is produced, processed, distributed, sold and acquired are key political questions and sites of struggle in the 21st Century. Agriculture is one of the key areas where capitalism is trying to maximise profits. As a result, our food systems worldwide are being increasingly industrialised and controlled by agri-business multinational corporations (MNCs), turning food into a market commodity that millions cannot afford. This violates people's inherent right to food and right to life, creating greater poverty and household food insecurity and unprecedented levels of hunger worldwide.

Industrial agriculture is also poisoning our bodies, our environments and attempting to make smallholder farmers consumers of and dependent on inputs (e.g.: seeds, fertilisers, pesticides) supplied by agri-business often with the support of subsidies from our governments. The use of these inputs (which rely on fossil fuels) and large-scale destruction of forests across the world is also one of the main contributors to climate change. Agriculture in developing countries in the global South (Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America) is specifically targeted. MNCs and some funders also target smallholder farmers and put them under pressure to "modernise." They promote local projects based on the 'Green Revolution',



dependent on the purchase of 'improved seeds', GMOs, and industrial fertilisers and pesticides. These destroy biodiversity and poison our soils. Once farmers start using these inputs it is very difficult to reverse these processes and stop dependency.

All this is creating havoc in rural areas. And rural women are often the most badly affected, as we are traditionally responsible for the production of food and for providing care in their households. **Despite our crucial role in food production, a shocking number of rural women and their families suffer from hunger and malnutrition.** This glaring disparity between the indispensable role we play in feeding the world and our own food insecurity is a grave injustice.

But even in the agroecology movement, control over land and markets remains largely in the hands of our male counterparts. This is why our movement sees it as important to practise Feminist Agroecology since women constitute most rural farmers.

RWA farmers not only practise Feminist Agroecology, but we are also involved in various projects to raise awareness and build consciousness about Feminist Agroecology. One such initiative is the RWA Feminist School. RWA's first ever Feminist Agroecology School took place on August 2022 in Zimbabwe, with the second school hosted in Zambia in September 2023. The RWA's annual Feminist School which brings together hundreds of rural women smallholder farmers and food producers across the SADC region, is focused on deepening the women's agroecological practise and capacity as food producers in the face of climate change, hunger and poverty. RWA





also hosts regular regional virtual teach-ins with sometimes close to 1,000 rural women across the ten SADC countries gathering in groups in classrooms, under a tree or in their fields to participate.

Feminist Agroecology is about having access not only to sufficient food, but to food which is culturally appropriate and produced in an ecologically sustainable manner. Feminist Agroecology challenges the power of the dominant model of industrial agriculture and profit-driven food system and consequently the patriarchal system sustaining capitalist relations of production. At the same time, it restores women's relationship with key bio-systems creating a nurturing harmony with the land, soil, water and the minerals upon which all species depend.

**Women, especially rural women, can no longer be excluded from decision making in food systems at local levels or in their households.** For the RWA, Feminist Agroecology intends to address unequal power relations between men and women in the food systems as well as affirming women's historical contribution to seed and food sovereignty. It is essential that women are mobilised and sensitised to challenge unequal land ownership patterns. Furthermore, women must also challenge

the manner in which industrial agriculture continues to create and exacerbate social inequalities and hunger which impacts the most vulnerable. It is about women's self-determination and reclaiming control of one's own food, land, and body — rights which have been stripped from the majority of producers by a productivist and profit-driven industrial agricultural paradigm.

The RWA promotes Feminist Agroecology to strengthen the coherence between caring for nature, seeds, trees, medicinal herbs, good food production and achieving food justice. For us, Feminist Agroecology allows women to reinforce, recover, improve and finally guarantee vigorous and sustainable productive processes and further nurture their relationship to nature and mother earth. We as rural women will continue to conserve, save, store and share traditional seeds and use traditional varieties, to advance the food justice imperative.

There is much still to do to advance Feminist Agroecology in Southern Africa, but as the women Rural Women's Assembly of Southern Africa remain resolute in our role as the, "Guardians of Land, Life, Seed and Love" and will continue to forge firmly ahead. ■



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### **Rural Women's Assembly**

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**Learn more:**

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



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