

Networking for a greener Africa.



Stories of Change

Africa Women Leaders in Agroecology (AWOLA)

1st Cohort

By PELUM Kenya, PELUM Uganda and PELUM Zimbabwe

Acknowledgement

Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM) Association namely; PELUM Kenya, PELUM Uganda and PELUM Zimbabwe through the Africa Women Leaders in Agroecology wishes to appreciate the support of the AWOLA Mentors and Mentees from Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe. They have been able to capture in this booklet amazing and inspiring stories of resilience and stories of change that have impacted the initiative.

The booklet has been prepared with the support of:



The views herein shall not necessarily be taken to reflect the official opinion of PELUM Kenya, PELUM Uganda and PELUM Zimbabwe or its Funding Partners.

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Acronyms

ACEPIS	Africa Centre for People, Institutions and Society
AFIRD	Agency for Integrated Rural Development
Africa CSID	Africa Centre for Sustainable and Inclusive Development
AFSA	Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa
AGNES	African Group of Negotiators Experts Support
AWOLA	African Women Leaders in Agroecology
BCFYE	Biofertilizer Centre for Youth Empowerment
BIBA	Biodiversity and Biosafety Association of Kenya
CSA MSP	Kenya Climate Smart Agriculture Multi Stakeholder Platform
CSHEP	Community Sustainable Agriculture and Healthy Environment Program
G-BLACK	Grow Biointensive Agriculture Center of Kenya
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
ISFAA	Inter sectorial Forum on Agro biodiversity and Agro ecology
ITK	Indigenous Traditional Knowledge
MESA	Multinational Exchange Sustainable Agriculture
PACJA	Centre for Pan African Climate Justice Alliance
PELUM	Participatory Ecological Land Use Management
KDC	Kitui Development Center
RESA	Research and Education for Sustainable Actions
RUCID	Rural Community in Development
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses Opportunities, Threats
UN FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization
WFF	World Food Forum
YEP	Youth Empowerment Program



Brief of AWOLA Initiative

AWOLA (Africa Women Leaders in Agroecology) Initiative is a leadership career development initiative of the PELUM network, with the aim of equipping women working on agroecology, sustainable agriculture and food systems with leadership skills. The initiative is funded by Tudor Trust from 2022 to 2024. PELUM Kenya is the coordinating agency for the AWOLA Initiative with PELUM Uganda and PELUM Zimbabwe as the Country Implementing Organizations for Uganda and Zimbabwe respectively. Fundraising efforts is being done to ensure the AWOLA Initiative reaches all the countries in the African Continent.

Through the AWOLA initiative, the PELUM network envisions strengthening leadership capacities and the active participation of women in agroecology institutions. PELUM association, the initiative owner, is a regional network of over 250 civil society organizations in 12 countries in East, Central and Southern Africa founded in 1995 and working in the area of participatory ecological land use management.

The PELUM Association works to improve the livelihoods of small-scale farmers and the sustainability of farming communities, by fostering ecological land use management. With country chapters in several African countries.

Objective of the AWOLA Initiative

The AWOLA Initiative main objective is to inspire, mentor, nature and fast track the leadership development of African women in Agroecology.

The initiative strives to ensure that women confidently taking their position in leadership without apologies by

1. Building the capacity specifically to lead and manage top level positioning
2. Building networks that add value to the leadership positions of women
3. Building up a cadre of competent Africa women mentors and coaches in leadership in Agroecology
4. Equipping women with top negotiations and policy influencing skills
5. Creating awareness in areas of gender and market dynamics



Activities of the AWOLA Initiative

The key activities implemented across the three countries are:

1. Each country to recruit and match 6 Mentors and 6 Mentees thus a total of 36 women leaders per year.
2. Training of 36 (12 per Country, 6 of whom are seasoned women leaders) women leaders (both seasoned and emerging) on principles of mentoring and coaching in Agroecology.
3. Monthly meetings between the mentors and mentees.
4. Support monthly motivational experience sharing for women on leadership and career development at country level (virtual sessions)
5. Support women (mentors or mentees) to participate in agroecological fora at county, regional, or international levels.
6. Support semi-annual meetings of mentors, mentees and trainers.
7. Hold annual Steering Committee meetings.
8. Document progress stories of mentees.
9. Support incubation / women enterprises through start-ups or expansion of ideas, enterprises etc.
10. Support short professional courses on leadership for women.
11. Develop Branding materials, short videos and documentation for project visibility.
12. Support networking symposium for all the mentors and the mentees e.g. Expo and Facilitate awarding an award system as a motivation for African women champions in agroecology.



Message from Country Coordinators



Rosinah Mbenya,

PELUM Kenya, Country Coordinator

PELUM Kenya is a national network of Civil Society Organizations promoting agroecology principles and practices among Small Holder Farmers and Pastoralists for their improved livelihoods. PELUM Kenya approaches include advocacy and policy advocacy, capacity building, networking and movement building and knowledge management. In its strategic plan 2021 to 2025, youth and women in agroecology has been identified as one of the strategic intervention areas.

Since 2022 PELUM Kenya has been coordinating the implementation of the African women Leaders in Agroecology (AWOLA) initiative in Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe. PELUM Kenya anticipates expanding of AWOLA to five more Countries hence covering four regions of Africa by end of 2024. AWOLA initiative goal is to inspire, mentor, nature and fast

track the leadership development of African women in Agroecology. AWOLA utilizes the mentorship approach where it matches seasoned women leaders with the emerging young women to build and nurture leadership skills of the young women. Through the initiative we envision strengthening leadership capacities and the active participation of women in agroecology at all levels.

It is fulfilling to recognize that AWOLA initiative continues to empower women as change makers more so in Africa where cultural and social barriers to change remain an obstacle. In addition, AWOLA has provided an opportunity for sharing the wealth of experiences from women who have managed to thrive in the male dominated world. AWOLA is a project with great potential to create an Africa where women take a front role in decision making, policy influence, agro-entrepreneurship and leadership at all levels hence creating a lasting change in agroecology.

AWOLA initiative has had profound impact on agroecology through transformative women leadership interventions. It is with gratitude that PELUM Kenya witnesses and shares the inspiring change stories from the first cohort of AWOLA initiative mentors and mentees.

PELUM Kenya acknowledges Tudor Trust for their financial support and extends an appreciation to our partners PELUM Uganda and PELUM Zimbabwe.

This booklet shares impact stories and journeys of our first cohort. It is my hope that these impact stories will motivate and inspire all the readers.

For more information about PELUM Kenya visit www.pelumkenya.net



Gertrude Pswarayi-Jabson

PELUM Zimbabwe, Country Coordinator

The AWOLA Initiative in Zimbabwe has contributed significantly to the personal and professional development of the mentors and mentees who participated in the initiative. The women have built through the periodic meetings and motivational sharing, a sacred space for themselves where they are accepted as they are, and the burdens and responsibilities they carry individually are recognized and honored.

Honoring the whole individual has allowed for effectively mentorship to take place, the 12 individuals who participated in the first cohort have grown to such a degree that some of the women who were mentees in the last cohort have applied to become mentors in the second cohort. The women have also gained knowledge and skills in running Agroecological businesses, leadership, communication, public speaking and advocacy. The AWOLA Initiative has boosted their confidence, accountability, networking platforms, and has helped fulfil dreams of some of the mentees.



Josephine Akia

PELUM Uganda, Country Coordinator

Welcome to a celebration of resilience, innovation, and leadership within the realm of agroecology in Uganda.

Agroecology has emerged as a transformative approach to sustainable agriculture, intertwining ecological principles with socio-economic justice. At the forefront of this movement in Africa are inspiring women leaders who are not only championing environmental stewardship but also fostering community resilience and empowerment. PELUM Uganda, under the African Women Leaders in Agroecology (AWOLA) program, has been pivotal in supporting and amplifying these efforts.

PELUM Uganda, we are driven by a vision of *"Empowered and Resilient smallholder farming Communities Sustainably utilizing their natural resources."* This vision frames every initiative we undertake and guides our journey towards Agroecology.

During the first cohort of the programme, we have enhanced leadership capacities of 7 young women leaders in the agroecology sector across Uganda. Mentors and mentees engaged in meaningful exchanges that built their skills, knowledge, and networks necessary for leading agroecological initiatives. This program demonstrated how targeted support and mentorship can elevate the impact of women in agroecology, fostering leaders who are now at the forefront of the agroecology movement.

I extend my deepest gratitude to our partners and donors, whose generous support makes our work possible. I also wish to acknowledge the relentless passion and dedication of our mentors and mentees, whose journeys inspire all of us to strive for better and to believe in the transformative power of agroecology.

As we celebrate the achievements of African women in agroecology, it is essential to continue supporting and amplifying their efforts. Initiatives AWOLA have proven to play a crucial role in this journey, ensuring that women's contributions are recognized and their leadership is strengthened.

The future of sustainable agriculture in Africa is bright, with women at the helm. By embracing agroecological principles and fostering inclusive leadership, we can build resilient communities and a healthier planet for generations to come.



Message from Chairperson of **AWOLA** Steering Committee



By Linda Kabaira

Chairperson of AWOLA Steering Committee



Aren't more women in food systems leadership positions an obvious necessity?

Only about 15% of the world's workers are female, despite the fact that women constitute as much as 43% of the workforce. In low- and medium-income countries, including those in Africa, women only hold 2% of leadership positions in the organizations responsible for food systems (FAO, 2023, UN Women)

As I reflect on the past year, I'm proud of the progress we've made with the African Leaders in Agroecology (AWOLA) initiative. This initiative was created, on the distinct brand to empower African women in agroecology. It's led and focused on women, aiming to develop female leaders to address gender inequality, hunger in both rural and urban areas, and biodiversity loss. I'm grateful for the opportunity to serve and take part in the program's mentorship initiative, which involved 18 mentees and 18 mentors from Kenya, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

With hindsight, we are proud of the many victories achieved by AWOLA in plugging into the struggle against the green revolution wars on seeds, agrochemicals and local technologies. We have made inroads in navigating policy and practice in relation to women on the front lines of agroecology. The mentorship program has had a significant impact in light of the increasing climate change shocks.

Despite the challenges posed by climate change, AWOLA achieved significant accomplishments. Over the course of the year, the program implemented a dynamic mentorship approach, inviting speakers from various backgrounds to share their experiences of what has been possible and what remains to be explored in navigating agroecology amidst the many giants of the green revolution. Exposing the mentees and mentors to a whole world of leadership possibilities.

Nearing the conclusion of the first year, we took stock of what we accomplished and one of those accomplishments was the emergence of new champions, in many facets of agroecology practice and policy. These include mentees winning awards on a national and even worldwide level.



Notwithstanding the volatile, uncertain, complex, and changing climate environment, Four out of eighteen mentees received accolades as agricultural/ agroecological trailblazers, demonstrating AWOLA's success in integrating a gender-transformative strategy. Many of these will be carried over as lessons into our second cohort, which has already begun.....

As we wrap up the first year, we've seen mentees emerge as astound new leaders in agroecology practice and policy. 20% mentees have received recognition at national and global levels. Influencing spaces. This success demonstrates AWOLA's gender-transformative approach.

"With huge support from my mentor, I managed to attend the world food forum flagship event in Rome as the world food forum national chapter leader representing Uganda,"

Elizabeth mentee - Uganda

The success of AWOLA is a testament to the expertise and skill of our personnel at PELUM country chapters and management, supported by our valuable funders behind the scenes

Our objective remains to elevate women in leadership roles, and we are constantly evolving our methods to achieve this. We regularly reassess how women can excel as leaders and make valuable contributions to our most pressing issues. We're a community of empowered women leaders, actively shaping our own paths towards a sustainable food system for our continent.



AWOLA is about supporting and fortifying women leaders as the core assets of resilient and sustainable food systems in our continent, recognizing that living would be simpler if there are more women leaders in agroecology as this is the future of our families, communities, nations and entire continent.



Meet the AWOLA Coordinating Team



PELUM Kenya



Rosinah Mbenya
PELUM Kenya,
Country Coordinator



Manei Naanyu
PELUM Kenya,
Head of Programmes



Ndiki Ndungu
PELUM Kenya,
Head of Finance &
Administration



Alice Kariuki
PELUM Kenya,
Senior Finance Officer



Bathseba Ratemo
PELUM Kenya,
Programmes Officer,
Knowledge Hub &
Communications



Monica Nyaga
PELUM Kenya,
Programmes Officer, Gender,
Youth & Advocacy



PELUM Zimbabwe



Gertrude Pswarayi-Jabson

PELUM Zimbabwe,
Country Coordinator



Farirai Jemwa

PELUM Zimbabwe,
Programmes Officer



Deltahcuti Dube

PELUM Zimbabwe,
Assistant Programmes Officer



PELUM Uganda



Josephine Akia

PELUM Uganda,
Country Coordinator



Joshua Aijuka

PELUM Uganda,
Head of Programmes



Grace Peyesu
PELUM Uganda,
Finance & Administration
Manager



Hadija Nalule
PELUM Uganda,
Programme Officer,
Agroecological Market &
Business Development

Meet the AWOLA Steering Committee



Group Photo of the AWOLA Steering Committee Members (From Left to right: Monica Kaporiri, Fortunate Nyakanda, Manei Naanyu, Rosinah Mbenya, Gertrude Pswarayi-Jabson, Josephine Akia, Linda Kabaria, Margaret Ikiara and Elizabeth Mwiyeria)

AWOLA Key Activities

Recruitment of 6 Mentors and 6 Mentees per country in Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe (a total of 36 women leaders) and training on principles of mentoring and coaching in Agroecology.

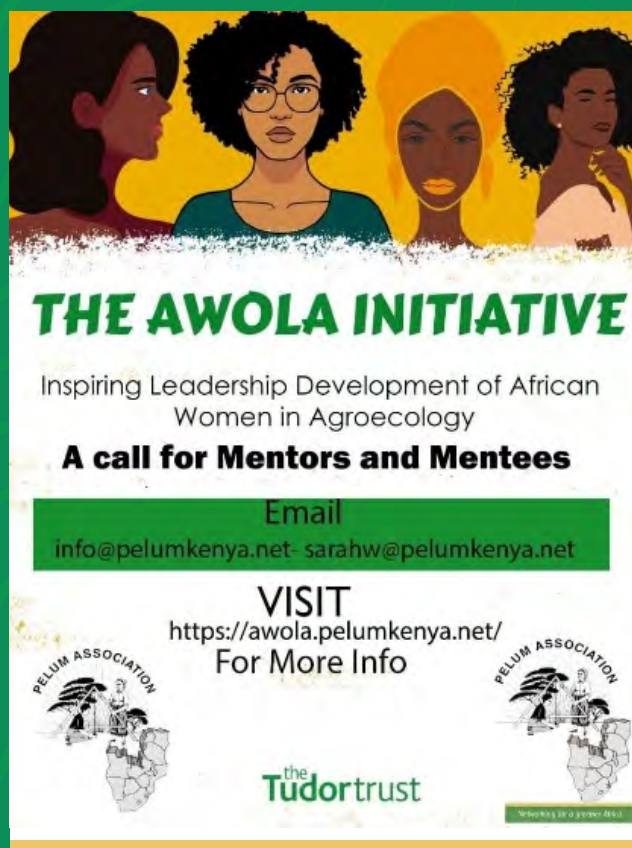
The call for recruitment of Mentors and Mentees took place from July to August 2022. The poster was circulated via email, social media in the three countries.

65 potential mentors and 45 potential mentees applied across the three countries. The shortlisting process utilized the tools developed by the Consultant, Nancy Rapando.

The mentees were subjected to virtual/physical interviews where the final 6 per country were shortlisted. They were then matched to Mentors who are able to mentor and coach as per the needs they highlighted.

PELUM organised Regional Physical Training on 1st November 2022 at the Luke Hotel- Nairobi for the AWOLA Mentors and Mentees from PELUM Kenya, PELUM Uganda, and PELUM Zimbabwe.

Each country representative was requested to share a motivation for the AWOLA Initiative.



Dr. Olembo from Kenya *"it is important to have a vision on what you are aiming at. Encourage each other and you will get there. It is also important to have confidence."*

Stella from Uganda *"Leadership is hard, and we need to learn to give a hug. The circle of support in terms of sharing of knowledge, lifting fellow women up and needing somebody to hold strength."*

Gertrude from Zimbabwe *"There is need to say things in a gentle and powerful way. The dominant system is for men, but we can have quality women leaders in different spaces."*



Manei Naanyu giving her opening remarks



Stella Lutalo sharing to the AWOLA Mentors and Mentees



Nancy Rapando, the consultant facilitating sessions during the regional training for Mentors and Mentees at The Luke Hotel – Nairobi

The annual steering committee meeting was held on 23rd November 2023 in Kampala, Uganda. The three countries had representation of 9 members with discussions on updates from the project coordinators, future of AWOLA and sustainability of AWOLA.



Photos from the Steering Committee Meeting in Grand Global Hotel in Kampala, Uganda



Monthly meetings between mentors and mentees

AWOLA mentors and mentees have held monthly meetings from November 2022 to October 2023. The mentor-mentee meetings are mainly to review the progress on implementation by the mentees as per

Individual Development Plan and sharing updates of the set targets such as analysis of partnerships, improvements on Record keeping, Improving communication and strategic leadership skills



Motivational experience sharing by selected seasoned women leaders

In order to continue to inspire the women leaders, PELUM organized for ten (10) virtual Mentorship talks on various topics touching on Agroecology principles and practices and leadership skills. The

AWOLA Mentors and Mentees participated in all the sessions though their networks would also join to learn regardless of gender.

<p>AFRICA WOMEN LEADERS IN AGROECOLOGY (AWOLA) MENTORSHIP TALK</p> <p>TOPIC: Empowering oneself to be a great leader of people and processes</p> <p>Speaker: Mr. Zachary Makanya Chief Executive Officer - RIDEP</p> <p>DATE: FEBRUARY 22, 2023 10:00 AM EAT 9:00 AM HARARE TIME</p> <p>Zoom Live MEETING ID: 898 9408 7945 PASSCODE: 707471</p> <p>Supported by </p>	<p>AFRICA WOMEN LEADERS IN AGROECOLOGY (AWOLA) MENTORSHIP TALK</p> <p>TOPIC: Holistic Health and Wellness</p> <p>Speaker: Pauline Mundia Independent Consultant</p> <p>DATE: APRIL 20, 2023 10:00 AM EAT 9:00 AM HARARE TIME</p> <p>MEETING ID: 824 4297 1110 PASSCODE: 037942</p> <p>Supported by </p>	<p>AFRICA WOMEN LEADERS IN AGROECOLOGY (AWOLA) MENTORSHIP TALK</p> <p>TOPIC: Organic Retail</p> <p>Speaker: Sylvia Kuria KCOA-KHEA Project Master Trainer Founder & CEO - Sylvia's Basket</p> <p>DATE: MAY 11, 2023 10:00 AM EAT 9:00 AM HARARE TIME</p> <p>CONTACT: +254787347353 EMAIL: ratemo@pelumkenya.net</p> <p>Supported by </p>
<p>AFRICA WOMEN LEADERS IN AGROECOLOGY (AWOLA) MENTORSHIP TALK</p> <p>TOPIC: LIVING IN BALANCE - AN INTEGRAL HEALTH PRACTICE THAT MAKES ROOM FOR THE PANOPLY OF ALL HUMAN QUADRANTS</p> <p>Speaker: Linda Kabaiba National Coordinator, SCOPE Zimbabwe</p> <p>DATE: OCTOBER 3, 2023 10:00 AM EAT 9:00 AM HARARE TIME</p> <p>MEETING ID: 994 5737 3445 PASSCODE: 282016</p> <p>Supported by </p>	<p>AFRICA WOMEN LEADERS IN AGROECOLOGY (AWOLA) MENTORSHIP TALK</p> <p>TOPIC: EVOLUTION OF AGRICULTURE - "THE NEED TO EMBRACE AGROECOLOGY"</p> <p>Speaker: Robert Guloba Programme Officer - PELUM Uganda Agroecology Practitioner</p> <p>DATE: MAY 25, 2023 10:00 AM EAT 9:00 AM HARARE TIME</p> <p>CONTACT: +256751547234 EMAIL: hadjahnalule@pelumuganda.org</p> <p>Supported by </p>	<p>AFRICA WOMEN LEADERS IN AGROECOLOGY (AWOLA) MENTORSHIP TALK</p> <p>TOPIC: MAKING BEE-FRIENDLY FARMS AND HOMES</p> <p>Speaker: Dr. Gugulethu Tarakini Founder and Director of Research and Education for Sustainable Actions (Zimbabwe)</p> <p>DATE: AUGUST 3, 2023 10:00 AM EAT 9:00 AM HARARE TIME</p> <p>MEETING ID: 952 1780 6769 PASSCODE: 920654</p> <p>Supported by </p>
<p>AFRICA WOMEN LEADERS IN AGROECOLOGY (AWOLA) MENTORSHIP TALK</p> <p>TOPIC: MOTIVATING SELF AND OTHERS AS A LEADER</p> <p>Speaker: Stella Lutalo Consultant/ AWOLA Mentor</p> <p>DATE: AUGUST 24, 2023 10:00 AM EAT 9:00 AM HARARE TIME</p> <p>MEETING ID: 869 8625 9114 PASSCODE: 488984</p> <p>Supported by </p>	<p>AFRICA WOMEN LEADERS IN AGROECOLOGY (AWOLA) MENTORSHIP TALK</p> <p>TOPIC: A TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP LENS FOR AFRICAN WOMEN LEADERS IN AGROECOLOGY</p> <p>Speaker: Harriet Mbabazi Consultant (Gender and Livelihoods)</p> <p>DATE: JUNE 22, 2023 10:00 AM EAT 9:00 AM HARARE TIME</p> <p>MEETING ID: 890 8790 5883 PASSCODE: 034310</p> <p>Supported by </p>	<p>AFRICA WOMEN LEADERS IN AGROECOLOGY (AWOLA) MENTORSHIP TALK</p> <p>TOPIC: MAINSTREAMING GENDER IN AGROECOLOGY</p> <p>Speaker: Fortunate Nyakanda Executive Director of Zimbabwe Organic Producers and Promoters Association (ZOPPA) & World Board Member at IFOAM Organics International</p> <p>DATE: SEPTEMBER 4, 2023 10:00 AM EAT 9:00 AM HARARE TIME</p> <p>MEETING ID: 966 3555 6015 PASSCODE: 129949</p> <p>Supported by </p>

YOU ARE INVITED

AGROECOLOGY WOMEN LEADERS STORIES OF RESILIENCE

Human library series allows you to narrate or share stories of resilience that are meant for learning and inspiration

LIVE

DATE: JULY 27, 2023
9:30 AM EAT
8:30 AM HARARE TIME

Speakers: Dr. Sarah Olembo, Fortunate Nyakanda, Venter Mwangera, Sylvia Kuria

Moderated by: NANCY RAPANDO

MEETING ID: 850 0106 5868
PASSCODE: 708708

Partners:



Support women (mentors or mentees) to participate in agroecological fora at county, regional, or international levels

PELUM supported AWOLA Mentors and Mentees to attend the 1st Eastern Africa Agroecology Conference, 2023 Zimbabwe National Good Food and Seed Festival, 2023 Harare Agriculture show, Africa Climate summit etc. The activities have:

- Built women's capacity to effectively manage Agroecological businesses.
- Strengthened knowledge and skills of women in leadership, communication, and advocacy.
- Enhanced knowledge and skills of women in Agroecological practices.
- Established a network of women leaders in Agroecology.
- Created a safe space for women leaders in Agroecology.



The AWOLA stall at the 2023 Zimbabwe National Good Food and Seed festival held from 29 and 30 September 2023. Mentors and mentees had the opportunity to display their products and also learn and share knowledge on agroecology. The festival was attended by approximately 1500 participants. *Photo: Farirai Jemwa/PELUM Zimbabwe.*



Gamuchirai Dambaza, one of the mentees from AWOLA Zimbabwe's 1st cohort. Gamuchirai says the mentorship programme has been a transformative experience for her, both personally and professionally, as she has gained confidence, competence, and motivation to pursue her Agroecological business. *Photo: Farirai Jemwa/PELUM Zimbabwe.*



AWOLA Mentor, Mrs. Bertha Nherera (in white) displaying produce from her company, Orsha Wholesome Foods, at the 2023 Harare Agricultural Show held from 28 August to 2 September in Harare, Zimbabwe. Her stall was visited by First Lady of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Dr. Auxillia Mnangagwa and representatives from the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development, including the then-Chief Director Professor. Obert Jiri (PhD) who is now the Permanent Secretary. *Deltahcuti Dube/PELUM Zimbabwe.*



Irene Mumo, an AWOLA mentee exhibiting in the 1st Eastern Africa Agroecology Conference



Photo during the Africa Climate Summit From left: AWOLA Mentees Sally Owuonda, Esther Kiruthi, and Bathseba Ratemo - Programme Officer

Organized Semi-annual meetings of mentors, mentees and trainers

PELUM organized for semi annual meetings to reflect on progress of the mentorship and coaching. This ensured mentors and mentees were able to share experiences (progress & key learnings)



AWOLA first cohort Mentors and Mentees in Zimbabwe during the first semiannual meeting held at SCOPE Zimbabwe in Mt Hampden on July 7, 2023. Photo: Farirai Jemwa/PELUM Zimbabwe



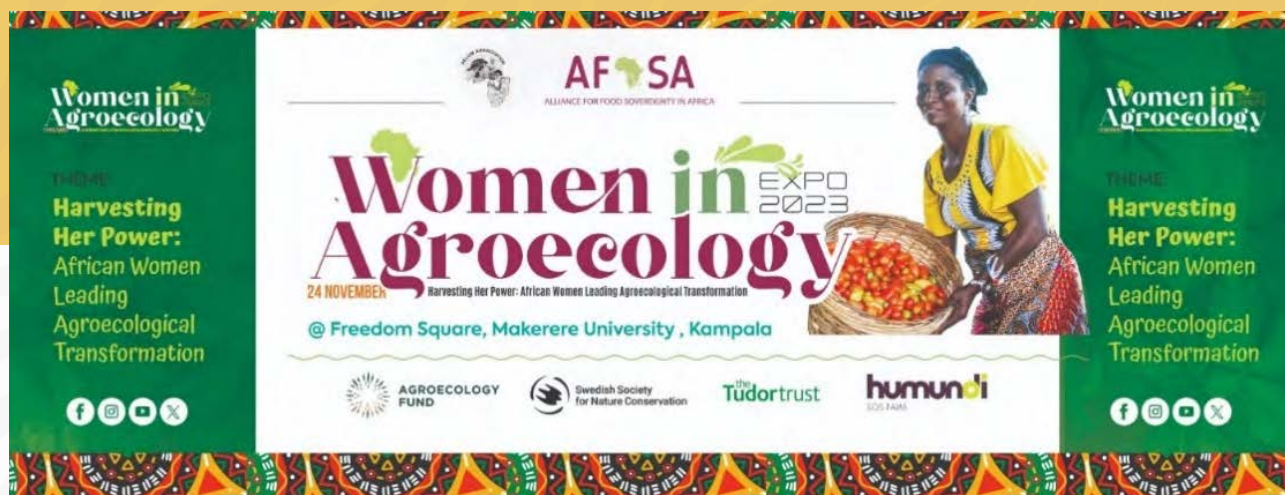
Group photo of participants during the AWOLA semi-annual meeting in Thika, Kenya



Photos during the exposure visit to Effective IPM Association in Kiambu, Kenya

Women in Agroecology Expo

AWOLA initiative together with the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) organized an African Women in Agroecology Expo, 2023 on the **24th of November, 2023 in Uganda.**



The African Women in Agroecology Expo 2023, themed *"Harvesting Her Power: African Women Leading Agroecological Transformation,"* culminated in a powerful conclusion that not only celebrated the achievements and contributions of women in agroecology but also laid out a roadmap for future actions and initiatives. The proceedings highlighted a range of transformative stories and insights, demonstrating the critical role of women in sustainable agriculture, health, nutrition, and environmental stewardship.

Key recommendations for moving forward included the emphasis on making the Women in Agroecology Expo an annual event, fostering continuous learning, sharing of best practices, and monitoring progress. The urgent need to reduce pesticide usage in farming was acknowledged, emphasizing sustainable and eco-friendly approaches to protect both health and the environment. The discussions called for greater youth engagement in agroecology, stressing the importance of educating young people about sustainable practices for the future of sustainable development.



Photo Speak





Photo Speak







Stories of Change from AWOLA Mentors and Mentees from Kenya



Mentee: Salome Owuonda

Salome: About me

Academic Background

Master of Arts in Gender and Development Studies
– Egerton University

Bachelor of Arts in Gender, Women, and
Development Studies - Egerton University

Completed various short courses and trainings on
climate, food systems, development and gender,
including those offered by the United Nations
Climate Change and the African Development Bank.

Professional Background

I am an accomplished expert in Climate, Gender
and Social Inclusion with a special emphasis on



Mentor: Dr. Sarah Olembo

food systems. My extensive experience involves
integrating gender perspectives into initiatives
related to climate justice, climate finance, food
systems, natural resource management and
empowerment. As a gender analyst, my professional
journey has been devoted to advocacy, program
coordination, research and fundraising.

Currently, I serve as the Executive Director at
the Africa Centre for Sustainable and Inclusive
Development after having previously made
significant contributions to various organizations,
including the Centre for Pan African Climate Justice
Alliance (PACJA), Africa Centre for People, Institutions
and Society (ACEPIS), Amnesty International Kenya,
Nairobi Women's Hospital – Gender Violence
Recovery Centre and Foundation for Women's Rights
in Kenya.

I actively participate in numerous multi-stakeholder engagements and assignments where I play several roles as a member of a task team responsible for creating a climate finance training handbook under the auspices of Climate Finance Unit at the National Treasury and United Nations Development Programs. This handbook aims to offer guidance on climate financing, budgeting, costing, tracking and coding to stakeholders. I am also a member of the National Natural Resource Management (NRM) Advocacy Platform where we collaborate with county-level NRM advocacy platforms in addressing topics like climate action financing, natural resources, policy implementation and overall NRM governance for sustainable development.

Additionally, I am engaged in the Inter sectorial Forum on Agro biodiversity and Agro ecology (ISFAA)- a diverse and inclusive platform promoting constructive discussions and collaborative efforts to address the challenges within our food system. Furthermore, I am involved in the Kenya Climate Smart Agriculture Multi Stakeholder Platform (CSA MSP) which is a network of organizations dedicated to promoting Climate Smart Agriculture practices and facilitating collaboration among stakeholders engaged in Climate Smart Agriculture initiatives.

My Mentorship Journey

At the start of my mentorship, my leadership focus was on agroecology, specifically promotion of integration of Indigenous Traditional Knowledge (ITK) and gender-responsive cultural values into seed systems and food for improved nutritional security. Professionally, I aimed at taking on more significant leadership roles at regional and global levels, expand my network in the fields of climate and food, become a proficient negotiator and resource mobilizer in climate and food. My primary leadership needs included enhancing motivation, relationship building, negotiation skills for influencing public opinion towards a paradigm shift and improving public speaking skills.

During our mentorship, we outlined three action plans:- The first was to attend regional agro ecology conferences and negotiation trainings which we intended to achieve through active participation in pre-COP and COP meetings, attending a minimum

of six agro ecology conferences by October 2023 and participating in at least two negotiation trainings or workshops by the same date.

The second plan involved pursuing a Ph.D. in agroecology with steps including expediting the release of my MA degree results, selecting a Ph.D. research area and topic and applying for Ph.D. scholarships.

Our final plan was to publish research papers on ITK-based agroecology in journals and various platforms with a goal of having at least one research paper published by October 2023.

Achieved Planned Objectives

Under the invaluable support and guidance of my mentor, we have successfully achieved most, if not all of our planned objectives. I have been actively engaged in Pre-COP processes and I am set to attend the upcoming COP28 scheduled to be held in Dubai. I have exceeded our initial goal by participating in more than six agroecology conferences and even had the privilege of presenting a paper at the 1st Eastern Africa Agroecology Conference. This marked a significant milestone as it was my first conference paper presentation and it was a joint publication with my mentor, Dr. Sarah.

Additionally, my mentor and I presented another paper at the 6th Annual Conference on the Status of African Women organized by the Department of Sociology, Social Work and African Women's Studies and the Women's Economic Empowerment Hub of the University of Nairobi. Our presentation focused on women's adoption of agricultural technologies under changing climate conditions. These accomplishments underscore the growth and support I have experienced during this mentorship. The first presentation is included in the conference book of abstracts while our second presentation is part of the draft book of abstracts representing our publications in the field of Agro ecology. In addition to my other accomplishments, I have had the privilege of participating as a panelist in various conferences and forums. This was made possible through the invaluable support and guidance of my mentor.



Completed Negotiation Trainings

I have successfully completed the two negotiation trainings as originally planned: *"Climate Governance, Diplomacy and Negotiations Leadership"* by the African Group of Negotiators Experts Support (AGNES) and *"Developing Skills for Women Leadership in Climate Action"* by C40 Cities and Foundation L'Oréal. During the mentorship journey, I completed the first level of the Biennial Transparency Report Review Training offered by the United Nations Climate Change. As a result of this accomplishment, I have been appointed as a member of the United Nations Climate Change Expert Technical Reviewers focusing on Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) REDD+ technical assessments. This role aligns perfectly with my work in agroecology and positions me to make meaningful contributions at both regional and global levels. On the academic front, I wrapped up all pending work for my Master's degree and graduated on October 28th, 2023. We have also identified a Ph.D. research topic and are actively seeking admission opportunities.

A Transformative Force

AWOLA mentorship program has been a transformative force in my career, propelling me from the role of a Program Manager to the esteemed position of Executive Director. This transformation was catalyzed by the encouragement and guidance from my mentor who instilled in me the belief in limitless possibilities. Together, we established a regional NGO, the Africa Centre for Sustainable and Inclusive Development (Africa CSID), where I serve as the Executive Director and Secretary to the board while my mentor is one of the five board members. This organization has experienced remarkable growth, affording me the opportunity to partake in the Regional Forum for the United Nations Framework for Climate Change's Adaptation Committee.

Africa CSID organized three side events at the inaugural Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi, Kenya and will host a side event at the Food System Pavilion during COP28. We await decisions on the status of two other side event submissions for COP28. These side events will elevate the organization's visibility and foster its growth. This potential growth will directly and indirectly contribute to my personal and professional development.

Throughout the mentorship period, I have not only witnessed substantial professional growth but also noticed positive changes in my personal life. My communication skills and personal relationships have remarkably improved.



**During our mentorship, we outlined three action plans:-
The first was to attend regional agro ecology conferences and negotiation trainings which we intended to achieve through active participation in pre-COP and COP meetings, attending a minimum of six agro ecology conferences by October 2023 and participating in at least two negotiation trainings or workshops by the same date.**



Juggling Between Work and Family



Mentee: Irene Mumo



Mentor: Sylvia Kuria

All work and no Play makes Jill a dull girl is how we can summarize our one-year exhilarating train ride through the AWOLA Mentorship program. From moving at breath taking speeds to catch up with time which left us breathless to almost crawling to a stop.

This is the story of two organic farmers, Sylvia and Irene who juggled between motherhood and doing their homework at 10:00pm. One of them had a stint of illness during the one-year mentorship program and was bedridden for a while not to mention the un-precedent rains that caused major food loss.

Fatigue did not hinder them from opening a new organic shop neither did the roller coaster of activity to meet the demands of the first ever export of organic avocados where they on-boarded 15 Women Trainers of Trainers (TOTs in agroecology and market access.

The duo describe a drive through greenery for a farm visit and community training as some of

the awesome experiences they had from AWOLA besides the joy of imparting knowledge to the women at the grassroots. *"We learnt a whole lot of new things through this program including agroecological farming technologies, leadership skills, finance management and book-keeping which we were happy to share with fellow women,"* said Sylvia.

The two managed to acquire a new farm within the mentorship program and got partnership development with several key Stakeholders in the agroecological ecosystem. Irene said the exposure to international markets through attendance of two International trade fairs has left a life-time mark in her.

They say that after the training, time is ripe to disembark and get down to real work where they will apply the lessons learnt. *"Our huge childish grins speak volumes in amazement at how quickly time has passed. We carry memories forever etched in the friendships and learnings build to last during this first Cohort of the AWOLA- PELUM program,"* said Sylvia.



"As we watch other passengers on-board, our prayer and hope is that their journey will be as memorable because by God's Grace and Mercies we have handed over the baton, leaving an indelible small footprint in the agroecology sands of time," she added.

The two organic farmers vow to continue the journey and are grateful to AWOLA through PELUM



Sylvia and Irene

Positively Impacted by AWOLA Mentorship Program



Mentee: Esther Kagai

I am a mother and a wife. I work for Community sustainable Agriculture and Healthy Environmental Program as the founder and Director. I am a teacher and an agronomist by profession who is passionate about seeds conservation and growing of African indigenous vegetables. I promote agroecological agriculture with its value chain from production to consumption.



Mentor: Janet Mumo

The mentorship's main focus areas were:

- Improvement of self-esteem and communication skills
- Improve leadership skills.
- Learn proposal writing and donor identification



The Mentorship Journey

The bonding with my mentor was easy because we already knew each other before the AWOLA Mentorship Program. We organized an exchange visit where my mentor visited CSHEP to familiarize herself with our work and my duties. We set our second month on working on communication skills and self-esteem. We set a target of looking for three events within four months that I would make speeches and

get an opportunity in public speaking. At one point I went to Kitui to preside over a tree planting event at Kitui Development Center (KDC). This really helped me gain confidence, especially because I had a prepared speech. This also helped me to clearly understand that I can do it and greatly helped me to gain courage for public speaking. I now know how to prepare a speech and address congregations. My self-esteem has since been enhanced.

We had several meetings and discussions. We sometime had our side meetings anytime we got an opportunity to meet along our mentorship journey. During the PELUM AGM for example, we got a chance for a side meeting. We had another side meeting in Zimbabwe during the National Seed Festivals where we bonded and discussed.

Milestones and Achievements

I have made tremendous improvement in terms of communication, self-esteem and even in my leadership journey as a director.

During mentorship period, I started accepting invitations as guest of honor, press conferences and media talk shows. Previously, I turned down such opportunities because I did not have confidence in my spoken English.

- 1. Personal stories:** Through travelling and taking up new, yet challenging opportunities, I have networked and gone places. I believe good communication skills the key to self esteem.



2. Impact: Am happy to say that the mentorship has left a huge positive impact in me. The positive influence is manifested whenever I am addressing to my staff. I've got the authority and ability to me decisions.

3. Future Goals: I am really happy to know that my mentor is still very ready to continue supporting men even when the project till I perfect what I we have started. Thank you!



During a talk to Mrs. Earth Kenya on agroecology During a women talk on Healthy food cooking



Having fun together during our visit to Zimbabwe

Sweet Fruits of Mentorship



Mentee: Lydia Mukami



Mentor: Alice Kariuki

AWOLA has opened my eyes to the fact that challenges, no matter how hard, have solutions. I have been working in an organization for the last 10 years. During the last 8 years, I faced a big challenge. I spent so much time working that I barely had time for my family. I also stopped breastfeeding my baby girl due to lack of time. I could not go for annual leave. I registered for an education program but dropped out due to lack of time. No one could do my work in the office since I was the only finance personnel in my department. At one time, I acted as the organization's Chief Executive Officer for nine months while still working as Finance Personnel. The work was so tedious that I could go without eating in order to squeeze time and deliver. Auditors often advised on the need to at least employ second finance personnel to ease the approval process. They always reiterated on the need to come up with a procurement policy manual. Yes, I had the ability to come up with one but where was the time! I faced a lot of conflict of interest on procurement since there were no clear guidelines.

The organization had no funds to hire someone to support me. Any funds raised could be used to add more programs staff because activities grew and grew. However, most of the projects did not support salaries. My boss used to comfort me by saying that I was competent enough to multi-task. This gave me a lot of stress because I could not get courage to push for more financial resources for finance personnel due to fear of victimization and even losing my job.

Applied for Mentorship

I heard of an open applications for mentorship on AWOLA program through PELUM Kenya. I was so interested in it because my organization deals with agroecological agriculture and I wanted to be mentored as a leader. I passed the interviews and was selected as one of the mentees.

The journey of mentorship started and ran very smoothly. At the stage of tackling different topics,

I became very open to my mentor since I wanted everything to succeed in the end of this program and future.

Leaders Need to be Firm

I narrated what I was going through at my workplace and she advised me on how to handle it. She told me: *"As a leader, you need to be firm and honest to your work and people. You cannot work under fear. Go to your boss and tell him politely that you need an assistant. You can work more and deliver more with an assistant. She also promised to support me come up with a draft procurement policy manual which needed input from other staff and approval by the board of trustees."*

Discussions with the CEO on the need to recruit an account assistant and coming up with procurement policy drafts started among other talks.

It took 3 months for the organization to fundraise for this position. After working for 8 years without someone to assist me in the finance department I got an assistant in July, 2023. This was achieved through persistence and courage that I gained from my mentor through AWOLA program. The fear is now over and I got confidence that I can as well ask for other opportunities.

Currently I am winding up the first 20 pages draft of the organization procurement policy manual which I shared with colleagues for their staff inputs.

Sweet Fruits of Mentorship

The organization will have its own procurement policy manual by the end of 2023. That means there will be a clear procurement process throughout.

Documents approval process has been strengthened. The external Audit has been always conducted in July - August every year due to lack of enough preparation time. The audit will now be done in time since the workload has been spread.

More time will be available for fundraising for new projects.

Through the various mentorship sessions that I have received from my mentor, I am applying the knowledge and skills in my daily work and also imparting it to my assistant who was recruited recently. I can also go back to school to further my studies and grow my career because I am not overwhelmed.

Persistence Pays

Being persistent and convincing as a leader is a big strength to everyone who needs success in this era. If it were not for my persistence, I could be in the same situation of doing everything and additional finance personnel staff would not be recruited.

Never object to an opportunity however tough it is. I think had I not been an Acting Program coordinator before, I could not have passed the AWOLA Mentorship program's interviews, especially the write up. This has really offered me a lot of opportunities to interact at different platforms.



As a leader, you need to be firm and honest to your work and people. You cannot work under fear.

Mentored to Mentor



Mentee: Terry Aseneka



Mentor: Esther Bett

Pamela Okuta is a widow 46 years of age, who hails from Kisumu County Ahero Location, Kochogo Sub location in Koderia village. She is a primary school dropout, having been married off at a tender age.

Ahero Ward is characterized by long periods of drought and massive flooding during rainy seasons. This has always resulted to displacement of communities, crops and livestock loss, emergence of invasive weed species and a surge in diseases such as malaria, cholera and pneumonia. Due to these conditions many households in Ahero Location face numerous months of food insecurity. These challenges coupled with the current economic situation worsen the living conditions for communities.

Pamela was a frustrated woman since she could not support herself, her son and additional two orphans left under her custody after her brother's death. Her son is fourteen years and her niece and nephew are 13 and 10 respectively. They could only afford a meal a day or sometimes go hungry.

Pamela could buy maize, sift it and use the flour for making porridge and 'ugali' for her children. Her illiteracy level denied her opportunities to access government extension officers. She had negative attitude towards development projects and partners especially training and would therefore miss out on such opportunities.

Her farm barely produced any yields owing to the prolonged periods of drought and infertile soils. Her vulnerability worsened as she lacked proper knowledge on farm diversification and use of appropriate farming techniques. This resulted in very low yields that could not even cater for her family needs.

In March 2023, I reached out to a demoralized Pamela to try and intervene in her situation. My mentor had encouraged me to mentor and uplift other women within my reach in coming up with sustainable solutions to their problems. She explained that she had tried several times to labour on her farm but it has always been in vain. It was out of Pamela's condition that I came up with ways



of ensuring she got food for her children through introduction of appropriate trainings. I requested her to identify seven women that were going through similar challenges. Pamela identified seven widows within her neighbourhood. Together with my mentor we developed training areas to assist them navigate through the challenges that they were facing. The curriculum involved; kitchen garden establishment where women were capacity-built on making small gardens on their farms and utilizing the little water within their reach for production of diverse nutritious vegetables and mulching to save the water from evaporation. The women were also taken through community saving and loaning scheme. They were saving Ksh50 weekly and would borrow loans whenever needs arose. We also taught them record-keeping to ensure that they had knowledge on records pertaining to their farms and their savings kitty. Water harvesting and management were the other topics the widows were taken through to ensure that they could collect the surface run-offs and utilize the collection during dry season.

They also learnt on preparation of compost manure as a way to improve soil fertility. The training on marketing will help in selling pawpaw fruits and other produce. Indigenous poultry keeping will help them improve resilience from the effects of climate change while at the same time utilizing chicken dropping as manure. In total, Pamela and 8 other women were capacitated in the afore-mentioned subjects and so far they have been taken through six practical sessions.

Pamela says that her skills have greatly improved through the training and practical sessions that were done on her small piece of land. She has since embraced crop diversification whose importance she previously did not know. *"My farm is now a real model based on the knowledge gained from the training sessions"*, said Pamela during the interview. Pamela bears testimonies to other women of how training has taken her to a higher level of understanding. She says that she has understood the importance of enterprise diversification of agricultural produce as a

way of adapting to climate change. At the moment, her farm produces different types of crops which include various indigenous vegetables such as cowpeas, jute marrow, amaranth, pigeon peas, local kales, beans, maize and Pawpaw. She also keeps local poultry and ducks. Pamela says that her farm's fertility has greatly improved through application of animal and compost manure prepared using locally available materials. This has ultimately enhanced her farm productivity. For instance, she can now sell different varieties of indigenous vegetables. She testifies that her income is now guaranteed and she is no longer worried about where to get the money.

Pamela sells produce at the farm gate price. In a day, she is able to sell indigenous vegetables at between Ksh100-Ksh150s. She uses part of her income proceeds to cater for family needs and invests the surplus in the savings and loaning scheme. The scheme has increased savings to Ksh100 weekly, their borrowing capacity has also grown.

Her future plan is to buy a water pump for irrigation. This will improve production and enhance income to enable her pay school fees for her children up to higher levels of learning *"I am now a proud mother; my children are happy too since they can now eat nutritious food comfortably produced from my own farm"*

She confessed, *"I am no longer the same, my life has totally changed. I have realized that the destiny of a person lies within one's change of attitude, perception and personal commitment, my song has changed!"* This change has happened in only 10 months.

As an AWOLA beneficiary, I have been reaching out to other women that I work with, while offering field extension services with the knowledge gained. It has greatly improved a number of them in the way they carry out their work and also improved relations within their families and neighbourhood. Thanks to the AWOLA mentorship sessions.



Pictorial presentation of activities at Pamela's farm



Pamela on the at her homestead preparing manure with fellow women at her home

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I am no longer the same, my life has totally changed. I have realized that the destiny of a person lies within one's change of attitude, perception and personal commitment, my song has changed!



My Story of Change through the Journey of AWOLA



Mentee: Lucy Mweche

Lucy is a young single mother of one, born in Kakamega in 1995 and raised in Busia in a family of four, being the oldest child. She faced significant challenges while growing up as her parents couldn't provide the best for their family. This upbringing instilled in her a sense of discipline and resilience, teaching her never to give up in any situation but to persevere.

She attended public schools throughout her life until she completed her secondary education with excellent grades, which earned her an invitation to pursue higher education at a university in Kenya. However, due to her family circumstances and the fact that she was a young mother at the time, she couldn't attend university. Instead, she embarked on a journey to explore alternative paths towards becoming a successful young woman.



Mentor: Venter Mwongera

This led her to hustle in Nairobi, taking on various jobs to sustain herself, support her family, and provide for her son. Fortunately, she was selected for a scholarship at the Manor House Agricultural Center in 2017/2018. Here, she pursued a diploma in agroecology, specifically in BIOINTENSIVE agriculture. Subsequently, she secured her first job with the Grow Biointensive Agriculture Center of Kenya (G-BLACK) as a farmer field officer.

Driven by her passion for agroecology, Lucy established, trained, and implemented innovative practices both at the center and in the community. Her dedication and advocacy led to her promotion to the position of program officer responsible for training, youth empowerment, and internships. Through her leadership role, she had the opportunity to collaborate and network with various stakeholders and individuals in the field.

Continuing her pursuit of knowledge, Lucy participated in an eight-month internship certificate program in ecology action, led by John Jevons, the founder of Ecology Action, with a focus on BIOINTENSIVE agriculture.

Later, Lucy had the privilege of joining the African Women Leaders in Agroecology (AWOLA) Initiative team through PELUM Kenya's announcement, where she became a mentee, further expanding her horizons of learning. The mentorship at AWOLA has improved her knowledge on diverse topics and has improved her contributions besides efficiency in her field of work.

Introduction

The AWOLA Initiative has profoundly altered my perspective on life and leadership by introducing me to my most esteemed mentor, Venter. Under her guidance, I have honed my leadership skills, addressing both my strengths and weaknesses. I used to believe that leaders were inherently born, but thanks to the mentorship program, I have evolved into a highly capable leader. This transformation was particularly vital as I'm now better in handling work-life challenges and navigating them effortlessly.

Throughout the one-year mentorship program, I acquired an array of invaluable leadership skills through the monthly virtual and physical mentorship meetings. These skills have proven instrumental in my journey to becoming a top-notch agroecology expert. They encompass effective communication, adept project implementation, climate change adaptation, proficient proposal writing, meticulous monitoring and evaluation, astute management of food governance, a deep understanding of food security and sovereignty, and a keen sensitivity to gender-related issues.

Through unwavering dedication and a deep passion for sustainable agriculture and the AWOLA program, I have embarked on a transformative journey of involving and empowering the youth within our community, equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary for Grow Biointensive Agriculture and various other sustainable, practical skills. Over

the years, our Youth Empowerment Program (Y.E.P) has borne witness to remarkable transformations. We have not only cultivated flourishing gardens but also nurtured the intellectual growth of these young individuals. The youth engage in an 18-month curriculum that I personally oversee, and upon completion, they graduate

Meet my Mentor

The African Women Leaders in Agroecology Initiative has profoundly reshaped my perspective on leadership through the introduction of an exceptional mentor, Venter. Venter is not only highly intelligent but also possesses extensive knowledge and experience across various domains. Under her guidance, I have evolved into a highly accomplished leader, excelling in diverse leadership domains.

I am profoundly grateful and appreciative of the PELUM Kenya team and all the supporters who have played an instrumental role in the success of this initiative. Their unwavering dedication has made this program immensely valuable to all women involved, empowering them to become outstanding leaders.





Stories of Change from AWOLA Mentors and Mentees from Zimbabwe

A Transformative Experience



Mentee: Gamuchiri Dambaza

I have been fortunate to participate in AWOLA mentorship program that covered various topics related to agroecology such as; leadership, gender, monitoring and evaluation and use of digital tools. My mentor, Fezile is a renowned expert in the field of agroecology and a passionate advocate for sustainable and inclusive farming practices. She guided me through the program with patience, wisdom and encouragement while at the same time helping me develop skills and knowledge in a practical and meaningful way.

One of the most valuable aspects of the mentorship program was the opportunity to apply what I learned to real-life situations. Fezile linked me with several agroecology projects where I observed and interacted with various activities. I also learnt how to communicate effectively with different stakeholders



Mentor: Fezile Ncube

such as farmers, researchers, policymakers and donors. I also learnt how to address the challenges and opportunities of agroecology from a gender perspective.

A Transformative Experience

In addition, the mentorship program has been a transformative experience for me, both personally and professionally. I have gained confidence, competence and motivation to pursue my career in agroecology. I have also developed a strong network of peers and mentors who support and inspire me to continue learning and growing. I am grateful to Fezile for her mentorship and friendship and I hope to follow her example by mentoring others who are interested in agroecology.

A New Perception of Agroecology



Mentee: Dr. Gugulethu Tarakini



Mentor: Josephine Zimudzi

It was in November 2022 when we embarked on this mentorship journey that changed our perception of agroecology. A mentorship program of the African Women Leaders in Agroecology (AWOLA) was launched in Kenya. Its mandate was to reduce chemical inputs in agriculture and to promote recycling, biodiversity, economic diversification and interaction. It was also meant to promote collaboration between African women with a common goal.

Josephine is a lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe who specializes in Plant Pathology. Her research thrust is on the promotion of non-chemical ways in controlling plant diseases through screening of plant extracts and soil microorganisms which can be used in crop protection. These approaches are in line with AWOLA objectives and hence the involvement in this mentorship program.

On the other hand, Gugulethu is the founder and director of Research and Education for Sustainable Actions (RESA) conservation trust. She is an entrepreneur whose main goal is to turn

agroecological products into a viable business beneficial to communities and attractive to many. The goals are also in support of the AWOLA's overall objective and hence the pairing was done to satisfy the mentee aspirations as an entrepreneur.

Objective: To Establish an Apiculture Business

The objective of the mentorship program was to establish an apiculture business which is sustainable environmentally and financially with opportunities to scale up. As a mentee I needed assistance in building a foundation structure for the business in terms of company registration, opening bank account, writing business concept note, business plan, business pitch, establishment of 30 hives on the apiary and ensuring the hives are occupied. I also needed support to get more funding to increase operations.

We held monthly meetings with my mentor and she was very helpful with resources on how to write a business concept note, business plan, and



business pitch. She strongly played the role of an accountability partner which really pushed me to achieve set goals at set times. She also helped a lot in proofreading the documents and providing valuable feedback. She was quite encouraging and comforting, something you really need in most discouraging situations. I loved her warmth and humility. She helped a lot in offering advice on different issues concerning bee management and marketing of products. She constantly sent me 'calls for funding' so that I could apply and raise resources to scale up the project.

Won two Fellowships, Increased Opportunities

This process refined my documents and made to competitively win two fellowships for entrepreneurs:- (Professional fellows Program at Michigan State University in the US and Academy for Women Entrepreneurs by US Embassy). These grants opened up more opportunities in terms of securing funding through collaboration with international partners. I managed to get advice on how to improve bee keeping business. In addition, I have registered my business, opened a bank account and have a business plan which, in most cases is required

when applying for funding and because it serves as a reference in checking progress in this business venture. So far, I have managed to set up 34 beehives in my apiary, exceeding the targeted 30 and so far 7 hives have been colonized.

Increased Professional Network

The mentorship programme improved my professional network especially by linking me to my mentor whom I never knew before. She has helped me plan and implement my dream. She has always been positive and encouraging. I remember her words of positivity even when I broke news of some bees absconding, it was good to know somebody believed it is well and it could be fixed.

The mentorship has helped me establish my first apiary which has always been a dream. I am reminded of my mentor's first sentence in her email to me in December, 2022 as we set the plan for the project *"I have gone through the document and it makes whole lot of sense and it can take you somewhere if given the attention it requires."* This statement encouraged me to work on the project and here we are. Below are some illustrations depicting stages in setting up of bee hives.



Fig 1: Planning stage before beehive mounting



Fig 2: Mounting of Kenyan Top Bar Hive



Fig 3: Bee hives mounted at the apiary awaiting colonization (a) Catch box Bee Hive (b) Kenyan Top Bar Bee Hive

Mentor too Benefitted from the Program

Josephine;- My leadership skills have improved owing to the contact time that I had with my mentee throughout the mentorship program. We set out goals and agreed on timelines at the beginning of the program which the mentee followed diligently, sometimes submitting work even earlier than expected. In this case, the program was mentee driven because I did not put much effort in persuading her to complete tasks as laid out in the individual development plan tool. I am involved in a bee keeping project at work but our approach does not follow the agroecological concepts employed in my mentee's business. I am actually adopting some of the principles and implementing them at work.

We had a healthy relationship and we are looking forward to continue networking in order to monitor progress in this business and sharing opportunities particularly in regards to calls for funding. Despite the interaction between mentee and mentor, the fellowship program enabled us to meet up with and learn from regional colleagues who also value the need to promote agroecological ways in ensuring sustainable food security and maintaining healthy ecosystems with improved biodiversity.



In a nutshell, the mentee has successfully managed to set a strong foundation for her agroecological business by acquiring proper documentation as well as setting up initial structures which are crucial for her to set the ball rolling.

With the documentation established she can apply for further funding and loans. The apiary, if managed well can produce honey which she can sell and save money to scale up.

So Many Lessons, A Worthy Cause



Mentee: Hluphekile Mujuruki

As a woman in leadership in rural Makonde I work with women who make up the majority of the farmers in my district. The AWOLA call came at a time when as a community, we had started noticing the negative impacts of climate change and deforestation. Blessed with a 24ha piece of land, we were not well equipped to manage it especially because it is prone to flooding.

A teacher by profession, I am now a community development worker in Makonde District in Mashonaland West province. I was twinned with an amazing woman, Mary, a teacher by profession and scope facilitator with more than 10 years' experience in agroecology.

We started by holding a local leadership meeting of the AWOLA program. The 80 women under 'Skills for Life' group we sensitized on- '*why practice agroecology*'. Our major challenge was flooding. With the mentor's help we were able to do land reclamation and plant vetiver grass along our drain ways. We also planted Sasol on barren land along



Mentor: Mary Chigiya

the boundaries in a bid to improve plant cover. Additionally, we did mulching to avoid soil erosion.

Water harvesting weir

Every rain season gallon of water would sweep through the center. My mentor encouraged us to dig water harvesting ponds or weirs that would save our water and lengthen our growing season. The water harvesting weirs run adjacent to our water drains. We demonstrated such weirs at the farm for the women to learn and then implement at their homes

Use of Organic Inputs to Increase Yield

Instead of using chemical fertilizers my mentor taught me about making use of natural organic matter for fertilizers. Through this I learnt of the Bokashi fertilizer which requires 15 days to mature. Since we are on a farm which has a lot of grass, raw materials for the fertilizer are readily available. Soil improvement is key to crop production. We were instructed on how do composting and crop rotation

by planting crops that improve soil health like beans. We did conservation farming by digging pits (slightly sunk paddocks) in which we would have roughly 500 holes for planting maize. We did companion planting which helped us produce so much on so little land. We then increased the number of livestock; we have goats, turkey and free-range chicken.

Herbal garden

Makonde is prone to malaria. For this reason, we planted wormwood in our herbal garden. My mentor also helped me source marigold for pest control as well as aloe vera, basil, rosemary, lavender and many other herbs to plant for use at the center as well as for sale.

Establishment of a Seed Bank

Makonde is in region 3 and as such, has an annual rainfall of between 750ml and 500ml. Though maize performs relatively well, small grains like rapoko sorghum thrive in these environments. Through AWOLA's support we were able to work with our women to establish a seed bank where we save seeds of all local indigenous crops found in our area. We realized that there are so many varieties that even some women farmers were not aware of. We intend to make this an annual activity. It will help us propagate and preserve our local grains. The exercise helped our women farmers learn on seeds sharing and the benefits of running a seed bank.

Thriving food forest

Mary's expertise assisted us in planning and establishing our food forest. We established a tree nursery comprising of mostly different indigenous, exotic fruit trees and herbs. We were taught scarification of seeds. This was something new and helped us a lot because we have so many indigenous seeds in the area that we were not able to plant previously. We were also taught on budding and grafting. These are crucial skills for any farm holder or agroecologist. We are so indebted to AWOLA who

provided a mentor for these trainings. Our orchard is meant to grow different types of indigenous fruit trees, monkey bread trees, *nhunguru* and *tsubvu*. We are trying to achieve an edible perennial forest.

Our journey was faced by some Challenges

Our main challenge was poor communication owing to unreliable mobile network especially because as a mentee, I am based in the rural area. As such I was not able to contact my mentor as often as I wanted to.

There were no resources also for my mentor to physically come on the ground at the Skills for Life Centre and demonstrate or help me plan. This would have helped a lot.

Agroecology is basically low cost however there are those resources that need money, tools to work the land for example. So financially we were constrained.

Envisioning the Future

With the knowledge and skills, I have now gained I wish to try to fundraise so that I am able to do what I was taught. I will continue my relationship with my mentor. In the meantime, I will also teach the women farmers in our group and others about agroecology.



Instead of using chemical fertilizers my mentor taught me about making use of natural organic matter for fertilizers.

Mentorship Broke My Glass Ceiling



Mentee: Natasha Kutsiura



Mentor: Dr. Linda Kabaira

My effort alone could not produce good results, therefore great thanks to AWOLA which played a significant role in my farming projects. I also thank my mentor Linda, for the lessons and support she accorded me through this journey.

It takes courage, dedication and humility for one to become an Agro-influencer. Linda deepened my knowledge about Agroecology.

Agroecology is the sustainable farming that works with nature. More so, it involves the application of ecological principles to agricultural systems and practices. Its main advantage is that it increases yields while reducing negative environmental impacts.

The Wonders of Record Keeping

Furthermore, I learnt about record keeping. Keeping records is essential in improving agroecological

practices. They also help to clarify the project inputs, outputs, feeding regimes, practices and possible changes and areas that need attention. Progress monitoring requires meticulous documentation. I adapted and adopted the record keeping concept and it's doing wonders for me. So far I have recorded 6 births of kiddies.

Rich Lessons on Ethno Veterinary

Additionally, I did lessons on ethno veterinary. This is the indigenous knowledge and practices that is associated with traditional beliefs in treating illness and protecting animal health. For example I now use donkey manure as an antibiotic and it's working wonders on new castle disease which is a common disease in poultry.

Currently I have 850 birds and 25 goats. I make feed for my animals on my own using organic sorghum, sunflower and yellow maize.

Upgrading Education Level

On a social aspect, Linda encouraged me to upgrade my level of education so currently I am doing my Honours degree in crop science at Great Zimbabwe University, level 1.2.

Through her motivation I also managed to get my class 2 driver's license. *"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."* (Abraham Lincoln)

I always tell myself that I will never stop working even if I am tired, I will stop at harvesting.

Treasured Moments

Agroecology also incorporates on how we dress as African, I also got the hands on skill on bead making jewelries and handbags.

Writing and submission of monthly reports also improved my English. I still believe and feel that people in Matebeleland are learning something from me.

Not forgetting that I wrote my Abstract which I am going to present in November about myself. Linda helped me to come up with a proper document.

In a nutshell, Awola has made me become a great leader, I never regret the moments that I had with other ladies. It has broadened my level of networking, thinking and courage to speak in public.

Currently I have 850 birds and 25 goats. I make feed for my animals on my own using organic sorghum, sunflower and yellow maize.



Taking Lead in Diversifying the Zimbabwean Diet



Mentee: Getrude Chambati



Mentor: Bertha Nherera

Bertha and Getrude of Harare Zimbabwe are Agroecology value addition entrepreneurs trading as Orsha Wholesome Foods and Majestic Africa Private Limited respectively.

Bertha openly shared her 12 years' experience as the founder and managing director of Orsha Wholesome Foods with Getrude, the mentee. Bertha holds a BSc in Agriculture and master's in environmental economics whilst Getrude is undertaking her first Degree in Agriculture management. Getrude looks forward and dreams of transforming her enterprise. Both their Companies are into processing of Zimbabwe's traditional foods which include the grains (finger millet, pearl millet and sorghum), vegetables, pulses and fruits. These foods contribute to diversified diets for Zimbabweans, which helps them to counter prevalent diseases like Cancers, Hypertension, Sugar Diabetes type 2 and negative effects of Climate Change. The two businesses are also contributing to other agroecological principles which include, culture and food traditions co-creation and knowledge sharing, synergies, participation and fairness.

Setting Eyes on the Goal

The mentorship programme aspirations were - to increase market share, to formalize Majestic Africa Private Limited in terms of tax and other relative business compliance matters, to draft a business plan detailing short and long-term targets for the mentee's enterprise. We also aspired to write a business profile for Majestic Africa and to establish a formal place of doing business for the company.

The goals above were inspired by the developmental gaps on the mentee's entity.

The Mentorship Journey

The mentorship program has been such an exciting experience. The mentor was highly resourceful and supportive throughout the tenure. Bertha referred some clients to me, more so she helped me to access market links through festivals like the National Seed and Good Food Festival. This has significantly increased market share and improved my brand awareness.

In a face-to-face meeting, the mentor challenged and guided me on writing business plan. Indeed, smart short- and long-term goals with deadlines. This shall guide the future endeavors like growth and quality management.

In addition, interactions with the mentor were an eye opener on legislative matters. More so, I had a chance to visit the mentor's place, home and work. I have a clear vision of what my entity should look like in the near future. The visits have inspired me and I am highly motivated to do more for the best outcome.

Milestones and Achievements

African Women in Agroecology program came into our life at the right time. I really needed guidance and mentorship in business. I now have a business plan and company profile. I have started looking for formal place to run my business. The network I managed to build through the program has done wonders in terms of marketing. I managed to attract more customers to sustain and grow my business.

More so, I have learnt some practical long- and short-term aspects on, organizing, leadership and business security and controls. Additionally, I had an opportunity to showcase my business at the National seed and good Food festival. Through this event, I grew my business network, gained new customers and met potential suppliers with new products lines. Over and above our objectives, I managed to learn from other mentors through mentorship talks. I have learnt about health and wellness, social and spiritual life.

Personal Stories

The AWOLA monthly talks were insightful. I learnt marketing skills for example valuing customers' feedback; quality service such as how to talk to customers in a polite way. I have learnt on how to maintain a customer's data base with delivery address, contact numbers and preferred products.

Impact

The Revenue for Majestic Africa has increased fantastically from **USD2400** in 2022 to about **USD6000** in 2023.

Future Goals

1. To continue looking for a formal place to undertake the business from for Majestic Foods
2. Increase sales from USD6000 to USD10,000 in 2024 for Majestic Foods.



Getting to know each other and discussing mentorship programme goals



Mentee's business place



Mentee, Exhibiting the 2023 Zimbabwe National Seed and Good Food Festival



Mentor on left with red-head gear, Exhibiting at the 2023 Zimbabwe National Seed and Good Food Festival with other Members of AWOLA

I Thought I Knew...Now I Know



Mentee: Roseline Mukonoweshuro



Mentor: Fortunate Nyakanda

I thought I knew agroecology, but I realized that I was actually starting to learn. Through the one-year mentorship journey, I have gained better understanding of agroecology. I learnt to read widely around the subject. I realized that the reason why we often fail to get a breakthrough in convincing our target is because we lack information to support our agroecology position as we try to advocate to stakeholders and influence farmers into adoption.

AWOLA mentorship has improved my knowledge, advocacy skills and confidence when presenting to peers, farmers and stakeholders. Through mentorship I managed to impart more knowledge to colleagues in my organization hence bringing better understanding, appreciation and a common position on Agroecology.

The Sister I never Had

I got a sister I never had who has encouraged me through this journey. Fortunate, my mentor, helped without judging and was there to provide guidance in all circles of life- social, religious, physical and personal growth. She was there to ignite the passive energy and encouraged me to further my studies. She searched for that hidden potential which I and others may not see in a person and encouraged it to bloom.

AWOLA mentorship has improved my knowledge, advocacy skills and confidence when presenting to peers, farmers and stakeholders.



Stories of Change from AWOLA Mentors and Mentees from Uganda

Valuable Experience and Exposure



Mentee: Stella Aber

At the beginning of the AWOLA program, I set high goals of influencing Agroecology through participating in public spaces and working with the youth to promote the practice and conduct climate action initiatives. I also set a personal goal of completing my Msc. Agroecology which was pending at research level because the effects of COVID-19 global pandemic made me to lose hope in furthering this cause. Thanks to the mentorship support, I have completed the MSc. in Agroecology course successfully and graduated. Within six months of active engagement, I have been able to do what I had failed to do since 2020.



Mentor: Hellen Kasujja

Media Engagement, Leadership Opportunities

With the help of the mentorship program, I lobbied for a freelancing opportunity at Farm Radio International Uganda where I featured on their weekly Agricultural Talk show. I addressed a multitude of listeners on how to farm without using chemicals and the dangers of using synthetic chemicals, environmental protection and how to embrace Agroecology.



I also initiated efforts at the Climate Action office which made me a Greening Taskforce member and a gender Taskforce member, additional roles that I hold to date at Plan International Uganda. Therefore, my leadership skills were boosted.

Through the mentorship and linkages therein, I have gained knowledge, confidence and experience. I participated as a panelist in various events such as the pre- International Women's Day dialogue which was organized by USAID in Lira city and shared panel with Agricultural Professors during the webinar on World Food Safety day organized by Caritas, Uganda.

I continue to incorporate Agroecology in my engagements with the youth and I know that I am causing great impact in the communities that I serve and the people I lead and work with.

Valuable Exposure, Experience

The AWOLA program has given me exposure and experience which is valuable for the rest of my life. I learnt more about communication, dress code at public spaces and gender mainstreaming which are a constant factor in the leadership space. Through the monthly Agroecology Talks, I have been able to appreciate more, the agroecology and the leadership space.

I am now more active on social media platforms such as the twitter, Facebook and the WhatsApp statuses which I use for advocacy about agroecology and leadership. During a symposium by ECHO which I participated in ARUSHA Tanzania, I brought alternatives such as male engagements as opposed to gender inequalities which are known to be the negative impact of developmental projects.

Great Milestones and Achievements



Mentee: Elizabeth Kabakoyo

Elizabeth: I am a Youth farmer who is very passionate about agroecological farming, with a bias towards improving soil health. I am the founder of Glowish Agro Solutions, a social enterprise that turns agricultural waste into Bio-fertilizer to improve agricultural production and productivity. I am an



Mentor: Stella Lutalo

Agricultural Extension Officer by profession with a bachelor's degree in agriculture and Community Development from Kampala University. I have five years of practical experience in crop farming, training farmers, organic fertilizer production and setting up demonstration farms. I am zealous about growing

myself and inspiring young people to embrace agriculture. I applied for the AWOLA mentorship program to grow my knowledge, expertise and networks in Agroecology as well as improve my leadership skills.

Stella: I am a Governance, Leadership and management enthusiast with over 15 years of experience in the agroecology sector. I am passionate about developing people and helping them realize their potential. I was excited to be part of AWOLA cohort 1 as a mentor because it would give me the opportunity to support another woman grow their agroecology dream. I felt I could use my knowledge, experience and very importantly wide connections and networks within the agroecology spaces to pave way for my mentee to thrive.

Elizabeth: At the beginning of our mentorship journey, I had the following goals and aspirations:

1. Impact my community with knowledge on agroecological soil health improvement.
2. Develop and profitably market agroecological products on soil health improvement.
3. Improve my knowledge and skills on agroecology and soil health
4. Promote agroecology among the youth

The journey

Stella: Elizabeth and I started our journey with great enthusiasm. I must say Elizabeth was *"boiling with energy."* very self-driven and quite ambitious. However, she is also very humble, thoughtful and teachable.

We had to spend some time grounding in the agroecology subject matter as well as prioritizing the spaces to engage in so that her energy would be in the right direction.

Elizabeth being a fast learner and committed to follow through each of our monthly meetings had exciting success stories, experiences and emerging opportunities.

She kept me very busy in good ways that were pointing towards action and progress.

We often had physical meetings as we found it the better option for us to connect. Elizabeth was always committed to the appointments and had to travel long distances from Mityana to meet me wherever I would be. We shared meals, laughed and above all, did the serious work.

Something I really treasured was Elizabeth's thoughtfulness and generous spirit. She never met with me empty-handed. She always carried a gift and this was for all our meetings. What a heartwarming gesture! The year has gone by so fast and yes we have some achievements and more that is yet to be done.

Elizabeth: It has been a process that involved spending a lot of resources, support and guidance from my mentor. She was always available to help me whenever I reached out, on both small and big matters. She was steadfast in connecting me to her agroecology contacts through which I acquired knowledge and skills as well as got further connections to relevant platforms. Through her support, I was able to achieve the following.

- I had exposure visits to various agroecology centers of excellence such as AFIRD, Kulika Uganda and RUCID where I gained more knowledge on vermiculture to improve my own practices.
- I got guidance and resources on how to improve my indigenous seed production
- I was guided and supported to improve my writing and presentation skills.
- I was continuously guided on how to effectively engage and participate in various youth and agriculture spaces at national and international levels specifically in conferences, seminars and exhibitions.
- I was supported to add value to my vermi-tea product which I later packaged, branded and widely sold.
- I was connected to various relevant information sharing platforms such as the Agroecology Actors Platform and YALTA.



- My mentor also shared materials and opportunities for personal growth including communication, time management and productivity.

She always encouraged me to take on challenging leadership roles. An example was participation in the World Food Forum (WFF) Flagship event in Rome, Italy, where I represented Uganda. Another one was leading the WFF webinar on ***“Youth policy solutions for agriculture food systems transformation in Uganda”***. Then there was the Africa Agroecology Conference in Nairobi. These opportunities challenged and exposed me to be part of high-level participants in national and global policy dialogues on food systems. I had never been in such spaces before. I needed someone to lean on and guide me and my mentor was there for me. I was able to confidently participate.

Great milestones and achievements

- Effectively participated in the world food forum flagship event from 16-20 October 2023 in Rome Italy at FAO headquarters as a world food forum National chapter leader in Uganda. It's a global platform for youth in agriculture and Elizabeth was interviewed by UN FAO Corner media and shared a stage as a speaker with the president of Ireland at closing ceremony in plenary hall.
- Organized the world food forum Ugandan chapter webinar with a theme “Youth policy solutions for Agri food systems transformation in Uganda that aimed at inspiring Ugandan youth in agriculture to advocate policies that will be presented at the flagship event in Italy
- Recognized as one of the women who empower rural women during celebration of International Rural Women (2023) in Uganda by GIZ, Rural Women International and Uganda National Young Farmers' Federation of Uganda.
- Awarded as 3rd runner up of the National Organic Sector category by the Uganda National Agriculture Awards in June 2023.
- Participated at the 1st Eastern Africa Agroecology Conference in Nairobi - Kenya where Elizabeth

exhibited my Eco -Organic fertilizer and learnt from other producers of bio fertilizers in Kenya.

- Due to the exposure visits to agroecology centers of excellence, my knowledge on vermiculture and agroecology improved in general. I was able to improve both my vermiculture structures and feeding of earthworms which increased fertilizer production.
- The exhibitions I was invited to at subnational, national and international levels provided space for me to market my bio-fertilizers as well as build my agroecology networks and connections.

It was thrilling for me to receive testimonies from various farmers around Mityana district that my bio-fertilizer product had improved their agricultural production and productivity.

My mentor is a great change maker in my life; - with open mind to advice, guiding me on better communication skills, giving feedback and tasks on how to improve. I have since improved on skills like leadership, time management, productivity, prioritizing spaces for engagement, writing, presentation and negotiation.

Impact

Owing to the mentorship, I have inspired other youth in agroecology and most of them wish to join the AWOLA initiative.

Improved my business productivity by increasing the production of organic fertilizers from 5 to 20- 25 litres a week, thus reaching 625 small scale farmers which has boasted sales.

Improved agroecology leadership skills, including skills to lead others in different programs like world food forum chapter in Uganda and businesses, with improved personal and organizational branding.

Travels to different places for exposure visits which has improved my agroecology and leadership skills.





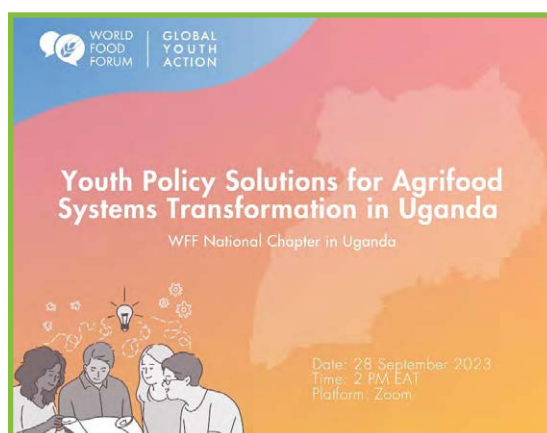
Elizabeth at AFIRD farm visit



Elizabeth at Kisoboka Agricultural Show



Elizabeth and her Mentor



Webinar flier

Elizabeth: Though Cohort 1 has come to an end, I plan to continue working on all pending aspects of the journey we have started:

- Continuous improvement of my vermi-tea product through nutrient analysis and certification. This will enable me access more profitable markets.
- Further growth in agribusiness
- Continuously improve my leadership skills to effectively manage the emerging leadership opportunities for me in different youth-in-agriculture spaces.

Conclusion

Stella: My journey of mentoring Elizabeth has been quite rewarding. I'm grateful for the opportunity to be a part of this great initiative and the strides made

during the one-year program. Elizabeth and I have developed a strong bond in the process and we shall continue to collaborate. We still have a lot of unfinished business.



Propelled to New Heights



Mentee: Lynnet Nakidde

I'm an Environmentalist and Agroecologist with practical experience and knowledge in this field. I am an Extension worker at St. Jude Family Projects in Masaka and the Founder of the Biofertilizer Centre for Youth Empowerment. (BCFYE)

When I saw the announcement for the first AWOLA mentorship program, it was a no-brainer for me that I would apply given that I am a person who wants to accomplish much in the future. The biggest challenge for an idea generator like me was navigating through the numerous career paths. I focused on how I could become an effective leader, confident enough, self-aware and a decision-maker. I was looking for help and advice to avoid common pitfalls through providing personal insights and perspectives based upon past experiences in these fields. My biggest question was;- *'Will I receive adequate guidance, perspective and knowledge from a senior mentor? Will the mentor be able to guide me through the jungle of career-related questions?'*



Mentor: Harriet Mbabazi

I decided to take on the challenge and started working on my application. The application process was generally easy and straightforward. Questions were obvious and I was finally ready to submit my application. After about 2-4 weeks, I received the formal acceptance letter from PELUM Uganda and was called for interviews. While some questions were quite easy, some were quite challenging and profound. An intensive process of reflection started and included basics like;- *'What do I really want to accomplish? What do I expect from a senior mentor? What are the metrics of a successful mentor-mentee match?'* among others but I emerged victorious.

Mentors-Mentees Paired

In November 2022, PELUM Uganda organized an online orientation session for mentees and paired each mentee with a mentor for the one-year program. This orientation followed a face-to-face workshop held in Nairobi, where all mentors and mentees gathered to receive comprehensive guidance on the program.

I was paired with Ms. Harriet, a private consultant and I was thrilled to have the opportunity to be mentored by such a successful African woman in agroecology. We held our first mentorship session right away on 2nd November 2022 in Nairobi. We discussed our aims and how we want to set up our mentor-mentee relationship through the program. We identified essential cornerstones under agroecology leadership focus areas i.e. governance, decision-making and accountability. We listed professional goals and aspirations such as becoming an effective woman leader, expanding production and engaging more youth in agroecology.

We set steps and tasks to undertake in order to achieve our goals and aspirations including assignments from my mentor on the key areas.

Strategic Management and Leadership Skills

I was assigned to specifically:

- Look out for the publication '7 Habits of Highly Effective People' by Stephen Covey, read it, and make a presentation.
- Develop a business plan for the Bio-fertilizer Center for Youth Empowerment (BCFYE).
- Get Exposure to leadership and engagements with the leadership of e.g. St. Jude Family Projects where I work as an extension worker.

Communication Skills

I wrote an article on youth in agroecology and shared a draft which was reviewed by my mentor and shared with Pelum Uganda.

I also wrote a profile on my stay in Germany and shared it on the AWOLA platform.

I read about effective communication and shared thoughts with my mentor.

Decision Making

I was required to leverage on the training in Germany to take up leadership roles to improve on leadership and decision-making.

I wrote to St. Jude and request to be assigned a one-month acting role in leadership where decisions can be made to exercise leadership with guidance from St. Jude. I am currently a project coordinator for a project titled TREEO which is about Carbon trapping. This is implemented by St. Jude for 3 years. This is an opportunity for me to boost my decision-making and leadership skills.

Confidence Building

I shared experiences with the Germany team and learnt as much to help in improving the practices and business at BCFYE.

I presented a paper about leadership to PELUM staff and AWOLA members.

Milestones and Achievements

I am now a project coordinator for a project titled TREEO which is about Carbon trapping. This is being implemented by St. Jude for 3 years. This is an opportunity for me to boost my decision-making and leadership skills.

Participated in the International Young Farmer's Exchange Program and travelled to Germany for a stay of 3 months.

Wrote a profile with the help of my mentor, on the tasks, roles, and responsibilities during my stay in Germany which I shared on the AWOLA platform.

With guidance from my mentor, I was able to write an article on the Youth in Agroecology which is under design and laying out by Pelum and will be shared to different platforms.



I participated in the Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi Kenya from the 4th- 8th of September, 2023, which went well and also made connections with Dr. Janet Edeme from AU who promised me an invitation to participate in the fertilizer summit in Nairobi in November 2023.

Impact

I have become better at writing. My mentor encouraged me to continue writing articles and share my experiences on different platforms.

I can now make decisions i.e., proactive, self-driven, and can work under minimum supervision.

I am confident and can approach and talk to people. I also make meaningful presentations. I presented about BOKASHI (bio-fertilizer) making to the workers at THUNEN institute in Germany. I also manage the farm tour and chair meetings at St. Jude. This shows how my confidence has improved and I hope to do even better.

Conclusion

A successful mentorship requires dedication and commitment from both sides. My mentor has always been receptive to talking, enthusiastic, respectful and appreciative of my achievements and efforts. This journey has empowered me to seize opportunities and has propelled my business and career to new heights. Thank you AWOLA.



My mentor Ms. Harriet Mbabazi sharing insights during a mentorship session on the left and us posing for a photo after a successful mentorship session on the right.



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A Priceless Opportunity



Mentee: Martha Kyokuhairé



Mentor: Magdalene Amujal

I am an Entrepreneur for Rural Access with Access Agriculture. I disseminate knowledge on agroecology in rural areas using videos in local languages. I have a dream of building a business in agroecology in line with project development.

I joined the program with a business idea which I was prototyping but lacked a strategy. I was doing so many things at the same time; showing agroecology videos in my community, rearing chicken, growing vegetables and was starting a piggery enterprise.

Overcoming Challenges

Prior to the mentorship program, the challenges I had were in strategic planning, team development, employee management (I was having a high employee turnover), financial management and pitching business idea. My aspirations are to develop long-lasting relationships with employees to reduce employee turn-over, to be organized- prioritize and manage tasks on time, have a good financial management system, and be good at talking about what I believe in.

Real-Time Lessons

My mentor shared the lessons she has learnt through her journey towards becoming her organization's Executive Director and life lessons in general. She shared with me how she works with her employees; - for example how she sits together with them to plan for the project funds. I visited her office and saw how freely she interacts with employees and how they freely access her office and brainstorm on ideas.

This taught me how to create a favorable working environment for employees. She also shared with me her journey with one of the employees who was so playful and didn't take his job seriously sometimes but she believed in him and invested time in talking to him until he became one of the best. This taught me not to quickly give up on employees, understand that none of them will give you 100 percent of your expectations and instead look out for a certain percentage and allow room for growth. I also learnt that when I'm hiring, I should not consider a score of 100 percent because the candidate with that score will soon find the job boring with no room for growth.



She was open with me and also shared some personal challenges that affected her work and how she navigated through them, including delegation and working overtime. I learnt that as a leader, moments like that will come but how you handle them matters.

A Priceless Opportunity

My mentor connected me to a project development program; - the AYNi Local Innovators Program 2023. From this program, I learnt how to identify a problem in my community using problem tree analysis and how to collaborate with different stakeholders to come up with a solution. It also opened an opportunity for funding for future projects and widened my network. I identified a problem in my community and developed a project proposal which I submitted to seek funding.

As a leader, I learnt that carrying out a personal SWOT analysis is very important and provides opportunity for a person to start knowing their leadership abilities and seek changes for the better.

We are currently working on a strategic plan and pitch for HomeGrown Initiative Uganda, a company by guarantee that is to be registered at the start of 2024. After developing personal diary, one of the highlighted leadership skills I needed was financial management. Along the way, I was lucky to be accepted in one company to practice it. I wouldn't have known the need if I wasn't with AWOLA program that guided me to think deep about the skills I needed as a leader.

My mentor visited me at the farm where I am testing the concept of homegrown vegetables for improved nutrition. She encouraged me to continue with the work and highlighted opportunities for connections even after the mentorship program. I'm so pleased for such an offer.

I am so grateful for being a part of this mentorship program. This is the best thing that happened to me in 2023. The benefits are priceless. Thank you very much for this opportunity.



This taught me not to quickly give up on employees, understand that none of them will give you 100 percent of your expectations and instead look out for a certain percentage and allow room for growth.



A Mentor is a Professional Parent



Mentee: Sarah Nakafeero



Mentor: Josephine Kizza

Sarah: In 2019 after my bachelor's degree in vocational studies in agriculture with education at Kyambogo University, I joined a non-government organization to volunteer in community development as an agriculture officer. I had a desire to give a hand in community growth and changing lives. During my work I desired to make many changes in my life and at work but it was impossible especially due to my rank.

During that time, I also started a nursery school where I incorporate my agroecology knowledge to bring the narrative of making children engage and love farming for home consumption at tender ages.

Remembering the Challenges

As a youth in agriculture extension, I was facing challenges like lack of exposure to agroecology knowledge, communication, decision making, advocacy and networking. This, I believe was impacting negatively on my work because even when I shared a good idea, it was always shadowed. This seemed to imply that I was not making any effort. It was until when I learnt of an opportunity to

grow my leadership skills through AWOLA that life took a new, better turn.

My mentorship journey

Joining AWOLA mentorship was an eye opener to actualize my long term vision of starting an agroecological organization that supports rural youth acquire agroecology knowledge and skills at low cost. This would enable them find employment in agriculture and food systems. Through the mentorship journey, I have been able to develop great relationship with my mentor Josephine, which I hope to maintain and nourish. Her openness and willingness to share both knowledge and internal details of her own business operations is refreshing. My mentor has been such a parent to me who ensures that I balance life holistically. She has been constantly motivating me to be the best at work and empowers me to make good decisions. She has encouraged me to knock at closed doors. My mentor has been so supportive to the extent of offering financial support for some of my mentorship activities.



I have been exposed to various agroecology knowledge and practices such as making bio fertilizer and pesticides. My mentor facilitated me to learn various income generating activities such as bar and liquid soap making, making disinfectants and briquettes.

I have also learnt a lot from the real stories of resilience which have also given me strength to push beyond limits.

Milestones

- In July, I convinced one land owner to shelve plans of using his land for sugarcane growing in favor of agroecology which could turn the land into good business. The land owner accepted and I have now planted maize and beans on one acre portion of the land. I am preparing to plant coffee and *matooke* on the other portion. I am yet to set this land into a demonstration center and an agroecology learning site.
- I have trained two youths with whom I am working in the farm.
- From my mentor, I have learnt a lot on personal health and responsibilities like nutrition, body check-up and right living.
- I have acquired skills in different income generating activities like making bar soap, disinfectants, liquid soap and briquettes.
- My financial literacy and practices have highly improved benefitting me at a personal and official level.

Conclusion

I thank AWOLA initiators for the wonderful thought. I used to think that mentoring was for a certain category of high-class elites until I became part of it. My experience of having someone to share business ideas with and guide me through is one that is best rewarding. I still have a lot of goals that I haven't accomplished and is still working towards achieving them. I don't know how best I can describe mentorship but I can say that having a mentor is having a professional parent.



A Mentor is a Professional Parent



Mentee: Christine Arwata Alum

I am a researcher with a background in agricultural sciences with over 10 years' experience in research and development programmes. My research interests include agriculture-nutrition linkages, farming systems, agroecology, climate change, governance, food and nutrition security and rural development. I was motivated to join AWOLA because I believed the mentorship experience would provide an opportunity for me to get support to practice and develop my leadership skills. I anticipated to learn from a mentor who has experience in leadership. My mentor, Josephine, has diverse experience and leadership skills in agroecology.

Goals/Aspirations

My goals/aspirations at the beginning of the mentorship programme were to;

1. Develop and widen my leadership skills
2. Self-development/learning
3. Staying connected and having career conversations
4. Disseminate research findings on sustainable/agroecological principles



Mentor: Josephine Kizza

The Mentorship Journey

I started on a journey towards success by enrolling for a course on 'Developing Skills for Women Leadership in Climate Action'. With guidance from my mentor, I also embarked on self-development, by reading inspirational books like, *'The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People'*.

With unwavering dedication and the guidance from my mentor, I had the privilege of attending enriching training sessions at St. Jude Family Projects in Masaka. These covered vital areas such as financial literacy, record-keeping in business and even income-generating activities, including making bar and liquid soap.

Furthermore, I expanded my knowledge by joining and actively engaging in webinars and seminars. This widened my horizons in agro-ecology-related topics. One of the best moments was submitting an abstract for an international conference in Berlin, Germany which was accepted for presentation. My journey has been a testament to growth, learning and an unwavering commitment to personal and professional development.



Christine (right) and her mentor Ms. Josephine (left) during one of the monthly meetings



Christine attending one of the trainings organized by her mentor at St. Jude, Masaka

Milestones and Achievements

My journey has been characterized by several significant milestones and achievements that have shaped the path to success. Key lessons below have been instrumental towards my personal and professional growth:

1. I have learned that personal development, fueled by reading books and networking with people from diverse backgrounds is a powerful strategy towards achieving my career goals. These experiences have expanded my horizons and opened doors to new opportunities.
2. I have come to understand the immense value of acquiring a diverse set of skills and knowledge. Every piece of knowledge and skill I have acquired has contributed to my ultimate goals, making me a more well-rounded and capable professional.

3. Recognizing the significance of record-keeping in business has been a turning point. It is not just about financial records but also maintaining contact information for service providers and stakeholders. This organized approach saves precious time when accessing necessary services thus enhancing efficiency in business operations.
4. Embracing income-generating activities as a means to engage and inspire the youth in agroecology has proven effective. This strategy not only provides economic opportunities but also promotes agroecology, making it more appealing and sustainable for future generations.

Impact

Through the AWOLA Initiative, I have been able to gain capacity development. The programme has helped to strengthen my capacity and engagement in leadership in such a way that I am able to develop my leadership abilities and skills. For example, I learnt how to manage relationships through exercising my abilities to communicate clearly and persuade others. Being able to join and participate in learning groups has helped in strengthening my leadership abilities. These groups have helped to identify my strengths and areas that I need to improve on by providing honest feedback. I have also been able to inspire the people I have interacted with during the seminars and learning groups on topics related to agroecology.

From the AWOLA Initiative, with guidance from my mentor, I was able to write and publish an article on agroecology titled 'Could Agroecological Entrepreneurship Lead towards Sustainable Food Systems?' The article was published by the Economic Policy Research Centre.

Envisioning the Future

My future goal is to apply the knowledge and skills I have gained through the mentorship program to become a leader in agriculture and food systems. Additionally, I aspire to mentor and guide younger women pursuing careers in agriculture by being and inspiration and support model.

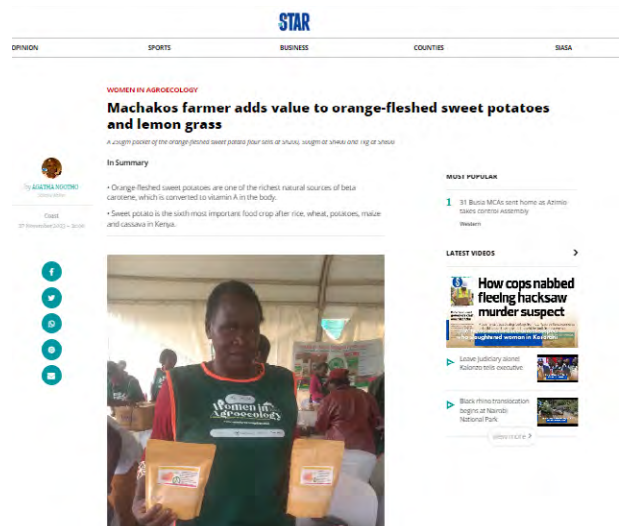
Media Engagement



<https://eprcug.org/blog/could-agroecological-entrepreneurship-lead-towards-sustainable-food-systems/>



<https://www.the-star.co.ke/counties/coast/2023-11-27-machakos-farmer-adds-value-to-orange-fleshed-sweet-potatoes-and-lemon-grass/>



[The Star News Article \(Kenya\) https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/star-farmer/2023-11-26-utilise-indigenous-knowledge-for-climate-adaptation-state-told/](https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/star-farmer/2023-11-26-utilise-indigenous-knowledge-for-climate-adaptation-state-told/)

Utilise indigenous knowledge for climate adaptation

Agroecological principles include recycling, input reduction, soil and animal health among others

In Summary

- Academic and research institutions urged to actively engage with local communities and Women in Agroecology to conduct research.
- In a declaration presented during the expo, the women urged African governments to utilise indigenous knowledge to design interventions.



Rosinah Mhenya country coordinator Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM) Association-Kenya during the African women in agroecology expo convened in Kampala, Uganda on Friday. (Image: AKA784 3657765)

Women in Agroecology lobby has urged African governments to prioritise agroecology and utilise indigenous knowledge to mitigate against climate change.

Rosinah Mhenya country coordinator of Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM) Association-Kenya said the government should direct new and accessible climate finance to sustainable climate



In Uganda, where agriculture is the backbone of the economy, there is a growing interest among young people in agroecology.

Agroecology is a sustainable approach to farming that seeks to promote the use of locally adapted and ecological practices to increase crop yields and improve food security. It is a holistic approach that takes into account the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of agriculture.

The youth in Uganda are increasingly becoming aware of the benefits of agroecology, for example, increased productivity, reduced environmental degradation, and improved livelihoods. This has been driven in part by the recognition of the negative impacts of conventional farming practices such as monoculture, heavy pesticide use, and land degradation.

An example of a youth-led agro ecology enterprise in Uganda is the Biofertilizer Centre for Youth Empowerment (BCFYE). This is a youth-led organization that promotes sustainable agriculture and entrepreneurship among young people in the rural areas of the greater Masaka region comprising of different districts such as Kyotera, Bukomansimbi, Kyanamukaka, Lwengo, Rakai, Sembabule, and Masaka itself. BCFYE works with more than a hundred youth in this region in making bio-fertilizers and organic pesticides for example Bacashi, vermi tea, compost manure, and plant tea. These products are sold to farmers at an affordable cost. Through this initiative, the youth have been able to improve their families' livelihoods by generating income and conserving the environment as well since these products have no harm to the biodiversity.



Lynnet Nakalinde founder / CEO BCFYE packing Biofert organic Fertilizers.

Organic fertilizers increase the microbial activity within the soil through increasing nutrient mineralization rates for the benefit of crops. Soil fertility is improved because these fertilizers do not harm but instead multiply the microbes in the soil which help in nutrient cycling, breaking down crop residues and stimulating plant growth thus improving the soil health resulting into high yields.

BCFYE

Success Stories Shared to Social Media Platform from AWOLA Mentees

Africa Women Leaders in Agroecology (AWOLA) Mentorship Program Cohort 1

"What a rewarding experience it has been for me to hold another woman's hand, showing them that their agroecology dream can be a reality!"
Mentor; Stella Lutalo (On the Left)



Africa Women Leaders in Agroecology (AWOLA) Mentorship Program Cohort 1

"Thanks to AWOLA and my Mentor Bridget Mugambe, I've embraced multiple leadership programs like Emerging Leaders & Global Crusaders, earned certificates through these programs. Procrastination is no longer an issue for me. My knowledge of Agroecology has been deepened by visiting fellow mentees' farms, preparing me to start my own. Grateful to PELUM Uganda for connecting me with Bridget, who has inspired my growth. I encourage passionate youth & women in Leadership & Agroecology to join the next cohort"
Mentee; Erina Irene Tuhirwe (On the left)



Africa Women Leaders in Agroecology (AWOLA) Mentorship Program in Kenya Cohort 1

"African Women Leaders in Agroecology initiatives has really changed the perspective of my leadership life through introduction of the best mentor who is smart, knowledgeable and experienced in different fields. It is Venter Mwongera who has made me to be the best woman leader in various leadership disciplines. Am grateful and thankful to the PELUM Kenya team and all supporters who have really made this initiative to be successful and helpful to all women involved to be great leaders."
Mentee: Lucy Mweche, (On the Right)



Africa Women Leaders in Agroecology (AWOLA) Mentorship Program in Kenya Cohort 1

"AWOLA has played a significant role in both my professional and personal development. Dr. Sarah Olembo, my mentor, has been an invaluable source of support throughout this journey. Dr. Olembo recognizes my potential, and motivates me to strive for a better version of myself. Although I'll miss our monthly AWOLA mentorship meetings, I am confident that my connection with my mentor, the AWOLA team, and PELUM at large will endure beyond the formal mentorship period."
Mentee: Sally Owuonda, (On the Left)




Africa Women Leaders in Agroecology (AWOLA) Mentorship Program Cohort 1

"AWOLA mentorship turned my dreams into reality. As a model youth in organic farming and Agroecology, I owe my success to their unwavering support. Without my Mentor (Ms. Stella Lutalo), my bio fertilizer business might have faded away, but her guidance and encouragement is keeping me on the path to success"
Mentee; Elizabeth Kabakoyo




Africa Women Leaders in Agroecology (AWOLA) Mentorship Program in Kenya Cohort 1

"What a wonderful gift I received through AWOLA Mentorship program!! My mentor, Alice Kariuki encouraged me and really supported me fully in this journey of embracing Agroecology in life. I confess that without this program, my dream could be dragging with potholes"
Mentee; Lydia Mukami, (On the Right)



Africa Women Leaders in Agroecology (AWOLA) Mentorship Program in Kenya Cohort 1

"The AWOLA Mentorship sessions have been priceless moments to me. The knowledge and skills gained from my mentor, Esther Bett and the three participating PELUM Country Secretariats has been awesome. My skills have been enhanced not just at a career level but also to the women I work with at community level. I am forever thankful for AWOLA."
Mentee; Terry Aseneka, (On the Right)

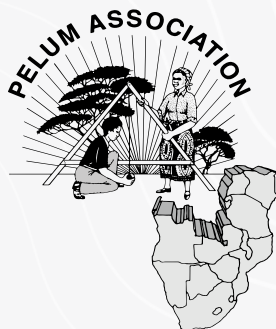


Africa Women Leaders in Agroecology (AWOLA) Mentorship Program in Zimbabwe Cohort 1

I am Beetha Shwera a mentor for Gertrude Chambati. The mentorship was meant to improve Gertrude's Majestic Food business but on my part, the mentorship invigorated me. I feel really good sharing what I have with Gertrude and Africa as a whole, lets hear from her...
African Women in Agroecology program came into my life at the right time. I really wanted guidance and mentorship in my business. The network I have built and building through the program has done me wonders in terms of marketing. I have managed to attract more new customers to sustain and grow my business. More so, I have learnt some practical aspects on business planning (short and long-term), organising, leadership and business security and controls. My sincerest gratitude to my mentor Mrs Beetha Shwera, the organisers, coordinators and steering committee of the mentorship programme to AWOLA.
Long live AWOLA. Mentee Gertrude Chambati



Contact Us



Networking for a greener Africa.

PELUM KENYA

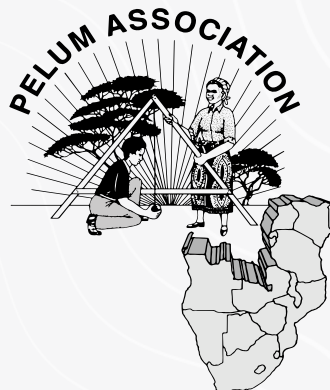
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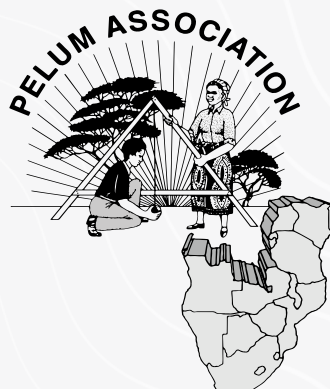
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