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Diary of my love for food production: My quest for sustainable agroecology

by Brighton Govha, Zimbabwe

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Stories
of
Change

Connecting traditional knowledge and
innovations for fair and sustainable
food systems

United Nations
Decade of
**FAMILY
FARMING**
2019-2028





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Stories of change: *Connecting traditional knowledge and innovations for fair and sustainable food systems*

In December 2017, the [United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the United Nations Decade of Family Farming \(UNDAF, 2019-2028\)](#) thus constituting a framework that recognizes the importance of family farmers, which includes peasants, indigenous people, traditional communities, pastoralists, fisherfolks, upland farmers, and many other groups of food producers that possess a unique potential to promote transformative changes in the way food is grown, produced, processed and distributed.

All over the world, there are thousands of stories of distinctive work carried out anonymously by family farmers, including women and youth, on successful transitions to more inclusive, sustainable and fair food systems. Those stories are based on co-creation and sharing of traditional knowledge and innovations that are helping to make food systems sustainable, leaving no one behind.

In this context, the [Family Farming Knowledge Platform](#) in collaboration with the [Barefoot Guide Connection](#) organized a series of “writeshops”, writing classes to support practitioners to write their own experience, generating knowledge which highlight the practices, changes, innovations and impacts of what they do in support of family farming.

These writeshops represented an opportunity to share the creative process through which identify, recognize, write and exchange stories and experiences from young people, women, farmers, small-scale producers who work to promote, improve and strengthen family farming and achieve prosperous and inclusive rural societies.

This initiative was conceived to provide a space to highlight the human, cultural and social dimensions of family farming, including the human rights embedded in family farming and its social and economic organization.

The stories presented in this compilation - selected among those written during the writeshops, highlight the different ways in which family farmers responsibly and creatively manage their natural resources, landscapes and ecosystems as well as the cultural and symbolic values that define their identity.

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Dear diary. Monday: How did this all begin?

From as early as I can remember, my grandparents inspired me with their love for gardening and growing food. They were enthusiastic, knowledgeable and instinctively knew how to grow vegetables and fruit. As a young child I would spend many days in the home garden with them, helping to weed the garden or pluck the ripe fruit and tender vegetables. During school holidays, I would spend hours outside in the sun with them, putting precious seeds into the ground, or making holes for the seedlings which had been carefully tended. These visits would also coincide with visits to aunts and uncles, and neighbours, where conversations inevitably centred around crops, harvests and food.

Whenever I think back on my life and wonder why, as an adult, I chose to grow food, I realise that this love of seeds, the soil and gardens and my connection with nature rose out of these foundational experiences with my grandparents and the community in which I thrived.

Now I spend most of my time at home in the small town of Norton, about 45 km from the busy central business district of Harare in Zimbabwe. Today in particular, I feel very relaxed as I sit in my room, listening to the whistling sounds from my chicks in a brooder box and some neighbours singing energetically and passionately at a community gathering. Over the past three years,

this place has become my new home and it has offered me a serene environment away from the hustle and bustle of the city. I have grown to become a micro-scale farmer working in my garden and chicken coup.



Photo by FAO.

Wednesday: What lockdown brought

I woke up this morning feeling refreshed and renewed. The cool air made me feel alive and happy. As I looked out of my window, I saw my garden, alive and bursting with vegetables and flowers. Gardening has become a daily practice and it has awoken so much energy and passion in me. It was still quite early, when I made myself a cup of tea and went outside to look out across my land. Like so many other days, I could see my neighbours already busy in their gardens. While a few of them prefer to maintain their lawns and grow flowers, most of them are absorbed in backyard farming

to grow food. Since the COVID-19 lockdowns, many people in this area became more involved in garden related activities, making great efforts to grow food for their families. I started small, growing some cowpeas and finger millet (rapoko), sweet potatoes, pumpkins and a variety of round nuts and beans.

My interest in my garden has grown, and I have many discussions with my neighbours on what is best to plant and how to care for my crops. I can see that our connections have grown stronger as they see my improved efforts in the garden and in the chicken coup.

Sunday: How things changed

Towards late 2017 when I first planted the garden, I worked on a small portion of land and produced just enough to last a couple of days. However, over the past 3 seasons, I have managed to turn this around. I now produce more than I need and the excess from the garden, I use to feed the chickens. I realise that I love gardening so much and I feel so satisfied when I see the amazing results each time I look at the produce. I have so many questions when I look at the plump tomatoes and the huge round pumpkins. What is the work and biological processes that lead to healthy fresh food? How does nature work to create these nutritious foods? What must I do to keep the soil rich? I no longer just have plans in my head and on paper only, I have become more practical and productive. My energy which has grown exponentially and I am more able to make decisions and take actions. I have realised that through small efforts, it is possible to cut down on expenditure on certain commodities, like eggs that I can easily produce.

This has not always been a smooth road. I knew that certain obstacles would occur in my agroecological venture, particularly as I wanted to ensure operational sustainability and continuity. Since 2017, I had many challenges, the main one

being the lack of water. I therefore focused on the limited rainwater available for producing corn. During the dry season, the activities on the land were minimised due to limited amounts of water from our well, however with much planning and hard work, I managed to have 2 boreholes drilled on site in May 2021. This solved our water scarcity.

Tuesday: Looking to the future

My sixth sense tells me that some of my neighbours share this same passion for producing food. Sometimes I feel left behind when I see people, who I think have less knowledge of agroecology, appear to get better results from their efforts. However, I am happy that I can play a part in the production of food for our world. I have come to realise that with effort and determination I can succeed.



Photo by FAO.

I now know that love can only be most real when it is strengthened by the relevant actions and effort. I have taken a position that my love for food production must be complimented by consistent and relevant actions. I am happy that I have a garden which I can use as a platform to showcase sustainable agroecologically sensitive food production approaches. Today I am pleased to say the love I have for my garden has yielded so much happiness!

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