

THE CATALYSTS

Women Transforming Agroecology in Africa

**AWOLA Stories of Change, Courage
and Transformation**

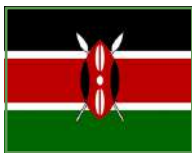




THE CATALYSTS

Women transforming agroecology in Africa

**AWOLA stories of change, courage
and transformation**



PELUM Kenya



PELUM Malawi



NOAN Nigeria



PELUM Uganda



PELUM Zimbabwe



Acknowledgements

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to everyone who contributed to this collection of AWOLA Stories of Change.

Our sincere thanks go to the PELUM networks in Kenya, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. We honour the Country Coordinators for their invaluable collaboration and for connecting us with the remarkable women featured in this edition. We also acknowledge PELUM Malawi and NOAN Nigeria for being part of this journey.

We are deeply grateful to both the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and The Tudor Trust for their financial and technical support, which made this book possible.

Special thanks to Turnaround Crew Limited for their editorial expertise, ensuring these stories are told with clarity, authenticity, and impact.

Finally, our warmest thanks to the AWOLA mentees, mentors, and wider community for generously sharing their experiences, challenges, and successes — your voices inspire continued action for agroecology and women's leadership across Africa.

This AWOLA Cohort 2 booklet has been prepared with the support of:



The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the official positions of PELUM Kenya, PELUM Malawi, NOAN Nigeria, PELUM Uganda, PELUM Zimbabwe, or their funding partners.

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*Countryside woman carrying African Indigenous Vegetables.
(Photo courtesy, Freepik)*



“

The AWOLA mentorship was the catalyst that turned my dreams into a reality, and through it our mentorship mantra was ‘Apedori’ – As a woman, I can. What started as a simple childhood memory of my grandfather’s farm has blossomed into a transformative movement for women in Soroti District in Uganda.”

*AWOLA Uganda Cohort 2 mentee –
Roselyn Ilemuyat*



Contents

Acknowledgements	5
Abbreviations	10
Foreword	11
About AWOLA initiative	13
Remarks from Country Coordinators	15
Joint remarks from programme coordinators	21
Meet the AWOLA coordinating team	22
The think tank: AWOLA steering committee	24
Key programme activities	25
2025 AWOLA regional forum	29
AWOLA Cohort 2 graduation	32
Expansion to Malawi and Nigeria	34
Media Engagement	36
Country stories of mentorship and leadership in agroecology	40
KENYA	40
UGANDA	66
ZIMBABWE	90

Abbreviations

AFSA	Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa
AWAI	Apedori Women Agro-ecological Initiative
AWOLA	African Women Leaders in Agroecology
CHRP	Certified Human Resources Professional
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FiBL	Research Institute of Organic Agriculture
IHRM	Institute of Human Resource Management (Kenya)
ISFAA	Intersectoral Forum on Agrobiodiversity and Agroecology
LGDA	Lower Gurusu Development Association
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NOAN	Association of Organic Agriculture Practitioners of Nigeria
PELUM	Participatory Ecological Land Use Management
RUCID	Rural Community in Development
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

Foreword



In our recognition of the accomplishments of 2024, we imagine the inception of AWOLA in 2022, as a unique brand dedicated to the empowerment of African women in agroecology. It is led and focused on female leadership to tackle issues of gender inequality, hunger in both rural and urban contexts, and the degradation of biodiversity. I express my appreciation for the achievements which have established a robust groundwork for the forthcoming third cohort. So far, we have seen 36 mentees and an equal number of mentors across the three countries.

In hindsight, we recognise the significant strides made in amplifying the narratives of African women in agroecology leadership. A collection of remarkable milestones we have reached together, illuminating the vital roles that women play in transforming agricultural practices across our continent, giving birth to entrepreneurs, researchers, executives and confident agroecologists that have set trends and now grab headlines as trailblazers in agroecology food processing, input production, research and agroecology practice.

This acknowledges and affirms the pivotal role of women as the foundation of African food systems, participating in a variety of functions throughout the value chain, encompassing production, processing, marketing, and distribution.

The FAO (2024) confirms that in sub-Saharan Africa, 66% of women's employment is situated within agrifood systems, in contrast to 60% for men. Nevertheless, women frequently encounter systemic obstacles, such as restricted access to land, credit, and technology, which impede their capacity to realise their full potential.

As noted by AWARD (2024), the concept of women in leadership goes beyond mere equity; it fundamentally contributes to the improvement of the efficiency and resilience of our food systems. Research indicates that bridging the gender divide in agriculture has the potential to contribute nearly USD1 trillion to the global economy and

“

Africa is led by women as far as food systems are concerned, but they are not seen enough in the decision-making spaces. AWOLA is building women leadership capacity”

*-Linda Kabaira,
AWOLA Steering Committee
Chairperson*



alleviate food insecurity for 45 million people. With this background, we take pride in the fact that AWOLA has established platforms and imparted invaluable lessons that have empowered numerous women in the first and second cohorts, as we unveil the third and as additional countries build upon the accomplishments of their predecessors.

Collectively, we are fostering a community of women who are not merely competent practitioners but also impactful advocates of sustainable practices that enhance both local and global food systems. Embracing the essence of Ubuntu, a profound African philosophy that highlights the significance of interconnectedness and collective humanity, we acknowledge that by empowering women in agroecology, we are not merely elevating individuals but are also building our communities and growing a more equitable and sustainable food system for everyone.

“Agrifood systems are a more important source of livelihood for women than for men in many countries”

As women rise to greater leadership roles, their unique perspectives and lived experiences have the potential to catalyse innovation, foster sustainable practices, and guarantee that our food systems become increasingly resilient and equitable.

With each story shared as testament of AWOLA, we celebrate the resilience, creativity, and leadership of women in agroecology.

*By Linda Kabaira, Chairperson,
AWOLA steering committee*



About AWOLA initiative



Africa Women Leaders in Agroecology (AWOLA) initiative is a women leadership development initiative of the PELUM Kenya network in collaboration with PELUM Zimbabwe, PELUM Malawi, NOAN Nigeria and PELUM Uganda. It aims to equip women working in agroecology, sustainable agriculture and food systems with leadership skills.

The initiative uses the mentorship approach where it matches seasoned women leaders with emerging young women for one year to build and nurture leadership skills of the young women. The programme supports their physical and virtual meetings.

Through the AWOLA initiative, we envision strengthening leadership capacities and the active participation of women in agroecology institutions. AWOLA initiative focuses on enhancing the leadership capabilities of seasoned and emerging women in agroecology for effective decision making and participation in agroecology.

The initiative seeks to empower mentees to enable them join the seasoned cluster of women. It also uses seasoned women leaders to

empower emerging to become excellent leaders. AWOLA also ensures that emerging women with leadership potential are well equipped with skills that place them in a better place in terms of becoming future leaders.

Its end goal is to have more seasoned women leaders at various levels in agroecology, including enterprises and institutions in Africa today and in the future.

AWOLA also focuses on enhancing business engagement of women through support to start-ups, agro-business incubation, support ongoing businesses after the mentorship.

Both mentors and mentees are facilitated to actively participate in policy-influencing process while at the same time focusing on capacity development of various agroecological subjects.

PELUM Kenya collaborates with think-tanks of steering committee members to ensure founding and passionate women leaders are frequently consulted to provide strategic leadership direction to AWOLA Initiative.

Objectives of the initiative

1. Building the capacity of women to lead and manage top level positioning in agroecology spaces
2. Enhancing strong grassroot women movement that add value to leadership position of women
3. Building up a cadre of competent African women mentors and coaches in leadership in Agroecology, Agro-enterprise , policy advocacy and Research
4. Equipping women with top negotiation and policy-influencing skills
5. Creating awareness in areas of gender transformative approaches in agroecology, policy influencing and agro-enterprises.
7. Webinars on stories of change and career development for women in Africa.
8. Physical motivational experiences for women on leadership and career development.
9. Development and strengthening of country level women in agroecology movements in four countries
10. Facilitating annual AWOLA steering committee meetings at country level and continental levels.
11. Hold semi-annual country level physical networking symposiums/expo for women in agroecology.
12. Celebrating the African women leaders/ champions in agroecology through campaign and awards.

AWOLA activities

1. Recruitment, mentorship and coaching mentees and mentors per year in Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Nigeria.
2. Training both seasoned and emerging women leaders in principles of mentoring and coaching in agroecology.
3. Monthly meetings between the mentors and mentees.
4. Supporting women mentees and young emerging women leaders to participate in short professional courses on various subjects of capacity development.
5. Incubation for start-ups and/or expansion of women-led agroecology enterprises.
6. Support networking symposia for mentors and the mentees, for example expo and facilitate an award system as a motivation for African women champions in agroecology.
13. Hold country exchange, learning and exposure programmes for women in agroecology to learn on best models and practices.
14. Facilitate documentation of the programme to enhance visibility through short videos, publications, IEC materials and media engagement.
15. Support the participation of women leaders in agroecology at strategic national, regional and international fora to influence policy processes on agroecology.
16. Hold the AWOLA alumni networking event (dinner/cocktail) for the different cohorts
17. Production of study based on AWOLA women's experience, identifying key challenges of women in agroecology, key successes of AWOLA, success stories; cost-benefit analysis of supporting women in agroecology.
18. Produce a communication product on how to engage women in agroecology.

Remarks from Country Coordinators



Rosinah Mbenya

PELUM Kenya

It is with deep joy that I present to you the success stories of the second cohort of the Africa Women Leaders in Agroecology (AWOLA). These pages are more than a celebration of achievements; they are a powerful reflection of resilience, hope, and transformation, written by women who have dared to lead where it matters most: in the heart of Africa's food systems.

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The principles of leadership are intrinsic to women, which is why the food systems transformation agenda has to be led by women from the grassroots to corporate and institutional levels”

–Rosinah Mbenya

Across Africa, women contribute up to 60–80% of the agricultural labour force and produce the majority of food consumed on the continent. They are seed keepers, soil nurturers, and custodians of indigenous knowledge. And yet, they face persistent barriers — from limited access to land, credit, and markets, to exclusion from agricultural policymaking and leadership spaces. In fact, women hold only about 20% of leadership positions in agriculture-related institutions across Africa. This imbalance is not just a gender issue, it is a development issue, a food systems issue, and a justice issue.

For far too long, African women — the backbone of our agricultural communities — have been under-represented in decision-making spaces, denied access to land and financial resources, and excluded from the very conversations that shape their futures. The path to leadership has been steep, often riddled with cultural, institutional, and systemic barriers.

Yet, in spite of it all, women continue to lead in their fields, in their homes, and now, more boldly, on the frontlines of agroecological transformation.

But change is happening, and the African women in agroecology space are leading it. Agroecology is more than a farming practice. It is a movement rooted in justice, sustainability, and indigenous knowledge. It places the well-being of people and planet at its core and recognises the essential role of women in restoring balance to our food systems.

In this second cohort, we see the embodiment of this movement. These women — from varied regions, languages, and contexts (Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe) — came together not just to learn, but also to grow, to lead, and to spark change in their communities. They faced challenges with courage and vision. They transformed obstacles into opportunities.

And through their stories, they remind us that the future of agriculture in Africa is not only female, it is also fearless.

This important work has been coordinated by Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM) Kenya, a network of 63 Member Organisations in Kenya promoting agroecological principles and practices. PELUM Kenya believes in participatory approaches that honour local wisdom, promote gender equity, and strengthen community-led solutions.

I salute the extraordinary women of Cohort 2. Your stories are not only your own, they are a collective road map to a more just and regenerative future. May your journeys inspire others to lead, to listen, and to never underestimate the power of a woman with a vision and her hands in the soil.

Looking ahead, we are thrilled to witness the continued growth of this movement with the launch of Cohort 3, which marks a significant milestone: the programme's expansion into Nigeria and Malawi. This broadening of scope is not just geographical, it is symbolic of the widening reach and relevance of women-led agroecology across the continent. Nigeria, with its dynamic agricultural sector and diverse agroecological zones, and Malawi, with its strong community-based farming traditions, offer fertile ground for deepening this work. We look forward to nurturing the leadership of even more women who are ready to reimagine food systems, reclaim their roles as ecological stewards, and build resilient futures for their communities and countries.

Enjoy the read. Be moved. Be inspired.



Josephine Akia

PELUM Uganda

Dear reader,

With great pride and deep reflection, I welcome you to this inspiring collection of stories from the AWOLA Cohort 2 mentees and mentors, especially those from Uganda. These stories are more than personal narratives; they are testimonies of resilience, transformation, and leadership rooted in agroecology and nurtured through sisterhood.

In Uganda, women play a central role in agriculture and food systems yet continue to face structural barriers, including limited access to land, extension services, decision-making spaces, and capital. The AWOLA Initiative, coordinated by PELUM Uganda throughout 2024, has been a powerful response to these gender gaps. It offers a nurturing space where women's voices are not only heard but are amplified; where leadership is cultivated, not imposed; and where mentorship becomes a tool for systemic change.

From monthly learning circles and motivational sessions to exposure visits and advocacy platforms, the AWOLA journey has sparked growth on multiple levels. We have witnessed young women agroecologists evolve into assertive leaders, successful agroecological entrepreneurs, and bold advocates for food sovereignty and climate justice. Our mentors—seasoned women leaders—have also found renewal in their roles, sharing wisdom while gaining fresh insights from the next generation.

The implementation of AWOLA in Uganda has shown us that when mentorship is rooted in context, culture, and community, it becomes a force for collective empowerment. Women in the programme have begun transforming community mindsets around gender roles in agriculture, asserting their space in leadership, and championing indigenous knowledge systems that have long been undervalued.

We are immensely grateful to The Tudor Trust through PELUM Kenya whose generous support has enabled this transformative journey. Your investment in AWOLA has helped unlock leadership potential and elevate women's contributions to agroecology, not only in Uganda but also across the region.

To our AWOLA mentees and mentors, thank you. You are the embodiment of hope, courage, and change. Your willingness to lead with authenticity and to walk alongside others is what makes this more than a project; it is a movement for equity, justice, and ecological integrity.

To our partners across Uganda and the African continent, we appreciate your solidarity. Together, we are building a strong ecosystem that champions women's leadership in shaping sustainable, just, and inclusive food systems.

As you turn the pages of this storybook, may you be reminded of the power of investing in women—not as beneficiaries, but as leaders, innovators, and changemakers in agroecology.

When women mentor women, we do more than share knowledge—we awaken courage, nurture leadership, and ignite collective power to transform our communities and food systems.

Let us keep the fire burning. Let us keep nurturing the seeds of transformation.



Theophilus Mudzindiko

PELUM Zimbabwe

Since time immemorial, African women have been the bearers of life and the custodians of seed. Long before the rise of so-called “modern” agriculture, it was the African woman who planted, nurtured, harvested, and preserved. She understood the rhythm of the seasons, the language of the soil, and the sacred balance between giving and receiving.

This deep-rooted wisdom is what the African Women Leaders in Agroecology (AWOLA) initiative seeks to reawaken — a proud legacy of women grounded in nature, knowledge, and care. AWOLA is about reclaiming that identity, celebrating the African woman as the nurturer of food systems.

Therefore, at PELUM Zimbabwe, we are proud to be part of a continental movement that places women's voices, knowledge, and leadership at the heart of agroecology. In Zimbabwe, the AWOLA programme has created powerful spaces for intergenerational mentorship, learning, and empowerment. Through their leadership, women are not only protecting biodiversity and traditional knowledge but are also building climate-resilient, just, and sustainable food systems.

This booklet captures a few of their inspiring journeys — stories of resilience, transformation, and courageous leadership. We honour every mentor and mentee featured here, each a torchbearer of solidarity, ecological wisdom, and community-led change.

To the women, we say: Thank you.

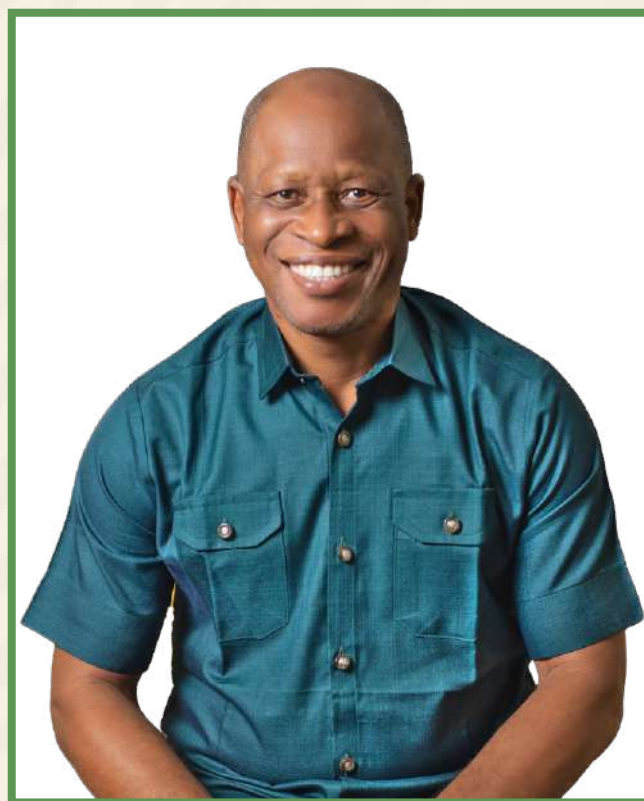
Thank you for your tireless work.

Thank you for your wisdom.

Thank you for your courage and sacrifice.

Thank you for daring to be in the frontlines.

We reaffirm our commitment to supporting women leaders in agroecology, ensuring their voices shape the future of food and farming. Together, we are cultivating a future rooted in justice, sustainability, and dignity for all.



Jude Obi, PhD

NOAN President

It is with great joy that I bring you greetings on behalf of the Association of Organic Agriculture Practitioners of Nigeria (NOAN). As the national umbrella body for organic agriculture stakeholders in Nigeria, NOAN is steadfast in promoting, coordinating, and facilitating the adoption and development of organic and agroecological practices across Nigeria. Our commitment to sustainability, food sovereignty, and ecological resilience drive our efforts in advocacy, training, research, and policy engagement.

NOAN strongly believes that meaningful transformation begins with capacity development, equipping people with knowledge, inspired by a shared vision, and supported by a nurturing community. It is this belief that makes our alignment with the Africa Women Leaders in Agroecology (AWOLA) Initiative powerfully

led by the PELUM Kenya network. AWOLA is an innovative platform that nurtures and supports female leadership in agroecology and sustainable agriculture across Africa through the elimination of imaginary barriers. Its values and objectives are in perfect harmony with the aspiration of NOAN to eliminate obstacles for growth and development especially for young and emerging women.

We are delighted that Nigeria has joined the growing list of implementing countries under the AWOLA Initiative, and we already bear testimonies of significant impact. The success of the recently concluded inception training in Nigeria was a clear indication of the subtle but clear evidence of the benefits of bringing together the selected mentors and mentees for a rich learning experience, strategic planning, and community building. The energy, commitment, and clarity of purpose displayed during the training have strengthened our confidence that this initiative will yield far-reaching outcomes.

We are not just optimistic, but also convinced that AWOLA will contribute meaningfully to the personal and professional growth of the participants. The mentors and mentees, selected through a rigorous application and interview process, are already demonstrating the kind of potential that will lead to transformative change. Through their periodic meetings and motivational sharing sessions, they are building a space where they are accepted as they are, yet continually inspired to evolve and grow.

Their burdens, responsibilities, and lived experiences are being acknowledged and honoured. And it is in this deeply respectful

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The future of agroecology in Nigeria is bright, and women are lighting the way.”

*–Jude Obi, PhD
NOAN President*

environment that true mentorship is taking place. By honouring the whole individual, AWOLA has created a fertile ground where confidence is restored, voices are strengthened, and purpose is reignited.

At NOAN, we are fully committed to supporting AWOLA in Nigeria. We are providing access to our vast network, technical expertise, and platforms for engagement and visibility. We have already seen how this initiative has increased confidence, accountability, and networking capacity of mentees and, in many cases, it has helped bring long-held dreams to life.

We are confident that the stories emerging from Nigeria will be inspiring, transformational, and reflective of the power of collective leadership. The future of agroecology in Nigeria is bright and women are lighting the way.

On behalf of NOAN, I express our deep appreciation to the AWOLA sponsors, the PELUM team, the mentors, and the mentees. Together, we are cultivating a new narrative of resilience, equity, and sustainability in agriculture. The journey has begun, and the harvest of change is already in sight.

Thank you.

**Wendy Bilima***PELUM Malawi*

Representation, leadership, and sisterhood with ambition are what we have experienced in a few months since the start of AWOLA, and it feels like we have been here

forever. AWOLA is exposing us to opportunities and platforms that are elevating our way of thinking and giving us the space to claim those opportunities without fear. With this kind of exposure, this mentorship programme has ensured that everyone feels like a mentor and a mentee at the same time, because we are all equal and this is a safe space to belong, to share no matter how small and to uplift each other. We know that one's success is for everyone in this leadership programme and will celebrate our small wins always. Thank you to PELUM Kenya for extending the programme beyond borders to Malawi and donor, Agroecology Partnership Programme, for the financial support. We also give credit to all the people out there working to make sure that our very first cohort succeeds in all our ambitions and goals. Let's build the world we want together, let's fix each other's crown. And let's celebrate women leadership.

Malawi Mentors and Mentees

*Judith - Mentor**Tamala - Mentor**Sarah - Mentor**Mtisunge - Mentor**Shukulani - Mentor**Tama - Mentee**Chimwemwe - Mentee**Grace - Mentee**Minala - Mentee**Tamara - Mentee**Tapiwa - Mentee**Chisomo - Mentee*

Joint remarks from programme coordinators



“

AWOLA is an instrumental project in PELUM Uganda. The AWOLA mentors have moulded mentees to be reliable and most reached resource contributors in knowledge and in different spaces of agroecology platforms in Uganda, including agroecology advocacy, territorial markets, and farmer-managed seed systems, among others”

*-Hadija Nalule,
AWOLA Uganda Programme
Coordinator*

The AWOLA Stories of Change provides an overview of the transformative Africa Women Leaders in Agroecology (AWOLA) mentorship programme from April 2024 to April 2025. It highlights significant milestones of AWOLA leadership development journey implemented by PELUM Kenya, PELUM Uganda, PELUM Zimbabwe. This phase was part of AWOLA's expansion to West Africa & Southern Africa, where PELUM Kenya onboarded NOAN in Nigeria & PELUM Malawi to implement the programme from May 2025. The one-year programme has been exceptional, registering immense growth in mentorship, partnerships, and initiatives undertaken by the mentees and mentors in the five countries. The programme has achieved its mandate of inspiring, mentoring, nurturing, catalysing and fast-tracking the leadership development of African women in agroecology, as evidenced by the impact of AWOLA Cohort 2 that culminated in successful graduation in May & June 2025 in Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

Meet the AWOLA coordinating team

PELUM Kenya



Rosinah Mbenya
Country Coordinator



Manei Naanyu
Head Of Programmes



Simon Mureithi
Head of Finance & Administration



Ndiki Ndung'u
Senior Finance officer



Monica Nyaga
Gender & Youth Project Officer



Diana Mwangi
M& E Project officer

PELUM Zimbabwe



Theophilus Mudzindiko
Country Coordinator



Farirai Jemwa
Programmes Officer



Rutendo Katsvamutima
Head of Finance



PELUM Uganda



Josephine Akia
Country Coordinator



Grace Payesu
Head of Finance

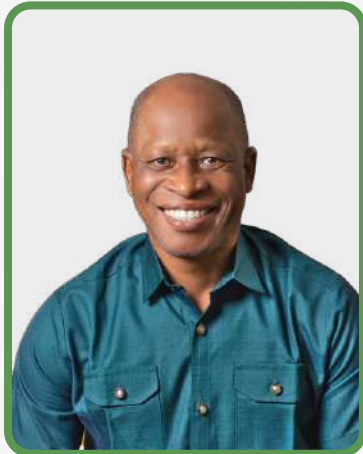


Jude Ssebuliba
Head of programmes



Hadija Nalule
AWOLA Programmes
Coordinator

NOAN Nigeria



Jude Obi (Ph.D)
NOAN President



Hepzibah Ebe
AWOLA Programmes
Coordinator



Oluwatoyin Babatunde-Ojo
AWOLA Finance Officer

PELUM Malawi



Wendy Bilima
Country Coordinator



MC Andrew Mphande,
Programme Assistant



The think tank: AWOLA steering committee

The AWOLA steering committee gives strategic direction and supports country implementing teams. It meets thrice in a year and has been instrumental in partnership development, resource development and supporting monthly webinars. The committee has started a discussion on how to engage men, traditional leaders, community gatekeepers and other key stakeholders to shift mindsets through gender dialogues and cultural change campaigns

to embrace women's leadership and active participation in agroecology. The team is keen on building the capacity of women leaders and transforming their institutions to create an enabling ecosystem that promotes women and communities to thrive. Further, it is keen to support AWOLA mentees to dismantle structural barriers and build institutional frameworks that enable women's sustained leadership, policy influence, cross learning among agroecology actors and agro-entrepreneurship positioning.



2024 AWOLA Steering Committee meeting at Harare, Zimbabwe.

Key programme activities

Recruit and train six mentees and mentors each per country

The AWOLA second cohort was recruited in December 2023 through a rigorous selection process. More than 1,600 mentees and mentors applied across the three countries. The process began with a call for applications followed with rigorous interviews conducted by the AWOLA selection committees. Six mentees and mentors each who made the cut in each country were then matched according to their professional interests, areas of interest and goals. Their diverse experiences, skills, networks and backgrounds enriched the programme. They came from different ethnic groups, professional, business and religious backgrounds, thereby promoting diversity and social inclusion in the project. The mentors were top women CEOs, professors, programme managers, and leading business minds in various non-profits in agriculture while others run successful agribusiness initiatives.

AWOLA Cohort 2 inception meeting

The selected underwent in-depth training on mentorship and an overview of the AWOLA initiative, including its history, achievements, and challenges. During the training, participants introduced themselves as they connected for the first time as mentees and mentors. The session outlined the expectations and requirements for both mentees and mentors, including the use of mentorship tools, which include mentee skills gap assessment, Individual Development Plans (IDPs), mentorship diaries, and mentee concept diaries. The orientation led to the establishment of a foundation for effective mentor-mentee relationships, provided essential tools and resources for their mentorship journey, and set the stage for future development and networking opportunities within the programme. PELUM Kenya participated in the launch of AWOLA Nigeria and Malawi to train the mentees and mentors.



AWOLA Kenya inception meeting.



AWOLA Zimbabwe inception meeting.

Monthly meeting between mentees and mentors

This is the core of the AWOLA programme! Mentees and mentors managed to hold 9-10 monthly virtual and physical mentorship sessions. They played a vital role in fostering a collaborative environment, actively engaging in meetings to strengthen their collective efforts. These strategic meetings provided a platform

for participants to share experiences, address challenges, and explore solutions. Further, the PELUM Secretariat organised regular monthly meetings that catalysed continuous learning, allowing mentors and mentees to share progress updates and successes; discuss challenges and receive guidance; access resources and expertise; and foster a sense of community and teamwork.

Through these sustained efforts, the mentors and mentees deepened connections, refined their skills, and collectively advanced their goals. Further the meetings allowed mentees to catch up with their mentors, sharing experiences, fears, milestones, gaps, support areas, and resources needed to achieve their goals. They would also review the mentees' personal development plan and discuss areas



that needed adjustment or more support from the AWOLA coordinator. This fostered a sense of friendship and community of support and strengthened their working relationship.

The PELUM secretariat's facilitation of regular meetings motivated, informed, and empowered participants throughout the mentorship journey. We are happy to report that the mentees achieved their goals and were above board.



Motivation by seasoned women leaders

The monthly motivational webinar catalyses women leadership by giving them opportunity to share skills, experiences and knowledge as facilitators and keynote speakers. THE AWOLA programme is proud to host the monthly webinars for AWOLA community, women and youth in agroecology and food system in Africa to ensure continuous leadership development, building strategic and supportive networks.

The topics include communication, personal branding, financial management, leading with purpose, integration of technology, artificial intelligence, mental wellness, financial management, policy influence, and advocacy. Each quarter, the three countries led webinars.

Webinars




AFRICA WOMEN LEADERS IN AGROECOLOGY (AWOLA)

MENTORSHIP TALK

TOPIC:
SAVING FOR YOUR RETIREMENT

Speaker:
Monica Kaporiri
Development Facilitator, Mentor and Coach
AWOLA Steering Committee Member

Partners

MEETING ID: 865 6607 9975
PASSCODE: 818755

APRIL 23, 2024
10:00 AM EAT
9:00 AM HARARE TIME

Tudortrust **Both ENDS**




AFRICA WOMEN LEADERS IN AGROECOLOGY (AWOLA)

MENTORSHIP TALK

TOPIC:
EMPOWERING AFRICAN YOUTH THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND LEADERSHIP SKILLS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT - AGENDA 2063: AFRICA WE WANT.



Speaker:
Morakane Madiba
South Africa

Partners

MEETING ID: 921 3594 4496
PASSCODE: 943103

JUNE 25, 2024
10:00 AM EAT
9:00 AM HARARE TIME

Tudortrust **Both ENDS**

AFRICA WOMEN LEADERS IN AGROECOLOGY (AWOLA)

MENTORSHIP TALK

TOPIC:
"RETURNING TO NATURE FOR HEALTH AND NUTRITION REMEDIES FOR HUMANS, CROPS & LIVESTOCK"

Speaker:
Bakirya Judith
Managing director-Busiano Fruits and Herbs-Uganda

Partners

MEETING ID: 825 7835 9824
PASSCODE: 764465

JULY 25, 2024
11:00 AM EAT
10:00 AM HARARE TIME

Tudortrust **Both ENDS**

Organized by PELUM Uganda
Supported by PELUM Kenya & PELUM Zimbabwe




AFRICA WOMEN LEADERS IN AGROECOLOGY (AWOLA)

MENTORSHIP TALK

TOPIC:
LEVERAGING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) TO BOOST PRODUCTIVITY AND PROFITABILITY IN AGRICULTURE

Speaker:
Isabella Maina
Creative Producer and Digital Trainer
Dive Productions



Partners

MEETING ID: 870 6515 4806
PASSCODE: 293459

AUGUST 6, 2024
10:00 AM EAT
9:00 AM HARARE TIME

Tudortrust **Both ENDS**

Organized by PELUM Kenya
Supported by PELUM Zimbabwe & PELUM Uganda

AFRICA WOMEN LEADERS IN AGROECOLOGY (AWOLA)

MENTORSHIP TALK

TOPIC:
STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP POSITIONING FOR WOMEN AND YOUTH IN THE AGROECOLOGY SPACE (FROM CAREER GROWTH TO LEGACY)

Speaker:
Stellamaris Mulaeh
Chief Operating Officer, Act for Change Trust
AWOLA Mentor

Partners

MEETING ID: 843 5986 8428
PASSCODE: 739345

NOVEMBER 22, 2024
10:00 AM EAT
9:00 AM HARARE TIME

Tudortrust **Both ENDS**




AFRICA WOMEN LEADERS IN AGROECOLOGY (AWOLA)

MENTORSHIP TALK

TOPIC:
BUILDING RESILIENCE AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE FOR LEADERS IN THE AGROECOLOGY SECTOR

Speaker:
Silas Kirinya
Consultant Counselling Psychologist

Partners

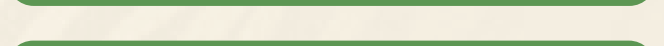
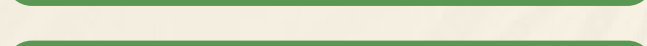
MEETING ID: 810 2127 8565
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DECEMBER 4, 2024
11:00 AM EAT
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10:00 AM HARARE TIME

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- Increase strategic networking se



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AWOLA semi-annual forums

Reflecting and reporting on our milestones!

The main objective of the meeting was reviewing progress, discussing the AWOLA performance, and exposing mentors and mentees to best agroecology practices. Sessions in Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe included use of small spaces for agroecology, managing and leading a motivated team (basic skills) as well as using advocacy spaces to push for agroecology. The mentors and

mentees learnt that trusting your team and delegating is important; sharing management is also key; a leader should give and receive feedback; and, learn how to motivate and give feedback to the team members.

A leader should appreciate the efforts of their teams and support them to excel. The event also fostered dialogue, exchanged experiences, and ensured continuity of leadership development among the mentees and mentors.

Support mentees and mentors to participate in country, regional & international forums

Exposure and visibility are core to the AWOLA programme. Therefore, the AWOLA coordinators and mentors are keen to ensure mentees take part in forums, workshops, seminars, trade fairs and conferences where they contribute and shaping decisions as women leaders. Our mentors and mentees participated in the following forums in 2023 and 2024.



AWOLA Cohort 2 graduation

AWOLA Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe graduated Cohort 2 mentees, giving them a platform to share their stories of change on the initiative. The mentees and mentors had achieved so much beyond what they had set in their development plans and personal milestones when the programme began. The mentees had experienced tremendous growth in all spheres of their lives and scaled up their businesses, while others had been appointed to leadership roles, such as farmers, agro-entrepreneurs, and women in the agroecology career space, as well as participating in local, national, and regional policy spaces for agroecology.

The six mentees from each country were being mentored, coached, trained, and allowed to unleash their leadership potential to climb

the agroecology career ladder, develop their organisations, meaningfully participate in policies, and build their capacity in agroecology principles.

They have strategically positioned themselves, leading in agricultural boards, media, climate change mitigation committees, and farmer organisations. The AWOLA initiative thrives on women leadership that is cultivated, not assumed, and the mentors are deliberate in supporting mentees to attain their goals. It is a platform to grow skills, build confidence, and expand networks.

It has built women leadership pathways by investing in long-term pipelines for women in agroecology to promote gender equality principles and achieve the mandate of SDG 5. Further, the programme has made



AWOLA Cohort 2 Zimbabwe graduation.



significant milestones in supporting women to influence agroecology policies, lead agro-based enterprises and assume strategic and managerial roles within institutions, government and regional bodies.

Some of the Cohort 2 graduates are part of National Agroecology Technical / Multistakeholders Working Groups (TWGs & MSPS) in the three countries and have advanced in their careers.



AWOLA Cohort 2 Uganda graduation.



AWOLA Cohort 2 Kenya graduation.



Expansion to Malawi and Nigeria

AWOLA has expanded its wings to Malawi and Nigeria, bringing a new perspective to the programme in terms of catalysing women leadership in science, agriculture, and academia. AWOLA mentors in Nigeria have taken over this space predominantly occupied by men and conventional agriculture scientists/researchers. They are bridging the gap between research, academia, and policies. The AWOLA Nigeria mentees and mentors are keen to design and develop inclusive data systems that collect and use disaggregated data in agroecology research, programme design, and policy monitoring.

The AWOLA Malawi team brings in diverse women from corporate, humanitarian, seasoned rural farmers, and agro-entrepreneurs. AWOLA Malawi is breaking barriers for women who cannot access leadership opportunities due to language and location barriers and other gender systemic challenges. AWOLA Kenya Cohort 3 brought in diverse women to influence legislation, technology, and business in the agroecology space. There has been successful recruitment of 30 mentees and 30 mentors from the five countries over the reporting period.

Welcome on board, AWOLA Cohort 3!



AWOLA Malawi launch at Blantyre City.



Nigerian team at Ibadan, Oyo State.

Parting shot

The programme has catalysed the emergence of women as influential leaders, strategic thinkers, and successful agribusiness entrepreneurs within the agroecology space in Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Nigeria. Further, AWOLA continues to invest in mentees and mentors leadership capacity, build networks, enhance personal brand visibility, and strengthen economic power, while dismantling the systemic gender barriers they face every day.

It is keen on building right ecosystems to ensure women will not only lead in agroecology but transform it. This transformation goal is not just about adding women to existing systems, but it is about changing the system to embrace women leadership at the core of agroecology leadership and food systems transformation in Africa.

Voices that inspire

"I'm now composed as a woman who is confident to stand as a leader and lead other women and voice for other youth in agroecology"

*-Lucy Weche,
AWOLA Cohort 1 mentee*

'Invest in people, invest in knowledge, invest in people, invest in positive leadership, and allow your business to champion for women's leadership'

*-Janet Mumo,
AWOLA Regional Forum, Keynote speaker & AWOLA Kenya Cohort 1 Mentor*

Women leaders should embrace situations that make them uncomfortable for example, receiving feedback and asking for help. Growth occurs when you embrace such situations, and mentorship supports you in navigating the learning journey"

*-Elizabeth Mwinyeria - VI
Agroforestry -Country Manager,
Uganda.*

AWOLA programme is a catalyst for policy influence and advocacy initiatives led by women in Africa. AWOLA regular motivational webinar spaces nurture bold voices and thought leadership that support women to build skills such as negotiation and having their space in the agriculture sector"

*-Monica Kapiriri,
Mentor and development practitioner*

Media Engagement

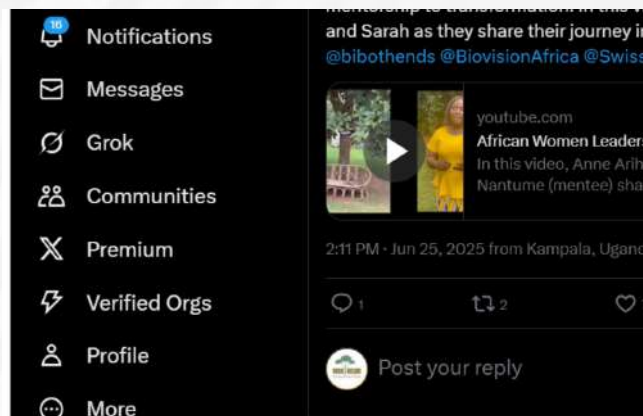
Blog on women leadership

<http://bit.ly/4nnzkXv>



PELUM Uganda on X

<https://bit.ly/49elv9l>



Picture stories

AWOLA Kenya: https://drive.google.com/drive/u/2/folders/1F1_RU4pc0_266h58HcdltfTcLsDR7USC

Monthly webinars: <https://drive.google.com/drive/u/2/rs/1OFx4TJYrdHmxkKG8llnT8UNbUHASz4Ai>

Semi-annual meeting & graduation: <https://didackphotography.pic-time.com/Rc7wDn7GTzG5p>

Inception meeting: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1YSQY-KQ1hkrtvIEAZJztxtqNsfjPMP--?usp=sharing>

AWOLA Zimbabwe: https://drive.google.com/drive/s/1agVJIVvNcyMZA0fZOzbQ8ggxMKagpmoZ?usp=drive_link

AWOLA Uganda: <https://drive.google.com/drive/rs/1CqgZgAEhpQIPqJwLiWTNDVvyMnNF6d33>

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Country stories of mentorship and leadership in agroecology



Giving agricultural start-ups firmer roots



Mentee: Fatuma Khalif

Fatuma Khalif at a glance

Country: Kenya

Mentor: Terry Gitau

COO, Organic Kenya Ltd; PhD in Agroecology (candidate)

Ventures: Almurid Exporters, AfriPesa, SheScales Africa

Highlights:

- \$25.5M Microsoft partnership for Almurid Exporters
- Chair, Ecofarm Organics (via AWOLA)
- Author, The Honest Hustle

Focus: Agroecology, women's economic empowerment, climate-smart farming

Vision: Thought leadership, food sovereignty, and resilient African food systems



Mentor: Terry Gitau

I am Fatuma Khalif, an entrepreneur and business consultant, who is passionate about sustainable agriculture, agroecology, and empowering women-led agribusinesses across Africa. My work sits at the intersection of agriculture, finance, and impact where I support founders in scaling climate-smart, community-driven solutions that regenerate ecosystems and uplift livelihoods.

From leading Almurid Exporters, which connects smallholder farmers to global markets, to co-founding AfriPesa, a cross-border fin-tech platform advancing financial inclusion in underserved regions, I have spent the past few years building ventures that drive systems change.

Now, through SheScales Africa, a consulting venture capital firm, I'm channeling my experience into supporting women and youth-led start-ups that are reimagining how we grow, distribute, and value food in Africa. My mission is to unlock the potential of agroecology and amplify the voices of women shaping our continent's agricultural future.



Terry Gitau (mentor) & Fatma Khalif (mentee) mentorship session instead of meeting

Mentorship that sparked a vision

A pivotal moment in my journey came when I was mentored by Terry Gitau, a dynamic leader in sustainable agriculture and agroecology. As the chief of operations at Organic Kenya Limited and a PhD candidate, her guidance helped me sharpen my vision, strengthen my resolve, and scale new heights in my career and mission. During the AWOLA mentorship programme, Terry won seed funding from the Tony Elumelu Foundation. Recognising my

potential, she appointed me as Chair of the Board at Ecofarm Organics, a role that has been instrumental in shaping my leadership journey.

The milestones

1. Business growth and global expansion

Under my leadership, Almurid Exporters has grown to meet international demand for premium agricultural products. Our focus on empowering small-scale farmers





and promoting sustainability attracted recognition from the VC Top Food & AgriTech Accelerator, leading to a \$25.5 million partnership with Microsoft and industry-leading mentors. This will power our expansion into new markets and further our mission.

2. Mentorship and thought leadership

As a mentor with Seedstars and the European Bank, I have guided start-ups in the agricultural sector, helping them to navigate challenges, scale sustainably, and build inclusive value chains. I'm committed to growing a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem rooted in innovation and equity.

3. Authoring 'The Honest Hustle'

I wrote *The Honest Hustle: The Confessions of an Entrepreneur* to reflect on the realities of building a business from scratch. It is a raw, honest account of the trials, triumphs, and lessons I've learnt — and a guide for aspiring entrepreneurs who want to build with purpose.

4. Balancing family and business

As a mum and wife, I've learnt to lead with empathy, resilience, and deep intentionality. Balancing family life and entrepreneurship has shaped my leadership style and reinforced the importance of support systems in sustaining long-term success.

Key lessons from AWOLA

1. Empowering women as change-makers

Women are not just contributors, they are catalysts. Supporting women in agroecology transforms food systems and drives innovation, resilience, and community well-being.

2. Agroecology builds resilient communities

Agroecology isn't just a farming method; it's a framework for resilience. By embracing local knowledge, biodiversity, and sustainable practices, we create communities that can withstand climate shocks and market disruptions.

3. Collaborative leadership

In agroecology, leadership is about bringing people together: farmers, NGOs, policymakers, and funders, to co-create solutions that serve the whole system.

4. Knowledge sharing is power

Impact multiplies when women farmers share their experiences, ideas, and innovations. Creating peer-learning spaces and networks is critical to scaling agro-ecological success.

6. Advocacy is essential

Agroecology requires systems change. I've learnt that influencing policy around access to land, finance, and education is key to enabling equitable and sustainable farming at scale.

“

Agroecology isn't just about farming—it's a way of living that celebrates local wisdom, biodiversity, and sustainability.”

— Fatuma

What next?

Expand my influence as author and speaker

I plan to build on the success of *The Honest Hustle* by writing more books, publishing articles, and speaking globally on entrepreneurship, sustainability, and resilience. My voice is rooted in real-world experience, and I aim to inspire the next generation of change-makers.

Advocate for Sustainable Agriculture

I will continue to work with global coalitions and local communities to promote climate-resilient farming, soil health, and food sovereignty through agroecology and policy advocacy.

Leave a Lasting Legacy

My long-term vision is to co-create an Africa where women are empowered, smallholder farmers are valued, and agricultural systems are regenerative and just. I want to help build ecosystems that endure, where innovation thrives and future generations inherit a more sustainable world.

Inspiring every woman

I say to every woman:

Your path is powerful and worth celebrating. Embrace every challenge as a doorway to growth. Lead with resilience, lean on your community, and lift others as you rise. You are not just part of the change, you are the change. Keep pushing forward. Your story will inspire generations to come.



Finding strength and beauty in vulnerability



Mentee: Leah Mwaura



Mentor: Dr Sarah Olembo

Leah Mwaura at a Glance

Country: Kenya

Mentor: Dr Sarah Olembo

Agroecology leader & educator

Profession: Senior Programmes Specialist,
Multi-Country Programme Manager at SNV

Expertise: Agroecology, regenerative
agriculture, market development,
ecosystem-based adaptation

Notable milestones:

- Presented at the Africa Food Systems Summit 2024
- Co-authored five research papers for the East Africa Agroecology Conference
- Contributed to community-based agroecology projects at Athi River Eco-community

Core philosophy: Strength and beauty can
be found in vulnerability like gold in Kintsugi

I am a passionate telephone farmer...there is joy in growing something. You watch it rise from a tiny seed, caring until it flourishes into something edible and beautiful.

Unfortunately, I have not had enough time to nurture my passion in farming, hence the telephone farming.

In terms of work, I am a senior programmes specialist with experience working with international organisations to catalyse systemic change in food systems. My main expertise lies in market development, agroecology and ecosystem-based adaptation. I work as a multi-country programme manager at SNV where I lead a programme on regenerative agriculture and circular practices with a nexus on renewable energy. I also serve as a member of ISFAA (Intersectoral Forum on Agrobiodiversity and Agroecology), private sector technical working group and as a member of investment committees targeted at financing micro and small enterprises.

I hold a Master's degree in Economics and a Bachelor's in Agricultural Economics. I am also an Africa Food Systems Leadership Programme Fellow.

Mentorship journey, our achievements

Dr Sarah Olembo and I can best be described as kindred spirits. We met and connected instantly in our first AWOLA workshop. We also found out that she also mentors my colleague, so together with Sally Owounda, a former AWOLA mentee, I was her youngest adopted daughter at the time.

We had three main goals set in the mentorship journey. On top of the list was improving my climate change knowledge and gaining negotiations skills. In this goal, PELUM hosted me in its membership training in carbon credits

where I gained invaluable knowledge on the design of carbon credit programmes, carbon markets and the subject policies in Kenya and the region.

After the training, I have done online courses and started integrating it in my work. I am currently researching how to best design a carbon credit programme on improved soil health and carbon sinking beyond agroforestry.

The second goal was presenting research papers in regional and international fora. I successfully presented a paper on "Meaningful Youth Engagement in The Agri-Food Sector" in the Africa Food Systems Summit in September 2024. In addition, I co-authored five papers for the East Africa Agroecology Conference, one with my mentor and Sally on "Phytosanitary Challenges in Farmer Managed Seed Systems".





My third goal was to progress in career through advanced education, looking out for new opportunities and expanding my portfolio by consulting. I have taken up the challenge and I am expanding my networks to grow my career, and I am embracing new opportunities.

In addition to our set goals as mentor and mentee, we got to practise agroecology in Dr Olembo's community, the Athi River Eco- community where she capacity-builds members and students at Daystar University. She held two community sessions, one on composting and setting up of vertical gardens for students and the other for the community members on the value of herbs and spices in home gardens.

Key lessons

Kintsugi, literally translated as golden joinery, is the Japanese art of mending broken objects. Kintsugi is often used as a metaphor for life, suggesting that we can find strength and beauty in our own flaws and challenges, and that healing and restoration can lead to a richer, more resilient existence. When I assess our journey with Dr Olembo, it reflects Kintsugi, where she taught me to draw strength in my challenges as it would lead to a stronger me. She was right.

Our mentorship journey taught us many lessons, but our key takeaway was 'crisistunity', which is looking at a crisis as an opportunity to improve or gain knowledge. For us this was having resilience when faced with tough situations such as potential job loss or grief; showing up differently with grit, clarity, and the willingness to be uncomfortable and, lastly, telling better stories, because the power of narrative is influential in changing minds.

The future

Dr Olembo has been a fantastic mentor, and I am looking forward to leaning in on her support even beyond this programme.

I am looking forward to growing my career in the development space and going beyond my work, being bold and venturing into new adventures. My goal is to broker negotiations at a regional or global level, and I am working towards that.

Inspirational message for women

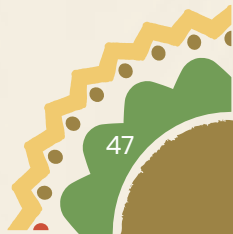
Lois Zachary once said that "Mentors and mentees may come from different backgrounds and have a limited understanding of each other's cultures and outlooks, but mentorship remains one of the most powerful tools for inclusion, professional development, and talent retention."

Embrace mentorship, it is worthwhile.

“

Our mentorship journey taught us many lessons, but our key takeaway was 'crisistunity', which is looking at a crisis as an opportunity to improve or gain knowledge”

– Leah Mwaura



Soaring as HR expert after AWOLA touch



Mentee: Irene Nyaboke

Irene Nyaboke

Country: Kenya

Mentor: Josephine Irungu – HR professional

Profession: Certified Human Resource Officer; Member, Institute of Human Resource Management (IHRM)

Key gains:

- Advanced from CHRP to full IHRM membership
- Improved emotional intelligence & workplace communication
- Strengthened leadership and conflict resolution skills

Focus: Time management, HR technology, healthy work culture



Mentor: Josephine Irungu

Irene Nyaboke is a certified Human Resource Officer registered with The Institute of Human Resource Management (IHRM), Kenya's statutory professional body responsible for regulating and certifying human resource (HR) practitioners.

Engaging in a year-long HR mentorship programme led to significant personal and professional transformations. The engagement with my mentor was also enlightening because we were both HR professionals, and we had similar personal experiences. Our busy schedules did not hinder our meetings since we were able to plan well.

During the mentorship, we outlined two action plans: Time management and embracing HR technology. We further realised that I needed to tap into leadership opportunities to foster positive employee relations, manage employee conflicts, and ensure their fair treatment for them to feel valued and appreciated.



Career advancement

When I joined mentorship, I had graduated as a certified human resources professional (CHRP). After some time, I registered as a full member of IHRM, whereby I enjoy Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programmes, including quarterly events and forums to facilitate knowledge exchange and networking among HR professionals, including subsidised trainings at branch levels, further enhancing my HR skills.

Self-awareness

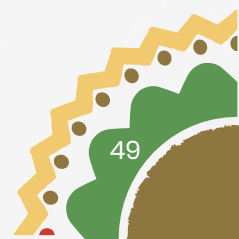
My communication skills and personal relationships have improved and started to recognise how my words and actions impacted others. This awareness has allowed me to tailor my communications to suit different audiences, fostering clearer and more effective interactions within and outside my networks.

I started understanding my emotions and reactions better, enabling me to empathise with my colleagues. In addition, it has led me to be able to resolve conflicts professionally, thus creating a more harmonious and collaborative work environment.

Incorporating self-awareness into daily practices has empowered me to navigate complex situations with insights, ultimately contributing to a more productive and supportive workplace.

Improved job satisfaction

The AWOLA mentorship has had a positive impact on my services as an HR practitioner. I feel more satisfied in whatever, hence being able to handle the HR tasks more professionally. This development has enabled me to successfully appreciate the organisational changes, contributing to the overall growth.



Personal development, increased confidence

The AWOLA mentorship programme has fostered my personal growth. I have enjoyed learning from my mentor and experiences and felt more confident in pursuing my HR career goals. Accompanying my mentor to her trainings, seminars, and also award-winning ceremonies was an eye-opener! The opportunity changed my ways of decision making and made me a good event organizer; in addition, there are physical positive changes in my personal life.

“

Mentorship didn't just sharpen my HR skills—it reshaped how I lead, communicate, and connect with others.”

— Irene Nyaboke

A journey worth celebrating

Our mentorship journey can be celebrated through the growth, insights, and connections we have cultivated together, and its end marks the beginning of continued personal and professional development built upon the strong foundation we've established.

Our time together with my mentor has been a chapter of learning and collaboration. May the lessons learned propel us into our next endeavours.



Stepping out of my comfort zone



Mentee: Beatrice Wangui Njoki



Mentor: Elizabeth Mulae

Name: Beatrice Wangui Njoki

Country: Kenya (currently based in the United States)

Mentor: Elizabeth Mulae

Foundation: Hope for Girls Foundation – supporting girls' education, especially those affected by early marriage

Key mentorship gains:

- Strategic goal-setting and leadership skills
- Networking for partnerships and resource mobilisation
- Emotional intelligence and personal branding

Future vision:

- Establish a mentorship & resource centre for young women
- Collaborate on policy advocacy for women's rights
- Inspire a generation of resilient African women leaders

My name is Beatrice Wangui Njoki, and I am proud to share my journey of transformation following my mentorship through AWOLA.

Before joining the programme, I was passionate yet unsure of how to translate my ideas into real impact. At times, I lacked direction, confidence, and the practical tools to grow—both personally and professionally.

Through the dedicated guidance of my mentor, Elizabeth Mulae, I gained not only knowledge but also the courage to step beyond my comfort zone. I learnt how to set clear goals, develop a strategic mindset, and take practical steps towards achieving my vision. With her support, I launched the Hope for Girls Foundation, which has already helped one girl return to school after escaping an abusive early marriage.

This mentorship inspired me to create a movement dedicated to supporting girls in returning to education, particularly those affected by early marriage. The foundation's vision is to coach and mentor girls so they can discover their values, realise their dreams, and ignite their passion for life.

Today, I am more confident, empowered, and driven than ever. I have begun mentoring others, giving back to my community—just as someone once did for me.

Mentorship focus areas

- **Networking for impact:** Through capacity-building sessions with AWOLA mentors—especially Elizabeth—I gained invaluable insights into building networks for partnerships and resource mobilisation. This broadened my understanding of collaboration for social impact, skills that will benefit both me and my organisation.
- **Leadership development:** My mentor regularly shared reading materials on leadership, gender empowerment, agroecology, and lifestyle. The literature, coupled with her real-life examples, strengthened my critical thinking and leadership skills.
- **Governance insights:** We explored governance in different contexts, comparing experiences across organisations, which deepened my understanding of leadership practices and what constitutes best practice.



- **Emotional intelligence:** My mentor shared strategies to enhance self-awareness and interpersonal skills, which have greatly improved my communication and relationships.
- **Resilience and career growth:** We explored diverse topics—from building confidence and setting achievable goals to exploring international educational and career pathways. Our discussions on resilience and effective communication further refined my leadership and mentoring abilities.

Programme insights

Through the programme, I learnt to better understand my emotions, manage stress, and respond thoughtfully rather than reactively—transforming my relationships and decision-making.

The sessions on personal branding helped me recognise my unique strengths and confidently present them in both personal and professional settings, boosting my self-esteem and public presence.

After moving to the United States—a completely new environment—I learnt to adapt by remaining open-minded, respecting diverse cultures, and actively engaging with my community.

Elizabeth also encouraged my spiritual growth, reminding me of the importance of inner peace, purpose, and maintaining a strong connection to my values and faith. These continue to guide me in life, especially while living away from home.

Future goals

Following my mentorship, my goals are rooted in empowering young African women to reach their full potential through Hope for Girls Foundation. I plan to use my knowledge,

networks, and leadership skills to advance girls' education and women's economic empowerment.

One of my key ambitions is to establish a mentorship and resource centre in my community, offering career guidance, entrepreneurship training, and mental health support. I also aim to work with local and international partners to advocate for policies that protect and uplift marginalised women, especially those with disabilities.

Ultimately, I aspire to be a catalyst for sustainable change, using my voice and experience to inspire a generation of confident, resilient, and impactful African women leaders.



Navigating the distance challenge

Despite living thousands of miles apart, my mentor and I kept our connection alive through regular WhatsApp calls—sometimes at rather inconvenient hours for one of us due to time zone differences!

I spoke to Elizabeth while in Washington DC, Pennsylvania, and Oregon, while she was in Kenya, Zambia, South Sudan, and South Africa. The distance never defined us—we used technology to keep our momentum strong, and we finished our journey with energy to spare.

To my fellow mentees, mentors, coordinators, and supporters of AWOLA—thank you for making this a truly transformative journey.

My walk mirrors the words of Ibukun Awosika:

“Every woman has power, but her power is useless by itself. Our power becomes superpower when we connect it; and we can use that superpower to support [other] women to live their dreams.”

My dedication to all women

Dear phenomenal women, as you step forward from this incredible mentorship journey, remember that the strength, wisdom, and courage you carry within you are powerful forces for change. You are no longer just participants—you are torchbearers, leaders, and role models.

Let the lessons learnt, the stories shared, and the connections built remind you that you are never alone on this path. Continue to rise with purpose, support one another with compassion, and lead with confidence.

The world is waiting for your brilliance—go and shine unapologetically.

“

The distance did not define us; we used technology to keep our momentum strong, and we finished our journey with energy to spare.”

— Beatrice Wangui Njoki

From self-doubt to purposeful leadership



Mentee: Mutheu Mutune



Mentor: Stellamaris Mulaeh

Mutheu Mutune

Country: Kenya

Mentor: Stellamaris Mulaeh

– Leadership & Development Professional

Profession: MEAL Officer, Slow Food Kenya

Key Gains:

- Refined personal brand & CV
- Strengthened M&E skills via Act for Change Trust
- Completed Climate Governance & Negotiation course
- Led logistics for Eastern Africa Agroecology Conference

Focus: Leadership development, agroecology, mentorship for young women

Vision: Empower girls through the Slow Food Academy & model purpose-driven leadership.

I didn't always see myself as a leader. People often referred to me as bold, confident, even eloquent. But behind the praise lived a quiet voice of doubt. I questioned myself constantly, shrinking from opportunities, second-guessing my worth, and assuming that leadership was for someone else.

That changed when I joined the AWOLA Mentorship Programme (Cohort 2) under PELUM Kenya. That decision marked a turning point. I didn't just gain professional tools, I found my voice, my strength, and a deeper belief in myself.

When I began the programme, I played it small. I hesitated to step up in meetings. I avoided platforms that could amplify my voice. I didn't fully recognise the strengths I brought to the table.

Then I met my mentor, Stellamaris Mulaeh, a powerhouse of clarity, purpose, and compassion. Through every check-in, every

assignment, every difficult conversation, she gently peeled back the layers of self-doubt I had built around me. She helped me see myself clearly.

Her guidance;

- Refined my personal brand and learned to own my narrative
- Revamped my CV to reflect the depth of my experience and potential
- Strengthened my Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) skills through a connection with Act for Change Trust
- Completed a three-month course in Climate Governance, Diplomacy, and Negotiation, deepening my understanding of climate policy and leadership

Each milestone was more than a task, it was a moment of reclaiming my confidence.

Before AWOLA, I would've shied away from regional events. But this time, I didn't just attend the Eastern Africa Agroecology Conference, I served on the organising committee. I co-ordinated, collaborated, and contributed to a platform bringing together policy influencers, researchers, and practitioners across the region. This wasn't just a professional win, it was proof that I belonged.

AWOLA taught me how to lead without burning out. I learned to prioritise what matters, set healthy boundaries, and invest in self-care. I began balancing motherhood, purpose, and profession with more clarity and intention.

One of the most exciting chapters of this journey is unfolding now. In August 2025, we are launching the Slow Food Academy, a platform under Slow Food Kenya that will train teenage



“

Mentorship is a powerful tool for personal and professional growth, and my experience as a mentee in the AWOLA Programme (Cohort 2) under PELUM Kenya has been nothing short of transformative.”

–Lilian Mutheu

girls and young women in agroecology. I will be contributing as a MEAL Officer and stepping up as a mentor.

This initiative is deeply personal. It mirrors the journey I've walked. The support I received through AWOLA now flows through me to the next generation. I'm helping create the kind of space I once needed, a space where girls can grow, lead, and believe they matter.

The journey doesn't stop here. To deepen my leadership and programme implementation skills, I've enrolled in short courses in M&E and Strategic Management, both made possible through AWOLA's support. I'm also refining my LinkedIn profile to strengthen my professional presence and expand my network.

I'm no longer shrinking; I'm taking up space, and creating space for others to rise too. AWOLA didn't just equip me with tools, it transformed how I see myself. From the quiet girl who doubted her power to a woman shaping her legacy, I stand tall, not just for me, but for every young woman watching. If you've ever felt unseen, unsure, or unworthy of leadership, I see you. And I'm here to tell you: you belong.

Thank you, AWOLA.

Thank you, Stellamaris.

Thank you, PELUM Kenya.

I'm building something bigger than myself. And this is only the beginning.



Unveiling a more resilient leader: A mentor's reflection



Mentee: Leah Mwaura



Mentor: Dr Sarah Olembo

Mentee: Leah Mwaura

Country: Kenya

Mentor: Dr Sarah Olembo

Focus: Governance, leadership, decision-making & accountability

Key achievements:

1. Created clear job descriptions and improved HR systems
2. Boosted policy awareness on youth engagement in agroecology
3. Launched the "Innovation Square" at SNV

Impact: Stronger staff engagement, streamlined recruitment, institutionalised innovation

Future goals: Enhanced stakeholder engagement, conflict resolution, and governance tech adoption.

Focus area: Governance, Leadership, Decision-Making, and Accountability Introduction

The AWOLA Mentorship Programme seeks to empower individuals in governance and leadership roles, fostering accountability and impactful decision-making. Over the past year, Leah Mwaura, under the expert guidance of her mentor, Dr Sarah Olembo, has made significant strides in her professional growth and leadership journey. This report details her achievements, learning milestones, challenges, and plans for continued development.

Achievements in the mentorship period

Leah has accomplished several impactful initiatives in her focus areas, showcasing her commitment to driving change:

1. Development of comprehensive job descriptions

Leah ensured the creation of detailed job descriptions, enhancing organisational clarity and efficiency.



2. Staff awareness of SNV policies

Through workshops and communications, Leah effectively raised awareness about the SNV policies, ensuring that staff understood and adhered to the guidelines, especially in areas of youth involvement in regenerative agriculture and agriecology.

3. Recruitment and leave management

Leah optimised recruitment processes and improved leave management systems, fostering fairness and transparency.

4. Innovation square launch

She spearheaded the launch of the Innovation Square at SNV, a dedicated space promoting creativity, collaboration, and innovation across teams.

Learning milestones

Leah has experienced significant growth across the mentorship focus areas:

- **Governance**

She has developed a stronger grasp of governance principles, streamlining organisational processes and aligning operations with strategic goals.

- **Leadership**

Leah has honed her leadership style to inspire her teams and manage challenges effectively, gaining confidence as a visionary leader.

- **Decision making**

Leah has mastered the art of making timely and well-informed decisions, considering both short-term outcomes and long-term impacts.

- **Accountability**

She has embedded accountability in her work culture, leading by example and ensuring responsibility at all levels.

Challenges and solutions

As part of her learning journey, Leah encountered several challenges, which she addressed proactively:

1. Stakeholder alignment

Bridging differing perspectives among stakeholders was challenging. Leah employed transparent communication strategies to build mutual understanding.

2. Balancing innovation and tradition

While championing innovation, she found maintaining the organisation's traditional values complex. She embraced a collaborative approach to integrate both seamlessly.

Impact assessment

Leah's initiatives have resulted in measurable outcomes:

- Improved staff engagement and alignment with organisational policies.
- Enhanced recruitment efficiency, reducing turnover rates.
- Increased innovation, evidenced by the successful launch of the Innovation Square.

Ongoing development and next steps

To ensure continued growth, Leah's mentorship journey will emphasise:

- Stakeholder engagement strategies:
- Enhancing skills in building relationships and managing diverse stakeholder expectations.
- Conflict Resolution and negotiation:
- Developing tools to navigate disputes and foster consensus in challenging situations.



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I've learnt to navigate tough confrontations, embrace multitasking with grace, and face uncertainty with fortitude.”

– Leah Mwaura

- Technology integration:
- Leveraging digital tools to streamline governance practices, improving transparency and reporting.

Conclusion

Leah Mwaura's growth under the mentorship of Dr Olembo reflects her dedication and ability to apply key principles in governance and leadership. Her progress, thus, far is commendable, and with the outlined next steps, she is well-positioned to become a transformational leader in her field.

From the mentor:

Celebrating Leah's remarkable achievements

It is with great joy and fulfillment that I share Leah Mwaura's outstanding progress and recognition. Not only has Leah been appointed as a Lead Consultant in a reputable organisation, but she has also been retained as a consultant by her own employer, SNV.

These accomplishments are a testament to her hard work, dedication, and growth throughout the AWOLA Mentorship Programme where

she mastered how to navigate challenges, confrontations and multitasking. It is in overcoming these areas that Leah's resilience and strength have emerged.

Gratitude for AWOLA

This journey has been deeply gratifying for me, and I am profoundly proud of AWOLA for the opportunity they entrusted me with as a mentor. The mentorship experience has been nothing short of transformative, not only for Leah but also for myself.

As a mentor:

- I have had the privilege of giving back to society, nurturing and empowering future leaders.
- I have gained a deeper understanding of myself and my ability to support others.
- I have grown immensely in confidence and competence in mentorship.

A personal reflection

This experience has been a gift to me in many ways:

- I have not only added to my professional growth, but also expanded my family, welcoming more daughters into my life. I have witnessed the seeds of guidance and encouragement flourish, as those I have mentored continue to grow and thrive in new and exciting grounds: my influence has expanded beyond my profession, my immediate family beyond geographical boundaries. I was wise enough to test Salome (my first mentee) and Leah during the East African Agroecology Conference where the three of us co-authored a paper and presented it under the umbrella of AWOLA. It is no mean statement to state that from AWOLA, we were the only ones that had a conference paper presented in the main event. The title of the paper

was: 'Phytosanitary Challenges In Farmer Managed Seed Systems (FMSS) 25-26 March 2025, Argyle Grand Hotel, authored by Dr. Sarah Olembo, Salome Awounda, and Leah Mwaura'

- For me, this paper will always be the flagship that will always bind me to my mentees of who I am so proud. It is an honour to look back and see the meaningful impact of the AWOLA Mentorship Programme and the legacy of growth it leaves behind.

A heartfelt congratulations

Congratulations to Leah whose achievements inspire us all, and to AWOLA for fostering a platform that nurtures leaders and empowers mentors. This programme has been a beacon of hope and transformation, and I am proud to be part of its remarkable and fulfilling journey. With humility, allow me to quote thus: "Keep your heart pure and your intentions clear, for the universe is the ultimate storyteller."

Thank you, AWOLA, thank you, PELUM -Kenya.



Rooted in purpose, rising in leadership



Mentee: Joleen Caroline Wambui



Mentor: Venancia Wambua

Stepping into agroecology

When I reflect on the woman I was in early 2022—a fresh-faced intern stepping into the world of agroecology at SACDEP Kenya—and the woman I am today three years down the line, I feel a wave of gratitude and quiet pride. My journey has been one of persistence, meaningful mentorship, and constant reaching for growth not just to run projects, but to influence change in the spaces I occupy.

I joined SACDEP with more questions than answers, but what I lacked in experience, I made up for in curiosity, dedication, and an eagerness to learn. I said yes to every task, every field visit, and every opportunity to engage. I wasn't just trying to prove myself, I genuinely wanted to understand how sustainable ecological agriculture could transform lives, especially for smallholder farmers. That commitment didn't go unnoticed. By January 2023, I had earned a full-time position as a Project Officer, a proud moment that came with new responsibilities, new challenges, and a deeper self-reflection:

How do I continue evolving in this space? How do I stay relevant and impactful as a young woman in agroecology?

Finding my mentor

At that key point in my career, I knew I needed more than just technical skills, I needed guidance. Someone who had walked the journey before me. So, when I came across the call for mentees by the African Women Leaders in Agroecology (AWOLA) programme, it felt like the door I had been waiting to knock on.

Being accepted into the programme was more than exciting, it was affirming. It told me that I belonged in this space, and that there were women ahead of me who were willing to walk beside me. When I was matched with Ms. Venancia Wambua, Head of Programmes at Biovision Africa Trust, I knew I was in the right hands. Venancia brought with her not only years of technical experience, but warmth, discipline, and perspective that I deeply admired.

Together, we co-created a structured Individual Work Plan that aligned with my professional goals and the technical areas I wanted to grow in. But beyond the structure, our relationship

grew into a safe space where I could ask hard questions, reflect honestly, and challenge myself to think more strategically.

Growth through mentorship

Mentorship, for me, wasn't about being told what to do, it was about being seen, challenged, and supported to grow into the woman I aspired to become. With Venancia's guidance, I began to see myself differently not just as someone doing the work, but as someone capable of shaping it. Together, we explored core areas that continue to define my growth:

Policy and advocacy

Coordinating the development of a Natural Resource Management Policy and a Wetlands & Riparian Areas Bill in Nyandarua County has been one of the most demanding yet fulfilling aspects of my role. Venancia helped me understand that influencing policy through advocacy isn't just about having the facts, it's about navigating relationships, reading the room, targeting influential individuals, having evidence driven data and knowing when to push and when to listen. She demystified advocacy and taught me how to stay grounded while speaking truth to power.

Agroecology and sustainable agriculture

While I'm already studying Sustainable Ecological Agriculture at SACDEP and implementing Ecological Organic Agriculture project, our mentorship conversations brought those lessons and experience to life. She pushed me to link theory with practice to ask deeper questions in the field, to engage critically with what I was learning. Her encouragement gave me the confidence to speak up during webinars and share my voice in spaces I once found intimidating.

PMERL (Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting & Learning)

These are more than just buzzwords in my work; they're part of how I operate. With her support, I learned to design clear work plans, track results meaningfully, and communicate impact with evidence. This has transformed the way I lead farmer group trainings and stakeholder sessions. I now walk into those spaces with clarity, knowing that what we're doing on the ground is backed by structure and strategy.

Public speaking, presentation and facilitation

Facilitation used to terrify me. But through our mentorship, I learned how to prepare content for presentations, the importance of preparing and understanding the subject matter ahead of public speaking, anticipating questions, centring myself before stepping into a room, how to engage different audiences, and how to speak from both heart and mind. Today, I confidently lead farmer trainings, stakeholder forums, and organisational discussions.



Joleen Wambui showcases seed saving methods during an exhibition



Fundraising and donor engagement

This was a completely new world for me. But Venancia, having organised three major conferences and worked closely with donors, generously shared her insights. She helped me understand the human side of donor relationships, the importance of transparency, consistency, efficiency, effectiveness, maintaining donor relationships, communicating impact and success, follow-up, and staying aligned with shared values. I've since begun supporting proposal development and identifying fundraising opportunities, knowing the long-term sustainability of our work depends on this.

Leadership and stress management

Perhaps one of the most powerful lessons was this: leadership isn't just about making decisions, it's about staying calm in uncertainty. Venancia taught me to always have a Plan B in situations of crisis, to prepare for what

might go wrong without fear, and to lead from a place of intentionality. Whether it's juggling responsibilities or handling unexpected changes in project timelines, I've learned to pause, assess, and respond with clarity rather than panic.

Overcoming challenges

Mentorship, like growth, is rarely a straight path. While my journey with Venancia was deeply enriching, it was not without its hurdles. While her schedules were packed with travel, mine, with increasing responsibilities, made it difficult to meet consistently. At times, I found myself feeling uncertain and even discouraged, worried that I might be missing out on key lessons.

But rather than giving up, I chose to lean into the challenge. I initiated a recovery plan, and together, we adjusted. We created a more flexible and intentional approach to our check-ins. We agreed to make every session count, no matter how brief. That process taught me one of the most powerful lessons in leadership: growth is not about waiting for perfect conditions, but about making progress even in imperfect circumstances.



Mc KNIGHT FOUNDATION MEETING
HELD AT ACACIA PREMIER HOTEL KISUMU ON 28/10/2024
Showcasing products during an exhibition in Kisumu.

Moments of recognition

One of the most affirming milestones on this journey was being recognised as one of SACDEP's Staff of the Year. That recognition reminded me that I was no longer just an intern trying to find her place, I had become a trusted part of the team, a woman whose work spoke for itself.

Today, I'm pursuing a Master's in Monitoring and Evaluation, a step that deepens my ability to measure impact, tell meaningful stories through data, and contribute to more effective, evidence-based programming.

Looking forward: sharing the light

As I look ahead, I do so with more clarity, purpose, and confidence than ever before. I am now a woman who speaks up in rooms that once intimidated me, who leads conversations around sustainable ecological agriculture, and who continues to grow not only technically, but personally. I've also become more intentional about visibility for impact. I understand

now that if I want to remain relevant and influence change, I must speak about my work, document it, and share it. That's how we inspire, how we open doors for others, and how we shift systems.

To other young women stepping into professional space and beginning their mentorship journey, my advice is simple: be proactive, ask for help, and don't be discouraged by imperfect moments. Mentorship is a relationship that you nurture, grow with, and learn from. Build relationships. Speak up. Stay curious. And remember that your journey doesn't have to look like anyone else's to be valid.

As I close this chapter of my AWOLA journey, I wish to extend my deepest gratitude to PELUM Kenya for envisioning and implementing the programme. The one-year mentorship has been a truly transformative experience that has expanded not just my skills, but my sense of purpose and belonging in agroecology and development work.

To my mentor, Venancia, thank you for your unwavering guidance, encouragement, and for believing in my potential even when I doubted myself. You led by example and created a safe space for growth; I will carry your lessons with me always. To my supervisor at SACDEP Kenya, Mr Paul Karanja, thank you for the opportunity to learn, make mistakes, and lead. Your trust and support have been instrumental in shaping the professional I am becoming. And to every woman rising may we continue to lift others as we climb.

I am not just working in agroecology, I am shaping it. I am not just learning leadership, I am stepping into it.

And this is just the beginning.



Paving the way for meaningful growth



Mentee: Sarah Nantume



Mentor: Anne Arihomugisha

Mentee: Sarah Nantume

Country: Uganda

Mentor: Anne Arihomugisha – JERO

Highlights:

- Revived governance structures at RUCID
- Founded Innovation Square for team brainstorming
- Launched Green Haven agroecology project
- Co-developed ENVIRO VERMI fertiliser via Stanbic Hi-Innovator

Focus: Sustainable agriculture, women's leadership, eco-solutions

Motto: Lead with vision, positivity, and trust

Hello! I am Nantume Sarah, an agroecology, organic agriculture, and sustainable food systems advocate. I am the Head of Programmes at RUCID (Rural Community in Development), a Uganda-based NGO committed to empowering rural communities through sustainable farming and organic agriculture.

With a background in Environmental Science and Project Planning and Management, I have years of practical experience leading agro-ecological initiatives and projects, driving community development, and promoting food system sustainability.

A significant turning point in my career was joining the Africa Women Leaders in Agroecology AWOLA (Cohort 2) by the PELUM. Anne Arihomugisha equipped me with essential leadership, governance, and decision-making skills. It also helped me refine my ability to manage people, projects, and systems while expanding my professional network.

Through AWOLA, I have become a more confident. I've worked to strengthen governance at RUCID, improve team management, develop leadership skills, and cultivate a better work-life balance while remaining committed to advancing agroecology in Uganda and beyond.

I am determined to continue fostering sustainable agricultural practices, amplifying women's leadership in agroecology, and creating lasting, meaningful impact in the communities I serve.

The foundation of my career transformation

At the start of my mentorship journey under AWOLA, I encountered professional and personal challenges that required intentional growth. My primary goal was to strengthen my leadership and management abilities. Although I had years of experience in agroecology and had taken on key responsibilities, I recognised the need to refine my leadership approach. I aimed to build leadership strategies to boost my confidence, improve decision-making, and enhance my ability to manage teams effectively, particularly as RUCID expanded. I also sought to deepen my understanding of governance, improve communication, and establish systems to manage people and projects more efficiently.

Expanding my professional network was another important objective. I understood that connecting with mentors and fellow leaders would create opportunities for collaboration and growth.

I became aware of knowledge gaps around governance and leadership dynamics. Addressing them was key to making informed

decisions, managing resources wisely, and leading in line with the RUCID goals and my values.

Ultimately, I have become a confident, responsible, and well-rounded leader, committed not only to career advancement but also to continuous personal growth and creating meaningful impact through leadership.

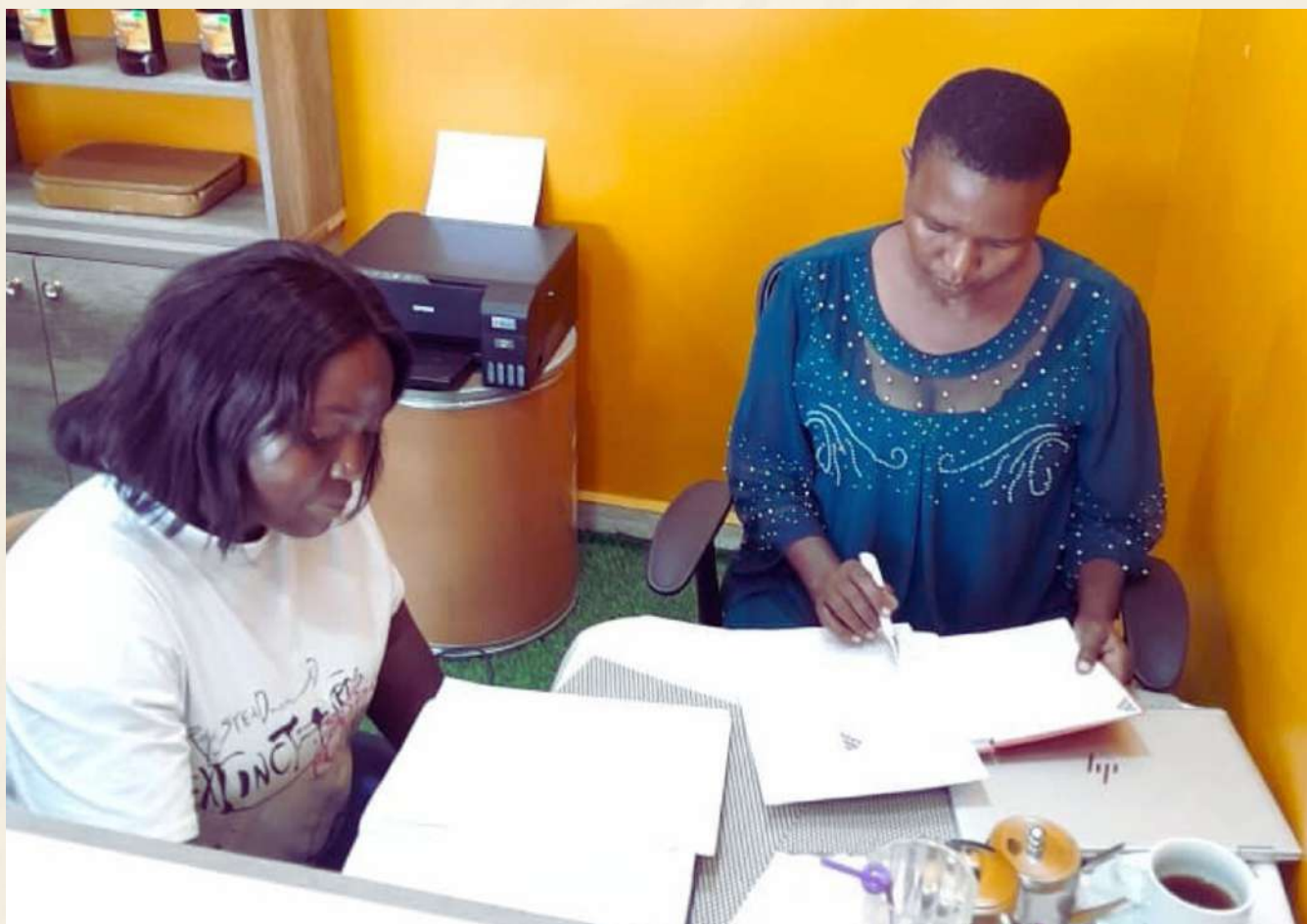
My mentorship journey: from struggles to strength and greatness

When I joined the mentorship programme, I honestly didn't know what to expect. At the time, I was already the Head of Programmes at RUCID. On paper, everything seemed fine. But behind the scenes, I was struggling.

I carried the weight of trying to do everything myself. I struggled to delegate, to communicate expectations clearly, and to nurture my team's growth. I felt overwhelmed, unsure of how to strengthen the governance and leadership systems within RUCID. As an organisation, we faced challenges around policies, unclear roles, and governance structures that just weren't working. I knew we needed change, but I didn't know where to start.

Then came AWOLA. I thought I was simply signing up for a mentorship programme. What I didn't realise is that I was signing up for one of the most transformative experiences of my career and life. I was paired with Anne Arihomugisha, a mentor I had never met before. I was feeling unsure, even a bit skeptical, but Anne was intentional, patient, and real. She didn't just show me leadership strategies, she asked me difficult, necessary questions, including: "Where do you want to be after this mentorship?" That question shifted everything for me.

Under Anne's guidance, I learned to let go of control and perfectionism. I realised that



leadership is not about doing everything yourself, but empowering others, building systems, and trusting your team. Slowly but surely, I started to delegate, communicate better, and focus on strategic decisions. I witnessed real, tangible changes not only in myself but in the performance and morale of my team.

RUCID became stronger; we improved governance, organised successful exhibitions, delivered on project implementation and evaluations, and even built new partnerships. I stepped into spaces I had never imagined, such as negotiating with banks, influencing decisions at the organisational level, and leading with clarity and confidence.

Today, I am a better leader, a better mentor to my team, and a better version of myself. If you're

a woman passionate about sustainable food systems, agriculture, or community leadership, I encourage you to consider AWOLA. It's not just a mentorship programme. It's a doorway to growth, clarity, and impact.

A story of growth, leadership and transformation

I entered the programme looking for tools to become a better leader, but left with much more clarity, courage, confidence, and a renewed sense of purpose.

Our mentorship wasn't just about formal sessions, we connected deeply and even created collaboration between our two

organisations, namely RUCID and JERO. These conversations opened my eyes to how powerful mentorship can be when it becomes a two-way exchange of knowledge, support, and shared vision.

One of the first things that changed was how I viewed leadership. I struggled with delegation, communication, and felt unsure how to unlock my team's full potential. But Anne's words stayed with me: "Endeavour to show your team the future all the time. A leader should always be positive." Slowly, I started to practice that, and the results were beautiful.

Tangible changes at RUCID

Projects and Policies

- We reviewed and revived key governance documents that had been gathering dust.
- We reimagined our farm operations, turning what was disorganised into an inviting, modern space, including a well-labeled herbal garden that now attracts visitors and tourists.
- We created an Innovation Square; where the team gathers to brainstorm, dream, and align our ideas with RUCID mission.
- We launched Green Haven, a new initiative that blossomed from the 90-day transformation process.

Leadership:

We revived weekly Monday meetings to keep the team grounded and focused. We worked on communication strategies to improve collaboration. We built stronger governance systems, revised procurement policies, and clarified team roles.

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Becoming a great leader requires hard work, bravery and good communication. I've learnt this from my mentor and have been able to use these key skills to attract women and youth into agroecology. I appreciate AWOLA mentorship for the unexpected project outcome of collaboration between my organisation and the mentor's organisation.”

–Sarah Nantume,

I had the privilege of attending entrepreneurship programs like Stanbic Hi Innovator, where I learned how to develop an agro-ecological product that is now in the pipeline for the market.

The shift wasn't just in systems, it was in people. I learned the true power of delegation and trust. I remember being away at the AWOLA Regional Workshop in Nairobi, and watching my team successfully organise the Harvest Money Expo 2025 without me micromanaging.

That moment showed me how far we had come as a team and how far I had come as a leader.

The ripple effect of mentorship was felt beyond me. Our Executive Director at RUCID, Mr Nyanzi Samuel, once told the team: I've found someone to think with. It's refreshing to have someone who is not only learning but also contributing ideas and strategies to move RUCID forward. He added: "I am now confident in Sarah's ability to take on the leadership of RUCID. It's been incredible to witness her transformation.



Hearing those words made me realise how far I had come and how mentorship had not only changed me but had also given RUCID the leadership it needed to move forward. That is the true power of mentorship; not just learning, but leading and lifting others along the way.

Personal growth:

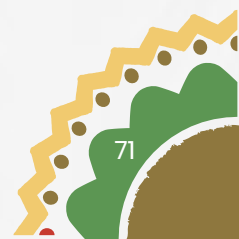
AWOLA didn't just change my career, it changed how I see myself and the people I work with. It has taught me that leadership is not a title, but a journey of learning, growing, and empowering others.

Key lessons learned

1. Leading with positivity and vision: One of the most powerful lessons Anne shared with me was the importance of leading with optimism and clarity. She reminded me to endeavour to show my team the future by always being positive. Positivity became a leadership tool, fuelling motivation, hope, and shared purpose.

2. The Power of Delegation: Anne taught me that effective leadership is about empowering others, trusting them, and sharing responsibility. Together, we achieved milestones such as strengthening RUCID's governance, organising exhibitions, and expanding programmes. Delegation became the catalyst for collective growth.

3. Networking and Collaboration: I discovered the transformative power of networks and partnerships. She introduced me to professionals and organisations that expanded my horizons. A key achievement was establishing a partnership between RUCID and Anne's organisation, JERO, which led to joint initiatives and mutual learning. I also built connections with groups like AVIAN Conservation, enriching our work in agroecology and eco-tourism.



4. Embracing Vulnerability and Openness:

Anne taught me that true leadership is not about perfection, it is about authenticity, humility, and openness to growth. I learned to embrace feedback, admit mistakes, and lead with vulnerability. This shift made me a more reflective and approachable leader. I realised that vulnerability is not a weakness but the foundation of authentic leadership.

5. Mutual Growth: One of the most surprising and beautiful outcomes of this journey was understanding that mentorship is a two-way street. Our relationship evolved into a space of mutual learning, honest dialogue, and shared reflection. This experience showed me that mentorship is about connection, not hierarchy.

6. Renewed Confidence and Purpose: The AWOLA programme instilled me confidence and clear sense of purpose! I began to see myself not only as a leader within RUCID but as a change maker in my community. A highlight of this growth was the creation of ENVIRO VERMI, an environmentally friendly fertiliser developed through the STANBIC Hi-Innovator Accelerator Program. This innovation strengthened RUCID's business model and demonstrated that women in agroecology can thrive as entrepreneurs.

Today, I am committed to empowering women and youth in sustainable agroecology, vermicomposting, and waste management. I am also working towards launching my enterprise to extend this mission further.

Conclusion:

Mentorship is a powerful catalyst for personal growth, community development, and transformational leadership. When one person

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We are using agroecology in Uganda as a means of transforming food systems and this can be achieved if we transform women more so through empowering youth, more so female youth. They get on board to embrace agroecological practices and lead on the front”

–Anne Arihomugisha

grows, entire communities rise.

My journey through the AWOLA has been nothing short of transformative. It has redefined what it means to be a leader and given me the tools to grow not only as an individual but also to uplift the entire RUCID team. Through the guidance of my mentor, Anne, I have learned the invaluable lessons of leadership, delegation, effective communication, and governance, all of which have paved the way for the continued growth of both myself and the organisation I serve.

For anyone seeking to grow, evolve, and make a meaningful impact, I wholeheartedly recommend the AWOLA mentorship programme.

Youth can lead!



Mentee: Kizza Justine Kambaire



Mentor: Jane Akot

Nyumbasam at a Glance

*Founder: Kizza Justine Kambaire (29),
Uganda*

Mentor: Jane Akot

Launched: 2024 via AWOLA Mentorship

Focus: Poultry farming with agroecology

Growth: From 60 to 250 birds; weekly supply of 5 trays of eggs

Innovation: Feed from farm by-products & planted supplements

Impact: 98 farmers enrolled for training

Next: Expand flock, add hatching machine, complete fencing, start structured training

I am Kizza Justine Kambaire, a 29-year-old agroecologist, mentee, and change agent with a strong passion for sustainable agriculture and rural development.

The story of Nyumbasam stemmed from my late father's dream of transforming our family land into a sustainable farmland. As the heiress, I had the passion to bring this vision to life, however, I had no idea how to begin until I met PELUM in 2024.

Under the AWOLA mentorship programme, I was paired with my mentor, Ms Jane Akot, an agroecologist and researcher, who has been nurturing me for a year.

With her guidance, I refined my vision into a plan of establishing a multi-service local poultry farm that models sustainable agroecological practices. To achieve these, I anticipated to develop my leadership in planning, communication, fundraising, and enterprise development.

Our first step was to develop an Individual Development Plan (IDP) and sets of working tools, including concept, business canvas model, growth plan, standard operating procedures, feeding and poultry disease management plans.

We moved into action, starting with mapping and designing the farm layout, followed by mobilising resources to begin implementation. Personal fund amounting to UGX 4.45 million was raised to construct a low-cost poultry house and fence the land, forming the foundation of the farm. Additional support from family members helped cover costs of stocking and initial operational set-up. We began operations with 50 hens and 10 cocks.

Costly feeds was a challenge, so I innovated and started using farm by-products such as cassava peels, kitchen waste. I also planted Jack bean and Amaranthus to supplement.

Our first egg sale was during the Agroecology Week, where I sold 30 trays. Demand for local eggs soon outgrew our production capacity. My mentor advised me to collaborate with local farmers to meet the growing demand. However, the collaboration faced quality control challenges in egg supply.

Following my mentor's recommendation, I decided to boost internal production and expanded the flock to 250 birds. Unfortunately, the addition of birds introduced disease challenges, a tough learning moment. I responded by creating a quarantine section and turning to local treatments to manage the outbreak.

As the workload increased, I addressed the labour gap that earlier affected several activities, including the failure of our initial vermicomposting setup, by recruiting and

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Nyumbasam is more than a farm — it is a movement for food security, resilience, and environmental sustainability.”

-Kizza Justine Kambaire

training a full-time farm manager. This decision strengthened daily operations, improved coordination, and created space for further growth and innovation.

Today, Nyumbasam supplies five trays of eggs weekly to Balimisa Consultants. Although we are still short of our goal of 84 trays per month, this is a promising start, and I am optimistic we will get there soon.

My leadership skills have grown tremendously. I now write professional reports, speak confidently, and have appeared on radio and national television during the National Agroecology Actors Symposium, where I spoke about youth-led agroecology innovations in Uganda's food systems.

Through AWOLA, my mentor and I have taken on leadership in the Agroecological Entrepreneurs and Market Actors Forum, an initiative created by PELUM Uganda. I was nominated as Secretary of the Climate, Agroecology, and Animal Health Committee, while my mentor was nominated as Chairperson of the Research and Innovation Committee. These roles allow us to influence policy and promote youth inclusion, organic farming, and community learning hub.

Our network has also expanded internationally, thanks to exposure through the AWOLA programme and participation in regional forums. This has allowed us to learn from global

best practices, form meaningful collaborations, and position Nyumbasam within broader agroecological movements across Africa and beyond.

We hosted a community Christmas party that attracted more than 300 participants. During the event, I sensitised attendees on agroecology and registered 98 farmers for future training. This engagement reinforced Nyumbasam position as both an eco-friendly poultry enterprise and a foundation for a Family Agroecology Learning and Innovation Hub.

As mentioned above, this journey has not been without challenges. Financial constraints delayed infrastructure development and stock expansion. Initial community skepticism about organic poultry required creative outreach strategies such as demonstration days and product tasting. Technically, our first attempt at vermicomposting failed, not due to concept, but due to lack of labour. This gap, however, was later addressed through the recruitment of a farm manager, which greatly improved workflow and consistency.

These challenges have strengthened my resolve to build a demonstration farm that promotes resilience through agroecological innovation. With ongoing support from Jane Akot, PELUM, and our growing local and international networks, I am confident that we are building a more just and sustainable agricultural future.

Nyumbasam is ready to scale up. Priorities include expanding poultry stock, acquiring a hatching machine, completing the perimeter fence, and launching structured farmer training and seasonal community outreach events.

This story proves that with mentorship and vision, youth can lead in transforming agriculture. Nyumbasam is not just a farm, it is a movement for food security, resilience, and environmental sustainability. Nyumbasam success is a collective effort. We invite partners, policymakers, and fellow farmers to collaborate with us in scaling this model to new communities. Let us invest in young women farmers and secure a healthier planet for all.



Mentorship turns aspiration into action



Mentee: Peskin Nahabwe



Mentor: Josephine Akizza

ROFA coffee and hot peppers at a glance

Founder: Peskin Nahabwe – Rweshande, Uganda

Mentor: Josephine Akizza

Highlights:

- Launched eco-packaged ROFA Coffee
- Boosted hot pepper yields by 50% with agroecology
- Added value via dried & ground pepper products
- Trained 25 young women in sustainable farming & branding

Next: Grow markets and expand women's agroecology training

Before joining the African Women Leaders in Agroecology Mentorship Program, I was a young woman with passion but little direction. Growing up in a rural farming community, I was surrounded by agriculture but lacked the knowledge and support to turn it into a sustainable and impactful livelihood. My dream was to grow food, create value from it, and share that knowledge.

When I was selected for the AWOLA mentorship, I felt like a door had opened. Over the course of a year of mentorship, I was nurtured by an experienced African women leader, Madam Josephine Akizza, who built my understanding of agroecology, sustainable farming, and value addition. Two key areas I focused on were coffee and hot pepper crops, which are grown on my farm but are often sold at low prices due to a lack of processing or branding.



With the skills I gained, I began adding value to coffee, especially through processing, packaging, and marketing it locally. This led to the creation of our community brand ROFA COFFEE, which quickly gained traction in nearby towns for its quality and eco-friendly packaging. At the same time, I applied agroecological practices to my hot pepper farm using organic compost, crop rotation, and natural pest control. As a result, the yields increased by more than 50%, and I was able to dry and grind the peppers into powder, which sold at a higher price in local markets.

Beyond production, this mentorship programme helped me to build a strong network of women farmers and entrepreneurs across the country. This support system has been vital.

“

This journey has turned my passion into purpose and my voice into one of leadership.”

–Peskin Nahabwe



Furthermore, I have shared my journey, learned from others, and found opportunities I never knew existed.

Today, I'm not only running a community-based organisation, Rweshande Organic Farmers Association (ROFA), but I have also trained more than 25 young women in my community on value addition, sustainable

farming, and branding. I have seen, firsthand, how knowledge can transform not just a farm, but a life.

This mentorship turned my passion into purpose, and now I walk with confidence as a youth leader, a farmer, and an advocate of agroecology.



Cultivating change



Mentee: Ilemuyat Roselyn



Mentor: Olleke Esther

Founded: 2022 – Occocia, Amuria District, Uganda

Members: 33 women, child mothers & youth

Focus: Organic vegetables, poultry, piggery & soap making

Milestones: Learning Centre, training in agroecology & leadership, diversified incomes

Impact: Better incomes, food security, soil health & women's leadership

In the small village of Occocia, Amuria District in Eastern Uganda, is Ilemuyat Roselyn who has worked in a farmer cooperative organisation for more than seven years, engaging with women at both group and family levels. During the period, the challenges rural women, teenage mothers and youth struggle with overwhelmed me. These include struggle with leadership, land ownership, land unproductivity, erratic climate change impacts, and barriers that prevent them from supporting themselves, families and the needy.

These women work long hours on their farms, using conventional methods that have depleted their soil, polluted waters, while providing meagre yields. They live in poverty, hunger, and malnutrition that plague their families. They felt trapped in a viscous cycle of poverty with no control over their own destiny.

With all these challenges, I looked left and right in the hope of finding a solution to end the suffering among the women, child mothers, and youth. It was then that I saw an advert on African Women Leaders in Agroecology (AWOLA) mentorship programme; it became a pivotal moment in my journey. The mentorship not only affirmed my passion for agroecology but also provided the guidance I needed to turn my vision into reality through Ms Olleke Esther, my mentor.

The transformation begins

With great passion for agroecology I built by admiring my grandfather work coupled with the challenges the rural women faced, I reflected on how best I could transform the community. Guided by my mentor, Apedori Women Agro-ecology Initiatives was born with 33 females consisting of women, child mothers and youth. (Apedori means 'I can').

The initiative envisions empowering the rural women and youth with knowledge and skills to improve the livelihoods of its members, enhance food security, and promote sustainable agriculture.

To achieve this, PELUM Uganda sponsored exposure visits to Slow Foods Project in Kisoga, Vermipro Project, and Nsambya Organic Foods Market. Engagements such as attending the International Day for Rural Women have helped me to broaden my understanding of agroecology in practice and refine my approaches.

Establishing agro-ecological centre

The Agro-ecological Centre was set up as a hub for knowledge sharing, skills development, and community mobilisation. The centre is a platform for the women to learn about agroecology, sustainable farming, environmental conservation, and the importance of biodiversity.



Income generation, change activities

Through the mentorship, I learnt various income-generating activities such as organic vegetable production, organic liquid soap making, piggery and poultry farming. This enabled me to roll out these activities at Apedori Women Agro-ecological Initiative (AWAI). They not only provided a source of income but also helped to diversify farming and improve the livelihoods of members.

Angwedo Joyce, a member, said: “I started growing eggplants using agro-ecological best practices that enabled me to sell, earn, and support my family”.

Loyce Isiko, a market facilitator of the group, said: “Through the knowledge I gained, I was able to grow the traditional vegetable Ecadoi (African spider plant) using chicken droppings compost and I was able to sell to the community people”.

Training in agroecology practices

My mentor trained me in practices such as organic farming, horticulture, and conservation agriculture, enhanced productivity, and combating effects of climate change. I learnt how to design and manage agro-ecological mini farms using locally available resources and minimal external inputs. The training had a profound impact on the women’s farming practices. They began to adopt sustainable methods that improved soil fertility, reduced pests and diseases, and increased crop yields.

Capacity building

For sustainability, I received training in leadership, governance, and community mobilisation, enabling me to coordinate, organise and mobilise women to tackle their challenges.

“

We turned barren fields into thriving ecosystems – and in doing so, discovered the power we’ve always had.”

– Ilemuyat Roselyn

A story of transformation

The establishment of the agroecology centre, income generation activities, trainings, and leadership capacity building transformed my ability to bring the women together for positive change. Some of them can now lead and have taken up roles in the initiative.

With the right knowledge, skills, and support, women can become agents of change, driving sustainable development and improving their livelihoods.

Empowerment and confidence

These women have experienced a new sense of empowerment and confidence, helping them to turn barren land into thriving ecosystems teeming with life and productivity. They began to earn a steady income from their farms, enabling them to afford basic needs, send their children to school, access healthcare, and improve overall well-being.

Reflections on the present

I have learnt that while the challenges rural women face are complex, they are not intractable. The mentorship has been a turning

point, helping me to not only establish the agroecology centre, but also equip me to support and empower other women. Through my efforts and the guidance of my mentor, members of Apedori are proud achievers as advocates of sustainable agriculture and women empowerment.

The vision

“To be a leading agroecology centre in Greater Eastern Uganda, renowned for its innovative approaches to sustainable agriculture, community empowerment, and high-quality organic products”.

Key objectives:

1. **Expand Training Programmes:** Develop and deliver comprehensive training in agroecology, sustainable agriculture, and organic farming.
2. **Deepen community impact:** Foster strong partnerships with local communities, promoting sustainable livelihoods, improving food security, and enhancing environmental stewardship.
3. **Develop value-addition:** Process and package high-quality organic products, such as local turmeric powder, to create



sustainable income streams and promote local economic development.

4. **Advance agroecology knowledge:**

Pursue education and research in agroecology, including a Master's degree, to stay in the forefront of innovation.

5. **Developing a thriving agroecology centre:**

Create a vibrant hub for agroecology learning, innovation, and community engagement, serving as a

model for sustainable agriculture and environmental conservation.

Appreciation

With great gratitude, I want to appreciate my mentor for always being present for me and accepting me as I am with all the challenges that I encountered during the period of mentorship. Much appreciation goes to PELUM Uganda, the AWOLA coordinator, Madam Hadijah, who was always patient and understanding. You are the force behind the achievement of a lifetime dream: Apedori Women Agroecology Initiatives.

Down the aisle of purpose



Mentee: Irene Nagudi



Mentor: Magdalene Amujal

Mentee: Irene Nagudi

Country: Uganda

Role: Environmental Scientist & Founder, Kichini Gardeners Initiative

Mentor: Magdalene Amujal, Kulika Uganda

Highlights: Secured 2 grants, launched school garden clubs, represented Uganda at Thousand African Youth Summit, named 2025 WILD Global Leader

Skills: Grant writing, M&E, agroecology, leadership

About Irene

Irene is passionate about conservation and children's involvement in addressing food security, and climate change.

She's the founder and director of Kichini Gardeners Initiative – a registered not-for-profit organisation established in Uganda empowering children (8-16 years), women, and youth with small-scale sustainable agricultural practices.

She's an environmental scientist by profession, with five years practical experience in small-scale sustainable vegetable growing. She's currently a mentee of AWOLA Cohort 2

About Magdalene

Magdalene is passionate about community development with specific emphasis on improving the quality of life through promotion of food and security nutrition, income generation, skilling initiatives, conservation and regenerative practices for reduced impacts of climate change and preserving biodiversity for the good health of the people, animals and environment.

She is the Executive Director of Kulika Uganda – an established and registered not for profit organization that promotes agriculture and educational activities with emphasis on boosting community development through ecological organic agriculture training in crop and animal production, farmer to farmer extension, creative capacity building, value addition and marketing,

scholarship support, youth and farmer skilling, adolescent empowerment and promoting approaches that amplify 'Voices to Choices' among others. She is a mentor on AWOLA Cohort 2

The mentorship journey

Irene (Mentee) was attached to Magdalene (Mentor) – both being in the nonprofit world and Education.

Irene was seeking support on;

- o Effective mobilization of resources for Kichini Gardeners
- o Master's Scholarship in Sustainable Agriculture
- o Ensuring sustainability in Kichini Gardeners
- o Improve on her grant writing skills





What began as a committed journey — traveling over 75km from Kayunga to Kampala — became a powerful season of growth. With consistent support from my mentor through in-person meetings, and exposure visits to organizations like Kulika Uganda and Pumzi Teas, I discovered the possibility of building a sustainable social enterprise beyond relying on grants.

Along the way, this journey has also led to key leadership and learning milestones:

- Appointed to the Teach For All Grant Review Committee, recognizing my potential in resource mobilization and project leadership.
- Elected Secretary of the Uganda Youth Wing – AFSA, by fellow participants of the Thousand African Youth Summit on Food Systems and Agroecology.

Selected for the YALTA Mentorship Program and as a 2025 WILD Global Leader, where I'm receiving mentorship, coaching, and global networking to elevate my impact.

Achievements and milestones

Through our mentorship journey I won 2 grants;

- Kofi Annan Foundation – to set up vegetable gardens in 2 schools and promote climate education among students
- SeedMoney Fund, 2025 – to implement the School To Home Garden Project – extending vegetable gardens in homes of different children

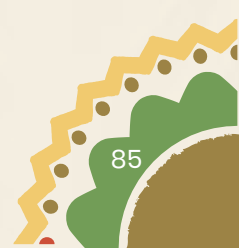
The two grants were possible – because I knew I had to make Madam Magdalene proud – what was I using the knowledge she shared with me for? In simplicity I had to be accountable.

We got into a partnership – Kichini Gardeners and Kulika Uganda working with 2 schools in Namayumba, Wakiso.

With this success, we have embarked on establishing School garden clubs – saving collectively after the sale of vegetables in the club.



'Irene was selected for the YALTA Mentorship Program and as a 2025 WILD Global Leader, where she received mentorship, coaching, and global networking tips.



With support from my mentor and other mentors like Jane Akot, I had the honor of successfully presenting Kichini Gardeners’ abstract titled “The Green Ambiance:

Transforming School Compounds into Green Spaces” at the 2nd African Forum on Urban Forests in Johannesburg.

At a time when I had nearly lost hope—after more than five Master’s degree scholarship applications had been turned down—my mentor stood by me.

She held my hand, offering unwavering support through powerful recommendation letters, which she drafted and I sent to multiple scholarship applications.

Today, I’ve been considered for a bursary to pursue a Master’s degree in Sustainable Agriculture. Her belief in me made this possible.

She also supported me with pitch mock sessions in the presence of Kulika colleagues — a valuable opportunity designed to strengthen my ability to write proposals and fundraise for Kichini Gardeners.

These sessions helped me refine my messaging, improve clarity, and build confidence in presenting our work. As a result, we now have a solid pitch that captures the heart of what we do at Kichini Gardeners and can be used to engage partners, donors, and collaborators.

She also provided me with relevant reading materials to support our sessions — including resources on grant writing, concept development, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

These materials deepened my understanding and equipped me with practical tools to better plan, track, and communicate the impact of Kichini Gardeners’ work.

“

You don’t need to know it all — just enough to lay the foundation. From there, growth will follow.

— Irene Nagudi

Stepping onto the global stage

In October 2024, I had the opportunity to represent Kichini Gardeners Initiative at the Thousand African Youth Summit on Food Systems and Agroecology in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

With my mentor’s support, I learned how to effectively network and share the story of Kichini Gardeners. Thanks to her guidance and the platform provided by AFSA, I was able to connect with fellow changemakers, amplify our mission, and leave the summit more empowered to grow our impact in the agroecology space.

Conservation curator

Today, I have a personal portfolio — a curated reflection of my journey, growth, and contributions through the Kichini Gardeners Initiative.

With support from my mentor, I’ve learned how to document my work clearly and meaningfully — capturing projects, milestones, lessons, and impact.

This portfolio helps me track progress, share my story with others, and stay grounded in the purpose behind everything I do.

Skills attained

- Improved knowledge on agroecology practices of growing food in schools and homes
- Improved Concept and grant writing along with the development of effective M&E Tools
- Effective management of community-based projects
- Embracing disappointments Way Forward

- Master's degree in Sustainable Agriculture
- Grow Kichini Gardners into a Social Enterprise
- Food security and Agroecology Policy

Conclusion

This is just the beginning of our journey, and through it I have learned to try - you do not need to know it all, but a bit of it lays the foundation, and it has been through this that I have managed to reach these heights today



I am grateful for mentorship



Mentee: Racheal Katushabe Arinda

Mentorship at a Glance

Mentee: Racheal K

Mentor: Flavia N

Key achievement: Developed Weevilcide – an organic neem-based pesticide effective against bean and maize weevils.

Other highlights:

- Joined the Research & Innovations Committee for agroecological entrepreneurs.
- Met Professor Florence Muranga, expert in banana nutrition.
- Gained skills to train and mentor others in agroecology.



Mentor: Flavia Nakaggwa

When I embarked the journey of AWOLA, I and my mentor, Flavia, agreed on the goal of coming up with a certified agro-ecological product on the market.

To achieve this lofty goal, we chose physical meetings for discussions, information sharing, and networking. It worked, now that we both knew where we were coming from and where we were headed.

One of the products we came up with was an organic pesticide known as weevilcide. It is made from a neem plant powder whose content is effective on the bean and maize weevils.

“

What began as a mentorship goal became a lifelong friendship — and the birth of a product farmers can trust.”

– Racheal Katushabe Arinda

I am grateful for meeting my mentor as a new friend forever, who I know will forever be available to preach the agroecology gospel.

During the mentorship, I also met Prof Florence Muranga, who is a professor of nutrition who has interest in the nutritional value of bananas.

I serve on the Research and innovations committee of agroecological entrepreneurs and territorial market actors.

Having been equipped, I am competent enough to train and skill others.





Farming art that grandma, AWOLA taught me



Mentee: Rutendo Muzipasi

Mentee: Rutendo Muzipasi

Country: Zimbabwe

Focus: Agroecology, Women's Empowerment, Sustainable Farming

Mentor: Mary Chigiya

Key impact:

- Trained farmers in soil fertility, water conservation, and sustainable food production.
- Led a successful water harvesting and land restoration project.
- Advocates for women's voices in agricultural decision-making.



Mentor: Mary Chigiya

My name is Rutendo Muzipasi. I am an AWOLA mentee in Cohort 2, who is guided by the wisdom of Mary Chigiya as my mentor. When I first applied for the AWOLA mentorship programme, I was in the nascent stages of my career as a programme officer training in agroecology. My journey began in the vibrant Mamutse community of Bikita District, Zimbabwe, where I closely collaborated with farmers to promote sustainable practices such as soil fertility management, water conservation, and the principle of growing and eating what they farm.

However, my passion for agriculture was rooted long before my professional pursuits. Growing up in a small village, I was raised by my

grandmother, a dedicated farmer whose hands were worn from years of working the land. Her life was a tapestry of hard work and resilience, instilling in me a profound love for the earth. Each morning, as the sun rose, I would follow her into the fields, where she shared her knowledge of planting and harvesting with infectious enthusiasm. She taught me that farming was not just a means of survival, it was a form of art, a dance with nature that required patience and respect.

Inspired by her unwavering spirit and the rich traditions of our village, I set out to blend her time-honoured wisdom with modern techniques. I envisioned a future where farmers could thrive by embracing agroecology, fostering a deep connection to the land, and ensuring food security for generations to come. My work with the Mamutse community became a manifestation of that dream, allowing me to empower farmers to reclaim their heritage while adapting to the challenges of our changing world.

At first, I thought I was there to teach, but I soon realised I was learning just as much. Women in the community were at the heart of food production, yet they were often excluded from decision-making spaces. I saw a gap in Zimbabwe's agricultural and food systems since women were doing the work, yet their voices were not at the forefront. Through AWOLA, I gained confidence in mobilising communities, not just to practise agroecology but to claim their rightful space in shaping food systems. I learned that knowledge doesn't flow in one direction; the communities carried wisdom that, when combined with scientific knowledge, became a powerful force for change.

One of the most inspiring moments in my work was a water harvesting project. As we built contours, reclaimed gullies, and enriched the soil with compost, the community began to see their land differently. They recognised not just the damage, but the possibility of healing. It wasn't just about farming, it was about restoring balance between people, land, and food.

“

I believed I was doing AWOLA mentorship for my career and for the community. Then I realised—this was for me too. I found myself drawn to agroecology beyond my work. I started growing food at home, reconnecting with the land in ways I had never imagined.

– Rutendo Muzipasi

Yet something else happened along the way. Initially, I believed I was doing this for my career and for the community, but soon realised that this journey was also for me. I found myself drawn to agroecology beyond my work, starting to grow food at home and reconnecting with the land in ways I had never imagined.

Now, a thought I had never entertained before has taken root in me: the desire to own land. In Zimbabwe, it is the norm for men to be landowners, but I now dream of a piece of land where I can practise and showcase agroecology.

Perhaps this is just the beginning. Perhaps the real journey is still unfolding. Will I take that step? Will more women step forward to reclaim their place in the agro-ecological landscape? The land waits, and so do the answers.

Cultivating purpose, inspiring change



**Mentee: Tanyaradzwa
Musariri**



**Mentor: Morakane
Madiba**



**Mentor: Muraro Loice
Makuyana**

About AgroInspireHub

Founder: Tanyaradzwa Musariri

Focus: Showcasing Zimbabwean women in agroecology

Goals: Promote heritage foods, boost women's market visibility, foster partnerships

Challenges: Limited funding, digital access gaps, rural outreach

Website: agroinspirehub.com

For quite some time, I wrestled with the question of how best to integrate ICT into the agroecology space in a way that was impactful and meaningful. I had a strong desire to contribute but the vision felt incomplete. I kept changing ideas. I had always wanted to do traditional grain selling, more of value addition by repackaging the grain into smaller packets and branding them.

One day, I thought about supporting women who were already into this business by advertising their products and sharing their success stories. The plan was to create an e-platform to help them showcase their products, connect with other likeminded women, and create partnerships. The platform would also attract funders.

It wasn't until I crossed paths with the remarkable Morakane Madiba that the puzzle began to come together. Through her thoughtful mentorship, she helped refine my ideas and transformed scattered thoughts into a focused concept. Her encouragement never wavered, and her ability to connect me with the right people at the right time brought my aspirations to life. Thank you, Morakane, for walking alongside me with so much warmth and insight.

I am also incredibly grateful to Muraro Loice Makuyana, whose guidance and support have been instrumental in shaping both my personal and professional growth during this journey.

The wisdom, patience and care shown by both of these inspiring women have left a lasting mark on me.

A sincere thank you to the PELUM Association for selecting me as a mentee in the African Women Leaders in Agroecology (AWOLA) programme, and to PELUM Zimbabwe for their encouragement. AWOLA has been a pivotal experience, one that provided not just direction, but confidence in my capacity to lead and innovate in agroecology.

It was from this foundation that AgroInspireHub came to life.

AgroInspireHub (agroinspirehub.com) is a digital platform tailored to support Zimbabwean women entrepreneurs who are preserving heritage foods and promoting sustainable farming. These women are guardians of indigenous food systems, yet often face steep barriers, from limited capital and digital visibility to a lack of entrepreneurial training and market access.

The platform aims to change that. By offering space to share their personal and business journeys, highlight the nutritional and cultural value of their products, and connect with potential buyers, partners and funders, AgroInspireHub opens new pathways for recognition and growth. It also fosters collaboration and knowledge exchange within a community of like-minded women.

Bringing this idea to fruition was not without obstacles; it came with real struggles, especially financial ones. There were several times when

“

When women's voices and digital tools come together, they can transform food systems.”

I didn't have the funds to pay for basic website hosting. I often had to pause or get creative with alternatives. Every dollar counted. I had hoped to carry out field visits to places like Goromonzi and Guruve to document the work of rural women entrepreneurs first-hand but unfortunately, there was no funding available to make those trips possible. These limitations were difficult but they didn't break the vision. Instead, they taught me persistence. I learned to do more with less.

This journey has reaffirmed the power of women in agroecology and how digital tools, when aligned with community values and vision, can be a true force for change.

Empowering women in agroecology



Mentee:
Beauty Musemwa

Beauty Musemwa at a Glance

Role: Mentee, AWOLA Programme Cohort 2

Mentor: Dr Irene Kadzere-Forichi (FiBL, Switzerland)

Base: Mashonaland Central, Zimbabwe

Key achievements:

- Launched She Farmers brand & LinkedIn page
- Led agroecology training and community outreach
- Adopted conservation agriculture on personal land
- Built networks with global agroecology organisations

Focus: Empowering women and girls in sustainable agriculture



Mentor:
Dr. Irene Kadzere-Forich

Hello! I am Beauty Musemwa from the Lower Guruve Development Association (LGDA) team in Mashonaland Central, Zimbabwe. I am excited to share my journey as part of the African Women Leaders in Agroecology (AWOLA) Programme in Cohort 2, implemented by the Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM) Association in Zimbabwe.

I would like to express my gratitude to my mentor, Dr Irene Kadzere-Forichi, a renowned expert in agroecology from the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) Switzerland, for her invaluable guidance and support. I also thank Nicoletta Maestrini from FiBL and to Dr Morakane Madiba from the Uhuru Career Center in South Africa for their valuable insights.

Lastly, thank you to PELUM for this life-changing opportunity through AWOLA. I am thrilled to share our collective efforts and experiences in promoting agroecology among women and girls in Mbire District, Mashonaland Province. Our work aimed to empower women and girls to become champions of sustainable agricultural practices, improving their lives and livelihoods.

As a mentee, my study topic was “Amplifying Agroecology Success Stories and Lessons from Women and Girls (She Farmers) in Mbire District of Lower Guruve, Zimbabwe, through Social Media Communication”.

Key achievements

- Developed a She Farmers logo and created a LinkedIn page to share Agroecology She Farmers stories (username: Beauty Musemwa).
- Built strong relationships with farmers, gathering and sharing their valuable insights and stories.
- Assisted the PELUM Zimbabwe media team during the 2024 National Good Seed and Food Festival, taking photos, creating content, and posting on Facebook.

Stories of change

- Increased confidence: Through the mentorship, I gained confidence in my public speaking skills. This experience has helped me to take on more leadership roles in my organisation.
- Leadership skills: The programme helped me develop strong project management skills. I was able to lead a team of farmers in implementing a new agroecological project, which was a huge success. This taught me the importance of teamwork, communication, and problem-solving in leadership.

- Networking opportunities: The programme connected me with like-minded professionals in agroecology. Through my LinkedIn page, I was able to connect with big organisations like Action Aid.
- Adoption of agroecological practices: I learnt the benefits of conservation agriculture. I was able to implement these practices on my own small piece of land, which has improved soil health, reduced erosion, and increased crop yields.
- Community outreach and education: Through the programme, I was able to educate my community— through trainings and demonstrations — on the benefits of agroecology. This helped to raise awareness and promote adoption of agroecology.
- Supporting women and youth: The programme helped me to support women and youth in my community to adopt agroecological practices by providing training and mentorship, which helped to empower them to take control of their own food systems.
- Action research skills: AWOLA helped me to design survey tools for collecting data among smallholder farmers. In the coming year, I will undertake the surveys and analyse the data which I hope to publish and guide agroecology development.

Personal growth and empowerment

- Overcoming challenges: I was able to overcome challenges related to limited resources and lack of access to markets. I developed new skills and strategies, which helped me to navigate these challenges and achieve my goals.
- Personal empowerment: It has empowered me to take control of my own life and make positive changes. I was able to develop a new sense of confidence and self-worth, which has helped me to pursue my passions and achieve my goals.



“

Agroecology is not just about farming — it's about empowering women to take control of their food systems and future.”

— *Beauty Musemwa*

- The mentorship provided me with an exceptional mentor, Dr. Irene Kadzere-Forichi, who became a role model and an inspiration. Her guidance, support, and expertise helped me navigate challenges, develop new skills, and refine my strategies. I'm forever grateful to her.

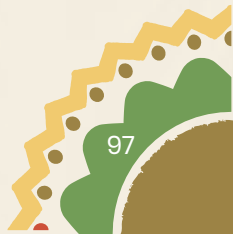
One particular instance that stands out was when Dr. Kadzere-Forichi flew all the way from Switzerland to Zimbabwe, just to have a face-to-face meeting with me. This remarkable gesture demonstrated her commitment to my growth and success. Throughout the programme, she offered constructive feedback, encouragement, and resources. Her mentorship not only enhanced my knowledge and skills but also boosted my confidence and self-esteem.

To ensure interaction between us beyond the 10 months of mentorship, she has integrated me into one of her projects in Zimbabwe where I shall be able to fulfil my passion for agroecology research. I'm honoured to have had Dr Kadzere-Forichi as my mentor and role model and hope that this is just the beginning of a long journey towards sustainable agriculture and food systems.

Her influence has been profound, and I aspire to emulate her exceptional leadership, expertise, and compassion. Thank you, Dr Kadzere-Forichi for an unforgettable mentorship experience!

To PELUM, I hope the AWOLA programme will expand and enrich many more women in Zimbabwe and beyond to contribute to agroecology development and the transformation of agri-food systems! I highly encourage other women to join this fulfilling programme.

I look forward to stay connected to the programme for greater networking, learning and cross-sharing.



Wow! I'm getting there



Mentee: Dr Sandra Makoni-Masawi



Mentor: Dr. Morakane Madiba

Dr Sandra Makoni-Masawi at a Glance

Role: Mentee, AWOLA Programme Cohort 2

Mentor: Dr Morakane Madiba

Focus: Documenting ethno-veterinary medicinal plants in Makonde District, Zimbabwe

Key achievements:

- Collected & showcased medicinal plant samples at the 2024 Good Seed and Food Festival
- Featured in PELUM Zimbabwe's International Women's Month series (2025)
- Built networks with farmers and fellow agroecology practitioners

What were your initial goals for your project/initiative, and how do you feel about your progress toward achieving them?

- To explore Ethno-veterinary medical practices for cattle, sheep and goats in Makonde Rural District
 - Capture and document data on the most common Ethno-veterinary medicines through workshops and questionnaires
 - Nomenclature of the respective plants and herbs, via collection of the samples and preservation through drying.
 - Examine effectiveness of chosen medicinal plants via a farmer led research/experiment
- However, the progress for this project was cut short due to lack of resources and funds.

Have there been any changes to your goals or priorities since you started? If so, why?

I was unable to carry out most of the objectives and was only able to use my personal funds to print and send out questionnaires and collect them. I was also unable to collect all the medicinal plants samples, only just a few. All this was due to lack of funds and resources.

What milestones have you achieved?

I showcased a few of the medicinal plants that I collected at the Good Seed and Food Festival in Harare at the Harare Botanical Gardens in September 2024). I also participated in PELUM Zimbabwe's International Women's month social media inspirational posts in March 2025.

A sample of Pelum Zimbabwe International Women's month social media inspirational post in March 2025.

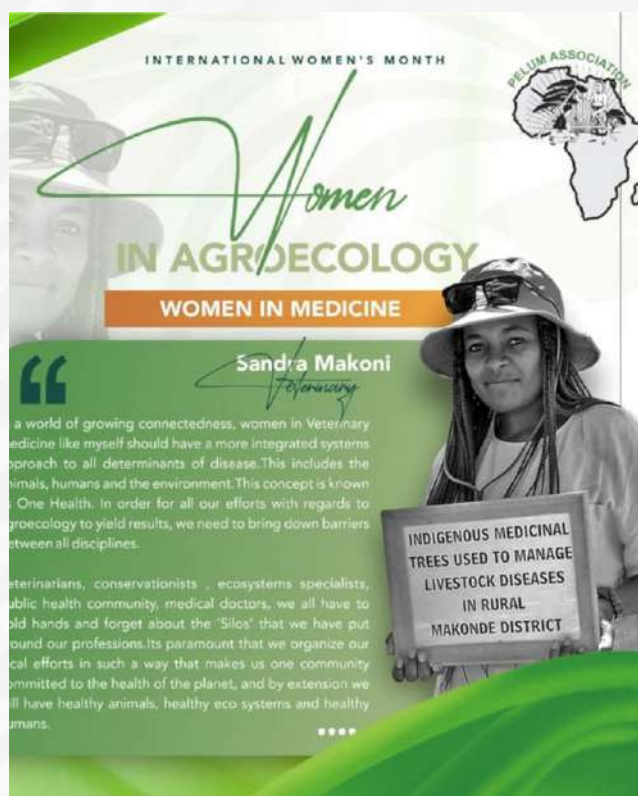
What are you most proud of accomplishing in your project so far?

Despite the limitations encountered, I was able to collect data on medicinal plants from the small farmers in rural Makonde and enough plant samples to showcase at the Good Seed and Food Festival 2024.

At the Good Seed and Food Festival in Harare Botanical Gardens in September 2024.

Can you walk us through your completed task or deliverable?

I contacted a local herdsman in rural Makonde District and explained to him the premise of my project and asked for samples of the medicinal plants. The herdsman, who knows the area well, was kind enough to get 10 samples. I used own money to pay both the herdsman for the kind gesture and the courier person who delivered the samples.



Pelum Zimbabwe International Women's month social media inspirational post in March 2025.

What challenges or obstacles did you encounter, and how did you address them?

Mostly, it was a lack of resources and funds, in which case I used personal resources where possible.

Anything that held you back or caused delays?

Lack of resources and funds.

How did you manage your time and resources to meet your project deadlines?

Since most of the project objectives had to be cancelled due to lack of funds and resources, I concentrated on what I was able to do, for example, online research on similar studies. I was also provided with a very rich book on useful indigenous plants of Zimbabwe by Farirai Jemwa, the AWOLA programme coordinator for AWOLA Zimbabwe

**Did you feel confident about the timeline?
Were there any areas where you think more
time or resources were needed?**

More time was needed for the collection of more medicinal plant samples, focus groups/ workshops with farmers and the farmer-led experiment on named medicinal plants.

**Are there any areas where you needed
additional support or resources?**

My project as a whole lacked financial support for sending out questionnaires, setting up the focus groups, incentives to farmers to show up and contribute, allowances for relevant stakeholders (EMA representative, Ministry of Agriculture representative, village herders and the farmers in the farmer-led experiment).

**Anyone else you reached out to for assistance
or advice on specific aspects of your project?**

Hlupekile Mujuruki, an AWOLA Cohort 1 graduate. She was an honorary mentor throughout the entire project and fellowship.

**What lessons have you learned that will
inform your future work?**

I had the honour to travel to Hwange and Victoria Falls Zimbabwe for a field trip and learned so much about landscape regeneration incorporating holistic cattle grazing in June 2024. In July 2024, I was part of another field trip to Kufunda Village in Harare where agroecology is practised and taught as well as personal growth and development.

From these visits, I witnessed the spirit of Ubuntu. The great lesson is that in order to better our communities and go far, we have to work together and include every single member of the

community. Every community has a hierarchy, values and channels to be observed and followed. Following these channels will not only be a symbol of the preservation of our culture and heritage, but will make the agroecology journey smoother.

I also took away the fact that being a good leader means having conviction and confidence in oneself. That no matter the obstacles ahead, I have the power to navigate around them.

Having a group of women around me (the AWOLA mentors, mentees and coordinators), showing support for one another, and sharing ideas on how to uplift our communities using agroecological guidelines was so powerful and refreshing.

**How has your understanding of the project or
subject matter evolved since you started?**

I have come to the realisation, in terms of traditional agroecological practices, that there is abundant rich and diverse knowledge that has been passed down each generation, but with little documentation and validation whatsoever.

“

*I may not be there
yet, but—wow!—I am
certainly getting there.”*

— Dr Sandra
Makoni-Masawi



At the Good Seed and Food Festival in Harare Botanical Gardens in September 2024.

What are your next steps or immediate priorities?

Publication of my work on documentation and nomenclature of the medicinal plants and herbs being used in rural Makonde District by small-scale farmers.

Is there any feedback you need from AWOLA to move forward?

Being part of the agroecological community and an AWOLA alumnus is quite outstanding such that working together with AWOLA in future is crucial to me.

Overall, is your motivation still strong about the project/initiative?

I realised that I had to finish this fellowship without realising all my goals but it does not take away the exceptional mentorship and lessons that I got from my mentor Morakane Madiba as well as all the support I got from the AWOLA team.

How does this project fit into your broader goals or career aspirations?

The skills and experiences I acquired have opened doors to experiences that I will carry into the future. I have grown personally and professionally. I have met like-minded women who are passionate about learning and doing better for our environment in the agricultural space as well as research. I have learnt that I have a voice that can be heard, which is what leadership is all about. I wanted to grow in practice and in experience and be able to pass the knowledge to those who are younger than me; I feel I am getting there. Overall, I am grateful for the opportunity that AWOLA afforded me, the awe-inspiring experiences and all the remarkable lessons!

A field trip in Victoria Falls/Hwange in June 2024.

Seeds of positive community impact



Mentee:
Yourshe Ropafadzo Chin'ore

Reflecting on my journey with AWOLA, I'm reminded of the day I joined the agroecology mentorship programme. Although I was familiar with the principles of agroecology, I knew that this programme would provide me with the opportunity to deepen my knowledge, refine my skills, and connect with like-minded individuals.

Sowing the seeds

When I began the programme, I was eager to explore advanced topics and best practices in agroecology. My mentor— Joseline Sithole— was instrumental in guiding me through this journey. Her patience, expertise, and motherly care made a significant difference in my learning experience. With her support, I delved into specialised areas such as regenerative agriculture, agroforestry, and integrated land use design. I appreciated the chance to refine my project planning



Mentor:
Joseline Sithole

Yourshe Ropafadzo Chin'ore at a Glance

Role: Mentee, AWOLA Programme Cohort 2

Mentor: Joseline Sithole

Focus: Regenerative agriculture, agroforestry & integrated land-use design

Key achievements:

- Led a school-based project on container gardens & land-use design
- Empowered youth with sustainable farming skills
- Overcame personal & logistical challenges to keep projects thriving

Next step: Expand community-based agroecology projects for lasting impact.

and implementation skills, ensuring that my agroecology projects were both sustainable and impactful.

Navigating challenges

As I progressed, I encountered setbacks like network challenges, which sometimes hindered communication with mentors and peers. Additionally, being pregnant during part of the programme presented its own unique challenges, from managing energy levels to ensuring my safety while working on projects. I also faced challenges in working with the community, particularly women, who were interested in our initiatives but expected incentives. Despite these challenges, Joseline's guidance and encouragement helped me stay motivated and focused. The AWOLA community's support was also invaluable in helping me navigate these challenges.

Harvesting successes

One of my greatest successes was working with young adults at a secondary school to establish container gardens and implement integrated land use design. Seeing them develop their skills and passion for sustainable agriculture was incredibly rewarding. The project is still ongoing, and I am proud to see its continued impact.

Growth beyond the project

AWOLA's mentorship programme didn't just enhance my technical skills in agroecology, it also helped me develop leadership skills,

“

She helped me plant seeds of change— seeds I am confident will continue to grow and flourish.

— Yourshe Ropafadzo Chin'ore

build confidence, and connect with like-minded individuals. Joseline's mentorship was more than just technical guidance – she was a friend and a source of inspiration. I've had opportunities to share my knowledge and experiences, inspiring others to adopt sustainable practices.

Looking ahead

As I prepare to graduate from the AWOLA programme, I'm excited to continue applying the skills and knowledge I've gained. I am confident that the principles of agroecology will guide me in making a positive impact on my community and the environment. I am grateful for the AWOLA community, mentors, and peers who have supported me on this journey, especially Joseline Sithole, whose impact on my life extends far beyond this programme.



A story of growth, resilience, hope



Mentee:
Sharing Lindsay Majese

When I applied to join the AWOLA programme, my goal was simple yet deeply meaningful: deepening my knowledge of agroecology beyond what I learnt in school. I was curious about how people around the world were practising agroecology, and I also wanted something purposeful to keep me busy after my attachment.

My experience as a mentee in AWOLA was nothing short of transformative. Through my project with a local school, I got the incredible opportunity to practise leadership skills. I worked closely with schoolchildren, their teachers, and the head-teacher – an experience that challenged and inspired me.

However, the journey wasn't without its hurdles. Navigating the school hierarchy was difficult at



Mentor:
Sipiwe Manjengwa

Sharing Lindsay at a Glance

Role: Mentee, AWOLA Programme Cohort 2

Mentor: Sipiwe Manjengwa

Focus: School-based agroecology project

Key achievements:

- Led gardening activities with high school students & teachers
- Supported mushroom cultivation and seedling preparation
- Built strong relationships for future community projects

Core strengths gained: Leadership, patience, resilience

first. Communication was slow, and often I was referred from one person to another without a clear direction. Financial challenges also stood in the way, as our projects were not funded. I had to rely on my parents to buy the seedlings and materials needed to keep the project going. In addition, there was a shortage of tools at the school, which made the work even more challenging. Despite all this, we persevered.

Through this journey, my self-esteem grew tremendously. Negotiating with the school on my own and successfully starting the project boosted my confidence. I even had the opportunity to inspire and assist some of the teachers — one with his mushroom classes, and others with seedling preparation. Working with high school students was not easy, but it strengthened my leadership skills and taught me patience and resilience.

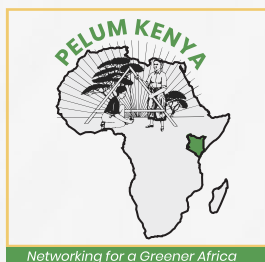
Although the project didn't unfold exactly as planned due to lack of funds, I am proud of what I was able to accomplish. More importantly, the relationships I built with the school community opened the door for more impactful projects in the future. This journey has been a foundation for promoting school mobilisation and deeper community engagement.

To future AWOLA participants, let's continue to grow this incredible community and inspire women around the world. We got this!

“
*Negotiating directly
with the school and
launching the project
gave me a new sense
of confidence—I've
grown in ways I never
imagined.*

— *Sharing Lindsay*

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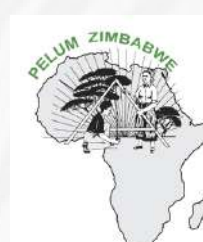
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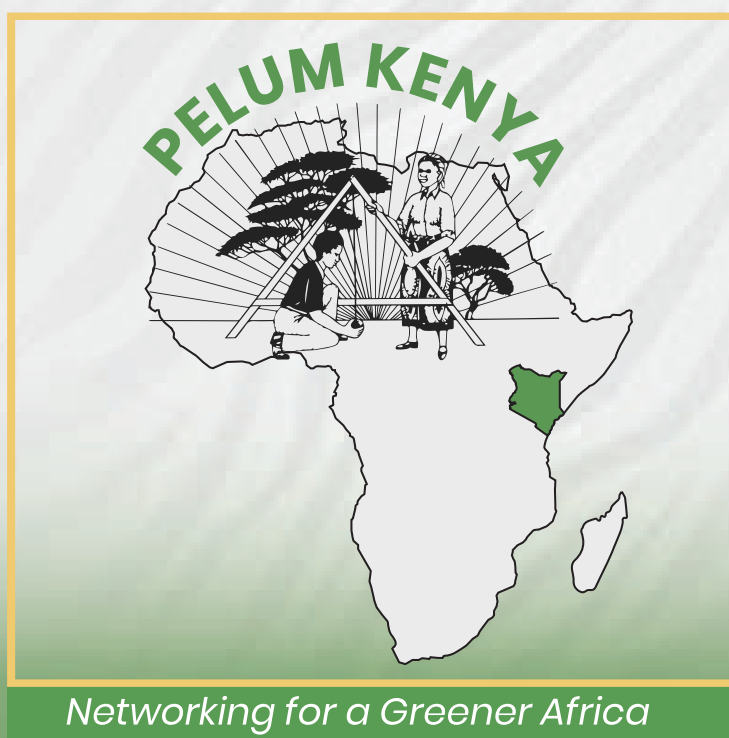
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