

The Business Case of Food Systems Change

Enhancing the Resilience of Food Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa through Responsible Business Conduct and Multistakeholder Approaches

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Photo: DanChurchAid

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	03
Introduction	06
Key Recommendations	12
Case Presentations	17
Strategic Partnerships that Build ‘Good Businesses’ are Contributing to a Sustainable Food System in East Africa <i>By Shona</i>	18
Reducing food loss and waste through green cold chain solutions for farmers and traders <i>By Danfoss</i>	23
Advancing Responsible Business Conduct: The Need for Enhanced Human Rights Due Diligence in the Agribusiness Sector in Kenya <i>By Centre for Education, Policy and Climate Justice</i>	27
Enhancing the Resilience of Food System through Responsible Business Conduct: Market Access for Smallholder Farmers in Eastern Uganda <i>By African Women Agribusiness Network</i>	34
Human Rights Violations in Zimbabwe’s Agriculture Sector: A Case for Enhanced Corporate Responsibility <i>By Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association</i>	40
Unfolding the Debate of Just Food Systems and the Plight of Vulnerable Populations in Kenya <i>By Pamoja Trust</i>	46
A Call for Food Sovereignty through Genuine Agroecological Policies in Africa <i>By Africa Food Sovereignty Alliance</i>	50
Mapping Intended Outcomes of Impact Funds in East Africa to Transform Food Systems <i>By Transformational Investing in Food Systems</i>	56
Shipping for Sustainability: Addressing the Challenges and Dilemmas of Exporting Fresh Fruits Produce from Uganda to European Markets <i>By DanChurchAid</i>	62

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From DCA, Cathrine Barklin, Sidsel Koordt Vognsen, Roya Høvsgaard, Rosa Pedersen, and Mikkel Bøhne have authored the introduction chapter and recommendations and compiled the report.

ABBREVIATIONS

AEE	Agroecological Enterprises
BHR	Business and Human Rights
CSDDD	Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive
CSRD	Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive
DCA	DanChurchAid
EUDR	EU Deforestation Regulation
HRDD	Human Rights Due Diligence
HRD	Human Rights Defender
NAPBHR	National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights
RBC	Responsible Business Conduct
SMEs	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
UNGPs	United Nations Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights

Photo: Rasmus Emil Gravesen



INTRODUCTION

Enhancing responsible business conduct (RBC) across food systems presents a significant opportunity not only for people and the planet but also for businesses themselves. Creating a positive impact for rights-holders – workers, consumers, and local communities in areas of operation - and avoiding negative impacts such as environmental pollution also strengthens the resilience of food value chains while making a strong business case.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, more than 60 percent of the population depends on agriculture, which remains the primary source of income and livelihood opportunities. The sector is responsible for ensuring food security and nutrition, while incomes enable access to e.g. education and healthcare at household level. Food systems transformation is essential not only for ensuring global food security for all, but also because the food sector significantly contributes to climate change, environmental degradation, and biodiversity loss. While industrial food systems contribute to one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions, climate change simultaneously has a negative impact on food production. Populations most at risk of food insecurity and least likely to access climate adaptation financing bear the greatest burden of these impacts.

The sector is further considered high-risk when it comes to negative impacts on human rights and environmental degradation such as deforestation. Despite clearly defined and agreed global human rights frameworks and guidelines, many companies still lag behind on addressing critical issues like child rights, land rights, labour rights, health and safety, pollution etc across the board. These frameworks and guidelines include the United Nations Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) and OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct, and sector specific guidelines such as the OECD FAO Guidance for Responsible Agricultural Supply Chains, and ILO Policy guidelines for the promotion of decent work in the agri-food sector. Addressing human and environmental risks and climate change impacts proactively also provides opportunities for African businesses and value chain actors to continue engaging with EU markets, responding to the newly adopted EU legislation on the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD), the Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) and Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD).

Transforming Food Systems through Responsible Business Conduct

This case compilation presents interesting perspectives, dilemmas and good practices from several actors working across the intersections of sustainable, resilient, just food systems and responsible business conduct (RBC) in different contexts across Sub-Saharan Africa (including Zimbabwe, Zambia, Uganda, Kenya, and broader investment cases in East Africa). The cases are presented by civil society organizations and networks, legal associations, investment initiatives and the private sector. Each case addresses different levers for food systems transitions, key issues to be addressed to advance RBC as well as concrete models and recommendations on the way forward.

The compilation presents coherent strategies for addressing structural drivers and barriers for system change. It emphasizes how duty-bearers should advance human rights and environmental due diligence and safeguards for most-at-risk groups, how policies can stimulate sustainable consumption patterns if informed by local civil society and should align with the above frameworks and regulation, how access to finance and technology can decrease food loss and waste, and how sustainable business models can be advanced through agroecology-focused investments which should also ensure integration of long- and short-term food security. It also builds upon the previous research “Private Investments in Adaptation (2022)” and case compilation “Bringing Principles into Practice (2023)” facilitated by DCA, which supports the analysis of food systems transformation being inevitably linked to RBC and inclusive value chain development. With the recommendations drawn from the cases below we see a future for models that integrate human rights, environmental and climate benefits, which is already demonstrated by some private sector actors, as illustrated below. This is therefore an invitation to businesses to enhance their value chain resilience and make a positive impact, while offering investors and donors an opportunity to increase public and private finance flows for food systems transformation. It aims to foster multistakeholder dialogue and push policy makers to create the relevant incentive structures.

Disclaimer

This publication draws on experiences and research conducted by the authoring organisations presented as cases in brief chapters. Each case and related statements solely represent the views of the author and authoring organisation, and each author is responsible for the data and references presented. Thus, the statements do not reflect the view of DCA nor other organisations contributing to the compilation if these are not listed as author of the specific case.

Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD)

The CSDDD defines standards and expectations towards EU companies with more than 1,000 employees and a worldwide net turnover of EUR 450 million, as well as large non-EU companies with a turnover of more than EUR 450 million within the EU to conduct human rights and environmental due diligence. The objective of the directive is to promote more sustainable and responsible supply chains and support a more just transition through building a sustainable economy and responsible corporate behaviour throughout own operations and across global supply chains. The directive will push larger companies to identify and address actual and potential adverse human rights and environmental impacts of their actions, and prevent, mitigate, end, and remedy such impacts in their operations. The CSDDD seeks to harmonize existing requirements throughout the EU and could potentially serve as a benchmark for countries seeking to strengthen existing regulations or introduce similar provisions to national law to address key gaps in for example commitments to integrate and implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) protect, respect and remedy framework.

Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD)

The CSRD regulates the information companies must disclose regarding their social and environmental impacts. CSRD follows the concept of 'double materiality', requiring companies to report on both financial and non-financial aspects. Therefore, companies must report on how their activities affect people and the planet, but also how climate change and other sustainability challenges influence their financial performance. The aim of the CSRD is to offer investors and other stakeholders' greater transparency to better evaluate EU companies' sustainability performance on people and the environment and the related financial risks and opportunities arising from climate changes and other sustainability issues.

EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR)

The EUDR aims to ensure that a set of key products traded and consumed in the EU and globally no longer contribute to deforestation and forest degradation. Companies placing or exporting the affected products in or from the EU market will have to conduct due diligence to confirm, that the products have not been sourced from land which was deforested or degraded after 31 December 2020. Companies will also have to verify that these products are compliant with relevant legislation of the country of production, including respect for human rights, and the rights of affected Indigenous people.

OECD-FAO Guidance for Responsible Agricultural Supply Chains

The OECD-FAO Guidance for Responsible Agricultural Supply Chains supports businesses to adhere to standards of responsible business conduct and undertake due diligence along agricultural supply chains to ensure that their operations contribute to sustainable development. It guides companies on how to mitigate risks of adverse environmental, social, and human rights impacts and targets all businesses operating along agricultural supply chains, from input supply to production, post-harvest handling, processing, transportation, marketing, distribution, and retailing.

ILO Policy Guidelines for the Promotion of Decent Work in the Agri-Food Sector

The ILO Policy Guidelines for The Promotion of Decent Work in The Agri-food Sector offer guidance for ILO constituents and other stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of policies and measures on decent work in the agri-food sector. This is a crucial element of efforts to develop sustainable food systems. The guidelines outline key principles and a policy framework to direct efforts toward achieving decent work in the agri-food sector. Due to the broad and complex nature of the issue, the required actions are many and diverse. The guidelines recognize the need for an integrated and coordinated approach involving many actors.

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Photo: Ferguson Olemarampa

RECOMMENDATIONS



1. Document and Showcase the Benefits and Value Addition of adhering to Responsible Business Conduct

Agri- and food business actors have a unique opportunity to strengthen the resilience of their value chains while making and showcasing positive impact. This includes addressing climate change, protecting the environment and benefiting rights-holders incl. local communities in areas in which they operate, creating decent jobs and ensuring health and nutrition for consumers. If public and private investors analyse and prioritise investments through systematic screening tools, that offers insights on how investments impact factors like human health, livelihoods, environmental factors and food system sustainability (also addressing negative externalities), this should create incentive structures to build more responsible and sustainable business models. Showcasing good examples provides inspiration for other companies, investors and policy makers, to ensure change and impact at scale.



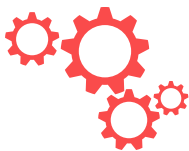
2. Support Investment Flows into Agroecological Food Enterprises and Development Programmes

Donors should leverage their funding for de-risking and creating incentive structures for private sector and development programme investments into agroecological food systems, which includes circular and regenerative principles. Systemic investment assessments, informing multistakeholder dialogue and initiatives to enhance financing, could unlock investments at scale including through blended finance, venture capital and innovative finance models. Further, credit facilities need to ensure that investment and loan structures are geared to also service smallholder farmers and other small-scale producers. Investments into high quality produce geared for conscious buyers (e.g. organically certified) should enable fair pricing models that benefit both farmers and buyers and support the inclusion of smallholder farmers into food value chains.



3. Shape Policy on Sustainable Food Systems Change through Meaningful Engagement of Local Civil Society

Meaningful inclusion of local civil society in food systems related policy processes will strengthen attention to local livelihoods, food security and access to clean, healthy and sustainable environments. This can e.g. be done through meaningful consultations and by leveraging locally- and farmer-led research and innovations which benefit local food- and ecosystems. Multistakeholder fora, including civil society and rights-holders, have the potential to foster inclusive, systemic and cross-sectoral processes to address these challenges, advance policy and identify key actions. Furthermore, it is essential to ensure policy coherence, e.g. that issues and actions addressed in National Action Plans on Business and Human Rights (NAPBHRs) are aligned with national food and agricultural policy and investment frameworks with climate and environment action (incl. food systems in NDCs). Public procurement policies, incentive and tax structures could further play a role in stimulating sustainable consumption and strengthening markets for responsible businesses.



4. Ensure that the UNGPs Reach Farm Levels

While national policies are key for defining overall objectives and setting standards, it is essential to ensure that policies are not only coherent horizontally, but also vertically. Governments should therefore invest in equipping the relevant local authorities and agencies to ensure uptake at all levels, including resourcing national human rights institutions to conduct monitoring activities. Furthermore, the UNGPs (16d) outlines that businesses' human rights policies should be "publicly available and communicated internally and externally to all personnel, business partners and other relevant parties", meaning they should ensure that organisational policies and commitments reach farm levels. The UNGPs (29) also underline the need for grievance mechanisms to be directly accessible at operational level for potentially affected individuals and communities.



5. Harmonise National Human and Environmental Rights Due Diligence Policies with the CSDDD

CSDDD alignment in national policies is essential for exports to EU markets, but it could also serve as a positive driver for market uptake in other regions. While NAPBHRs function as relevant roadmaps to domesticate the UNGPs, they typically also address the need to increase mandatory regulation. As the agri-food industry is notoriously considered a high-risk sector when it comes to ensuring human and environmental rights, national regulation should impose concrete provisions for due diligence in prevention, mitigation and remedy mechanisms, in line with the CSDDD risk-based due diligence provisions. The CSDDD i.e. underlines the need to tackle “harmful purchasing practices and price pressures on producers, particularly smaller operators” and a recommendation to large food processors and retailers to “adapt their purchasing practices and develop and use purchasing policies that contribute to living wages and incomes for their suppliers.”



6. Ensure Access to Markets for Marginalised Groups

Donors and private investors should support innovations and innovative business models that ensure access to food markets for marginalised groups to strengthen local food systems and value chains and reduce inequalities and food insecurity. Beyond gearing credit facilities towards smallholder farmers and other small producers, this also means ensuring equal access to technology such as post-harvest handling solutions (cooling etc.). Furthermore, businesses should leverage positively on the inclusion of women to promote gender equality in business models and in governance structures. It is recommended to set targets for gender equality in companies’ board and management structures.



7. Establish Safeguards for Groups at Risk of Rights Abuses

Businesses, investors and policy makers should pay particular attention to the most marginalised and at-risk groups in the agricultural and food sector, including women, children, and human rights and environmental defenders. This should happen through safeguards such as complaints and grievance mechanisms, and e.g. safeguarding women by ensuring that gender-based violence is prevented across operations and that fair maternity schemes are in place. Additionally, there should be meaningful inclusion of organisations that represent marginalised groups in risk assessment consultation processes both for investments and policy developments.



8. Integrate Interventions of Short- and Long-term Food Security

Donors should scale up support to address growing food insecurity and take measures to integrate interventions for short- and long-term food security. This could entail increased support to transition to climate resilient, sustainable agroecology-based food production, which will enhance self-reliance in fragile and humanitarian contexts and nature restoration for ecosystem-based adaptation. Integrating responses to acute and longer-term food insecurity will reduce dependency on food imports and global value chains, which can be vulnerable to e.g. geopolitical tensions. At the same time, this integration will stimulate green jobs and income opportunities locally.

Photo: Jesper Houborg



CASE

PRESENTATIONS

Strategic Partnerships that Build Good Businesses are Contributing to a Sustainable Food System in East Africa

By SHONA

Recognising that a sustainable food system is one of the foundations for our vision of building prosperity and that agriculture is one of the key sectors in East Africa, we see the private sector (in the form of Good Businesses) playing a crucial role in building this sustainable food system by promoting agroecology, regenerative agriculture and circular agribusiness. Over the past few years, SHONA has built strategic partnerships with SMEs, NGOs, investors, corporates and development partners to design and implement new programs and ideas that support entrepreneurs to build Good Businesses, contributing to a sustainable food system that is agroecological, inclusive and resilient.

SHONA Guides, Backs and Connects entrepreneurs, supporting them to build Good Businesses. We identify high-potential ambitious entrepreneurs and give them the knowledge, tools, capital and networks they need to build skills and the capacity to grow well-run businesses that are good for customers, employees, owners, value chain partners, the environment and the local communities where they are based. Good businesses create good jobs, create high-quality products and services that improve quality of life, generate wealth, build industries, protect and regenerate the environment, and invest in their local communities, building prosperity.

Mainstreaming and Scaling Agroecology in East Africa

One of the strategic partnerships is The Neycha Accelerator & Fund (Neycha), designed to mainstream and scale agroecology in East Africa to build a more holistic and circular agrifood economy through increased flow of capital to Agroecological Enterprises (AEEs) by proving that there is an agroecology business case through successful and inspiring Agroecology Enterprises. Agroecological Enterprises provide markets to farmers and support them in transitioning to agroecology either by providing them with organic inputs and services or output markets for their produce.

SHONA is doing this by identifying and partnering with 60 growth-oriented Agroecological Enterprises (AEEs) in Uganda and Kenya, operating along the entire agriculture value chain from input provision to processing and consumption, providing them with the capacity building (business growth support, agroecology support and investment readiness support through training, mentorship and technical assistance), capital (flexible business loans of between USD 10,000 – USD 50,000 for working capital, asset financing and more tailored to the AEE's needs), and connections (markets and the agroecology movement) they need to grow.

This partnership is between SHONA and Biovision Foundation (a not-for-profit organisation committed to ecological development, supported by Ikea Foundation for this project), SHONA Capital (an SME lender and fund manager) and investment partners including DOEN Foundation, the Dunn Family Charitable Foundation, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, McKnight Foundation and The 11th Hour Project. Some examples of the AEEs part of Neycha include:

- **Safi Organics**, based in Kenya, manufactures locally sourced organic fertilisers, biochar, and foliar to enhance soil health and increase crop yields for smallholder farmers in rural Kenya.
- **Millionstars Health Products Company**, based in Uganda, promotes natural health remedies and sustainability by specialising in the production of herbal medicines that address various health conditions, using locally sourced herbs. They also convert the herbal waste into organic manure for use in banana plantations.
- **Kaya Nuts**, based in Kenya, seeks to create consumer satisfaction by processing flavoured cashew nuts and other healthy value-added products in the cashew nuts value chain.
- **Agape Innovations**, based in Uganda, is dedicated to empowering farmers with innovative and sustainable solutions. They produce products, such as organic fertilisers and pest control solutions, that are designed to be affordable and effective, catering to the specific needs of farmers.
- **Fine Aromas**, based in Kenya, provides the basic family requirements in terms of organic certified fresh and dry products, wild harvested and naturally grown products.

- **Griincom Organic Fertilisers**, based in Kenya, provide solutions to organic waste challenges through the bioconversion of waste into organic fertiliser, foliar, and pest-repellent, offering farmers affordable, research-based alternatives that promote soil health and crop productivity. They focus on empowering women and youth by establishing crop and livestock manure supply chains. This initiative allows urban and peri-urban farmers to profit from their waste while receiving training in composting, which reduces input costs and enhances soil health, leading to increased productivity.

Purpose-driven Entrepreneurship in Uganda

The second strategic partnership is Rootical Business Builder, a start-up studio that powers purpose-driven entrepreneurs in Uganda to build and own their regenerative agri-food businesses—to foster job creation, transition to agroecology and strengthen the agroecological movement from within. Bringing together talent, resources and ideas, a venture studio is a streamlined process with a proven methodology to produce start-ups. Rootical’s process begins with a food system leadership bootcamp for a group of 40 selected individuals. These potential entrepreneurs build their food system leadership skills and conduct a participatory food system analysis to identify key challenges in the food system. Next, in the Systemic Venture Building, 10-12 inclusive business models are developed to address the prioritised pivotal challenges. Finally, after extensive piloting and validation, 5-6 businesses are incorporated with Rootical as a co-founder, receiving runway capital and active venture builder support to grow. Rootical’s venture studio model is designed to provide the opportunity to build the purest form of agroecological enterprises. This partnership is between SHONA and Fresh Ventures Studio, the DOEN Foundation, Biovision Foundation, the French Embassy in Uganda, and a Belgian private Family Foundation. Some of the examples of businesses Rootical is building through this process include:

- Ecologic that provides smallholder farmers with access to organic farming inputs.
- Eden Seeds which is building a farmer-owned indigenous seeds company and network.
- Guarding Fresh produces natural shelf-life extension solutions for fruits and vegetables, replacing the current use of harmful chemicals like Mancozeb.

SHONA also has additional strategic partnerships contributing to a sustainable food system, including:

- **Generation Food Uganda** that is supporting entrepreneurs in Mbale and Gulu cities to grow businesses contributing to sustainable food systems in these two cities. This partnership is between SHONA, Rikolto, DOEN Foundation, SHONA Capital and YouCa.
- The **AfriFOODlinks Mbale Circular Business Program** that is identifying and partnering with circular agribusinesses or agribusinesses that have potential to integrate circularity in their business models in Mbale City, providing them with the training, business coaching, capital and networks they need to grow. This partnership is between SHONA, Rikolto, ICLEI Africa, Mbale City Council and part of a wider program, AfriFOODlinks, funded by the European Union.
- **Growing Female-Driven Social Businesses For Zero Hunger In East Africa**, that will identify and build the capacity of 40 female-driven businesses in Uganda and Kenya in climate-smart food production, agriculture, climate change, nutrition, WASH, digitalization, and skills development, creating at least 80 jobs and benefiting at least 24,000 people (as customers, users, and suppliers). This partnership is with Welthungerhilfe and funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Recommendations to Further Enhance ‘Good Business’ Partnerships in East Africa

This work is still in its early days, but shows great promise. We also see additional opportunities to improve how Good Businesses can contribute to sustainable food systems. Some of these include:

- Build common knowledge, insights, materials and tools around agroecological entrepreneurship. This is key to accelerate East Africa’s transition towards agroecology. As the interest in agroecology entrepreneurship grows, there is an opportunity to amplify and accelerate all our learning by bringing our heads and resources together under one umbrella to build common knowledge, insights, materials and learning. In collaboration with Biovision Foundation, Rootical, The TIFS Initiative, McKnight Foundation and the Netherlands Food Partnership, SHONA is currently building a Community of Practice on Agroecology Entrepreneurship in East Africa.

- **Finance the transition of smallholder farmers to agroecology.** While many organisations are providing technical support to help farmers transition to agroecology, the cost is still high for most farmers, who are the foundation of a sustainable food system.
- **Invest in food system entrepreneurship.** To enhance resilience and strengthen sustainable food systems, it is key to enable investment flows into entrepreneurship. Alongside TIFS, Rootical, Fresh Ventures, and a group of experts, SHONA is designing a funding vehicle to increase the flow of capital into building more agroecological enterprises across different continents and bio regions. We are currently studying different design options, for example: a fund, a fund of funds, and more. Interested in being a potential financing partner, contact Hannes Van den Eeckhout (hannes@rootical.org).

About SHONA

SHONA has been Guiding, Backing and Connecting entrepreneurs, supporting them to grow Good Businesses in East Africa since 2013. SHONA has worked with more than 500 SMEs and 2,000 entrepreneurs across multiple sectors, including agriculture, financial services, health care, education, manufacturing, water and sanitation, and energy, who have grown to create more than 1,700 jobs and collectively raise more than USD 35 million in investment.

A sustainable food system is possible, and while the work to achieve one is ambitious, including entrepreneurs in this conversation is one of the best ways to accelerate how we achieve it. We are inspired by all the work that is going on in East Africa and welcome and look forward to building more strategic partnerships to play our collective role in accelerating East Africa's transition towards a sustainable food system. For interests in participating in a Community of Practice on Agroecology Entrepreneurship, contact Joachim Ewechu (jewechu@shona.co). For interests in building strategic partnerships on sustainable food systems, contact Carina Juilfs (carinaj@shona.co). For interests in investments in FS entrepreneurship contact Hannes Van den Eeckhout (hannes@rootical.org).



Reducing food loss and waste through green cold chain solutions for farmers and traders

By Andrea Voigt, VP Head of Global Public Affairs & Sustainability, Danfoss Climate Solutions

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With the world's population expected to grow by nearly 2 billion people by 2050 according to the International Energy Agency (IEA), investments in sustainable cold chain technology are urgently needed to ensure that we are able to feed the growing number of people on the planet. A cold chain is an uninterrupted system of temperature-controlled transport and storage of refrigerated food products between upstream producers and final consumers, designed to maintain the quality and safety of perishable food products.

Globally, around 14% of food production is lost due to a lack of effective refrigeration – enough to feed 1 billion people. In fact, temperature is the main factor affecting the safety and quality of perishable food products. By implementing effective global cold chains, 55% of the food losses attributable to current global cold chains could be avoided, while reducing up to 50% of the CO2 emissions. However, growing demand for reliable cold chains to safely deliver much needed food and medicines to a rapidly increasing global population is an often neglected focus in the green transition. The resulting food loss poses severe challenges for ensuring a transition that is just, economically and environmentally viable, by adversely impacting both food safety and security, as well as the ability of smallholder farmers and traders to maintain a living wage as defined by the UN.

This is particularly significant in developing countries where access to refrigeration is much lower than in developed countries. In Sub-Saharan Africa, as much as 40% of food production is lost between farms and markets, with two-thirds within the first mile. The good news is that we already have many of the solutions needed to tackle the world's challenges while creating growth. In partnership with DanChurchAid and DANIDA, Danfoss is working with local organisations in Kenya to pioneer solutions to address a key cause of global food loss through the Loss2Value (L2V) project.



Andrea Voigt, VP and Head of Global Public Affairs and Sustainability, Danfoss Climate Solutions says: *“The cold chain and its beneficial impact on the economy of a country and the health of its population is far from getting the attention it deserves. With projects such as the L2V project we want to raise awareness, educate and show how the installation of cold rooms can improve the livelihood of local smallholder farmers while improving food safety and security for the entire population.”*

The Loss2Value Project in Kenya

Smallholder farmers in Kenya lose up to 30-50% of their vegetable and fruit production due to fragmented value chains and lack of accessible and affordable cooling solutions. Farmers bear most of the costs associated with food loss until the produce reaches the pack house, impacting their financial returns. The Loss2Value project in Nakuru and Nyandarua counties of Kenya aims to develop sustainable business models and financing solutions for smallholder farmers, providing energy-efficient cold storage to reduce food and income loss from post-harvest spoilage.

This addresses some of the immediate challenges related to food loss and maintaining a living wage, as well as enabling a lasting and resilient impact on the agribusiness landscape in Kenya. The project was launched together with the DanChurchAid at the Africa Climate Summit in September 2023 and funded by DANIDA Green Business Partnerships (DGBP). Our other partners include InspiraFarms and the Fresh Produce Exporters Association of Kenya (FPEAK). By developing cold chains solutions to reduce food loss and waste in Kenya, the Loss2Value project contributes effectively to local climate adaptation, support financial and food security, and reduce environmental impact of the food wasted, both carbon emissions and water use.



We want to raise awareness, educate and show how the installation of cold rooms can improve the livelihood of local smallholder farmers while improving food safety and security for the entire population.



Key project objectives

- Reduce post-harvest losses through farmers' inclusion in green value chains
- Innovative business model and sustainable financing for green cooling solutions
- Increased expertise, accreditation, standards for cold/cooling systems
- Enabling environment for responsible climate solutions.

A survey conducted among farmers and traders in the Nakuru and Nyandarua countries of Kenya in relation to the Loss2Value project indicated that about 96% of the surveyed farmers reported the need for a cooling system in the cooperative, with 93% willing to pay for the facility for the financial benefits provided by e.g. cold rooms.

The first cold rooms, expected to be installed in September 2024, will provide local farmers with cold room storage to reduce food waste and secure higher incomes for farmers. Over the course of the Loss2Value project, we plan on installing up to 7 cold rooms, impacting around 2,000 smallholder farmers and 4 trader associations.

Key highlights in 2024

- Mapped over 950 farmer organisations identified for potential onboarding, as well as 31 cooperatives. The main crops cultivated by the identified farmer organisations and cooperatives are French beans, snow peas, sugar snaps, chilis and other locally consumed vegetables.
- Training of selected groups of smallholder farmers and traders/trader associations on delivery and storing of produce in cold storage through climate-resilient farming techniques.
- Community mobilization and capacity building of rural smallholder farmers and trader associations on costs and benefits of cold storage for reduced post-harvest losses.
- Partnered with the African Centre of Excellence Rwanda (ACES) by providing training modules and a cold room for training purposes. ACES is a pioneering organisation working towards sustainable, smart cold-chain, cooling and post-harvest management.



- Provided training for local farmers on good agronomic practices, food safety and quality assurance. To foster local skills development, our local team visited technical schools in Nakuru and Nyandarua to assess refrigeration courses and propose recommendations for curriculum development.
- Enrolled 12 students across Africa to collect market data from their home countries. Over six months, the students specialized in mechanical and electrical engineering have conducted research on food facilities, hotels and industries in Rwanda, Nigeria, Kenya, and the Ivory Coast.

About Danfoss

Danfoss engineers solutions that increase machine productivity, reduce emissions, lower energy consumption, and enable electrification. Our solutions are used in such areas as refrigeration, air conditioning, heating, power conversion, motor control, industrial machinery, automotive, marine, and off- and on-highway equipment. We also provide solutions for renewable energy, such as solar and wind power, as well as district-energy infrastructure for cities. Our three segments continue to invest in innovation and developing our global footprint, bringing innovative solutions and technology to the market and our customers. The focus on innovation is a key part of our green growth strategy and instrumental to realizing our sustainability goal of becoming our customers' preferred decarbonization partner. Together, we engineer tomorrow to build a better future.

Advancing Responsible Business Conduct: The Need for Enhanced Human Rights Due Diligence in the Agribusiness Sector in Kenya

By Florence Shako, Executive Director, Centre for Education Policy and Climate Justice (CEPCJ)

Kenya is one of the four African nations to adopt a National Action Plan (NAP) on Business and Human Rights and hence domesticate the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). The main objective of the NAP is to guide the state in fulfilling its duty to protect individuals and communities from business-related human rights abuses consistent with its domestic and international obligations. Further, the NAP guides businesses on the measures they should undertake to meet their responsibility to respect human rights in their operations and to offer a roadmap of strengthening access to judicial and non-judicial remedies for victims of business-related harm. However, there is yet to be full realization of the implementation of the NAP in enabling responsible business conduct (RBC) by businesses in Kenya. This is essential in particular for industries such as the agribusiness sector which remains at high risk when it comes to business-related environmental and human rights abuse and violations. This case study analyses the need to strengthen RBC by enhancing human rights due diligence in the agribusiness sector in Kenya.

The Centre for Education Policy and Climate Justice (CEPCJ) provides capacity building and training for businesses on navigating responsible business conduct and specifically, implementing strategies for enhancing human rights due diligence in the agribusiness sector in Kenya. This is at the core of advancing business and human rights in the country.

Human Rights Risks in the Agri-business sector in Kenya

The agricultural sector continues to play a critical role in Kenya's economy accounting for about 20 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The sector also employs over 40 percent of the total population and more than 70 percent of the rural populace.

The most serious human rights risks in the agribusiness sector in Kenya include forced labour, child labour, health and safety risks, and unfair working conditions, working below minimum wages, excessive hours, abusive treatment and discrimination in employment, lack of access to grievance mechanisms, environmental risks, land grabbing and displacements among others. The most susceptible persons to these adverse conditions in the agribusiness sector are migrant workers, women and children. Three substantive examples of the high risk nature of the agribusiness sector in Kenya briefly spotlighted:

a) Kakuzi Case

In 2020, seventy-nine Kenyan claimants alleged that the security guards protecting Kakuzi land holdings “intentionally and systematically mistreated members of the surrounding communities to physically punish local community members for either crossing Kakuzi property or raising issues against Kakuzi.” Specifically, the claimants alleged that security guards in the area battered a young man to death for allegedly stealing avocados, raped ten women, and committed multiple attacks on villagers.³ Camellia PLC, Kakuzi’s UK based parent company, settled the group lawsuit for £4.6 million in addition to major structural changes to their operations without admitting liability.

b) Del Monte Case

In December 2023, a rights group and community activists filed a lawsuit against U.S. multinational food giant Del Monte over accusations of killings and assaults at its vast pineapple plantation near Nairobi.



The most serious human rights risks in the agribusiness sector in Kenya include forced labour, child labour, health and safety risks, and unfair working conditions, working below minimum wages, excessive hours, abusive treatment and discrimination in employment, lack of access to grievance mechanisms (...)



The case, lodged at the High Court of Kenya, was also on behalf of people who stated that they had been attacked by Del Monte security guards, and relatives of alleged victims. The human rights abuses were allegedly perpetrated after individuals were caught stealing pineapples from the Del Monte farms and they were then subjected to inhumane treatment by the security guards on duty.

c) Confirmation of KTDA Zonal Director in Kericho County

Six human rights lobbies moved to court seeking to block confirmation of the new Kenya Tea Factory Development Agency (KTDA) zonal director for Tegat/Toror Tea Factory in Kericho County. The director was elected on June 28, 2024 for Ainamoi zone but his win kicked up storm following claims of sexual exploitation of workers at a multinational tea company in an expose by the BCC. The petitioners under the Umbrella of Coalition Organizations Working on Sexual Violence in Kenya and Crusaders for Human Rights and Public Interest Cases, argued that the conduct, as portrayed in the documentary, disqualifies him from holding public office in Kenya. The petition stated that the BCC documentary exposed the director abusing his power and office by sexually exploiting women who worked and sought job opportunities at James Finlays Kenya.⁵ The petition is pending in court but organizations working with KTDA threatened to pause business with them immediately if the recruitment was to follow through.

These few examples illustrate the urgent need to advance RBC in the agribusiness sector in Kenya in alignment with pillar 2 of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Businesses should demonstrate corporate respect for human rights which includes avoiding infringing on the rights of others and addressing adverse human rights impacts with which they are involved.

RBC includes promoting workers' rights and safe working conditions, preventing human trafficking, and addressing other human rights-related risks.⁶ There is a need to advance RBC for businesses operating in the agrifood sector in Kenya in order to address these human rights risks and abuses. RBC principles sets out an expectation that all businesses – regardless of their legal status, size, ownership or sector – avoid and address negative impacts of their operations, while contributing to sustainable development in the countries where they operate.⁷ RBC further includes committing to robust due diligence efforts, including identifying and mitigating adverse impacts of business conduct, and remedying abuses where they occur.

In building capacity of business, CEPCJ encourages the uptake of human rights due diligence (HRDD) by businesses in the agribusiness sector. However, the substantive framework for HRDD, both in law and practice, has yet to be standardised in its implementation in Kenya with different approaches taken by different organizations. CEPCJ also engages in policy advocacy for a coherent policy environment for business and human rights in Kenya as well as pushing for a coherent approach in developing accompanying measures to make HRDD a reality.



The directive should serve as a benchmark for other countries, like Kenya, to introduce similar legislation also for businesses exporting to other markets than the European.

Implementing Human Rights Due Diligence

While there has been recognition and uptake of business and human rights in Kenya, businesses in the agribusiness sector have not yet fully implemented human rights due diligence (HRDD) in their operations. HRDD is the primary tool that ensures that businesses identify the human rights risks of their activities, take measures to avoid or mitigate them, and where the harm has already occurred, ensure that the victims have access to an effective remedy. This responsibility extends beyond their activities to their business relationships including suppliers and contractors.

At a global stage, the UNGPs for BHR advocate for the uptake of HRDD by businesses. Similarly, the European Union Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) has introduced the obligation for companies to conduct appropriate human rights and environmental due diligence with respect to their operations, subsidiaries and business partners in their supply chain. The directive should serve as a benchmark for other countries, like Kenya, to introduce similar legislation also for businesses exporting to other markets than the European. The directive entails risk-based human rights and environmental due diligence to identify actual and potential adverse impacts, and prevent, mitigate, end and remedy these in businesses' operations and 'chain of activities'.



In Kenya, organizations such as the United Nations Global Compact Network Kenya have put in initiatives to encourage businesses to take up HRDD. However, many businesses in the agribusiness sector are yet to conduct comprehensive and credible human rights impact assessments before they commence their operations or continuously review the assessment to ensure that they prevent, address and redress human rights violations. Such impact assessment is critical in involving meaningful consultation with potentially affected groups and other relevant stakeholders. While many agribusinesses have demonstrated willingness to undertake HRDD, the 'how' to do it remains unclear.

Businesses should be encouraged to conduct impact assessments through toolkits or adopt risk-based due diligence along agriculture supply chains. The OECD-FAO Guidance for Responsible Agricultural Supply Chains provides a five step framework for risk-based due diligence along agricultural chains. Enterprises should implement the following five-step framework to undertake risk-based due diligence along agricultural supply chains: (i) establish strong enterprise management systems for responsible agricultural supply chains; (ii) identify, assess and prioritise risks in the supply chain; (iii) design and implement a strategy to respond to identified risks; (iv) verify supply chain due diligence; and (v) report on supply chain due diligence.¹⁰

Recommendations

To address issues around RBC in the agribusiness sector in Kenya, the following recommendations should be taken into account by public and private actors:

- a) Prioritize RBC in the agribusiness sector through capacity building and trainings to businesses along agricultural supply chains, including through the NAP implementation.
- b) Encourage systematic human rights due diligence (HRDD) by businesses in the agribusiness sector, e.g. through the OECD-FAO Guidance for Responsible Agricultural Supply Chains and implementation of the five-step framework to undertake risk-based due diligence along agricultural supply chains.
- c) Advocate for a coherent policy environment for business and human rights in Kenya and a coherent approach in developing accompanying measures to make human rights due diligence (HRDD) a reality;
- d) Develop toolkits and programs specific to the agribusiness sector to help businesses take up human rights due diligence in their operations in Kenya.

About the Centre for Education Policy and Climate Justice (CEPCJ)

The Centre for Education Policy and Climate Justice (CEPCJ) is a pioneering woman-led organization dedicated to advancing climate justice through research, policy advocacy, and strategic litigation. CEPCJ aims to be a global leader in promoting access to justice for vulnerable and marginalized communities affected by climate change. CEPCJ has a strong commitment to equity, human rights, and climate justice. It is based in Nairobi, Kenya. CEPCJ aims at building the capacity of businesses both in country and regionally in issues of just transitions and loss and damage. The principle of “just transition”, integral to the Paris Agreement, aims for fair, inclusive decarbonization that leaves no one behind, linking it to sustainable agribusiness systems and SDG 2 is a natural extension. Strong policy frameworks that promote sustainability, equity, and social justice in the food systems also provide the necessary support and guidance for a just transition. CEPCJ advocates for the uptake of HRDD in order to advance responsible business conduct.



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Enhancing the Resilience of Food System through Responsible Business Conduct: Market Access for Smallholder Farmers in Eastern Uganda

By Joyce Atuhaire, Executive Director, African Women Agribusiness Network Uganda Ltd (AWAN)

In Uganda, agriculture remains the major source of livelihood for over 80% of the population (Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), 2020). The sector is responsible for ensuring food security at the household level, contributing to positive nutrition outcomes, and enabling households to have some form of income to meet other necessities such as education and healthcare. However, the sector has a notorious high potential for creating negative environmental, social, economic, and health consequences. On this basis, African Women Agribusiness Network Uganda (AWAN) is emphasizing responsible business conduct (RBC) by all value chain actors including smallholder farmers, SMEs working as off-takers, suppliers of goods and services and project staff during the design and implementation.

Market Access for Smallholder Farmers in Teso Subregion

The Market Access Project for Smallholder Farmers (MAPS) is one of the many interventions being implemented by AWAN in line with its mission of building gender inclusive agri-food market systems. The intervention is being implemented in Kapelebyong, Amuria, and Katakwi districts in Teso Sub-Region, Eastern Uganda. The main objective of the intervention is to improve the household incomes of 300 smallholder farmers in Eastern Uganda through intensification of market-led organic production, and facilitation of access to both domestic and export markets and business development services. Based on the findings of the market study conducted at the project inception, AWAN is working with four main commodities namely: groundnuts, soybeans, pumpkins, and avocados, which were identified on the basis of commercial viability and market demand both locally and internationally.



A range of services have so far been provided to the smallholder farmers including training in organic production and post-harvest handling, linkage to organic inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides, provision of quality inputs and post-harvest handling materials, and facilitating access to formal markets through farmer-to-off-taker linkages. The interventions along the food value chains have demonstrated increased uptake of agroecological practices and post-harvest handling technologies leading to increased productivity, reduced post-harvest losses and improved quality of produce. To ensure a feedback mechanism on possible human rights abuses, AWAN has through the project put in place a mechanism for obtaining feedback on any possible human rights abuses or exploitation by staff, suppliers, off-takers, and other direct and indirect agents of the project. In every activity, participants are encouraged to provide feedback in confidence through a piece of paper without showing their identity. A dedicated telephone number has also been provided for raising complaints and feedback. The telephone line available is however not toll-free which may still hinder some rights holders from raising their issues.

Responsible Environmental Practices

Environmental sustainability has been at the core of the MAPS intervention. Naturally, interventions aimed at increasing agriculture production increase threats to environmental sustainability as smallholder farmers and production-facing businesses use unsustainable mechanisms including too much use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. Farmers have also been known for encroaching on sensitive environmental ecosystems such as wetlands and forests due to the ever-growing population which reduce the available arable land per household. The above-mentioned practices contribute to adverse environmental impacts including contamination of land, water, and air, reduced forest cover, and increased carbon gas emissions (FAO, 2024).



(...) AWAN has through the project put in place a mechanism for obtaining feedback on any possible human rights abuses or exploitation by staff, suppliers, off-takers, and other direct and indirect agents of the project.



To enhance responsible business conduct that reduces the risk of environmental degradation and ensures sustainability, MAPS has been able to implement various interventions. First, there has been an emphasis on good agricultural practices that use locally available resources to improve soil fertility and increase protection against pests and diseases while minimizing the use of agrochemicals. The project has engaged consultants and in-house staff to build the capacity of 300 small farmers in making organic liquid fertilizers, compost manure and formulating pesticides using local materials. Promotion of high-yielding and tolerant varieties such as SERENUT 14R for groundnuts and MAKSOY 3 N were promoted to increase the productivity of farmers without increasing the demand for more land, pesticides, and production-enhancing synthetic fertilizers.

Fair and Responsible Pricing

Fair pricing is an important element of a responsible food market system. Fair pricing determines whether smallholder farmers get reasonable income from their farm investment or not. In Uganda and Teso sub-region in particular, pricing has long been the privilege of the buyer as smallholder farmers often lack the negotiating power and market information needed to influence the price. To deal with this challenge, some actors have come up with interventions such as contract farming where prices are predetermined at the contracting stage. This approach has however come with its challenges. In case of a price boom, farmers are not able to benefit since prices are fixed, and on the other hand, when the market prices are lower than the agreed price, the off-takers run away leaving farmers stuck with their produce.

To mitigate the challenge and have a win-win solution, AWAN facilitated an engagement between farmers and off-takers, and a floating pricing arrangement was agreed upon, which was signed by both parties. To incentivize the off-takers to pay the above market price, AWAN has ensured that the produce is of high standard by working with farmers at all stages of the production cycle from production, harvesting, post-harvest handling, and storage. AWAN also operates aggregation centres where the produce is received, sorted, and graded before being supplied to the off-takers. By doing this, off-takers are assured of quality, volumes, and reduced cost of collecting the produce from individual farmers.



Women are the main source of labour for tilling the land, planting, weeding, harvesting, drying, and other critical tasks within the production cycle. However, they are usually neglected in making critical decisions such as when, and what to plant, and determining land usage.

Enhancing Gender Equality in the Agri-food System

In the Teso sub-region where the project is being implemented, women contribute significantly to agriculture production. Women are the main source of labour for tilling the land, planting, weeding, harvesting, drying, and other critical tasks within the production cycle. However, they are usually neglected in making critical decisions such as when, and what to plant, and determining land usage. Worse still, women are left out of selling decisions and selling of produce and how proceeds from such sales are used, and often excluded from land ownership. Driven by the need to build inclusive food systems, the MAPS intervention emphasizes the need to increase the role of women in making important decisions.

This has been achieved through intentional targeting where 60% of the lead farmers and out growers have to be women. As such, the women participating in MAPS are engaged in making important decisions regarding which enterprises they want to be engaged in, which varieties, and participating in negotiations with off-takers to determine the prices. Through the project, AWAN has also supported smallholder farmers, majority of which are women to formalize their enterprises legally so that they can participate in formal markets.

Through engagements with farmers, it was agreed that producer-cooperative societies were the most appropriate legal form for the project participants. In the formalization of the enterprises, the project has also emphasized gender inclusiveness by putting a threshold of 60% for executive committees and membership of all the 6 producer cooperative societies registered.

Health and Safety for Consumers

In an agri-food system, it is important to ensure that consumers enjoy their right to purchase and consume safe and high-quality food. However, this is often not the case as high risks of food contamination exist across the value chain during production, harvesting, post-harvest handling, storage and transportation. At the production level, there has been generally increased use of agrochemicals without adherence to application specifications such as spraying intervals, doses, and pre-harvest intervals leading to high chemical residual levels (Kakuru and Akurut, 2022). Additionally, many grain farmers harvest before the appropriate time, do not observe the required moisture content, dry their produce directly on the ground, and do not use appropriate storage technologies due to lack of access and affordability. All these increase the risk of contamination exposing consumers to unsafe foods (Gourd, 2023).

Under MAPS, the health and safety of consumers has been tackled in two main ways. First, the producers have been sensitized about the dangers of risky production and handling practices on their own lives since they are also consumers. Secondly, the producers are aware through the off-take agreements that produce that has not been handled according to required standards will not be eligible for the market under MAPS. The third intervention has been practically training the farmers in the proper handling of produce and providing post-harvest and storage technologies including tarpaulins and hermetic bags. During the second year of the project, AWAN experienced increased demand for post-harvest and storage technologies on a cost-sharing basis.



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About African Women Agribusiness Network Uganda

African Women Agribusiness Network Uganda Ltd (AWAN) is a membership-based Entrepreneurship Support organization (ESO). AWAN was established in 2004 by a group of women entrepreneurs with the collective objective of working together to increase women's participation, role, and influence in agri-food value chains. The organization has grown from 12 founding members to 300 women-owned agri-SMEs. AWAN's main goal is "Economic Empowerment of Women through building gender and nutrition-sensitive value chains". AWAN's implementation is guided by four main objectives:

1. Building the capacity of women to access economic opportunities and jobs Agri-food value chains
2. Increasing access to finance and non-financial business development services
3. Enabling women to access formal lucrative markets in the agriculture value chains
4. Advocating for gender-inclusive legal and policy environment

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Human Rights Violations in Zimbabwe's Agriculture Sector: A Case for Enhanced Corporate Responsibility

By: Obert Bore, Responsible Investment and Business Program Lead & Michelle Chitando, Climate Change and Energy Governance Program Lead, Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association (ZELA)

Agriculture is one of the key economic sectors underpinning Zimbabwe's development agenda as espoused in the National Development Strategy 1 (2021 – 2025). Thus, the Government has consistently attempted to increase agriculture production and productivity, especially supporting smallholder farmers to ensure food and nutrition security, enhance income, and increase opportunities for developing agribusiness value chains.

While the agriculture sector has generated significant economic benefits for the country, it has also experienced grave challenges associated with human rights. This case study sheds light on complex dynamics and human rights violations surrounding the agriculture sector, and why a National Action Plan on Business on Human Rights is fundamental for enhancing corporate responsibility.

This case study is based on a baseline survey conducted by the Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association (ZELA) in partnership with the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) in 2020, in which the current levels of implementation of the United Nations Guiding Principles (UNGPs) on business and human rights in Zimbabwe was assessed. The baseline information was meant to inform the implementation and prioritization of actions for the National Action Plan (NAP) on Business and Human Rights. A mixed methodology was used to collect data including qualitative research methods such as Focus Group Discussions with communities in Chiredzi, Mazowe, Triangle, and Kwekwe. Key informant interviews were also conducted with policy makers, local government authority officials and parastatals such as Environmental Management Agency.

Reported human rights violations in the Zimbabwean Sugarcane Industry

The agricultural sector in Zimbabwe comprises various supply chains including but not limited to livestock, tobacco, maize, horticulture, and sugarcane among others. The sector generates significant levels of rural employment, supporting millions of livelihoods for Zimbabweans. However, the baseline survey noted various human rights impacts for sugarcane the sector, which raises significant questions for policymakers to not only consider the NAP as a crucial tool but to develop mandatory human rights due diligence framework for agriculture and food supply chains.

For sugarcane production, the baseline noted abuses faced by individuals working as cane cutters and millers for transnational agri-processing businesses. Key human rights challenges faced by workers relate to a lack of access to decent housing that has running water and electricity. Women are the most affected as they must travel long distances to fetch water and firewood, thus exposing them to risks of snake bites, and sexual abuse as well as resulting in girls missing school lessons. There have also been reported deaths related to snake bites, mostly for women and children. Furthermore, most sugarcane farm workers are poorly paid and live far below the poverty datum line. When employers delay payments of wages, they allow employees to buy basic foodstuffs and household goods on credit in employer-owned shops, sometimes at inflated prices. This is in contravention of section 65 (1) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, which provides for the right to fair and safe labour practices and standards and to be paid a fair and reasonable wage.

Notorious rights abuses in the broader sector

Beyond the sugarcane sector, another violation noted in the assessment relating to agriculture is gender-based violence in the form of sexual exploitation. This particularly relates to managers or supervisors who ill-treat women when they refuse to give them sexual favours. The high prevalence of sexual exploitation of women on farms is mainly attributed to the fact that there are very few female supervisors or managers in the agricultural sector. The sexual abuse of women demonstrates that business players in the agriculture sector have not adequately incorporated key human rights standards as part of their internal policies.

Such standards include undertaking a human rights due diligence process to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for how they address their impacts on human rights in line with UNGP 15(b). Further, our research reveals that some farmers disregard the labour rights of pregnant women as they make no provision for maternity leave. In addition, cases of gender discrimination were recorded in some farms wherein farm owners reportedly refused to employ women.



Victimising workers for raising concerns has a chilling effect on the effective operations of workers and the enjoyment of collective bargaining rights.

The baseline also assessed levels of compliance with the safety and health-related rights of employees in farms. In some farms, health and safety rights are being violated while some farms are trying to protect the health rights of employees. Health and safety violations occur through failing to provide protective clothing, especially for farm workers who work with chemicals. It was noted that some workers working with very dangerous chemicals were exposed to health hazards such as respiratory diseases chest pains, headaches, TB and different types of cancer. There is also a high prevalence of work-related injuries because employees work without safety clothing. In some farms, it was noted that the employees have to pay for their safety clothing although the labour law enjoins employers to provide safety clothing. Nonetheless, the baseline noted that businesses operating farms are making efforts to protect, enforce and promote the safety and health rights of the employees through the provision of safety clothing and access to health services for employees. For instance, large farms like Mazowe Citrus constantly go through audits and because their goods have to be sold on the global market, they have to comply with health principles, while small farms that supply domestic markets are lagging.

One of the fundamental rights in the Constitution of Zimbabwe is the right to associate, form or join a worker's union. However, the survey noted that workers who voice their concerns in demanding better wages and working conditions often get victimized and harassed. Victimising workers for raising concerns has a chilling effect on the effective operations of workers and the enjoyment of collective bargaining rights.

Absorption of the UNGPs at the farm level

Having noted key challenges in the sector, the research assessed whether businesses operating agriculture ventures have clear policies in place to support and uphold human rights. Unfortunately, most farms operating in Zimbabwe do not have clear human rights policies or internal control measures that integrate human rights-based approaches across their operations. This is a clear recommendation in UNGP 16 (d) which states that human rights policies should be publicly available and communicated internally and externally to all personnel, business partners and other relevant parties.

Only a few farms highlighted the presence of policies and codes of conduct around human rights and environmental laws, for example, Gushungo Dairy noted that it strives to comply with UNGP on business and human rights through making their human rights policies publicly available and accessible. Broadly, most of the employees working in other farms that were interviewed revealed that they are not aware of any human rights policies that guide the operations of farms. This creates a very fertile ground for human rights violations as the workers will not be able to identify and report rights violations.

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(...) government should invest in research and monitoring particular value chains such as sugarcane, dairy, tobacco and flowers. This is fundamental to inform the processes of developing a NAP. While a NAP on BHR may provide a framework for integrating human rights in business operations, mandatory human rights due diligence in agricultural supply chains is equally imperative.

Recommendations for enhanced corporate responsibility

Therefore, to strengthen respect for human rights and responsible business conduct in the agriculture sector, Government, civil society actors and other stakeholders ought to first appreciate the full scale of human rights challenges in the agricultural sector.

This will be key in developing sector-specific standards for the country context. In this regard, government should invest in research and monitoring particular value chains such as sugarcane, dairy, tobacco and flowers. This is fundamental to inform the processes of developing a NAP. While a NAP on BHR may provide a framework for integrating human rights in business operations, mandatory human rights due diligence in agricultural supply chains is equally imperative. Zimbabwe has yet to adopt such a framework, but will soon be indirectly affected by regulations such as the EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive for exports to the European market.

To address the above challenges faced in the sector, businesses and the state should consider adopting the following recommendations:

- The Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission and government actors should come up with a comprehensive national multi-stakeholder awareness raising programme on business and human rights.
- The Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission should progress with a NAP that includes specific attention and action relating to the agricultural sector
- Farm owners and buyers should invest in human rights due diligence and impact assessment along the agricultural supply chains
- The Government should consider giving incentives to businesses that comply with pillar 2 of the UNGP on their responsibility to respect human rights through various means including policies that impact the agricultural sector.
- Through its monitoring and Inspections unit, the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission and its partners may need to consider conducting regular monitoring visits to inspect businesses' level of compliance with international, regional and national human rights instruments.

About ZELA

The Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association (ZELA) is a public interest group established in 2000, as a natural resources governance organisation in Zimbabwe and the Southern Africa region. ZELA's work has evolved around promotion of environmental rights to a broader natural resource governance agenda that include natural resources such as land, water, wildlife, gas and mineral resources. ZELA is a critical node to all major discussions on natural resources governance particularly as it relates to extractives. The organisation's capacity to conduct legal, policy and practice relevant research has firmly established ZELA as a critical voice, convenor and knowledge broker on natural resources governance. An important niche for the organisation has been the fact that it works to promote natural resource governance through a legal approach lens. ZELA currently works at the local community level, with local authorities, civil society and national level stakeholders. ZELA's work is mainly anchored on a core group of rights which are reflective of natural resources governance namely Environmental, Economic, Social and Cultural (EESC) rights. As such a large component of ZELA's work involves influencing implementation and reforms within legal and institutional frameworks governing the environment and natural resources sector mainly through research, civic education and advocacy.

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Unfolding the Debate of Just Food Systems and the Plight of Vulnerable Populations in Kenya

By: Olando Samuel, Executive Director & Sally Miruri, Program Officer, Pamoja Trust

In the quest for social justice and responsible business conduct in food systems, land as a factor of production has been at the center of the debate in Kenya, which emanates from the strong history of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Kenya. The policies which drive food systems have not only increased the precarity of vulnerable communities but also continually marginalized them. The majority of these communities, who have been drivers of the food systems production, continue to face insecurity of tenure and constantly face the threat of evictions from multi-national companies heavily investing in the food systems value chain. Further to this, communities continue to live without land ownership documents and in most occasions are engaged in constant legal battles among themselves and driven by external players.

The Need to Progress Just and Fair Food Systems Policy

Land alienation for supposed public interest and use, taxation regimes and poor labor conditions continue to dominate the food systems debates. In Kenya, agri-food systems for national and international have continually relied on primary commodities which are coffee, tea, pyrethrum, and flowers for foreign exchange. It is consistently reported that these crops are facing low productivity due to weak production and governance systems, absence of extension services by the various duty bearer institutions at the national and sub-national levels, the rising cost of production, and the global prices which keep on fluctuating. Ultimately, the net effect is that of small holder farmers who are consistently exploited.

In the value chains of these products, the public sector is obligated to ensure that the policy environment is not only inclusive but also one that cushion the smallholder farmers. Further to this, the exploitative tax regimes not only dampen the spirit but also push the efforts of the smallholder farmers further to the margins.

In remedying this predicament, the state and its bilateral and multilateral partners are obligated to ensure that the extension models employed are not exploitative, and that the guidelines and the standards applied respect the social justice principles which includes but are not limited to participation, rule of law and non-discrimination.

The Responsibility for Private Sector to Protect Smallholders in Agrifood Value Chains

Whilst the state has an obligation, the private sector is also duty bound to ensure that particular human interest centered approaches to investment on the food systems value chains are sought and implemented. For instance, the credit facilities offered to the farmers in the food systems should be those who cushion them from the vulnerabilities of the markets. Unfortunately, the practices in the credit facilities are marred by high interest rates, absence of adequate information and constant complexities which are exploitative in nature.

Further to the above, there have been tendencies of private sector players in the food systems value chain impacting the environment negatively and on some occasions being the drivers of climate change. Business actors have e.g. been accused extensively of blocking rivers and water bodies and also discharging effluents into water bodies in Kenya. It has also been observed that the rivers which communities rely on are blocked upstream to help large farms conduct irrigation at the detriment of communities, who depend on the rivers for domestic use downstream. These are examples of the extent to which the private sector's activities in the food systems value chain can negatively impact the cumulative interests of vulnerable segments of the society overall contribute to the effects of climate change. The cumulative effects of these to the environment continues to make communities vulnerable and very detrimental to the environment.

The constant emerging question is whether businesses in the food systems continue to make positive contributions in the realm of economic, environmental, and social progress or are driven by profit. It is however emerging that due diligence as a key determinant to the drive for responsible business conduct is put aside, particularly where communities from low income segments of the society are situated. In instances where remedial approaches are sought, the efforts are met with sometimes brute force.



In the application of an intersectional lens, it is apparent that approaches seemingly have ignored power dynamics, norms, practices, intersecting privileges, vulnerabilities, needs, interests, rights and obligations of men and women and other variables presented by the community of human rights defenders.

The Significant but Endangered Role of Human Rights Defenders

Communities continue to organize and generate a constituency of human rights defenders amongst themselves, through Civil Society Organizations' like Pamoja Trust and National Human Rights Institutions to situate and solve the challenges bedeviling and stagnating their socio-economic growth. It is increasingly evident that the alternative voices in the media, academia, religious institutions, civil society organizations, trade unions and independent constitutional commissions have been consistently stifled of their independence through retrogressive laws, suppression and punishment of the actors negating the call for responsible business conduct. Whilst this has been the case, there are people who suffer multiple forms of discrimination.

The situation of human rights defenders on most occasions are people whose voices are swallowed in the larger debate and advocacy processes. In the application of an intersectional lens, it is apparent that approaches seemingly have ignored power dynamics, norms, practices, intersecting privileges, vulnerabilities, needs, interests, rights and obligations of men and women and other variables presented by the community of human rights defenders. In this continuum, there has been an absence of data which interrogates parameters which reinforce inequalities, stereotypes, exploitations, violations such that attainment of systems and practices that supports responsiveness from an intersectional lens, which would create equitable norms is seldom discoursed.

About Pamoja Trust

Pamoja Trust (PT) is a non-profit making organization founded in 1999. PT is dedicated to promoting access to land, shelter and basic services for the marginalized populations. The organization takes pragmatic approaches to protection and promotion of social and economic rights through advocacy and precedence setting models for problem solving. PT provides social, technical and legal expertise at local communities, national and international levels to ensure that human development adhere to social justice principles and those national and international Human Rights standards are implemented in favour of the most vulnerable of citizens. PT collaborates closely with people's organizations', federations of over 30,000 households living in 400 informal settlements across Kenya. Over the last decade, we have pursued this mandate by organizing the vulnerable and marginalized; undertaking trainings and advocacy and setting problem solving models. The vision of the organization is based on five pillars: State and Market Justice; People's Movement; Ecological Justice; Institution Building and Sustainability; Asset building and models for Rights.

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A Call for Food Sovereignty through Genuine Agroecological Policies in Africa

By Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA)

Current conventional agricultural practices (monocropping, intensive mechanisation and use of synthetic agri-inputs) often degrade soil health, contribute to environmental degradation and compromise long-term food security. It is crucial to address these challenges by promoting agroecological approaches that emphasise the importance of healthy soils and sustainable farming systems. To create a political enabling environment for just, fair and sustainable food systems, policy makers must recognise the need to secure genuine agroecological policy. This is also the only viable route towards genuine food sovereignty in Africa. The following will reflect upon the case of seed sovereignty in Zambia and unfold the related critique of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) policy priorities.

Farmer Seed Sovereignty Dependent on Strong Agroecological Policy: A Case from Zambia

Farm-saved seeds are the main source of planting material for many smallholder farmers in African countries. In Zambia, much of this (between 80-90% of all seeds planted) is supplied by women. These farm seeds offer many advantages to smallholder farmers. They are available locally, when needed at planting time, and at a low cost.

There is, however, less investment in these systems than in the national-level formal seed systems, which often exclude farmers all together, except throughout grower arrangements made by multinational seed companies that monopolise this and other markets including agrichemicals. It is important to build and support seed sovereignty at the community level to grow agrobiodiversity levels, including of locally available seed, which, in turn, will help to build resilience to climate change and boost household nutrition security.

In 2021, Zambia began developing its second National Agriculture Investment Plan (NAIP II), a five-year framework intended to guide the country's agricultural development. The initial stages of the NAIP II process were seen as democratic and inclusive, with broad stakeholder participation.

However, the Comprehensive Agriculture Transformation Support Programme (CATSP) marked a significant shift towards the Green Revolution model, prioritizing commercial agriculture and private sector involvement over smallholder-friendly and sustainable approaches – as a result effectively sidelining alternative proposals that focused on agroecology, food sovereignty, and biodiversity. Local civil society organizations, including the Zambian Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity (ZAAB), have been vocal in their opposition to the CATSP. They argue that the policy development process was flawed, with key stakeholders and alternative approaches marginalized in favour of a top-down, industrialized model. This approach, they contend, risks further entrenching corporate control over Zambia's agricultural sector, exacerbating food insecurity and environmental degradation.

Locally Driven Approaches Need to shape the Development of Agroecological Policy across the Continent

Recognizing the pressing need for sustainable and locally led solutions, there is need to foster a genuine policy and support system that would usher producers towards a realm of healthy and sustainable agriculture across the African continent. Unfortunately, policy initiatives through e.g. the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) have been heavily criticised for steering agricultural policies in Africa towards industrial agricultural models that emphasize the use of chemical inputs and genetically modified organisms (GMOs), often at the expense of more sustainable and locally-driven approaches.

AGRA was established with the ambitious goal of transforming Africa's agricultural sector by doubling the productivity and incomes of smallholder farmers and halving food insecurity by 2020. Initially focused on promoting the Green Revolution model across Africa—characterized by the widespread use of synthetic fertilizers, hybrid seeds, and other inputs—AGRA's approach has been increasingly criticized for failing to deliver on its promises by a number of actors.



A 2022 donor-commissioned evaluation highlighted AGRA's shortcomings, leading the organization to pivot its focus towards influencing agricultural policies at both national and continental levels. In May 2024, AGRA played a pivotal role in organizing the African Union's Fertilizer and Soil Health Summit in Nairobi. The summit concluded with a commitment to triple fertilizer use within a decade. This approach, however, has faced criticism for worsening soil degradation and threatening long-term sustainability.

While organisations like AFSA advocated for biofertilizers made from local materials, such proposal received little attention compared to the dominant narrative favouring chemical fertilizers.

AGRA has also significantly shaped the Post-Malabo process, which is critical for determining the next decade of African agricultural policy. Through its funding and support of key meetings, such as the July 2024 Lusaka gathering, AGRA has influenced the policy direction, raising concerns that its focus on synthetic fertilizers and industrial practices might undermine food sovereignty and marginalize agroecology. The ongoing development of the Kampala Declaration, set for January 2025 approval, further illustrates AGRA's impact, as calls for including agroecology have been overshadowed by an emphasis on biotechnology and corporate-led models. AGRA's involvement in continental policy-making, particularly in the AU's Fertilizer and Soil Health Summit and the Post-Malabo process, demonstrates its broad influence. While AGRA promotes agricultural transformation, its focus on industrial agriculture raises concerns about the future of food sovereignty and sustainability in Africa. It is essential that African governments and civil society resist external pressures that prioritize corporate interests over the well-being of farmers and ecosystems. As a consequence, several actors have called for donors of the AGRA initiative to cease funding. For instance, faith leaders expressed that "It's time for international funders to transition towards agroecology through respecting and supporting locally defined holistic approaches in Africa, by Africa." This statement underscores the broader demand for a shift in agricultural funding away from industrial models towards more sustainable, equitable, and community-driven practices.

The findings presented contribute to the broader dialogue on responsible business conduct (RBC) within food systems in Africa, highlighting the importance of inclusive, transparent, and democratic policy-making processes that genuinely serve the needs of African communities and ecosystems.

Recommendations

Based on the findings presented in this case study, the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) makes the following recommendations to funders, governments, and civil society:

To Donors

- **Redirect Funding Towards Agroecology and Sustainable Practices:** Funders should prioritize supporting initiatives that align with agroecological principles, which promote biodiversity, soil health, and resilience to climate change. These practices offer a sustainable alternative to the high-input, industrial agricultural models that have proven detrimental to smallholder farmers and the environment.
- **Ensure Transparency and Accountability:** Funders must demand transparency and accountability from organizations they support, ensuring that funds are not used to promote policies that undermine local food sovereignty or prioritize corporate interests over those of African farmers.
- **Support Locally- and Farmer-Led Research and Innovations:** Encourage and fund research that is led by or directly involves smallholder farmers, particularly in developing solutions that are context-specific and grounded in Indigenous knowledge systems.

To Governments

- **Resist Corporate-Driven Agricultural Models:** African governments should resist the influence of corporate-driven models that prioritize profit over the well-being of people and the planet. Instead, they should adopt and promote agricultural policies that are inclusive, democratic, and aligned with the principles of food sovereignty.



Support Locally- and Farmer-Led Research and Innovations: Encourage and fund research that is led by or directly involves smallholder farmers, particularly in developing solutions that are context-specific and grounded in Indigenous knowledge systems

- **Strengthen Local Governance and Policy-Making Processes:** Governments should ensure that agricultural policy-making processes are inclusive and participatory, involving all relevant stakeholders, particularly smallholder farmers and civil society organizations. This will help to safeguard against the undue influence of external entities and ensure that policies reflect the true needs of the local population.
- **Promote Agroecology as a National Priority:** Governments should recognize agroecology as a viable pathway to achieving food security, improving nutrition, and enhancing environmental sustainability. This includes integrating agroecological practices into national agricultural policies, investment plans, and extension services.

To Civil Society

- **Mobilize and Advocate for Food Sovereignty:** Civil society organizations must continue to mobilize and advocate for food sovereignty, ensuring that the voices of smallholder farmers, Indigenous peoples, and local communities are heard in policy-making processes. This includes resisting the encroachment of industrial agriculture and promoting sustainable, locally-driven food systems.
- **Build Alliances and Networks:** Strengthen alliances and networks at local, national, and continental levels to collectively resist the corporate capture of Africa's food systems. Collaboration among civil society organizations can amplify their impact and increase their influence on policy-making processes.
- **Promote Public Awareness and Education:** Increase efforts to raise public awareness about the negative impacts of industrial agriculture and the benefits of agroecology. Educating communities, policymakers, and consumers can help shift public opinion and support for sustainable agricultural practices.

About Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA)

AFSA is a continental coalition of civil society organizations dedicated to advancing food sovereignty and agroecology across Africa. The alliance represents a diverse range of entities, including food producer networks, civil society organizations, indigenous peoples' organizations, faith-based groups, women and youth organizations, consumer movements, and international partners.

Currently, AFSA is a network of networks with 41 member organizations actively engaged in 50 African countries, impacting approximately 200 million individuals. Web: www.afsafrica.org

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Mapping Intended Outcomes of Impact Funds in East Africa to Transform Food Systems

By Rex Raimond, Director and Laura Thompson, Strategic Partnerships Manager, Transformational Investing in Food Systems (TIFS)

Regenerative and agroecological food systems provide the key to unlocking solutions to the interconnected challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, food and nutrition security, and income inequality. But, these solutions require that financial institutions and businesses let go of business-as-usual approaches. To create a regenerative and agroecological food future, the world needs systemic business and financial models that support sustainable, just, and secure food systems.

The Transformational Investing in Food Systems initiative (TIFS), as a thought leader inspiring innovative solutions, provides project incubation and transition finance services to an impact network of funders, investors, intermediaries, and enterprises building a market for a regenerative, equitable, and climate-resilient food future. We also foster network effects for disruptors that catalyze investments. Leveraging our networks, thought leadership, and methodologies, TIFS is engaged in co-creating an investment ecosystem in East Africa with the goal of transforming food systems by supporting responsible businesses that invest in food security and nutrition, dignified livelihoods for food producers and workers, and stable climate and healthy ecosystems.

TIFS' work in East Africa to map intended outcomes of a sample of impact funds demonstrates potential gaps and externalities of investment funds on food systems. It also showcases how a focused RBC intervention can strengthen resilience throughout the food value chain and highlights the importance of the use of a holistic investment screening tool.



Assessing Investments of Agroecological and Regenerative Businesses in East Africa

In 2023, TIFS engaged in a study to map the intended outcomes of a sample of 23 of 50 relevant impact funds operating investing in agroecological and regenerative companies in East Africa. Our study focused on three specific countries: Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, in order to develop a market for agroecology in these countries, which are focus areas of our partners, Rootical, Neycha, and Biovision. Alongside Biovision Foundation, ISF Advisors, and SHONA, TIFS developed a set of investment screening tools that offer a holistic view of the intended impacts of companies and funds. Focusing on a regional portfolio of investments ensures connection to local context and relevance to the regional agribusiness ecosystem. The majority of the sampled funds are below USD 10 million of Assets Under Management (AUM). While this is partly a result of the sample, this is also considered a good reflection of the reality in the market, with relatively more new and smaller funds entering a market segment aimed at food systems change.

For this study we utilized our Systemic Investing Assessment (SIA) tool, an impact investment fund assessment tool, which first looks at funds' design quality and potential for generating impact using the Global Impact Investing Network's (GIIN) four Core Characteristics of Impact Investing: 1) intentionality, 2) evidence, 3) management of impact performance, and 4) contribution to industry knowledge. Assessing funds based on these core characteristics helps us determine if they were designed for purpose and can execute their stated impact thesis.

The SIA tool also assesses to which extent the funds align with the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition's (HLPE-FSN) 13 principles of agroecology and TIFS' 7 principles: renewability, resilience, equity, diversity, healthfulness, inclusivity, interconnectedness. These principles offer a holistic vision for sustainable, equitable, and resilient food systems. To apply these principles for investment decision-making, TIFS applied The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity for Agriculture and Food (TEEB AgriFood) model, which we organized into five impact themes for the purposes of reporting on our findings: Environment, Life & Biodiversity, Livelihoods, Human Health, and System Sustainability.



Opportunities to Enhance Social and Environmental Investment Impact Models

Based on our findings, the sample of funds assessed are very actively investing in Livelihoods, System Sustainability, and Environment. In particular, the Livelihoods impact driver of Fair Wages and Income stands out as the most invested in, with 89% of the funds explicitly working on it throughout their investment cycle. While living wage standards are not always achievable in the short run, there are other opportunities for funds to consider, including implementing profit-sharing mechanisms, promoting steward ownership models, or benefit sharing across local businesses. TIFS hypothesizes that funds and their investees – by sharing best practices and sharing the risk of innovation – can scale business model innovations that build community wealth.

Conversely, two areas that emerged as the main gaps among the impact themes include Life & Biodiversity and Human Health. We expect that the Life and Biodiversity impact theme is relatively underinvested because animal husbandry, the livestock industry, and pastoralism are often deliberately excluded from the scope. We also expect that investing in ecosystems and the conservation or regeneration of biodiversity beyond the field and farm level is considered highly complex and difficult to attribute to the investments of a fund. We assume that incentives from public or private investors for investing in biodiversity and animal welfare are lacking and, therefore, are responsible for part of this gap. We believe further research could test this assumption as well as define the appropriate roles, resources, and incentives for private capital in this space.

The underinvestment in the Human Health impact theme is linked to the fact that negative externalities are not properly incorporated in investment decisions. The costs related to these failures remain externalized and not reflected in market prices. In addition, nutrition metrics are not fully developed for impact investing. Funds have the opportunity to apply scientific developments by supporting portfolio companies to explore relevant commercial opportunities that will capitalize on the connection between regenerative practices, soil health, and improving the nutritional quality of food.



Moreover, our assessment resulted in the identification of three key opportunities for funds to enhance their ability to deliver their intended impact. One of these opportunities is around improving the impact thesis or theory of change for a fund that is backed by scientific evidence and clear strategies to achieve their goals – not only around financial returns, but opportunities to address social and environmental challenges. Another opportunity is around strengthening governance structures, particularly around the creation of a formal stakeholder engagement plan and mechanisms to incorporate stakeholder feedback. Policies like impact-linked compensation structures can be effective motivation tools to hold fund managers accountable for their stated impact goals. Finally, many funds do not have a system in place to track and report data on potential negative impacts. While most funds implicitly manage an impact risk reduction strategy, the measurement and reporting on negative (potential) impacts should clearly be strengthened.

Systemic Investment Assessment Will Strengthen Responsible Business Conduct

Now, TIFS is using the data from this study to engage fund managers, investors, entrepreneurs, and service providers in identifying and prioritizing actions that will enhance funds' collective impacts on regional food systems. The findings from our study, as well as a detailed dashboard provided to each participating fund, have allowed for the creation of a regional comparison tool of each fund's strengths and areas of improvement. This comparison can serve as a benchmark for investors, fund managers, and entrepreneurs.

This case study has solidified what we already knew –impact investors need tools, strategies, information, and partners to contribute to agroecological and regenerative food systems. To meet this need and grow the ecosystem of mission-driven investors in East Africa, TIFS is creating a community of practice of investors in the region as well as convening workshops that foster engagement and spark action. TIFS is building upon our work in East Africa, and based upon growing demand, recently designed and convened global stakeholders (including producers, financiers, and food companies) for a week-long retreat to explore how best to shape systemic financing interventions to unlock regenerative agriculture at scale. Additionally, our widely-read recent report, *Financing for Regenerative Agriculture*, provides investors with key approaches to help advance the transition to regenerative food systems.



In conclusion, this case study showcases how the utilization of the SIA tool as an RBC intervention can strengthen resilience in food systems value chains within the East African context by helping investors to understand potential gaps and areas for improvement within their funds. We look forward to the opportunity to continue to apply this holistic assessment tool to other global contexts in order to provide value to investors while also supporting responsible business practices and building regenerative and agroecological solutions.

About TIFS

TIFS is an Allied Initiative of Global Alliance for the Future of Food, a strategic alliance of philanthropic foundations who collaborate on bold action across the planet to transform food systems and their impacts on climate change and food security. As an innovative thought leader, TIFS works to seed and scale regenerative innovations by unlocking access to integrated capital and growing the field of systemic investing.

Ultimately, TIFS' goal is to increase financial flows to companies and financial practitioners that invest in food security and nutrition, dignified livelihoods for food producers and workers, and stable climate and healthy ecosystems. TIFS achieves this goal by developing case studies, reports, and events to educate investors, fund managers and philanthropy, while serving the interests of farmers, ranchers, fishers, and nature. We also organize convenings, webinars, and other activities that connect regenerative and agroecological companies with investors, and work alongside regenerative and agroecological finance practitioners to prototype and build financial mechanisms that meet the requirements of producers and their communities as well as institutional investors.



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Shipping for Sustainability: Addressing the Challenges and Dilemmas of Exporting Fresh Fruits Produce from Uganda to European Markets

By DanChurchAid

Transforming sustainable food systems at the global level requires the exploration and establishment of new value chains, while enhancing social, environmental, and climate impacts. The project “Fresh Fruit Nexus: Sustainable Livelihoods for Refugee and Host Farmers in Northern Uganda,” supported by the Danida Market Development Partnerships (DMDP), was developed to achieve this goal. This initiative aims to improve the livelihoods of both refugee and host communities by integrating them into sustainable agricultural practices and international markets. While the transport of fresh fruit and vegetables from Uganda to Europe currently occurs only through air freight, the project sought to green the value chain by exploring opportunities for shipping organically certified, orange-fleshed sweet potatoes from the West Nile region, ranked as the second poorest region of Uganda. This shift not only aims to reduce carbon emissions associated with air freight but also to create a more resilient and inclusive economic model for the region.

The following case will unfold and address the key dilemmas that arose during the value chain development, which was challenged and affected both by the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. These global events highlighted the vulnerabilities in international supply chains and underscored the importance of developing robust, sustainable systems that can withstand such disruptions.

A Request for Greener International Value Chains

In 2021, the Danish supermarket retailer Rema 1000 announced that they would completely phase out fruit and vegetables transported by air. This decision was based on the fact that the CO₂ footprint of produce imported through air freight is considerably larger than that of locally sourced or shipped goods. For example, blueberries transported by air from South America are estimated to have a footprint 20 times the size of blueberries shipped via ferries and trucks.

Rema 1000 decided to make a principled decision to support its customers in making more sustainable choices when grocery shopping for fruits and vegetables. This broader development and demand for more sustainable value chains informed the design of the Fresh Fruit Nexus DMDP project, which emerged from a multistakeholder consortium including DanChurchAid, Nordic Fruit A/S, and Lishe Limited Uganda. Each member of the consortium brought unique expertise: DanChurchAid provided humanitarian support, Nordic Fruit A/S offered market access and distribution networks, and Lishe Limited Uganda contributed local agricultural knowledge and community engagement. The consortium aimed to 'green' the existing value chain and market for exported fresh fruits from Uganda to Europe by seeking new routes through Kenya towards the Mediterranean Sea and on to the highways of Europe.



Sustainable food systems and green value chains are crucial for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, minimizing waste, and promoting biodiversity.

The project is built upon the needs of the population in the West Nile, a region that is continuously affected by an influx of refugees from South Sudan and Congo, with more than a million people arriving in recent years. This influx significantly strains local resources but also presents an opportunity to integrate refugees into the local economy. The project aims to create 'green' income opportunities for both host and refugee communities by linking them to the global market for organic produce. By doing so, it not only seeks to improve livelihoods but also to promote environmental sustainability and economic resilience in one of Uganda's poorest regions.

Sustainable food systems and green value chains are crucial for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, minimizing waste, and promoting biodiversity. They also provide significant economic benefits by creating jobs and supporting small-scale farmers. Integrating refugees into these value chains enhances economic resilience and provides stable income opportunities. Moreover, sustainable food systems ensure food security and improve nutrition by providing access to healthy, organic produce. They promote social equity by including marginalized communities in the economic process.

Biodiversity within these systems strengthens resilience to climate change and reduces vulnerability to environmental shocks. Green value chains can adapt more effectively to global disruptions, such as pandemics or geopolitical conflicts.

The Journey of the Orange-Fleshed Sweet Potato

While the process of organic certification relating to soil quality was not an issue – since larger areas of ‘virgin land’ in the region had not been disturbed by fertilizer and other chemical inputs – the consortium partners quickly realized that the sweet potatoes consumed in Denmark (Beauregard variant) were a different variant than the ones consumed at local markets in Uganda. This required a new certification for the new variant as well as comprehensive stakeholder collaboration, including certification bodies and universities for vine multiplication. Efforts were also put into training farmers to focus on organic farming and eventually principles of agroecology, including inter-cropping and crop diversity.

Agroecology practices not only enhance soil health and biodiversity but also improve resilience against climate change. This approach aimed to ensure incomes across potato harvest seasons while promoting the nutritional benefits of sweet potatoes – rich in vitamin A and zinc, which are often lacking in children’s diets – and the sustainability advantages of sweet potatoes. Organically certified potatoes also commanded premium prices in the international market (in which sweet potatoes have been promoted as ‘super foods’, stimulating demand).

Alongside the process of training and certification of the new variant, the consortium started to explore the new route of transport. The first challenge was establishing cold chains, including post-harvest handling and packaging facilities that ensured the produce was properly handled to endure the long travel. Effective cold chain management is crucial for maintaining the quality and safety of fresh produce during transportation. This included examining how the produce was dried, stored, cooled, the materials used for packaging, and how the temperature was regulated within the container. A test run simulated different drying and cooling methods using simple techniques. Despite the production not being up to full speed, a smaller test trial in 2021 did not deliver the expected results. This was due to challenges related to both inadequate tracking of the temperature and issues with customs authorities.

As a result, the delivery was not fit to be sold on the market and was instead donated through a Danish anti-food waste initiative as the products were safe for consumption but did not qualify for retail sale. The test trial provided valuable insights into the logistical challenges and highlighted areas for improvement in future shipments.

Adjusting the Business Case to Global Challenges

The aforementioned challenges resulted in stakeholder consultations, including with the Danish embassy that had supported a post-handling facility (CURAD), which could wash and dry the produce. CURAD's support was crucial in adapting the project to new logistical challenges. This presented new opportunities; however, the value chain development was severely challenged by the eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected both logistics and prices of many global value chains. The pandemic caused significant disruptions in transportation, increased costs, and created bottlenecks in supply chains. As a result, the consortium partners started to look for local and regional value chains and adjusted the original business case. Activities related to post-harvest handling created opportunities to generate new jobs and smaller businesses, such as bakeries in West Nile and smaller street-food businesses in Kampala, using the flour and puree from second and third grade harvests. The support for entrepreneurship targeted female-led households, refugee women, and young people.

The project continued exploring the opportunity for international shipment, but prices remained high and were further challenged by geopolitical developments in 2022. East Africa, in particular, experienced food insecurity related to wheat flour and oil, highlighting the need to assess locally sourced alternatives. Russia's war on Ukraine exacerbated an existing food crisis on the African continent, as a great deal of wheat sold on the African market came from Ukraine. This geopolitical instability underscored the importance of developing resilient, locally sourced food systems to mitigate dependency on international markets.

Shipping for Sustainability?

The global challenges mentioned sparked broader debates on independence from international markets relating to food security. The private sector partners of the project, Nordic Fruit and Lishe, eventually assessed that there was currently not a commercial incentive for international export.

Ensuring responsible business conduct, food security, and job creation became a higher priority for the Danish food retailer, Nordic Fruit, which assessed that this shift represented a better business case, both for the private sector partners and the farmers who were a part of the project. The consortium partners regularly shared experiences, challenges, and perspectives on the hands-on engagement in this value chain, which also affected their way of understanding business, focusing first on the principles of 'do-no-harm' and the rights holder perspective. They remain open to exploring opportunities for international export in the future, provided a business case can be assessed on social impact as well, and if other local value chain actors can ensure production at scale, which is needed for a new value chain to be commercially viable, considering logistics and other factors. The project partners continue to engage in dialogue with market actors because there is a need for systems thinking, not only with actors in Uganda but also with logistics partners.

Summary and Conclusions

The Fresh Fruit Nexus project highlights the complexities and challenges of developing sustainable food systems in a global context. The consortium's adaptive approach, prioritizing local and regional value chains over international export, underscores the importance of flexibility and resilience in the face of global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical conflicts. By focusing on responsible business conduct, the project has not only aimed to improve food security and create jobs but also to set a precedent for ethical and sustainable practices in the agricultural sector.

The project's emphasis on the principles of 'do-no-harm' and the rights holder perspective has fostered a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of social, environmental, and economic factors in value chain development. While the immediate commercial incentives for international export may be limited, the consortium remains committed to exploring future opportunities that align with their social impact goals and sustainability principles. In conclusion, the Fresh Fruit Nexus project serves as a model for how multi-stakeholder collaborations can navigate the challenges of sustainable development. By continuing to engage with local and international partners, the project aims to build a more resilient and inclusive food system that benefits both producers and consumers, while also contributing to broader goals of environmental sustainability and social equity.

About DanChurchAid

DanChurchAid (DCA) currently works with communities, local and international partners in 18 countries to ensure food security and support the transition to more sustainable, resilient, and just food systems. DCA convenes multistakeholder dialogue to strengthen collaboration and best practices among civil society and public and private duty-bearers, while also supporting smallholder farmers and farmers organisations to position themselves for more influence. DCA supports the transition to sustainable, climate resilient food production through agroecology-based approaches – integrating yield and nutrition gains, social equity, local value chain and market development, climate adaptation and mitigation action as well as biodiversity benefits. Working from farm to landscape level, DCA supports locally led restoration and sustainable management of natural resources as the basis for food production and climate adaptation. This links to our support for environmental human right defenders.

DCA advocates for increasing private sector investments in climate adaptation for smallholder farmers as well as changing consumer and market preferences towards locally produced environmentally friendly and nutritious foods. DCA is member of the Global Compact Network Denmark and the multistakeholder platform Ethical Trade Denmark, which provide tangible steps (through the 6 Due Diligence Steps Guide) for private sector to actively integrate human rights, environmental and climate due diligence.

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