

SPARKS OF A NEW ECONOMY



**How communities are living out values
of an economy that centres wellbeing**

A message from ASHISH KOTARI

A People- and Planet-friendly Economy is Already in the Making!

As the intersecting crises of planetary ecological collapse, wars and conflicts, authoritarian states, class inequality and social deprivation, stare at us in the face, there is a desperate search for alternatives. Are there pathways of decision-making and economy that can lead us out of these crises, while also tackling the challenges of patriarchy, racism, casteism and new forms of colonialism? Do we have practical and conceptual alternatives that can also help us heal the rift with nature created by half a millennium of colonial and neo-colonial destruction?

This tastefully designed little publication says: 'yes!' The stories it features, all from the global South, are of previously deprived and marginalized people (women, girls, Indigenous people, landless, unorganized workers), who mobilise to transform their lives towards greater economic security and self-reliance. In this they are often helped by civil society groups or individuals from outside, but it is ultimately their own confidence, strength, knowledge and wisdom that establishes their initiative on a firm footing. We read of rural urban women who are now managing their own cooperatives or companies, pastoral and Indigenous communities enhancing their local resource-based livelihoods, women contributing significantly to better community and individual health through improved economic status, urban communities combining enhanced livelihoods with cultural activities, and more.

The booklet brings out several common 'threads' across these diverse stories: centering care, empowering women and girls, nurturing the commons, reducing environmental harm, well-being in various forms, participatory decision-making and sharing power, building resilience, sharing wealth, intergenerational transfer of knowledge and culture, and growing and accessing food sustainably. It shows that scale can be achieved through governmental policy shifts that support such initiatives.

The intersectional nature of transformation also comes out clearly. While dealing primarily with 'economic' solutions that communities are practicing on the ground, these stories also have glimpses of

political, ecological, cultural and social transformations that are necessary for the economy to work for people and the planet. In India and elsewhere we see this as a 'Flower of Transformation', with five intersecting petals - radical political democracy, economic democracy, cultural and knowledge diversity, social justice and well-being, and ecological resilience and regeneration.¹ At the core of this Flower are ethics or values that form the foundation of transformation: equity, justice, human rights and the rights of nature, diversity, solidarity, commons, and so on. One glimpses many of these petals and values in the stories featured here.

I would have liked to see brief mention in each of the stories about the challenges they face in sustaining such transformations, as also on the problem of running up against capitalist and statist power that many such initiatives face when trying to reach scale. Or perhaps a listing of further resources where one could find these elements. But in reading about the struggles through which they all emerged, one can get some glimpse of these challenges.

Overall, the stories are compelling enough to make readers believe, or at least have a seed sowed in their minds, of the possibility of an economy that works for all humans and the planet.

We need many more such accounts from across the world; at a modest level some of us have been trying this through initiatives like Vikalp Sangam in India and more worldwide, Radical Ecological Democracy and the Global Tapestry of Alternatives.² This publication by Oxfam is a very welcome addition to the growing search for, and visibilisation of, real alternatives that centre people from the global South.

Ashish Kothari

Vikalp Sangam and Global Tapestry of Alternatives
<https://ashishkothari.in>

FOREWORD

By the Huairou Commission

Oxfam Novib and the Huairou Commission have a historical commitment to economic systems change: to address the root causes of socio-economic inequality. In the FAIR for All program, we have joined efforts to build support for a new economic narrative – one that is centred on the wellbeing of people and planet rather than unfettered growth, profit and extraction.

This publication showcases several such approaches. We named it Sparks of a New Economy to attract readers to these innovative ideas for reimagining our economic system. All around the world – most notably in the Global South and in marginalized communities – bottom-up community practices that challenge the dominant economic mindset are surging and illustrating how people-centred alternative business models can improve people's access to food, energy and care.

These initiatives apply different values and success criteria: rewarding collectivity and stewardship of natural resources, and sharing access to basic needs and services. And they build upon deep (ancestral) knowledge, predating the neoliberal economy, which values the economic wellbeing of groups over individuals.

Huairou Commission, a global grassroots women-led social movement that builds resilience in high-risk communities, features five examples of its members in this paper. Oxfam Novib shares four 'Sparks' of its collaborations with communities and frontrunning companies to build alternatives and hold businesses to account.

When it comes to envisioning the new economic system we need, it is these Global South communities we should learn from.

At a time when countries in the Global North appear to be retreating from investing in a holistic, people-centred economic model, urban and rural poor communities are teaching us the values and good practices that can sustain our families, communities and economies over time.

Read the wonderful stories, be inspired by the common threads, and kindle the fire for a new economy that puts people and planet at its (and in our) heart!

Violet Shivutse

Chair, Huairou Commission

Lilian Alibux

Director, Oxfam Novib

¹ <https://vikalpsangam.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Alternatives-Framework-7th-Avatar-digital-v1.4.pdf>
<https://ashishkothari.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/The-flower-of-transformation-Wall-Street-International-Magazine-March-2022.pdf>

² www.vikalpsangam.org
<https://radicalecologicaldemocracy.org>
<https://globaltapestryofalternatives.org>

SPARKS OF A NEW ECONOMY

Across the world, communities are reshaping economies to reflect the things they value, centring care, empowerment, collaboration and regenerative practices. They are proving that an alternative economic model – one that puts people and the planet above profit – is possible.

The current dominant model prioritizes economic growth and profit over the wellbeing of people and the planet. While some people have benefited, too many have been left behind through rising levels of inequality and widespread ecological destruction. Rather than generating prosperity for all, the system has produced widespread material, psychological and ecological harm.

In a world of plenty, everyone should have what they need to ensure their comfort, safety and wellbeing, and should be able to use their creative energies to support the flourishing of all life on the planet. Unless we transform how the economy works, we will never realize this goal.

Over the last decade, growing discontent with the current economic system has created the momentum for economists, politicians and thinkers across disciplines to explore models that move beyond economic growth, and instead prioritize the wellbeing of people and planet. At the grassroots, communities are creating alternative economic initiatives rooted in local realities and driven by collective action.

This paper presents a series of case studies: a rich tapestry of eight community initiatives spanning East Africa, Southern Africa, the Middle East, South America and South Asia. These were carefully selected based on communities' innovative approaches to local economic transformation. The case studies were created through interviews with leaders from each community to gain in-depth understanding of the initiatives, while also drawing on a literature review to provide context – including ways that governments are playing a crucial role in scaling up.

What emerges is a series of inspirational stories reflecting a new economic paradigm taking shape across the world, from the ground up, with some common threads.

COMMON THREADS

VALUING CARE

An understanding of the value of care is central to each of these thriving initiatives, which recognize that human and planetary wellbeing should be at the heart of the economy. In Brazil, the Rede Pintadas Living Better Centre champions dignity and belonging, providing essential services to children, elderly people and vulnerable members of the community. In Kenya, Winam Grassroots eases women's care workload by providing nourishing meals, health insurance and safe havens for families in crisis.

In each of the initiatives, as women become economically active they are able to ensure that income is used in ways that put their family and community wellbeing first. This is changing power dynamics in households and communities. As men recognize the value of women's contribution, they are sharing responsibilities for caregiving and decision-making over household income, and governments are being pressured to appropriately value and compensate community caregiving.

The communities understand that care is not just about ensuring survival by meeting basic needs. Through art, music and community celebrations, they demonstrate that care is also about enabling people to live fully and joyfully.

MOVING BEYOND GENDER NORMS

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by the impacts of unregulated markets, climate change and other crises. These initiatives move beyond gender norms that devalue women's economic roles, and ensure that women have decision-making power, financial independence and secure access to land and resources.

Women can invest in farms, providing both income and food security while caring for the land. With training, small capital investments and community support, they are creating businesses – processing food, making crafts and selling products that sustain their families. As recognition of their contributions grows, women are stepping into leadership roles, shaping decisions in their communities and influencing local policies. Beyond economic and political empowerment, the initiatives are driving significant shifts in patriarchal cultural norms.

For example, due to its awareness-raising and advocacy activities, the Rural Women Network in Kenya has seen a reduction in instances of female genital mutilation and early marriage.

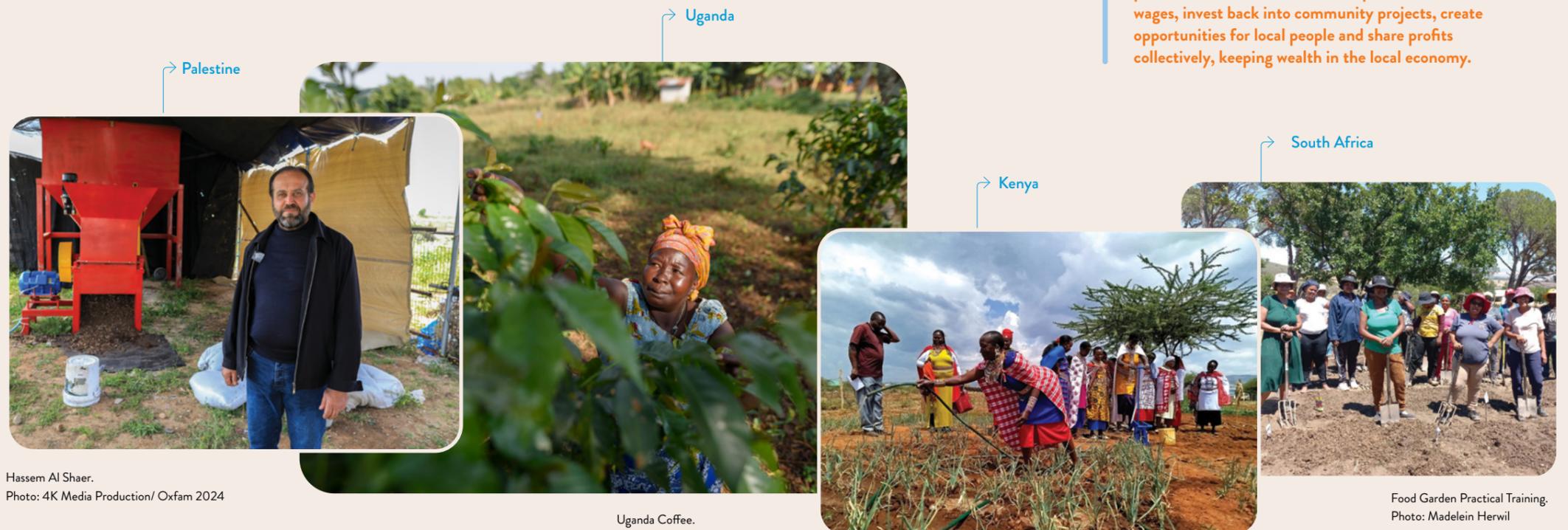
COLLECTIVE GOVERNANCE AND WEALTH SHARING

Rather than concentrating power in the hands of the few, power is shared collectively, along with the responsibilities that come with it. Every initiative in this study embraces democratic participation, valuing local, Indigenous and feminine knowledge. This results in economies that benefit communities rather than distant business owners or political elites.

Cooperatives are a common model. Member-owned and -run, they strive for collective decision-making to manage the enterprise and ensure that profits are shared fairly. However, cooperatives are not the only way to achieve shared decision-making and benefits. Zombo Coffee in Uganda, for example, has created an innovative business model where local farmers are active participants and decision-makers. Instead of relying on large processing plants, where they have no say in pricing and are at the mercy of global commodity price fluctuations, farmers govern micro-processing stations, receive a living income and are respected as an important part of the value chain.

Meanwhile, Rede Pintadas in Brazil reinvests profits into a network of local enterprises, ranging from an animal feed production plant to a credit cooperative that provides low-interest loans for local people.

Unlike capitalist business models that extract profits for a few, these initiatives provide fair wages, invest back into community projects, create opportunities for local people and share profits collectively, keeping wealth in the local economy.



Hassem Al Shaer.
Photo: 4K Media Production/ Oxfam 2024

Uganda Coffee.
Photo: Tinkasiimire Peter Paul

Irrigation Pump. Photo: Rural Women Network

Food Garden Practical Training.
Photo: Madelein Herwil

BUILDING RESILIENCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Communities that have contributed the least to the climate crisis are facing its worst consequences. The initiatives featured in this paper are not just responding to crises – they are building resilience, minimising harm to their local environment while regenerating ecosystems.

Instead of allowing a privileged few to exploit natural resources, the communities are demonstrating that land, water and local resources can be nurtured and sustained for the good of all. By reclaiming regenerative farming practices, improving land access and harvesting water collectively, they ensure that resources are shared more equitably.

For example, participatory research is helping Winam Grassroots in Kenya to learn how communities can build resilience to flooding that destroys crops and livelihoods, while Keravriksha in India is supporting communities to adapt in the face of floods and droughts. Compost Mix in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) reduces waste by turning it into compost used by farmers and municipalities, and Rede Pintadas has also created innovative waste management initiatives.

Each of the case studies demonstrates how community resilience and environmental stewardship weave together for the benefit of all.

PRODUCING FOOD REGENERATIVELY

For decades, industrial agriculture has stripped the land of nutrients, driven biodiversity decline and exploited small farmers while prioritizing short-term profit over long-term food sovereignty. These initiatives are rebuilding food systems that are local, sustainable and resilient.

By integrating traditional knowledge with agroecological methods, communities are improving soil health, enhancing water conservation and increasing food sovereignty. Techniques such as seed saving, composting, water harvesting and natural pest control are replacing expensive, harmful, synthetic chemicals. Zombo Coffee's future-proof agriculture project and Shibuye's training are equipping farmers with skills and tools to adapt to the changing climate. Rede Pintadas supports local farmers to produce natural animal feed using food waste, while the Women on Farms project uses local experience to advocate for national policies that support agroecology.

These communities are demonstrating that farming is more than just food production – it is an act of love, a commitment to future generations and a way of building resilience into the landscape.

RECLAIMING TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURE

Colonial and capitalist systems have for centuries devalued Indigenous knowledge, erased cultural practices and imposed extractive economic models. These communities are reclaiming and integrating local and traditional knowledge into modern practices, and asserting their right to shape their futures around their own cultures.

Women are leading this movement. In Kenya, the Rural Women Network is breathing new life into traditional beadwork, blending economic independence with cultural pride. Across many of the initiatives, women are reviving Indigenous farming techniques that had been cast aside in favour of corporate-controlled seed and chemical inputs.

The examples provide evidence that traditional knowledge is not a relic of the past – it is a key to a future of wellbeing.

→ Brazil



Gathering at the 2025 Assembly.
Photo: Rede Pintadas communications team

→ India



Grassroots women farmers - shareholders of the Keravriksha FPO collective.
Photo: Swayam Shikshan Prayog

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BREWING EQUITY

A farmer-first model in Northern Uganda

INTERVIEWEES:

Andy Carlton

Managing Director and Co-founder of Zombo Coffee Partners

Aggrey Chombe

Production Director at Zombo Coffee Partners and Team Leader, Agency for Community Empowerment (AFCE)



Uganda coffee. Photo: Sven Torfin

The majority of people in the Zombo region of northern Uganda are subsistence farmers who rely on coffee as a cash crop. These farmers have long faced systemic challenges, particularly the unpredictability of coffee prices, which discourage long-term investment.

Zombo Coffee Partners, operating across the Alur Highlands in Nebbi, Zombo and Arua districts, was established to address these challenges by connecting smallholder farmers with the international specialty coffee market. It was founded by Andy Carlton, whose two decades of experience in smallholder coffee projects across Africa shaped the company's vision.

Zombo Coffee aims to improve the quality of coffee produced and create sustainable employment within local communities, thereby enhancing farmers' livelihoods and quality of life – all while maintaining a sustainable and growing business.

Zombo Coffee pre-finances 15 microstations (small processing facilities) annually, providing interest-free loans for production equipment and operational costs, enabling them to purchase coffee cherries from their member farmers. The company guarantees a minimum price per kilogramme of fresh cherry, which is slightly above the Fairtrade Living Income reference price for Arabica coffee from Uganda. Each microstation, owned and operated by 50 to 250 farmers, processes the cherries into dry coffee, which is then delivered to Zombo Coffee's factory for further processing and export. Zombo Coffee shares a portion of its net profit with farmers annually and offers microstations the option to invest in the company. According to Andy, "Our promise, agreed with all our buyers, is that our price for fresh cherry will never drop below US\$0.60 per kilogramme, no matter what happens in the global marketplace. And whenever we make a profit, we will share it with all our farmers."

From small beginnings, Zombo Coffee Partners has reached new heights. In its first year it worked with just six farmer groups, each with its own microstation. Using a rented store in Zombo

and a commercial dry mill factory in Kampala, it exported slightly more than a single container of coffee. Despite early challenges, including funding shortages, Andy formally registered Zombo Coffee Partners Ltd in 2018, using his own savings as seed capital. The company's motto, 'Three P's: Patience, Persistence, Presence', has helped it to grow, along with support from international buyers and the collaborative efforts of partners like the local NGO Agency for Community Empowerment (AFCE), which provide critical support in negotiating donor funding for new microstations built by new farmer groups. In 2025 it boasts 15 microstations and its own coffee dry mill, and exports seven containers of coffee annually to destinations around the world. It now buys from almost 5,000 farmers across the three districts, benefiting the farmers, their families and the wider community.



VALUING CARE

As women farmers gain more income and recognition through their involvement in the coffee value chain, long-overlooked forms of labour – such as cooking, cleaning and caregiving – are also becoming more visible.

Increasingly, instead of decisions being taken only by men, women and men are engaging in joint planning for their households, and prioritizing long-term goals such as building homes and investing in education.

These shifts have been supported in part by the introduction of the Gender Action Learning System (GALS), a community-led methodology which encourages more equitable decision-making within households. While GALS is primarily a tool for advancing gender equity, its ripple effects are deeply felt in how domestic responsibilities are being acknowledged and more fairly distributed.

Numerous stories have emerged of couples collaborating more intentionally, with men recognizing the full scope of women's contributions – not only in the field, but in sustaining family life. Rather than spending income on non-essential purchases like alcohol, some families are jointly investing in the future.



ECOLOGICAL REGENERATION AND RESILIENCE

In response to climate change impacts such as droughts and hailstorms, each microstation has a dedicated trainer who helps farmers adopt climate-smart and -resilient practices.

A regenerative agricultural project has been underway for two years to introduce practices including mulching, water harvesting and the use of bio-liquid fertilizers, which nourish the environment and protect the long-term wellbeing of local communities.

Two staff members provide additional hands-on training to support these initiatives. The early results are promising, with improved yields and higher-quality coffee cherries, even in the face of crop disease. Zombo Coffee has now adopted the project as standard practice and it is being gradually extended to all 5,000 farmers the company buys from.



COLLECTIVE DECISION-MAKING

Each microstation is governed by an executive committee of elected leaders, including a chairperson, secretary and committee members. Leaders are voted in at an Annual General Meeting (AGM), ensuring accountability and representation of farmer members. The microstations operate under their own constitutions, reflecting principles and guidelines agreed upon by their members.

Decision-making is conducted democratically. Some microstations are already registered as cooperatives, while others are in the process of registering for cooperative status.

Engagement with farmers and committees is a cornerstone of the partnership. Through regular meetings, training sessions and collaborative planning, Zombo Coffee ensures transparency.

AFCE plays a critical role in engaging with the farming community, and Zombo Coffee treats farmers as partners, involving them in decisions about operations and connecting them directly with buyers to better understand market dynamics.



COLLABORATION

Zombo Coffee thrives on collaboration. The company works closely with farmers, buyers and local organizations, ensuring that all stakeholders contribute to and benefit from the coffee production process. This partnership model fosters mutual support and shared risk. Farmers rely on the company for prefinancing, fair pricing, training, education, transparency and market access, while the company depends on the farmers for the supply of high-quality coffee.

Also key to the success of this model is the community of buyers – people who are willing to pay fair prices for high-quality coffee and to be true partners, committing to long-term relationships and accepting the risks inherent in the business model.

Building partnerships with buyers who share this vision is crucial. Zombo Coffee has agreed with its buyers that it will never pay farmers less than a minimum price, based on Fairtrade International's living income reference price for coffee from Uganda.



EMPOWERMENT

While many cooperatives in Uganda have struggled to sustain themselves, Zombo Coffee has built a thriving model grounded in capacity strengthening and equitable partnership. Farmers are supported with the skills and resources needed to manage their farms effectively while working in close collaboration with the company to navigate a complex market. At the same time, the company actively promotes gender equity by creating spaces for women's leadership and financial empowerment.

GALS is key to this approach, helping women and men map out their visions for the future and challenge harmful gender norms.

Through GALS, women are gaining more say in household decisions, increased confidence, and support from male family members. The company also offers premium payments for coffee produced by women, encouraging increased production and income generation for women farmers. These efforts have led to meaningful shifts in gender dynamics – with women taking on more visible roles in farming, leadership and income generation, and with men increasingly supporting women's work both in the field and at home.

<https://zombocoffee.com>



Uganda coffee . Photo: Tinkasiimire Peter Paul



Increased export from Uganda



5,000 farmers



Maintaining sustainability

ROOTED RESILIENCE

Reimagining rural women's livelihoods in southern Kenya

INTERVIEWEES:

Pauline Kariuki
Director, Rural Women Network

Lazarus Maina
Consultant (research, training, programming)



Irrigation Pump. Photo: Rural Women Network

Rural Women Network (RWN) was established in Kenya in 2011 as a grassroots, women-led organization. Its mission is to equip rural women smallholder agricultural producers with skills and resources to build sustainable livelihoods.

Historically, RWN has supported pastoralist communities, particularly the Maasai, by helping women leverage livestock resources such as milk and manure for income. However, the increasing frequency of droughts has disrupted these traditional livelihoods, leaving women particularly vulnerable.

Grassroots women's organizations already existed in the region before RWN's involvement. These groups were mostly from the Maasai community, where women came together to save, borrow and improve their mud and cow-dung houses. Recognizing these established networks, RWN consulted with the women to identify their most pressing needs. Through these conversations, growing vegetables and adopting climate-resilient agricultural methods emerged as solutions to tackle malnutrition the women and children face when livestock migrate during droughts.

In response, RWN launched Livelihood Learning Centres to support the women in finding alternative income sources and building resilience. The first centre was established in Kajiado County, followed by two more in 2022 and 2023. At the centres, women learn techniques such as water harvesting, bucket irrigation, drought-resistant farming, organic herbicide application and beekeeping. Beadwork was introduced as an additional income stream, with the women retaining control over production and sales. Today the centres serve 48 groups and over 1,500 women, whose lives have improved significantly as a result of these activities.



The centre serves 1500 women



Beadwork for additional income



Maintaining sustainability



VALUING CARE

In Maasai communities, women are responsible for childcare, household tasks and providing food for the family – often relying on livestock for nutrition. When animals migrate due to drought, women are left without milk or any source of income, exacerbating food insecurity.

The Livelihood Learning Centres enable women to produce their own food, thus reducing dependency on erratic livestock cycles. Women grow vegetables and keep indigenous chickens – a new practice among the Maasai – improving household nutrition and reducing the time they have to spend sourcing food. Cooperative structures enable the women to share responsibilities and collectively manage tasks, which also lightens their care workload.

By gaining financial independence as a result of their income from beadwork and agriculture, women have gained greater decision-making power within their households. This means they have been able to direct more of their household finances towards their families' wellbeing.

Malnutrition, particularly among pregnant women and children, has historically been a pressing issue in these communities, and is often exacerbated during periods of livestock migration. By equipping women with the skills to grow vegetables and rear chickens, the learning centres have helped the women improve household nutrition, leading to better maternal and infant health outcomes. Babies are now better nourished and there are fewer cases of anaemia during pregnancy, creating healthier foundations for the next generation.



ECOLOGICAL REGENERATION AND RESILIENCE

At the learning centres, women take part in practical training on climate-smart and conservation agricultural techniques. This ensures that their farming methods are both environmentally sustainable and resilient to climate challenges.

These practices emphasize the use of local manure and organic, homemade herbicides and fertilizers instead of synthetic pesticides and harmful nitrogen-based fertilizers.

Other agroecological farming methods include mulching, farm forestry and organic spraying to enhance soil fertility, conserve water, and protect crops and biodiversity.



COLLECTIVE DECISION-MAKING

Each centre is run collectively, with women making key decisions about production, sales and resource allocation. Leadership roles – such as chairperson, secretary and treasurer – are filled through a nomination process, ensuring representation and accountability.

The Rural Women Network (RWN) has supported the establishment of three women-led Multi-Purpose Cooperative Societies in Kajiado County, Kenya. Each cooperative has put in place a leadership structure, and the leaders have received training in cooperative management, governance, and financial literacy.

These cooperatives offer a structured platform for rural women to save money, market their products and beadwork, and access loans—fostering greater financial inclusion.



COLLABORATION

As a project-based organization, RWN does not have permanent employees, so Livelihood Learning Centres are mainly run by the community. Local women take charge and lead the training, organize activities and oversee day-to-day operations, with support from the RWN team.

The learning centres foster strong community ties by bringing together women from different backgrounds to collaborate and share knowledge. Although RWN originally focused on the Maasai community, the initiative has expanded to include women from 12 different tribes, promoting cross-cultural learning and solidarity.

Community impact extends beyond economic gains – the centres play a vital role in supporting safe spaces for discussions on social issues, including gender-based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriage.

Traditionally, decisions around FGM are made by male community leaders, and women often lack the agency to directly challenge these decisions. To address this, the centres work with male 'champions' who reject harmful practices and act as advocates for women. These champions include elders, faith-based leaders, husbands and sons, who collaborate with the women to raise awareness and speak to chiefs on the women's behalf. The results of these activities are already being seen in the area where the first centre was established: FGM rates have slowly begun to decline, and more girls are continuing their education instead of being forced into early marriage.



EMPOWERMENT

Women are now growing enough food to feed their households, alleviating hunger and malnutrition for themselves and their children, especially during months of drought. They have an additional source of income from selling surplus agricultural produce at local markets; this also saves them money, as they don't have to buy fresh produce from supermarkets. Through a collaboration with the local government, the women have begun drying vegetables for storage and sale during periods of drought, ensuring that food is available year-round.

RWN leads training to equip women with budgeting and savings skills, ensuring that they can make informed financial decisions. In some cases, women have used their earnings to pay school fees, invest in housing improvements and purchase livestock. Rather than viewing financially independent women as a threat, some men now recognize that women's contributions benefit the income and stability of the whole family.

Women who previously had little say in community affairs are now participating in decision-making at various levels. Some have joined local committees and leadership structures, advocating for policies that support women's economic rights.

Further, these initiatives directly challenge colonial assumptions that devalue Indigenous knowledge, art forms and communal practices by reclaiming traditional Maasai beadwork as a source of economic empowerment and cultural pride for women.

<https://ruralwomenkenya.org>



Feeding Chicken-Indigenous Chicken Enterprise. Photo: Rural Women Network

FLOURISHING FIELDS

How women farmers are combating climate change and food insecurity in India



Grassroots women farmers - shareholders of the Keravriksha FPO collective. Photo: Swayam Shikshan Prayog

INTERVIEWEES:

Chandran Puthiyottil

Senior Programme Manager on Community Resilience, Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP)

Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP), an NGO founded in 1998, has worked with 350,000 women farmers across seven Indian states, reaching over six million people through its sustainable farming initiatives.

This case study focuses on two pioneering, women-led agricultural ventures that SSP has initiated in disaster-prone regions of India. The first is Keravriksha Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO), which promotes climate-resilient, women-led farming in Wayanad, Kerala, an area frequently affected by landslides and flooding. The second is Sarayi Sakhi FPO, which operates in the drought-prone Bhoom District of Maharashtra, where it supports women farmers to build resilience through sustainable agriculture.

In both regions, SSP's vulnerability risk mapping identified food insecurity as a key challenge, leading to a focus on food security and economic empowerment. Rather than prioritizing cash crops for quick profit, the initiatives are based on a model where women have access to a half- to one-acre piece of land that can grow 10–15 varieties of vegetables and pulses, primarily for home consumption.

The approach centres the wellbeing of families; in doing so it has reduced malnutrition among women and girls, who are traditionally the last to eat and the first to go without when times are hard.

Over the past four years, 30,000 women farmers have benefited from these women-led initiatives. Government recognition has led to increased resources and training, allowing women to access new techniques and sell their produce at fair prices.

As SSP's programme manager, Chandran Puthiyottil, states:

"We aim to create a space for women in the agricultural value chain, promoting organic produce at fair prices, and gaining recognition and respect among local governments and communities."



VALUING CARE

For many years, men dominated family farms in these regions – prioritizing quick profits from cash crops – and were unwilling to allocate land for women to cultivate. Thanks to the Farmer Producer Organisations, men have seen the positive results of women farming and attitudes have begun to shift.

Husbands and male elders in the family are now more supportive, and are not only granting women access to land but also sharing care responsibilities, such as looking after children while their wives are farming or visiting markets.

While women still shoulder most of the care workload – rising before dawn to collect water, manage household chores and then farm their land – they express pride and joy in their work. Their flourishing fields and the recognition from others brings them happiness and a sense of accomplishment.



ECOLOGICAL REGENERATION AND RESILIENCE

SSP's vulnerability risk mapping revealed severe challenges driven by the climate crisis – drought in Maharashtra and increased flooding in Kerala. The response prioritizes regenerative farming practices and climate-smart agriculture, including the use of local seed varieties and organic fertilizers, and greater water-efficiency.

These methods have reduced chemical use, restored soil health and enhanced biodiversity. In Kerala, government partnerships also provide training and seed distribution, helping communities adapt to the changing environmental conditions.



COLLECTIVE DECISION-MAKING

The governing body of Keravriksha FPO comprises between five and ten directors, who are elected annually. Directors hold monthly meetings to make decisions, which they then communicate to members. Members are shareholders, and shareholders can become directors over time. Shareholders contribute funds to join and collectively own the organization, while directors contribute a larger amount. Profits are shared equally among members at the end of the financial year. Crucial decisions are taken collectively in governing body meetings involving all members.

Women, who were previously excluded from financial decision-making, now influence household economic choices and are getting involved in community matters.

As Chandran explains, "Women become decision-makers for family matters and later address community issues, developing leadership skills."



COLLABORATION

Wayanad is a hill station in Kerala with ten distinct Indigenous tribes, including the Paniya community, who were enslaved under British rule. Colonial legacies have shaped economic mindsets; burdened by the legacy of slavery, people in this community have long perceived themselves solely as labourers, not as farm owners.

As a result, they restricted themselves to working on the farms of others, often returning home to a cycle of inactivity and, in some cases, substance abuse. However, this mindset is gradually changing. Through the efforts of SSP, 150 Indigenous farmers and their families have established food gardens on their own land. For the first time, many are beginning to grow food on a small scale, embracing their potential as self-sustaining farm owners.

A positive impact on women and children is already evident, with improvements in happiness and wellbeing widely reported.

Women farmers actively share knowledge and support each other in farmer groups, strengthening interdependence. Peer learning and local dialogues drive the initiative.

Women leaders, known as sakhis (Hindi for 'companions') coordinate activities, mobilize the farmer groups and engage with local government. In Kerala, the groups are therefore called Sakhi Farmers Groups. These communities of women influence land rights policies, access agricultural resources and establish farmer organizations for sustainable income generation.



EMPOWERMENT

In Kerala, a strong partnership now exists between SSP and the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), an agriculture research centre housed within the Department of Agriculture. KVK emerged as a result of state officials being impressed by the activities of the first women-led FPO of this scale in the region. It provided 500,000 rupees (€5,500) to fund a flour mill, and SSP supplemented this investment by supplying equipment for processing coconuts, turmeric and coffee, creating a comprehensive production hub. The women sell their products from the mill along with farm goods at two outlet shops in Kerala.

In Maharashtra, Sarayi Sakhi FPO produces milk-based products such as ghee and khova. The revenues from their sales provide a monthly honorarium for the saleswomen, and small profit margins are starting to emerge. These women once depended on the limited cash their husbands provided from selling cash crops to purchase food for their households. Now, women farmers are selling directly to consumers and receiving fair prices through marketing initiatives led by the FPO. This setup ensures a fairer redistribution of income and strengthens economic participation by prioritizing local producers over exploitative intermediaries.

In the past, women here had no say in financial matters. Today, they have the autonomy to make important decisions on areas such as education and health expenditure, and are able to contribute to family expenses.

This represents a significant shift in power dynamics and challenges the entrenched economic and gender norms that have historically marginalized women.

<https://swayamshikshanprayog.org>



Checking the price and quality of products made by women of the Keravriksha FPO collective. Photo: Swayam Shikshan Prayog



Partnership with Kerala Government



30,000 women farmers benefited



Fairer distribution of income

COMPOST AS CATALYST

Empowering farmers and regenerating soil in the Occupied Palestinian Territory



Hassem Al Shaer. Photo: 4K Media Production/ Oxfam 2024

INTERVIEWEES:

Amjad Anabtawi
Palestinian Farmers Union

Majd Al Khoury
FAIR for ALL Project Lead, Oxfam OPT



Municipal contract



Reducing air pollution



Local economic resilience

Compost Mix was set up by Hassem Al Shaer in his village in the West Bank, Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), to produce a nutrient rich, odour-free compost mix out of locally collected waste.

Hassem, who has a PhD in psychology, had no background in farming. When an unused factory became available, he was inspired by the business opportunity and decided to set up a composting facility, learning everything from scratch. Against the odds, he succeeded in turning the unused factory into a thriving operational composting facility. However, when an ownership dispute with the municipality led to its closure, Hassem returned to his home village and established Compost Mix to put his new skills into practice.

He applied for funding to purchase composting equipment and scale up his operations. The business was one of just 30 ventures selected from 400 applicants to receive grant and training support from the Palestinian Farmers Union. Thanks to this assistance, and additional support from Oxfam OPT, Hassem has been able to expand his business, tap into new markets and create links with local farmers.

Within just three months of opening the new composting facility in September 2024, he had sold compost worth 45,280 new Israeli shekels (NIS) (US\$12,362), generating a profit of 8,480 NIS (US\$2,315).

Compost Mix has expanded its reach to multiple areas in the West Bank, including Qalqilya, Ramallah, Tulkarem, Nablus, Salfet and Hebron.



VALUING CARE

Compost Mix currently employs seven people. Hassem and the employees are able to pay for their children's education and support household wellbeing. In times of crisis, such as the ongoing war, these jobs are lifelines, offering financial security when other income sources dwindle.

Compost Mix also supports the livelihoods of the people it buys waste from, including women farmers, with indirect benefits for care work and children's wellbeing.



ECOLOGICAL REGENERATION AND RESILIENCE

Beyond improving soil fertility, the initiative directly reduces environmental pollution. Agricultural waste – including organic matter – is usually burned, releasing harmful emissions into the air. Compost Mix mitigates this by repurposing the waste into soil – enriching compost, reducing air pollution and promoting regenerative farming practices.

Conventional composting in the region often relies on chicken waste, which produces strong odours. Compost Mix has pioneered a process that incorporates lamb waste along with organic materials like guava and avocado leaves, resulting in an odour-free, high-quality compost.

There was a significant breakthrough for the business when Hassem secured an agreement with Habla Municipality to collect large quantities of agricultural waste that would otherwise have been incinerated. In exchange, Compost Mix provides the municipality with free compost when needed, creating a sustainable and mutually beneficial solution to waste management. The municipality uses this compost to plant trees in public spaces. Hassem has also managed to secure a contract with Ramallah Municipality, which now purchases compost from Compost Mix on a regular basis.



COLLABORATION

By strategically sourcing inputs from local farmers and in return offering superior-quality compost at a fair price, Compost Mix is helping to strengthen intra-community business relationships.

Sheep farmers in Habla Municipality, who often struggle to make a living, can now sell animal waste to the business, encouraging them to remain on their land and sustain their livelihoods.

In this way, farmers gain an extra income, the municipality benefits from environmentally friendly waste removal, and Compost Mix gains a reliable source of waste for its compost production.

Previously, many Palestinian farmers relied on low-cost compost imported from Israel. Compost Mix presents a more desirable alternative – its compost is locally produced, nutrient-rich and more affordable due to the absence of import duties. This shift fosters local economic resilience, keeping wealth within Palestinian communities and ensuring that farmers have access to high-quality agricultural inputs.



EMPOWERMENT

Compost Mix directly enhances the economic stability of local entrepreneurs and farmers, with an emphasis on supporting women-led initiatives.

Local farmers, and especially women farmers, gain an additional income stream by selling their agricultural waste to the business.

So far, Compost Mix has purchased a total of 198 tons of raw materials from around 23 local farmers and women's businesses. Hassem also offers a special discount to women farmers and cooperatives, providing them with compost at the wholesale price (8 NIS/US\$2.18 rather than 10 NIS/US\$2.73 per bag) to support their businesses.

<https://tinyurl.com/5enwccsp>



Tending plants. Photo: Kieran Doherty/Oxfam GB 2019

RESTORING RIGHTS, REGENERATING LAND

The power of community-driven land lease guidelines for women in Kenya

INTERVIEWEES:

Violet Shivutse

Chair of the Global Governing Board of Huairou Commission, Director of Shibuye Community Health Workers (SCHW)

Samuel Nakhosi

Technical Support Staff, SCHW

Doreen Magotsi

Programmes Officer for Land and Women's Land Rights, SCHW

Shibuye Community Health Workers, a grassroots, women-led organization in Kenya, began as a support network for families affected by the devastating consequences of HIV/AIDS.

Shibuye soon recognized the broader challenges women faced, particularly in relation to agriculture and land ownership. Cultural norms and patriarchal practices limited women's ability to inherit land from their late husbands or to purchase land, meaning many widows lost access to family farms and weren't able to purchase new plots in their own names. As a result, leasing became a common alternative for women, but informal, undocumented agreements often led to disputes and exploitation. For example, women would work hard on leased land to improve degraded soil and increase crop productivity, only to be evicted by landowners who then took over the now-productive land. Another challenge was that their husbands would lease family land without their knowledge or consent, creating further tensions and further undermining women's access to agricultural land.

To address this, Shibuye worked with the research organization, TMG Berlin to develop the Community-Driven Land Lease Guidelines through a consultative process in 2015. First piloted in Isuga Central ward, Shibuye then partnered with local leaders to expand the initiative across Kakamega, Siyaya and Homa Bay Counties.

Over five years, 278 people – 204 of them women – have been able to secure land through these guidelines, enabling greater participation in agriculture.

In places like Siyaya County, where women traditionally could not own ancestral land, large tracts of previously idle and degraded land are now being used for agriculture. In Kakamega County, women have gained greater independence in purchasing and leasing land. The guidelines have also been applied beyond agriculture, extending to ventures like fish farming and sweet potato production.



Land Lease Guidelines Trainers. Photo: Shibuye Community Health Workers



VALUING CARE

Women in Kakamega and Homa Bay Counties spend 60–70% of their time on care-related activities that sustain their families and communities. They are simultaneously juggling farm work, providing childcare, supporting elderly family members, caring for sick relatives and securing food for their household.

By integrating awareness about unpaid care work into all its training programmes, Shibuye encourages communities to recognize and collectively address the unequal distribution of care work.

With their increased household incomes, many women are prioritizing their children's education. This investment is expected to create long-term positive changes, as educated children will have greater opportunities to uplift their families even when donor funding ceases.



ECOLOGICAL REGENERATION AND RESILIENCE

Shibuye champions a regenerative approach to agriculture that directly challenges colonial and extractivist farming practices. Sustainable methods include composting using organic waste, agroforestry techniques, natural pest control management and vermicomposting (using earthworms to produce eco-friendly fertilizers). These approaches demonstrate a holistic understanding of agricultural ecosystems. Shibuye also advocates for the use of climate-resilient crops that can survive and thrive under unpredictable conditions, such as increasingly erratic rainfall.

The results are compelling. Farmers using regenerative practices have consistently produced more food, improved soil health, reduced dependency on synthetic fertilizers and created more resilient farming systems.

In Siyaya County, farmers successfully eliminated pervasive weeds by using compost manure and lime, where previously, chemical fertilizers had only exacerbated the problem.



COLLECTIVE DECISION-MAKING

Shibuye's approach to decision-making is fundamentally participatory and democratic. The creation of land-lease guidelines began at the most local administrative level – the 'sub-location' level – with assistant chiefs, who oversee approximately 10 village elders managing around 50 households. Shibuye worked closely with these assistant chiefs and elders to gain buy-in at the grassroots level. It then involved chiefs, and continued gaining consent from higher administrative leaders until reaching the county level. This ensured community-driven ownership of the initiative along with widespread buy-in.

Cooperatives form the backbone of the decision-making model.

Leaders are elected democratically and rotate every two years, preventing power from being concentrated in the hands of a few people. Monthly meetings are spaces of collective discussion and debate, with funds managed communally and decisions made transparently and collectively.



COLLABORATION

Collaboration is at the heart of the village savings and lending scheme. At the start of each year, women contribute to the fund, which is then used to provide loans to members in need. Borrowers return the loans with a small amount of interest, and at the end of the year the accumulated funds are shared among contributors.

Innovative community strategies have emerged from the funds. In Homa Bay, declining fish stocks in Lake Victoria prompted two women's groups to work together to develop a pond for fish farming, using water from the lake.

By early 2023, one of the groups was able to lease its own land and build an additional fish pond, greatly increasing the women's income stability. The women reinvested more than half of their earnings into the project and their village savings fund, which is now being used to establish a third fish pond.



Expansion across Kenyan counties



204 women secured land



Women's access to land



EMPOWERMENT

By challenging patriarchal structures, the land-lease guidelines initiative and learning centres have enabled women not only to gain access to land, but also to play an active role in deciding how family land is leased, what crops to grow (African vegetables and honey are popular, as they have strong market demand and are well suited to the land and climate), when to grow them, how to sell their produce and how to add value to it (for example by making chips from sweet potatoes).

Women are now producing crops on leased land and maintaining diverse and sustainable sources of income to support their households.

These include rearing chickens, working as market vendors and running other small-scale ventures. The cooperatives have also made it easier for women to access land, markets and government resources, such as funding from the National Agricultural Value Chain Project and the Department of Cooperatives.

Women are also better able to provide for their families, including sending their children to school. The initiative encourages small-scale investments, such as purchasing a single chicken for US\$1. In just one year, with that chicken a household can generate enough income to cover a child's school fees. The cycle is simple yet powerful: within six months, the chick matures into a hen, lays eggs and hatches more chicks. Over time, this cycle creates a self-sustaining source of income.

<https://shibuyechw.or.ke>



Eshirumba Grassroots Women Farmers at their Land Lease Farm. Photo: Shibuye Community Health Workers

CLEARING THE WAY

Resisting marginalisation and regenerating economies in north-east Brazil

INTERVIEWEE:

Nereide Segala Coelho

Manager of the Rede Pintadas Brazilian Grassroots Women Resilience Practitioners Platform

Rede Pintadas is a network of 15 legal entities based in the municipality of Pintadas in Bahia, Brazil.

Founded in the 1970s on principles of social and economic justice, the organization has grown from a grassroots mobilization around land rights to a multifaceted movement that supports local entrepreneurship, sustainable development and community wellbeing. Pintadas, a relatively young municipality of around 10,000 people, has historically faced challenges of poverty and underdevelopment but has also been a pioneer in social progress, as seen in its election of one of the region's first female mayors.

Over time, Rede Pintadas has established a range of initiatives – all of which are registered as legal entities – including a credit cooperative, a food waste cooperative, a women's association, a farmer's association, a woodworking enterprise and a cultural dance group. Through collaboration, these initiatives have strengthened the local economy and contributed to the resilience of the wider Jacuípe Basin region, which encompasses 16 municipalities and has a population of around 250,000.

Rede Pintadas also supports 120 solidarity economy groups in the region, providing crucial support in areas such as product labelling, market access and financial management. By offering small financial contributions, equipment and strategic guidance, Rede Pintadas helps these groups to become self-sustaining enterprises.

At the heart of Rede Pintadas are 30 key members known as 'architects' or 'dreamers', who guide its strategic direction. Among them is Nereide Segala Coelho, a dedicated leader who has been instrumental in creating and sustaining numerous community-led projects. Nereide describes herself as "the one who clears the way and opens doors".



120 solidarity groups



Reducing food insecurity



Credit cooperative with 80,000 members



Gathering at the 2025 Assembly. Photo: Rede Pintadas communications team



VALUING CARE

The Rede Pintadas network embodies respect for care through multiple initiatives that prioritize community wellbeing. For example, its Living Better Centre provides targeted support for vulnerable groups including elderly people, children, people with disabilities, and those affected by addiction.

This approach goes beyond growth-based economic metrics (which ignore or dismiss the value of care), recognizing the importance of social support and holistic community health.

The network's care extends to supporting local associations, including women's and farmers' associations.

A cultural cooperative financed through the self-sustaining credit cooperative organizes cultural and social activities, such as guitar lessons and traditional dances. This community understands that care goes beyond meeting basic needs to also include social connection and cultural expression.



ECOLOGICAL REGENERATION AND RESILIENCE

Rede Pintadas has developed innovative waste management and recycling initiatives that transform waste into valuable resources. For instance, its recycling cooperative processes organic waste, including animal bones, fat and cartilage, converting it into cleaning products. Nereide spearheaded an initiative to address local food waste by organizing workers to collect unused fruit and bring it to Rede Pintadas for processing and distribution. The fruit is now sold at markets and supplied to local schools. Rede Pintadas succeeded in getting the Ministry of Agriculture to recognize these fruits as native species, and has developed techniques for drying and storing surplus food to reduce food insecurity.

The community has also implemented sustainable agricultural practices, such as using wastewater for irrigation and producing up to one million kilogrammes of animal feed annually.

Solar energy initiatives across various projects – including the fruit pulp industry, restaurant and other enterprises – further demonstrate a commitment to regenerative practices that reduce fossil fuel dependency and carbon emissions.



COLLECTIVE DECISION-MAKING

Decision-making is collective and leadership is decentralized, with each of the 15 legal entities having its own board of directors, who are elected by its members. The Rede Pintadas board consists of two representatives from each entity, and provides overarching coordination for the legal entities.

While decisions are discussed at the Rede Pintadas board level, each legal entity retains its autonomy and operates independently.



COLLABORATION

The network's initiatives are deeply rooted in local needs and directly emerge from community experiences. From establishing the first local credit cooperative in 1998 to opening the first restaurant in Pintadas in 2002, each project is the result of careful identification of community needs. For example, the credit cooperative was created to provide finance to local businesses and residents because there was no bank in the Pintadas municipality. It gives local enterprises access to affordable credit and is funded purely by local contributions, creating a circular system within the community.

Initially, the credit cooperative relied on money from retired individuals and local shops. The funds circulated within the community, and when they faced a shortage, members would work together to raise money by collecting funds from local businesses. While some initially saw the credit cooperative as an impossible venture, it has grown to include 80,000 members and expanded to other municipalities in Bahia and beyond.

The cooperative now provides affordable financial services to all local businesses, enabling them to thrive and reduce their dependence on external capital.

The credit finances the network's cultural and social activities, as well as supporting the women's and farmers' associations. Each branch is managed locally, with Rede Pintadas offering training and support.

Another example of community interconnectedness and mutual support is seen in the way members of the various legal entities hold meetings at the Rede Pintadas restaurant or purchase food from the women's association when they organize an event.



EMPOWERMENT

This region of Brazil has historically been marginalized and neglected by public policy and government investment. Lacking support and access to basic resources, communities faced significant challenges in developing the local economy. They also had to cope with a perception that people in the North-East are unproductive, incapable and lacking in knowledge – a deeply rooted colonial mentality. Through the success of all its initiatives, Rede Pintadas is proving this harmful stereotype wrong, and showing that local knowledge and skills are valuable assets for economic development.

The network rejects the colonial narrative that external expertise is needed to solve local problems, instead believing – and clearly demonstrating – that the community's greatest resource is its people.

As a result, people across the region have been able to challenge external perceptions of their worth, and are now seeing themselves as agents, leaders and creators. This is evident in how they establish and manage the various economic initiatives, against the odds.

<https://redepintadas.org.br>



Gathering at the 2025 Assembly. Photo: Rede Pintadas communications team

RESILIENCE IN THE FLOODPLAINS

Innovative agricultural practices in Western Kenya

INTERVIEWEES:

Mary Opot
Co-founder, Winam Grassroots

Dorothy Midimo
Programmes Officer, Winam Grassroots



Showcasing garden. Photo: Winam Grassroots

Winam Grassroots emerged as a response to the challenging environmental and economic conditions faced by communities in western Kenya's low-lying, flood-prone areas.

It operates across Kisumu, a cosmopolitan city, and Siaya, a rural county. Co-founded by Mary Opot and led by Dorothy Midimo as Programmes Officer, the organization has grown from a disaster preparedness initiative into a comprehensive community development platform.

Winam began its journey by addressing the immediate needs of communities frequently impacted by floods.

Kisumu often experiences food shortages, so people have to buy food from neighbouring counties at higher prices. For people living in relocation centres due to flooding, being able to afford food becomes an insurmountable challenge. This leaves many families facing hunger and extreme vulnerability.

Winam's Homestead Food Nutrition and Zero Loss initiative is a six-month participatory research project addressing food security, food waste and food sovereignty. Through five focus group discussions with diverse stakeholders, the project explored how communities manage food waste, storage and crop destruction, particularly in flood-prone areas. Winam identified the key challenges faced by women, including crop loss due to heavy rainfall, lack of cold storage at markets leading to food waste, and transportation inefficiencies. The initiative aims to develop actionable solutions, such as flood management strategies, cold storage facilities and seed-saving practices, to improve household food security and economic resilience.



VALUING CARE

Winam's approach to care is multifaceted and rooted in a deep understanding of the disproportionate challenges women face. The organization recognizes that women bear the brunt of climate-related disasters and are often forced to restart their lives with minimal resources after flooding events.

One innovative approach to alleviating women's care workload is the establishment of local eateries which offer affordable meals.

For many women, buying a pre-prepared meal of chapati and beans is more economical and time-efficient than purchasing ingredients and cooking from scratch. By directly reducing domestic labour, women have more time to pursue economic activities or manage other responsibilities.

Winam provides targeted economic support through small grants of approximately US\$100, enabling women to develop their own economic enterprises. The organization has also developed comprehensive health support systems, subsidizing medical insurance for women and encouraging them to make small monthly savings. So far, Winam has covered half the annual medical insurance cost for 30 women, with the women making a recommended monthly saving of 50-100 Kenyan shillings to cover potential healthcare expenses.

The organization goes beyond economic support by creating social groups where women can share resources, advice and emotional support. Winam also partners with organizations that provide specialist services and care for women who have experienced displacement and abuse.



ECOLOGICAL REGENERATION AND RESILIENCE

Winam's regenerative practices help communities build resilience in the face of climate extremes, particularly flooding. Farmers have built small dykes to channel water away from farms and store it for later use. They are encouraged to plant drought- and flood-resistant crops that can be easily harvested before evacuation, and are using vertical gardens that protect crops and allow for easier harvesting and storage during flood events. Good soil-management practices are helping them to preserve soil quality and reduce crop loss.

Winam and its partners are supporting communities to build granaries to store food, enhancing food security when harvests are lost.

Granaries are built with locally available materials that are supplemented by sturdy bases of cement and iron for durability, and aerated to keep cereals, vegetables and beans dry and safe from spoilage.

In 2022, supported by the Huairou Commission, Winam established a Livelihoods Centre where community members take part in training on storing vegetables, pulses and staple foods to prevent waste. They also learn Indigenous agricultural practices tailored to modern needs, and organic farming methods such as turning food waste into nutrient-rich compost. As a result of these methods, communities have successfully cultivated crops like carrots and potatoes in low-lying areas that are usually considered unsuitable for such produce.



COLLECTIVE DECISION-MAKING

Winam's decision-making process is fundamentally participatory and community-driven. When an idea is proposed, the organization thoroughly evaluates its potential community impact, with the ultimate responsibility for discussion and agreement resting with the community members themselves. An example of this approach is the revival of the *dero*, a traditional granary system.

The idea was proposed by the flood-affected communities, who together with Winam decided to adapt this indigenous practice by reinforcing the granaries with cement and iron, to address climate-related impacts such as flooding and extreme heat.



30,000 households reached



Planting drought resistant crops



Community seed banks



COLLABORATION

The Livelihoods Centre links 30 pre-existing community groups to facilitate exchanges, enabling peers to learn from each other and replicate new techniques at home. Through these exchanges and the agricultural training, the centre has significantly improved household nutrition levels across the community.

As a result of local crop cultivation, seed saving and traditional regenerative practices, communities have moved away from colonial agricultural models that tie farmers into buying imported seedlings and fertilizers.

Young people are learning how to grow food without using genetically modified crops. The approach has built a sense of pride and strengthened bonds within the community.



EMPOWERMENT

By advocating for budget allocations and developing policy documents, Winam has directly influenced local governance. A partnership with a civil society organization resulted in a bill at the local assembly to provide cold storage facilities for women, directly addressing a key barrier to women's ability to establish markets.

Communities now have the skills and information to manage their agricultural and economic resources by reducing dependency on external inputs while improving household food crop yields.

Mary Opot, reflecting on Winam's approach, emphasizes that the key is "not to reinvent the wheel but to organize and support existing community capabilities". Winam continues to prove that grassroots initiatives that support local knowledge can create meaningful and lasting change.

<https://winamgrassroots.or.ke>



Maintaining healthy vegetables. Photo: Winam Grassroots

GROWING BEYOND THE SEASON

Agroecology and autonomy for women farm workers in South Africa



Food Garden Practical Training. Photo: Madelein Herwil

INTERVIEWEES:

Madelein Herwil

Organizer and Agroecological Food Gardens Lead, Women of Farms Project (WFP)

Denile Samuel

Labour Rights Coordinator, Women of Farms Project (WFP)

The Women on Farms Project (WFP) is based in the Western and Northern Cape of South Africa and supports women who are employed as seasonal farm workers.

With their farm work only lasting four to six months a year, the women face insecure employment, labour rights violations and financial instability. Through a participatory approach, WFP works closely with the women to identify their needs, and provides training to improve their working conditions and quality of life.

Over 15 years ago, WFP identified an opportunity for women farmworkers to establish their own agroecological food gardens. The project addresses a pressing issue: during the six to eight months of the year when women are not employed on farms, they have no income. This means they often face food shortages and hunger, as well as lacking meaningful activities to engage in during their off-season. Compounding the problem, the number of permanent farm workers (who are predominantly men) is diminishing, leaving seasonal female workers without a stable source of income for their household.

WFP's food gardens initiative is enabling women to feed their families and generate some income by selling any surplus produce in their communities.

WFP envisioned that food gardens could tackle various challenges simultaneously – by providing food for the household and community, generating income, fostering skills development and promoting personal growth. Since the programme's inception, more than 3,500 food gardens have been established, and over the past four years alone WFP has provided 120 women with theoretical and practical training covering essential topics such as seed collection, crop family classification and ecological pest control. WFP provides all the necessary inputs for setting up the gardens, including seeds, tools and resources. Once the gardens are established, it provides ongoing mentoring to ensure the crops are thriving, and supports the women in selling their surplus produce.



VALUING CARE

As a result of the food gardens, women can prioritize cultivating crops that they actually enjoy eating as a family, rather than growing produce solely to meet market needs. The initiative has also enabled them to reduce dependency on food from supermarkets.

Farming has become a family affair, so instead of childcare being a burden while women work, children often get involved in watering and tending the plants. For many families, this has been a joyful and bonding experience.

As food gardener Nicoline McGee, explains: "The garden brought me and my children closer. We didn't use to spend a lot of time together, but now we work in the garden as a family. Even when I attend workshops, I'm at peace knowing my kids are looking after the plants. When I started harvesting, I realized I no longer had to buy vegetables from the shop. Selling some of the crops helped with other household needs too."



ECOLOGICAL REGENERATION AND RESILIENCE

WFP provides training in climate-smart and drought-resistant agricultural methods. The food gardens adhere to agroecological principles, including creating homemade compost and using local manure, natural pest control and organic herbicides.

To cope with water shortages, women capture and use greywater as an alternative source.



COLLECTIVE DECISION-MAKING

The initiative is driven by the women, who have full ownership of their gardens. WFP encourages them to make decisions based on their preferences, cultivating crops that they want to eat and share with their families and communities. This gives them autonomy to choose what to grow while meeting both household and local community needs.

Food gardener Estelle Arendse says:

"It was my first time making a food garden. Since I started, my life has changed – it feels like my life has more meaning. I spend most of my days in the garden, and the most exciting part was harvesting. I could feed my family, but I also sold some of my crops. It gave me such joy."



120 women trained



3,500 food gardens



Drought resistant methods



COLLABORATION

WFP's food gardens have nurtured a sense of community and interdependence. Women share extra produce with their neighbours, supporting each other and contributing to the local food economy. They happily share stories of their gardens and talk of how their children enjoy being outdoors, listening to stories and digging their fingers in the soil.

Many women recall how their parents and grandparents had food gardens and, while the knowledge was lost for a time due to colonial farming practices, WFP's training has reignited their enthusiasm and inspired them to reclaim traditional methods.

More experienced women who have participated in previous programmes and whose gardens are thriving play a vital role in co-facilitating and running new training sessions. These older women often share seeds with younger, less experienced participants. The initiative has sparked interest among younger women, many of whom are eager to adopt agroecological practices, marking a generational shift.



EMPOWERMENT

Each woman typically supports a household of 4 to 12 people. Of the 30 new women who have taken part in training each year, 90% have successfully set up their own gardens and enjoyed social and economic benefits as a result. As well as reducing their grocery expenses, women are able to make small profits selling surplus produce such as green beans, cabbage and beetroot, with some earning over 1,000 Rand (US\$54) per month.

While men sometimes help with the gardens, women drive the majority of the work. This marks a significant shift from the past, when men were the primary farmers and responsible for managing the land.

This traditional setup posed a challenge, as women didn't engage with the land and lacked the knowledge to farm if their husbands passed away or chose not to work. Women are now taking full ownership of their food gardens, creating and managing the plots themselves. Through the gardens, women not only grow food for their families but also gain a sense of independence and pride.

<https://wfp.org.za>



Compost Heap. Photo: Madelein Herwil

CO-CREATING CHANGE

Vietnam's cross-sector roadmap for a Human Economy

While communities are creating and practising new economies at local level, social organizations, research institutes are actively contributing to and advocating for a shift towards people-centred development that values both human wellbeing and the health of the planet.

For example, [Oxfam in Vietnam](#) has been working with local partners, research institutes, and think tanks to develop a blueprint for a 'Human Economy' that puts people and planet before profits – contributing to dialogues as Vietnam transitions towards becoming an upper-middle-income country.

Created through a participatory process with local organizations, academics and researchers, the idea of a Human Economy extends beyond GDP growth measurements to more holistic indicators of development and wellbeing, environmental sustainability, social equity and shared prosperity.

The key elements of this alternative economy are:

- **Manage markets, rather than being managed by them**
- **End extreme concentration of wealth**
- **Progressive taxation**
- **Universal public services**
- **Gender equality**
- **Fair wages**
- **New forms of business**
- **Citizen participation**

Detailed proposals and ideas behind these key elements have been shared with government bodies in discussions and events, with high-level recognition from officials. There has also been engagement with the public to promote the concept of a Human Economy and encourage participation, through events like the annual BridgeFest music festival.

This event attracts young people from across the country and showcases community-led practices and initiatives, celebrating diversity and inspiring audiences to become change agents towards a Human Economy.

As a result, there is growing momentum in the country to integrate the concept of a Human Economy into Vietnam's national vision for 2045.



Bridgefest Festival. Photo: Oxfam in Vietnam



Bridgefest Festival. Photo: Oxfam in Vietnam

SCALING UP

Governments play a vital role

A new economy is not a distant vision. Around the world, local community initiatives are already putting into practice an alternative economic reality.

For all these initiatives to have a chance within the current economic system and become pioneers for systemic change, they need supportive policies and policy makers. A recent [Oxfam report](#) on how to scale up inclusive, responsible and sustainable business models explains the roles that civil society and NGOs should play when working with business, governments and allies to create lasting, systemic change. This is a useful guide for organizations who share the vision of a new economy in which responsible business is the norm.

Politicians and public and private actors need to get behind a fundamental change to create economies that put people and the planet first, and to invest in and scale up new economic practices.

Some governments are already leading the way in this, and have started supporting cooperative enterprises, sustainable food systems and gender-inclusive economic policies.

In Kerala in India, local government authorities invested in a women-led flour mill, recognizing the value of community-led food production. In Kenya, advocacy efforts have led to policies supporting communal cold storage for women entrepreneurs, preventing food waste and increasing market access.

In Vietnam, Oxfam – together with partners, research institutes and think tanks – has been successfully engaging the national government to promote a '[Human Economy](#)' that emphasizes fairness, social justice, environmental sustainability and collaborative action.

In the Netherlands, the city of Amsterdam has started a public-collective partnership called [MeentCoop](#), uniting citizens, entrepreneurs and the municipality to shape the city's economy. By sharing knowledge, financial resources and networks, MeentCoop aims to ensure that by 2035, at least 35% of Amsterdam's economy is collectively managed. Amsterdam is also the first municipality to embrace Kate Raworth's '[doughnut model](#)', which promotes a sustainable development framework that aims to find a balance between meeting human needs and respecting planetary boundaries.

In Cleveland, USA, the Cleveland Foundation in collaboration with local institutions has created a network of sustainable enterprises called [Evergreen](#), which supplies goods and services to public service institutions like hospitals and universities. The enterprises are employee-owned, and the majority of employees are Black and from historically underserved neighbourhoods.

With global initiatives like the [Wellbeing Economy Governments](#) (WEGo) partnership – a group of national and regional governments committed to advancing wellbeing economies by sharing knowledge, expertise and effective participatory policy approaches – there is an opportunity to take a new economic model to scale. Since its launch in 2018, the WEGo partnership has grown organically and now includes the governments of Scotland, Iceland, New Zealand, Wales and Finland, with Canada also actively engaged.

SPARKS OF A NEW ECONOMY

How communities around the world are lighting the way to a better future

Across the globe, the call for a different kind of economy is growing louder. People in every continent are asking: what sort of economy do we truly want? Citizens are taking action, creating community-led initiatives that meet needs in more human-centred ways.

The initiatives featured in this [paper](#) are centring care, moving beyond traditional gender norms, sharing wealth and power, building resilience, reducing environmental harm, growing food regeneratively and reclaiming their traditional and cultural knowledge. They are grounded in a view of human beings as cooperative, caring and inherently social – not merely competitive or individualistic.

At the core of these initiatives are values of community, connectedness, mutual care, reciprocity and stewardship of the planet.

The initiatives offer ideas and practices that actually work. While each context requires its own unique adaptations, the hope is that these case studies and their common threads offer valuable inspiration that could underpin a new economic reality.

It is time to celebrate and learn from the communities around the world that are lighting the way toward a better future – not with hesitation, but with the conviction that building a new economy rooted in community and wellbeing for people and the planet is the spark that could create a just and sustainable future for us all.

THIS IS A FAIR FOR ALL PUBLICATION

FAIR for ALL is a Power of Voices partnership with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a consortium with SOMO (The Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations), Third World Network-Africa (TWN-Africa), the Huairou Commission, and Oxfam Novib.

Around the world, people are rising up against systems that prioritize profit over people and the planet. FAIR for ALL supports these brave citizens, enabling them to play their diverse roles as educators, mobilizers, creators, and watchdogs—shifting power imbalances and working towards fair global trade and value chains that put people and planet before profit.

Operating at grassroots, national, regional, and global levels, FAIR for ALL finances over 100 civil society partners, involving 900 community-based organizations and informal groups. This initiative spans 14 countries—Brazil, South Africa, Mozambique, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, India, Vietnam, Indonesia, Cambodia, Myanmar, and the Netherlands—targeting regional institutions in Africa, Asia and the EU.

Together, we drive systemic change to shift power imbalances, inspire collective action across continents, and appeal to actors to respect human rights, protect the environment, and promote women’s economic empowerment.

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rooted in community and
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