SeedChange

JOTTINGS



Jottings is the name our founder, ***Dr. Lotta Hitschmanova****, gave to the stories she captured in her leather-bound notebook while visiting programs around the world. Sharing these jottings with supporters has been a tradition since 1945.*

Agroecology: A Catalyst for Change

HOLIDAYS 2024

GREETINGS FROM SEEDCHANGE'S PROGRAM DIRECTORS



JEFF DE JONG
DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

As the year winds down, we reflect on the transformative power of agroecology across our global programs. Agroecology is more than a set of farming practices; it's an approach and philosophy that empowers communities to rebuild equitable and resilient food systems from the ground up.

This holiday season, we celebrate the rural women and smallholder farmers who champion these methods, restoring the land and revitalizing local economies. Together, we're witnessing sustainable, lasting change that transcends borders and has become a credible global movement. Thank you for supporting SeedChange as we work alongside these farmers to foster a future where communities and ecosystems thrive in harmony.





AABIR DEY
DIRECTOR, CANADIAN PROGRAM

In Canada, the holiday season is a moment to reflect on the interconnectedness of food, land, and people. Agroecology stands at the heart of this connection, guiding our work to empower Canadian farmers to preserve seed diversity, improve soil health, and strengthen local food security.

As we champion seed security nationwide, we are reminded of the power of agroecology to bring transformation to farms, communities, and ecosystems. Thank you for your partnership in building a more resilient, diverse, and sustainable food system across Canada. Together, we're planting the seeds of a better future.



AGROECOLOGY

WHAT IS IT?

Agroecology is a holistic approach to farming that combines ecological principles with sustainable agricultural practices. At its core, agroecology focuses on working in harmony with nature, rather than against it, to create food systems that are productive, just, resilient, and friendly to the environment.

PRINCIPLES

ECOLOGICAL BALANCE



Agroecology seeks to mimic natural ecosystems in agriculture. It uses crop rotation, composting, agroforestry, natural pest management, and other natural processes to reduce reliance on chemical inputs and grow crops in ways that restore the ecological health of the planet.

BIODIVERSITY



Agroecology recognizes that diverse, regionally-adapted seeds are a key driver of biodiversity and the foundation of sustainable food systems. Preserving existing seed varieties and developing new ones enhances genetic diversity and strengthens the resilience of farming systems.

SUSTAINABILITY



By reducing dependence on chemical inputs and fossil fuels, agroecological practices aim to conserve natural resources and minimize environmental impact for future generations.

SOCIAL JUSTICE



Agroecology goes beyond just farming techniques. It advocates for fair access to land, empowerment of marginalized farmers and local communities, and preservation of cultural, traditional, and Indigenous knowledge.

RESILIENCE



Through diverse, adaptive practices, agroecology builds the capacity of farming systems to withstand and adapt to climate change, economic pressures, and other challenges.



Amina Agustin Mzelu, Farmer and Chair of the Matumaini Group, tends to her field in Kikundi Village, Morogoro, Tanzania.

AGROECOLOGY: A VIABLE PATH FOR WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

In Morogoro, Tanzania, **Amina Mzelu** stands as a testament to the transformative power of agroecology, championed by PELUM Tanzania — a valued partner in the Rural Women Cultivating Change (RWCC) project led by SeedChange. Before receiving training, Amina practiced conventional agriculture, relying on modern seeds and chemical inputs that drained her resources and left her yields unpredictable. Today, her fields tell a different story — one of abundance, resilience, and empowerment.

"We were using modern seeds, but thanks to the training, we are now using Indigenous seeds," Amina explains. "When you plant Indigenous seeds, they are resistant to drought." This shift has not only increased her yields, but has also provided her family with enough food for both consumption and storage. Her experience is mirrored by others in her community, such as Maria P. Mgaba, who attests, **"I used to harvest four sacks of maize, but now I harvest 30 sacks from two hectares."**

Agroecology's benefits extend beyond yield. The training has empowered women like Amina and her neighbours to reclaim leadership roles in their communities.

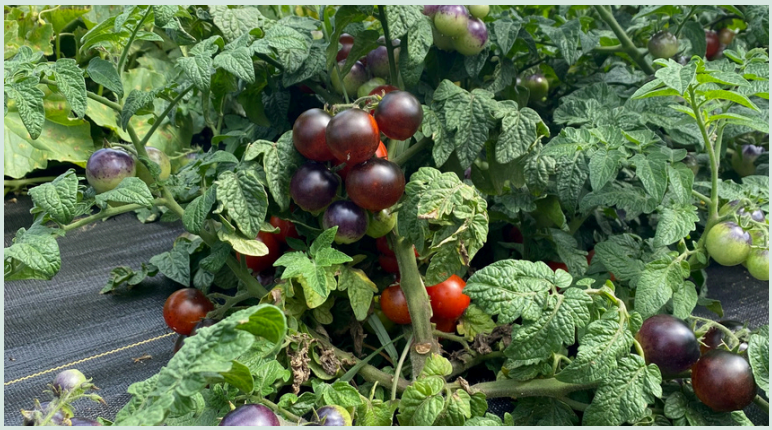
"In the past, we did not know the meaning of leadership for a woman," Amina shares. "Now, the village chairman and doctor are women. We are proud."

The transition to sustainable practices has also fortified the community against climate challenges. Indigenous seeds and organic composts resist pests and drought, and line spacing techniques enhance productivity. For farmers like Amina, this has meant relief from pest attacks and improved food security.

Through agroecology, Amina and her peers are cultivating more than crops — they are growing resilience, equity, and hope for a sustainable future. Their stories exemplify the profound impact of localized, ecological farming practices on livelihoods and communities.

DEVELOPING SEED FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Seed breeding plays a key role in developing crops that are resilient to climate change, pests, and diseases — safeguarding the reliability and adaptability of our food systems for generations to come.





Farmer Nikola Barsoum, showing off Lil Red N Black tomatoes growing at Fertile Ground Farm in Ontario. Photo Credit: Duane Falk.

For thousands of years, farmers have carefully selected and adapted seeds from their best crops to grow stronger plants, creating diversity, resilience, and flavour for future generations of farmers and eaters.

A great example is Lil Red N Black, a cherry tomato variety developed by **Duane Falk** and **Vita Gaike** at Mimosa Research Farm in Ontario. Their goal was to create a cherry tomato that was not only beautiful and delicious, but also highly productive, resilient, and easy to manage. By crossing Dwarf Red Cherry with Indigo Black through multiple breeding generations, Lil Red N Black was born.

Lil Red N Black grows vigorously, regardless if they are grown in a container or field. They start bearing fruit early in the season up until the last frost, making them extremely productive. They produce a cherry-sized, near-black fruit that then shows a rich red when fully ripe.

They are also resistant to late blight and most other common tomato diseases.

This tomato was showcased at SeedChange's Ontario Demonstration Garden at Fertile Ground Farm, where it made a strong impression. Seed farmer **Kim Delaney** was so impressed with the variety that she decided to offer it commercially. You can now purchase seeds for this special variety through her company, Hawthorn Farm Organic Seeds.

Developing new, resilient varieties through agroecology and careful breeding is crucial for building a better food system — one that is rich in diversity and can withstand the challenges of climate change.

A LIFE-CHANGING SHIFT IN THE HILLS OF HONDURAS





Simeona's farm before and after implementing the agroecology practices learned through the Seeds of Survival Program in Honduras.

Only a couple of years ago, **Simeona Pérez Hernández**'s and **Maria Nery Gonzales Martinez**'s farms looked nothing like they do today. They struggled to grow a few annual crops, mostly corn and beans, which required heavy use of chemicals. The land was poor and their meager yields weren't enough to sustain their families.

But, in 2022, everything changed for Simeona and Nery when they joined the Seeds of Survival program. With guidance from CIAL, SeedChange's local partner in Honduras, they learned to manage pests without chemicals. They were introduced to agroecological practices and agroforestry. They learned to diversify their crops, integrating foods that are more nutritious and have more economic value. Their fields now grow maize, beans, coffee, avocados, and bananas.

"I can now grow food without harmful chemicals," says Simeona. "We manage pests naturally and are no longer dependent on external inputs. It has transformed our production and improved my family's food security."

The shift went beyond simply farming techniques. Simeona and Nery became recognized leaders in their community, respected for their agricultural knowledge and capabilities. **"The learning experience has transformed the way I think, and it has transformed my and my family's life,"** says Nery.

Their commitment to sustainable agriculture has inspired other women to follow suit, strengthening the resilience of their community. Through their hard work, Simeona and Nery have created a legacy of sustainability, proving that, with determination and the right resources, transformative change is possible.

The lush, green fields that now thrive under Simeona's and Nery's care stand as a powerful testament to what women can achieve when empowered to lead the way toward sustainable change. These changes are the basis for the transformation of food systems towards sustainability and equity.

BERNARD DIENE NDOUR: A LEGACY OF PASSION AND DEDICATION



"In 2024, the challenges are even greater than when I joined the organization seven years ago. Biodiversity loss, climate change, and global inequities are more pressing than ever. But that also makes SeedChange's work more vital than ever."

For seven transformative years, **Bernard Diene Ndour** dedicated his expertise and passion to SeedChange, serving as Treasurer on the Board and guiding the organization with vision and integrity. When asked why he chose to engage with SeedChange and devote so much of his time, he explained, **"I was seduced by the work SeedChange does with seeds — which are the starting point of the entire food chain. As someone who values justice, I also deeply resonated with the organization's commitment to equity and to empowering farmers, particularly in rural areas of the world."**

Bernard's connection to seeds and agriculture runs deep. Growing up in Senegal, he witnessed the labour and care his family invested in growing their food. Those early experiences gave him a profound appreciation for seeds and the farmers who sustain us. **"Too often, people take seeds for granted. They go to the grocery store without wondering where their food comes from. This work around seeds is vital because it impacts everything — our food, our health, the well-being of our families, and the lives of others, be it our neighbours next door or across the globe,"** he said.

As a Board member, Bernard felt proud to be part of an organization committed to empowering small-scale farmers and preserving biodiversity at a time when the world needs it most. **"In 2024, the challenges are even greater than when I started. Biodiversity loss, climate change, and global inequities are more pressing than ever. But that also makes SeedChange's work more vital than ever."**

Reflecting on the future, Bernard shared his hope that SeedChange's impact will continue to expand. **"I hope more people will engage with SeedChange and jump in on this journey, whether by donating, by being involved with the Board, or by sharing its work and mission with others."**

As Bernard's term on the Board comes to an end, we are deeply grateful for his extraordinary service and dedication. His legacy is an inspiration for all of us to continue sowing seeds of change with the same passion and drive he has shown.

Join us in honouring Bernard's commitment by supporting a vision of a world where sustainable agriculture is the norm and food and seed systems thrive.

PLANTING THE SEEDS OF TOMORROW

As we look toward the new year, we remain steadfast in our commitment to empowering small-scale farmers, safeguarding biodiversity, and fostering climate resilience through agroecology.

If you feel inspired, we invite you to join us in planting the seeds of tomorrow.

Together, we can cultivate a brighter future where communities thrive and sustainable food systems are the norm.

Thank you for helping make this vision a reality.



Ways you can support this life-changing work:

Donate online. It's easy, fast, safe, and secure:
weseedchange.org/donate

Call our toll-free number:
1-800-565-6872 and **press 101**

Mail your cheque to SeedChange:
56 Sparks Street, Suite 600, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5B1

SeedChange

We are a registered Canadian charity: 11927-6129-RR-0001

SeedChange was founded by Dr. Lotta Hitschmanova, in 1945, as the Unitarian Service Committee of Canada (USC Canada).

79 years of impact

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