

# ISAN

# MAGAZINE

FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

February 2025

Media perspectives  
on climate change  
in southern Africa

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# About ISAN Magazine

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ISAN Magazine was born in 2021 out of the Knowledge Hub for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Southern Africa (KHSA), a project funded by BMZ and operationalised by GIZ and African NGOs through five knowledge hubs making up the Knowledge Centre for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Africa. The aim is to support the emergence of a strong regional network, to capacitate multipliers of farming knowledge and to fill knowledge gaps that hinder the uptake of organic agroecology.

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ISAN Magazine is dedicated to building a strong network of informed civil society actors and organisations across the southern African region to advocate for organic agriculture and agroecology as a framework for regional food and farming systems.

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## Welcome Note

Celebrating the truth-tellers, real-time storytellers and guardians of our freedoms. A reflection on the role of journalists in a time of climate change.



It has been an honour to collaborate with the journalists through the Knowledge Hub for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Southern Africa (KHSA) regional media programme and to receive their submissions for this special edition of ISAN Magazine.

Throughout the programme, we engaged deeply in discussions about the crucial role journalists play in combating the climate crisis. We explored how their work intersects with media's commitment to objectivity and their essential responsibility in ensuring the public has access to information that directly impacts their lives and livelihoods.

The stories featured in this edition powerfully illustrate the pivotal role journalists have in bringing attention to the tangible impacts of climate change—especially on marginalised communities. Journalists are not just documenting these changes; they are amplifying the voices of those often overlooked. They also shine a light on successful adaptation and resilience-building efforts. Equally important is their role in holding policymakers, corporations and vested interests accountable for their actions. Climate change is a multifaceted issue, intricately

woven into every aspect of our lives—energy, water, health, the economy and biodiversity. It demands that journalists possess a broad, integrated understanding of various sectors. Beyond that, they must have the skill to decode complex jargon and transform dense scientific data into language that is not only clear but also relevant to their audiences.

We ask an immense amount from journalists, and to meet these demands, they need our support—access to comprehensive training on these interconnected topics, as well as reliable sources and story opportunities. The KHSA regional media programme represents the pilot of a dynamic, short-series training format to ensure that journalists in our region are equipped to continue their vital work.

For more information about the programme, email KHSA Programme Director at [angela@sustainabilityinstitute.net](mailto:angela@sustainabilityinstitute.net).

### **In gratitude**

Stefanie Swanepoel  
Managing editor: ISAN Magazine  
KHSA Communications Manager

# About KHSA's regional media programme

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## Snapshot

- 38 journalist applications from Malawi, Namibia, South Africa & Zambia; 20 active participants
- 18 women & 20 men
- 1 between 15–24 years of age, 20 between 25–35 years and 17 between 36–65 years.
- Journalists worked across a range of mediums from television, radio and print to blogging and social media stories.
- Timeframe: July–Nov 2024
- Programme: 3 online regional expert sessions, 5 in-person /online country sessions, 3 Food Jams
- 13 article submissions for this edition

In July 2024, the Knowledge Hub for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Southern Africa (KHSA) launched its regional short series media programme to build on the work undertaken by in-country partners with journalists and editors between 2021 and 2023, and to strengthen media networks focused on sustainable food and farming systems.

### Previous KHSA media training

- **PELUM Zambia** has worked with about 33 journalists over the past five years providing training on agroecological farming principles and methods, and story development.
- **Kusamala Institute of Agriculture and Ecology** in Malawi engaged with 10 journalists and 10 editors in 2023 in a series of workshops focused on reporting on sustainable farming and making the linkages between climate change and agriculture.
- **Namibian Organic Association** hosted 2 farm tours and Food Jams for 10 journalists in 2023 and 2024 exposing them to a practical sense of the benefits of organic farming and giving them access to story sites and sources.

Journalists who had been through these training series were invited to apply for the regional media programme.

### Focus of the training

Climate change was chosen as the focus of the training as it is a cross-cutting issue driven by and driving many of the most significant challenges in southern Africa.

In particular, climate change:

- Is a critical threat to food production and thus food security in the region.
- Requires educated and holistic reporting in accessible formats and languages for a diverse range of target audiences.

**Journalists have a unique opportunity to disseminate climate change knowledge and information to call for mitigation, support adaptation and help build resilience.**

### Training programme

The programme was designed around three online expert sessions, interspersed with in-country meetings and three Food Jams.

### *Expert presenters*

- Leonie Joubert, an acclaimed South African science writer tackling pressing environmental and social justice issues.
- David Le Page, co-founder, director and coordinator of Fossil Free South Africa campaign and environmental and human rights journalist
- Jo-Anne Smetherham, an award-winning journalist with a passion for telling stories of those working to create a more humane and sustainable world.

- Stefanie Swanepoel, a strategic communications specialist focused on food and farming systems.

### *In-country sessions*

Following each expert presentation session, in-country meetings were held by KHSA's team to enable journalists to share their reflections on what they had learned and how they could use it in their work.

### *Food Jams*

KHSA pioneered Food Jams in 2023, combining a curated farm tour followed by journalists helping to harvest and cook their own lunch. This methodology supports knowledge sharing while providing journalists with access to story material and sources.

### About this publication

This special edition is an outcome of the regional media programme and it features the reflections, insights and stories of selected journalists in the programme.

The KHSA is part of the Knowledge Centre for Organic Agriculture and Agroecology in Africa project, a collaborative country-led partnership funded by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. It is one of five Knowledge Hubs pursuing the goal of disseminating knowledge and shaping a network on national, regional and continental levels. The other hubs are implemented by GIZ and country implementing partners in North, West, East and Central Africa. [kcoa-africa.org](http://kcoa-africa.org)

# Amplifying urgency: Citizen journalism & the climate crisis



By Kabelo Moratwe, South Africa

*The climate crisis is here, and its effects are devastating communities around the world. While mainstream media tends to focus on high-level discussions and global targets, the stories of those most affected—particularly in rural, marginalised areas—often go unheard. Citizen journalism becomes a vital tool, amplifying the voices of those on the front lines of environmental disasters and pushing for urgent climate action.*

Africa, despite being one of the lowest contributors to global carbon emissions, is disproportionately impacted by the climate crisis. Prolonged droughts, floods and rising sea levels are destroying livelihoods and displacing entire communities. Yet, these experiences are often reduced to numbers and statistics, failing to capture the human cost of environmental destruction.



**Citizen journalists, armed with smartphones and social media, have the ability to shift this narrative by providing real-time, raw accounts of how climate change is affecting their communities.**

Citizen journalism gives a platform to those whose voices are often ignored in mainstream climate discussions. When a farmer in Kenya loses her crops due to a drought, or a village in Nigeria is submerged by rising waters, these stories are documented in real-time by the people living through them. These firsthand accounts bring the climate crisis to life, making it harder for policymakers and the public to ignore the immediate and human consequences of inaction.

But citizen journalists do more than document destruction—they also highlight resilience. Across Africa, many communities are adapting to climate change by using Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) that have long promoted sustainable environmental practices.

In Kenya, agroforestry techniques are being revived to combat drought, and in South Africa, Indigenous groups have sustainably managed ecosystems for centuries. By showcasing these local solutions, citizen journalists demonstrate that the answers to the climate crisis are not only

found in global policy but also in grassroots innovations and traditional practices. Citizen journalism democratizes climate reporting, offering an alternative to mainstream media that often overlooks the experiences of marginalised communities. Social media platforms allow citizen journalists to share stories directly with a global audience, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers. In doing so, they bring attention to the urgent need for climate justice and challenge the notion that the crisis is something that can be addressed with slow, incremental policy shifts.

With this power, however, comes responsibility. Citizen journalists must ensure that their reporting is accurate and ethical, especially in the digital age where misinformation can easily spread. The credibility of these stories depends on their truthfulness, particularly when the stakes are so high.

As the climate crisis intensifies, citizen journalism offers a powerful way to document its impacts and advocate for action. By amplifying the voices of those living through the crisis, these journalists not only bring attention to the problem but also push for immediate, just and global solutions.

**In a world where the most vulnerable are often ignored, citizen journalism gives them a voice—and that voice is demanding urgent action.**

# Combating climate change misinformation: the role of journalists



By Vicky Mphande, Malawi

*Climate change is one of the most pressing issues of our time, with far-reaching consequences for our planet and its inhabitants. Despite overwhelming scientific evidence, however, climate change misinformation continues to spread, fueled by social media, politics and special interests.*

In Malawi, two journalists, Reuben Banda, a reporter for Nkhoma Synod Radio, and Khumbo Chiudzu, a reporter for Dowa Community Radio, are taking on the challenge of combating climate change misinformation.

**"As journalists, we have a critical role to play in combating climate change misinformation, we must ensure that the information we disseminate is accurate, unbiased, and based on scientific evidence."**

- Reuben Banda

Chiudzu agrees, "Climate change is a complex issue, and it requires a nuanced and informed approach. As journalists, we must be careful not to spread misinformation, and instead, focus on amplifying the voices of experts and affected communities."

Both journalists emphasised the importance of fact-checking and verifying information before sharing it with the public. And Chiudzu highlighted the need for journalists to engage with experts and affected communities to gain a deeper understanding of the issues, saying that "By listening to the stories of those affected by climate change, we can humanise the issue and make it more relatable to our audiences."

They also stressed the importance of using clear and simple language. "Climate change is a complex issue, but that doesn't mean we have to use complex language to explain it," said Banda.

The Department of Disaster Management Affairs in Malawi, which is responsible for coordinating Malawi's response to climate change, has also noted the importance of accurate and trustworthy information.

"As a government, we recognise the critical role that journalists play in shaping public discourse on climate change. We are committed to providing journalists with accurate and timely information on climate change, and to supporting their efforts to combat misinformation and promote public awareness and understanding of this critical issue," explained Chipiliro Khamula, spokesperson for the Department of Disaster Management Affairs.

As Reuben Banda and Khumbo Chiudzu demonstrate, journalists in Malawi are taking on the challenge of combating climate change misinformation. Their work is crucial in promoting a more informed and nuanced public discourse about this critical challenge.

Combating climate change misinformation requires a concerted effort from journalists, experts, and affected communities. By **fact-checking, engaging with experts and affected communities**, and using **clear and simple language**, journalists can play a critical role in promoting accurate and trustworthy information about climate change.

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## Climate change misinformation/disinformation in Africa

Climate change misinformation—whether intentional or not—undermines crucial adaptation and mitigation efforts.

It distorts facts, hindering essential changes in industry, business and consumer behavior.

Africans need reliable, timely information on how to cope with a changing climate.

Disinformation, on the other hand, is the deliberate spread of false claims, typically by those with vested interests, aiming to discredit climate science and block policies that threaten their profits.

Click [here](#) to view articles related to common climate change misinformation/disinformation.

# Community Mphala: Catalysing sustainable food systems in Zambia



By Misheck Nyirongo, Zambia

*As Zambia grapples with the challenges of climate change, environmental degradation and social inequality, it has become increasingly clear that our food systems must undergo a radical transformation. And we need innovative methods to support this.*

Austin Nyirenda from Lundazi District Agriculture (DACO)'s Office bemoaned, "The current high cost of food items throughout, access points are at the declining productivity and production in our farms, especially the small-scale farmers. The high cost of food is attributed to high cost of farming inputs, seed, fertilisers, pesticides, herbicides, among them."

A farmer, Sam Nyirenda advocated transforming some agriculture policies or programmes such as Farmers Input Support Program (FISP) that promote unsustainable farming practices such as, high use of chemical fertilisers.

**Community Mphalas have emerged as a powerful tool for empowering school communities to take action and promote sustainable food systems.**

'Mphala' refers to a 'village forum' or community gathering in Tumbuka culture. It is a space where local people come together to discuss important issues, share knowledge and make collective decisions, such as those related to climate change.

These Community Mphalas serve as a vibrant gathering that facilitates dialogue, partnerships and collaboration among stakeholders, including farmers, policymakers, researchers and civil society organisations.

In the Lundazi District, the Ministry of Agriculture, as a strategic partner in transforming food systems, is involved in these to support the building of capacity in school communities.

In Zambia, the KHUMBILO Agroecology Media Services, supported by the Zambia Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity (ZAAB), organised two Mphalas at two schools in Zambia's Eastern Province in 2024. Schools are selected as venues as they are ideal community gathering spaces and have land available on which to set up demo sites. These Community Mphalas were held under the themes of 'My Food Is African', 'Farmers' Rights', 'No to GMO' and 'Agroecology'. They have fostered a deep sense of ownership and pride among local farmers, and highlight the importance of sustainable soil fertility management, encouraging use of available natural resources to make bio-fertilisers like bokashi.

They have also sparked some innovative initiatives. Kaithinde Primary School was inspired to create a demonstration plot using bokashi to showcase to surrounding school communities. Kaithinde Primary School's Head Teacher, Francis Mumba, testified, with a gleam of a smile, "As you can see, the maize we planted on 27th October 2024 is growing healthy; initially pupils were watering, before the onset of rains."

**"The involvement of youth and educational institutions have been particularly impactful, as it ensures the sustainability of these initiatives by educating the next generation about the importance of food sovereignty and sustainable farming practices."**

- ZAAB Programme Officer, Omali Phiri

The established evidence validates that the concept of Community Mphalas can play a vital role in amplifying and supporting the development of agroecological practices and strengthening climate-resilient food systems, while reducing the use of chemical pesticides and fertilisers.



*Farmers practising bokashi making after the Mphasa*



*Status of school's demonstration plot, December 2024*

# Climate-resilient futures: Importance of local success stories



By Khumbo Chiudzu, Malawi

*It is important that we tell local success stories to inspire others, show practical ways in which we can adapt to climate change and build resilience. Journalists have a key role in this regard. One such story is that of the Masinja Irrigation Scheme in Dowa district, Malawi.*

The Masinja Irrigation Scheme is a remarkable story of community resilience and determination. Established in 2006, the scheme has 97 members who have come together to build a thriving agricultural project that has transformed their lives and livelihoods.

Despite the challenges posed by climate change, the scheme's members have invested in canal irrigation, enabling them to irrigate eight hectares of land and plant a diverse range of crops, including maize, Irish potatoes, tomatoes, peas and vegetables.

Anthony Kaferanjila, the scheme's Secretary, said that in 2023 the scheme generated an impressive 9.7 million Malawi Kwacha (about US\$5 520) in profits from produce sales. This has enabled individual members to invest in assets like motorcycles, oxcarts and donkeys to further support agricultural activities and meet transportation needs.

**Laban June, a scheme member, said that this success had also enabled members to improve their food security and reduce their reliance on rain-fed agriculture.**

"Looking ahead, we are aiming to expand our irrigation coverage to 20 hectares, which will likely lead to even greater yields and profits," said June. He adds that with their focus on sustainable agricultural practices and community collaboration, the Masinja Irrigation Scheme serves as a model for other communities facing similar challenges.

Chikondi Kamanga, the Assistant Agriculture Extension Development Coordinator for Dowa district, said that in a region vulnerable to climate change, the Masinja Irrigation Scheme offers a beacon of hope and a testament to the power of community-led initiatives.

Kamanga added that as the scheme continues to grow and thrive, it will likely inspire other communities to adopt similar approaches, creating a ripple effect of resilience and prosperity across the region.

Through their hard work and determination, the members of the Masinja Irrigation Scheme are proving that even in the face of climate change, there is always hope for a more resilient and prosperous tomorrow.

Rain-fed farming in sub-Saharan Africa is particularly vulnerable to **climate change - rising temperatures, shifting rainfall patterns and droughts all dramatically impact small-scale farmers ability to produce food for their livelihoods and survival.** There is increasing focus on improving water harvesting and extending irrigation to this farmer group to ensure ongoing production.

# Turning back to nature: Climate-smart responses



**By Jarvis Lupheoh, Zambia**

*Videos and radio broadcasts are an appropriate and effective way of sharing information about climate change and appropriate responses.*

Watch this short video piece [here](#) and listen to a radio story title Hunger in Shire Ward, Zambia [here](#). (Available in PDF version only)



# The role of journalists: Bridging climate science & lived realities



By Onthatile Talafala, South Africa



*Inadequate infrastructure (housing stormwater management and sewage compound the effects of extreme climate events in East London, South Africa's slums. Credit: Onthatile Talafala*

*Climate change disproportionately impacts vulnerable communities, especially those residing in slum areas. These stories need to be told to inform climate change responses.*

In East London, South Africa, a region grappling with profound socioeconomic

difficulties, the effects of environmental degradation are obvious. Combined with issues such as pollution, limited access to clean water, and unemployment, residents living in the city's slum areas experience a precarious living environment.

**These communities face escalating climate-related risks and journalism plays a crucial role in increasing awareness and driving meaningful change through local reporting.**

The slums of East London often go unnoticed, with the struggles of their inhabitants marginalised in mainstream discussions around climate change. But they bear the brunt of climate change consequences.

Soaring temperatures, unpredictable weather patterns and escalating pollution levels result in severe health hazards, particularly respiratory illnesses. The most common is tuberculosis, which has become increasingly prevalent in this area.

In this context, journalism becomes a potent advocacy tool, highlighting the pressing needs of these marginalised communities.

Narratives shared by East London's residents highlight the tangible impacts of pollution and resource scarcity, making the crisis more relatable.

Localised storytelling can help to foster empathy and support from wider audiences, underscoring the collective obligation to address climate change.

Nevertheless, journalists in financially disadvantaged areas encounter significant obstacles. These include limited resources, inadequate training in climate reporting, and difficulties in accessing reliable scientific data impede effective communication. Additionally, journalists struggle with an environment in which their work may be unappreciated or overlooked, despite its potential influence.

Overcoming these barriers requires a commitment to establishing a conducive atmosphere for local journalism, highlighting the importance of training and resources specifically dedicated to climate change reporting.

**As the impacts of climate change increasingly endanger the livelihoods of East London's slum residents, journalism emerges as a crucial bridge between climate science and human realities.**

By spotlighting the lived experiences of those most affected and advocating for essential changes, journalists can raise awareness and inspire practical solutions.

For East London, raising these narratives leaves behind basic reporting. It signifies a dedication to nurturing a fairer and more sustainable future for all.

# Speaking to burning topics: Human-wildlife conflict in Zambia



**By Juliet Makwama, Zambia**

*As climate change continues to alter ecosystems due to increased occurrence of climate-related shocks, human-wildlife conflict is also becoming a complex issue that requires immediate attention.*

This is because climate change impacts among other factors are pushing animals out of their normal habitats in search of water and food, resulting in increased chances of interactions with people, who are equally being forced to move longer distances in fetch of food and water, notes Zambian-based environmentalist Felix Chisha.

In fact, the entire southern Africa region has not been spared from experiencing the effects of climate change through rising temperatures and changing rainfall patterns, resulting in ecosystem alterations causing disruption of natural habitats for wildlife. Crops are raided and people killed as wildlife move into territories dominated by humans in search of food, water and shelter.

In South Africa, human-wildlife conflict in national parks such as the Kruger National Park is a very big concern while the increasing frequency of droughts in neighbouring Botswana is exacerbating conflict in places such as the Okavango Delta where people and wildlife compete for water.

This conflict is having a devastating impact on wildlife populations. Conservationist Maxwell Zulu believes that some animals may actually go extinct as habitat loss can lead to them being confined to smaller areas, affecting population size. Zulu notes that there is a need to address the root causes of climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and, if possible, transitioning to renewable energy sources to help ecosystems regenerate themselves.

Zambia's Tourism Minister Rodney Sikumba said that there had been 4 206 human-wildlife conflict instances recorded in Q2, 2023, resulting in the loss of life of 10 people and killing of 53 'problematic' animals as they became a threat to human life.

Sikumba expressed concern about the growing number of reported incidences as it affects the lives of people and their food security. He noted that, "Munchinga, Eastern, Lower Zambezi, Southern, Western and Kafue regions are the areas in Zambia where most of the reported human wildlife incidences happen. Most human-wildlife conflict occurs between people and elephant, buffalo, hippopotamus, crocodile and bushpig."

**According to the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), human-wildlife conflict is born from competition for limited resources, including water to drink, food to eat and space to live.**

AWF's Grace Wairima notes that with rural communities relying on farming and livestock, these activities convert critical wildlife habitat, often driving out of the landscape many species that resident carnivores rely on for prey.

Without their usual food source, lions and leopards often turn to the next available option, community livestock," Wairima said, "As human settlement increasingly expands, areas that have been historically inhabited by wildlife are converted into agricultural plots or grazing areas for livestock." Elephants also often raid community crops.

Grassroots Zambia, an environmental conservation organisation, has noted that mitigating this conflict requires solutions that strike a balance between protecting wild animals and ensuring that the livelihoods of people are not disturbed. Co-founder Rolf Shenton says this is an issue that was already predicted to worsen more than 25 years ago, and that some countries have not been very active on regional conservation efforts such as The Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA).

KAZA is the world's largest land-based transboundary conservation area spanning through parts of five southern African countries: Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Shenton singled out Zambia as not being active in KAZA saying there is need is for all countries to participate towards ecosystem restoration to avoid the factors making the climate change crisis worse and hopefully reduce human-wildlife conflict in the region. He notes that government needs to initiate proper management of grass lands and make sure that wildlife can access food to deter them from straying into human settlements. In addition, he notes that there is a need for continuous sensitisation of communities to not burn bushes or disturb wildlife corridors.

# Will climate justice ever be a reality in Africa?



By Patrick Njawala, Malawi

*Climate change is more than a climate issue, it's political, economic and many things in-between. Africa must wake up from its slumber on the issue of climate justice. Justice is never given; it must be fought for.*

Zwide Dexter Jere Co-founder and Managing Director of Total LandCare in Malawi shared his experiences of the Congress of the Parties (COP) 29 on his return from Baku in Azerbaijan in November 2024. He expressed excitement over how developed Baku is and how well Azerbaijan had prepared for COP29. There was a specific route for guests, everything was in place, he noted that "I wish we were that prepared and that proactive in everything we do". By saying 'we', Zwide Jere is referring to Africans and Malawians in particular. There is a tinge of frustration in his voice.

Zwide is a quiet man, his father is a chief with eight wives and growing up in that environment, challenging as it was, taught him how to co-exist and how to tame his temper. The fact that there was even a hint of frustration speaks volumes about what Zwide feels about climate justice.

Zwide has 30 years' experience in land use and natural resources management; environment monitoring and developing; testing and promoting soil conservation and agroforestry interventions; community empowerment; and production of user-friendly high-quality extension and training materials in the form of manuals, training kits, posters, leaflets and radio messages targeting different audiences.

Working with rural communities, government, NGOs and private sector organisations, Zwide is well placed to handle cross-cutting issues. He excels at assessing and analysing problems and resolving conflicts arising around resource use.

He has made many achievements in his work over the past three decades; recounting them brings joy to his face. But climate change has reversed many of the gains made, and, as a son of a chief who cares about his subjects, he is worried about the future. "There are deep challenges around African countries' positions at COP and these meetings appear to be mere talk shops," he notes.

In that, Zwide is right. An assessment of COP29 points to three key weaknesses:

- The absence of key global leaders.
- The declining prominence of the climate crisis on the global agenda.
- The role played by this year's COP presidency.

This meant that key issues were not adequately or appropriately dealt with. These include how to phase out use of fossil fuels, meet climate financing needs (there is a substantial gap in meeting the US\$6 trillion in climate financing needed by 2050) and cooperation and knowledge transfer.

There is also a significant gap in member countries' climate targets and mitigation capabilities and a failure to secure agreement from the 197 parties who participate.

It is like begging the person hurting you to take you to the hospital, what would stop that person from hurting you again? African countries like Malawi should be angry. As long as Africa goes to these meeting with a reconciliatory tone, nothing will change.

**Justice is never given; it must be fought for.  
Africa must wake up from its slumber.**

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## Climate change Conference of the Parties

Congress of the Parties (COP) 29 was the United Nations Climate Change Conference that took place 11-22 November in Azerbaijan. These meetings bring together world leaders and negotiators from the member states (parties) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Key priorities for COP 29 were to secure a new goal on climate finance, ensure that countries could take stronger action, radically reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build resilient communities.

Representatives also spoke about the next round of national climate plans and reporting on progress made against these.

The annual COP meetings are an outcome of the UNFCCC treaty from 1992 and the 2015 Paris Agreement. It is the world's only multilateral decision-making forum on climate change, bringing together most countries.

Read the [BBC's coverage](#) of the outcomes of COP 29 related to the funding given to developing countries, and more.

# Sharing knowledge to combat climate change: Soil acidity



By Francis Maingaila, Zambia

*Journalists have a key role in sharing stories that provide solutions to critical issues, such as those affecting staple crop production that will be exacerbated by a changing climate affecting food security and livelihoods. The article is an example of this kind of reporting.*

Soil acidity poses an urgent and growing threat to Zambia's agricultural productivity, endangering staple crops like maize, cassava and groundnuts, while threatening the livelihoods of millions of smallholder farmers who depend on agriculture to feed their families and sustain rural economies.

Mitigating soil acidity is critical to securing food security and fostering sustainability. Patson Ncube, a farmer and soil microbiology enthusiast, is among those witnessing the devastating impact firsthand.

**“Acidic soils are slashing our yields. It's not just a productivity issue—it's a survival issue.”**

– Patson Ncube

Ncube emphasises that embracing organic farming techniques can reverse this trend, saying that, “Simple, sustainable practices like composting, crop rotation, and applying lime can help us restore soil health and feed our communities.”

For farmers like Agnes Mwansa in Central Province, the stakes are high. “Our maize harvests have shrunk dramatically, and the cost of chemical fertilisers is unbearable,” she laments. Yet, she sees hope in organic farming. “By using natural inputs, we can lower our costs while improving soil fertility over time.”

Soil acidity in Zambia is caused by both natural and human factors. High rainfall, common in certain regions, leaches essential nutrients like calcium and magnesium from the soil. Practices like monocropping and over-reliance on chemical fertilisers exacerbate the issue, further degrading soil quality.

Experts warn that without intervention, soil acidity will continue to reduce yields, degrade land and threaten the country's agricultural future. Wilfred Miga, Programs Manager at Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM), emphasises the need for change. "Overusing acidic fertilisers without countering their effects with lime is like adding fuel to the fire," he says. Miga advocates for scaling up organic farming practices to rebuild soil health.

Evidence from other African countries underscores the potential of organic solutions. In Kenya, the introduction of lime and organic treatments reversed soil acidity, boosting yields of staple crops like maize by up to 50%. In Zambia, similar success stories are emerging.

The FarmLime project, which produces affordable lime from local dolomite, has shown promising results, with demonstration plots nearly tripling maize yields and increasing groundnut yields sevenfold. Ncube highlights the benefits of organic methods, saying, "Practices like using compost and leguminous cover crops not only reduce soil acidity but also enhance fertility, ensuring healthier crops." Integrated Soil Fertility Management, which combines organic inputs with sustainable practices, is gaining traction as an effective strategy.

The Zambian government is beginning to take note. Minister of Agriculture Reuben Mtolo Phiri

acknowledges the challenge, saying, "Our National Agricultural Policy is evolving to promote sustainable farming practices, but we need more comprehensive support systems for farmers." Phiri points to initiatives aimed at raising awareness and providing resources, though much remains to be done to make lime and other amendments accessible to smallholder farmers. Experts agree that addressing soil acidity requires a collective effort. Farmers, government agencies, NGOs, agro-scientists, and private companies all have critical roles to play. Education campaigns and financial support must prioritise equipping farmers with affordable organic inputs and practical knowledge. Programmes like the Africa Fertiliser and Soil Health Action Plan are already making strides. By guiding farmers on sustainable practices, these initiatives are helping mitigate soil acidity and improve productivity.

Acidic soils impact more than yields—they also reduce seed quality and hinder early crop development, and while synthetic fertilisers offer short-term fixes, organic solutions ensure long-term sustainability. Zambia must embrace organic farming as a cornerstone of agricultural policy. Practical solutions like crop rotation, composting and lime application can safeguard soil health. Stakeholder collaboration will ensure that farmers have the tools and knowledge to transition to sustainable practices, securing food security for future generations.

# Stories of hope: Intercropping as drought mitigation

By Samuel Mbewe, Zambia

*Zambian small-scale farmers have been severely impacted by the El Niño-induced drought, leading to widespread crop failures and growing food insecurity. Some farmers have managed, however, to find success through innovative farming practices, particularly intercropping.*

Julius Mufana, a farmer from Kayuni Agricultural Camp in the Chirundu District, is one such example. Despite the area's limited rainfall, which has left many farmers without maize in their fields, Mufana's crops have withstood the climate-induced difficulties.

He attributes his success to intercropping, where different types of crops are grown together in the same field. He explains, "Intercropping is very important because it helps in moisturising the soil, and the crops are less likely to wither due to poor rainfall... I planted cowpeas and maize together. The roots of the cowpeas provide nutrients to the soil, while the leaves serve as a relish, and the peas, once harvested, provide good nutrition and are a cash crop."



Example of intercropped field, Zambia

This approach has allowed Mufana to not only survive the drought but thrive in it, as he can still harvest one of his crops even if the other is affected by the dry conditions.

Patson Ncube, farming just south of Lusaka, also advocates for intercropping, emphasising its role in promoting biodiversity. On his farm, Ncube practices intercropping to manage pests naturally.

Ncube explains that, "Pests found on tomato plants can be controlled by the pests that attack cabbages," he explains. This natural pest management approach has enabled Ncube to avoid the use of chemicals, reducing the environmental impact of his farming practices.

Similarly, Anny Katongo, a farmer from Shibunji District in Central Province and a board member of the Rural Women's Assembly, shares her experience with intercropping. She highlights how it can enhance soil fertility and control pests in the field. "If you plant groundnuts or pumpkins along with maize, the pests from the groundnuts help control the pests in maize," Katongo says. "Groundnuts also improve soil fertility, reducing the need for chemical fertilisers." Mrs. Katongo encourages farmers who still rely on herbicides and chemical fertilisers to consider switching to intercropping. "It is better to embrace intercropping as it not only helps control pests but also enhances soil fertility without the need for harmful chemicals," she advises.

Edwin Abwino, Assistant Programs Manager at the Community Technology Development Trust, also emphasises the importance of crop diversification in the face of changing weather patterns. He recommends intercropping and growing cash crops alongside food crops to increase farm productivity and nutritional security.

Mr. Abwino adds that cover crops like cowpeas help retain moisture in the soil and provide additional food sources, such as leaves and pods, which can contribute to household nutrition.

**Intercropping, the practice of growing alternative crops or non-crop plants alongside cash crops, offers numerous benefits for smallholder farmers. It helps control weeds, manage pests and pathogens, reduce soil erosion, and minimise the need for chemical inputs such as fertilisers and herbicides.**

Common intercropping systems include mixed intercropping, row intercropping, and strip cropping. In Zambia, where many farmers are facing the harsh realities of climate change, intercropping provides a sustainable solution to ensure food security and reduce dependency on chemical inputs. Through continued education and support, more farmers are likely to embrace this practice, improving both their livelihoods and the environment.

# Success stories: Resilience building strategies



**By Maureen Kawerama, Malawi**

*Matsukambiya Village in Chikwawa District, Southern Malawi, has emerged as a beacon of hope for climate resilience following its relocation to safer ground. Once a disaster hotspot, the village's decision to move has dramatically reduced fatalities and losses caused by floods and cyclones.*

The turning point came after Tropical Storm Ana in 2022, which devastated the village. Homes were swept away, livestock perished, and crops were destroyed. In response, the government, through Chikwawa District Council, facilitated discussions with community members and purchased new land in a safer location. By the end of 2022, the entire village relocated. Today, the community is thriving.

Cyclone Freddy in 2023, which claimed hundreds of lives across Malawi, did not record a single death in Matsukambiya. "Since moving, we feel much safer," said Fainess Fulaye, a 45-year-old mother of five and a survivor of Tropical Storm Ana. "During Ana, I lost everything—five heads of cattle, 31 goats,

and all my crops. But Cyclone Freddy did not harm us because we were no longer in harm's way," she noted.

Fulaye urged other communities in disaster-prone areas to embrace relocation. "It's not easy, but safety comes first," she said. She noted, however, that hunger remains a challenge in the new location, as they lost their farmland during the 2022 floods. "We are surviving on mangos," she added, calling on the government and well-wishers to provide food support.

Matsukambiya Village's relocation efforts and the subsequent results has left the Civil Protection Committee in the area beaming with joy. "During Tropical Storm Ana, Chikwawa was the hardest-hit district with the highest death toll. But during Cyclone Freddy, the death toll was significantly lower—only 32 deaths compared to over 200 in districts like Blantyre and Mulanje," said Harold Suwali, Chairperson for the area's Civil Protection Committee.

Suwali emphasized the importance of learning from Matsukambiya Village's success.

"Relocation works. It is a strategy that must be prioritised for other vulnerable communities."

Chikwawa District Disaster Risk Management Officer, Charity Machika, said the relocation aligns with broader climate adaptation strategies, "Apart from relocating communities, we are supporting them with drought-tolerant crops, livestock, and social cash transfers."

The government has included the relocated population in the El Niño response program, which provides food aid from November 2024 to March 2025. Renowned environmental activist in Malawi, Matthews Malata, applauded the

relocation initiative but stressed the need for comprehensive planning. "Relocation is a critical step, but it's complex and costly. Authorities must ensure access to basic services and decent housing to avoid disrupting livelihoods," he said. Malata urged the government to fully implement the Disaster Risk Management Act of 2023. "Relocation must be backed by systematic planning and budgeting to ensure its success," he added.

**Matsukambiya Village's journey is a testament to the power of collective action and forward-thinking policies in reducing disaster impacts.**

**It offers a model on how Malawi can adapt to the growing threat of climate change.**

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# Tackling the infrastructure deficit

**By Asiatu Ngulinga, Malawi**

*Climate change extreme events, such as Cyclone Freddy in 2023, devastated infrastructure, causing increased challenges for local populations already battling poverty and hunger.*

The most affected by the loss of bridges in particular are pregnant women and children.



During the 2024 rainy season, they had to use water transport to reach public amenities, such as the district hospital. This puts their lives in danger, and for many it is restricting their access to public health. Efforts must be made to replace infrastructure lost to climate-related extreme events, else the most marginalised communities will continue to suffer disproportionately.

# Bridging the Funding Gap: Climate Disaster Financing



**By Thabo Molelekwa, South Africa**

*South Africa stands at a critical juncture in its fight against climate change. While the nation has made commendable strides in mitigating future climate risks through initiatives like the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme, a glaring gap remains in addressing the immediate impacts of climate-related disasters.*

The increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events demand urgent action to bridge the funding shortfall for disaster response and resilience-building. Without this, South Africa risks undermining its long-term climate goals and leaving vulnerable communities exposed to escalating devastation.

Climate change is no longer a distant threat; it is a present reality for South Africa. The South African Weather Service (SAWS) has documented a significant increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events over the past two decades. The April

2022 floods in KwaZulu-Natal serve as a harrowing example. The disaster claimed more than 448 lives, displaced thousands, and caused an estimated R17 billion in damages. News reports from the time, such as those by the BBC and other major outlets, documented the devastation. Despite the scale of the catastrophe, the government's response was often criticised as insufficient to address the long-term recovery needs of affected communities. Similarly, the Eastern Cape and Western Cape provinces have faced severe droughts, crippling agricultural productivity and water supply systems.

Despite these recurring disasters, South Africa's fiscal allocations for disaster response remain woefully inadequate. South Africa's climate financing efforts have predominantly focused on mitigation strategies, such as transitioning to renewable energy, while adaptation and disaster response have been sidelined. Finding precise budget breakdowns can be challenging, but the National Treasury's budget documents are the starting

point for this kind of analysis. In 2023, the National Treasury allocated R131 billion (\$7 billion) in climate-related funding, but a much smaller percentage was earmarked for disaster response and resilience-building. A study by the Climate Policy Initiative estimated the need for significantly more funding for adaptation. Current allocations fall far short of this target, leaving communities vulnerable to the immediate and long-term impacts of extreme weather. This funding gap not only exacerbates human suffering but also places a significant strain on the economy.

The economic consequences of inadequate disaster funding are profound. Infrastructure damage from floods and wildfires leads to soaring repair costs, while prolonged droughts exacerbate food insecurity and water shortages. Marginalised communities, often the hardest hit, bear the brunt of these disasters, deepening social inequalities. Investing in disaster resilience and response is not just a humanitarian imperative but an economic necessity.

Addressing the climate disaster funding shortfall requires a multi-pronged approach:

- Increased budget allocations: Prioritise disaster preparedness and response in budgets, ensuring funds are available for immediate relief and long-term recovery.
- International climate finance: Leverage global climate financing mechanisms to supplement domestic resources.
- Public-private partnerships: Collaborating with the private sector to develop innovative financing solutions can reduce the burden on public finances.
- Decentralised disaster funds: Municipalities should have access to emergency funds to enable rapid response to climate-related disasters without bureaucratic delays.
- Stronger governance and transparency: Ensuring that climate disaster funds are managed efficiently and reach affected communities is crucial for building public trust and resilience.

South Africa's energy transition is a vital step in combating climate change, but it must not come at the cost of neglecting immediate disaster response needs. The rising frequency of floods, droughts, and wildfires demands a more proactive and well-funded approach.

**By closing the climate disaster funding gap, South Africa can safeguard vulnerable communities, protect its economy, and build a more resilient future.**

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