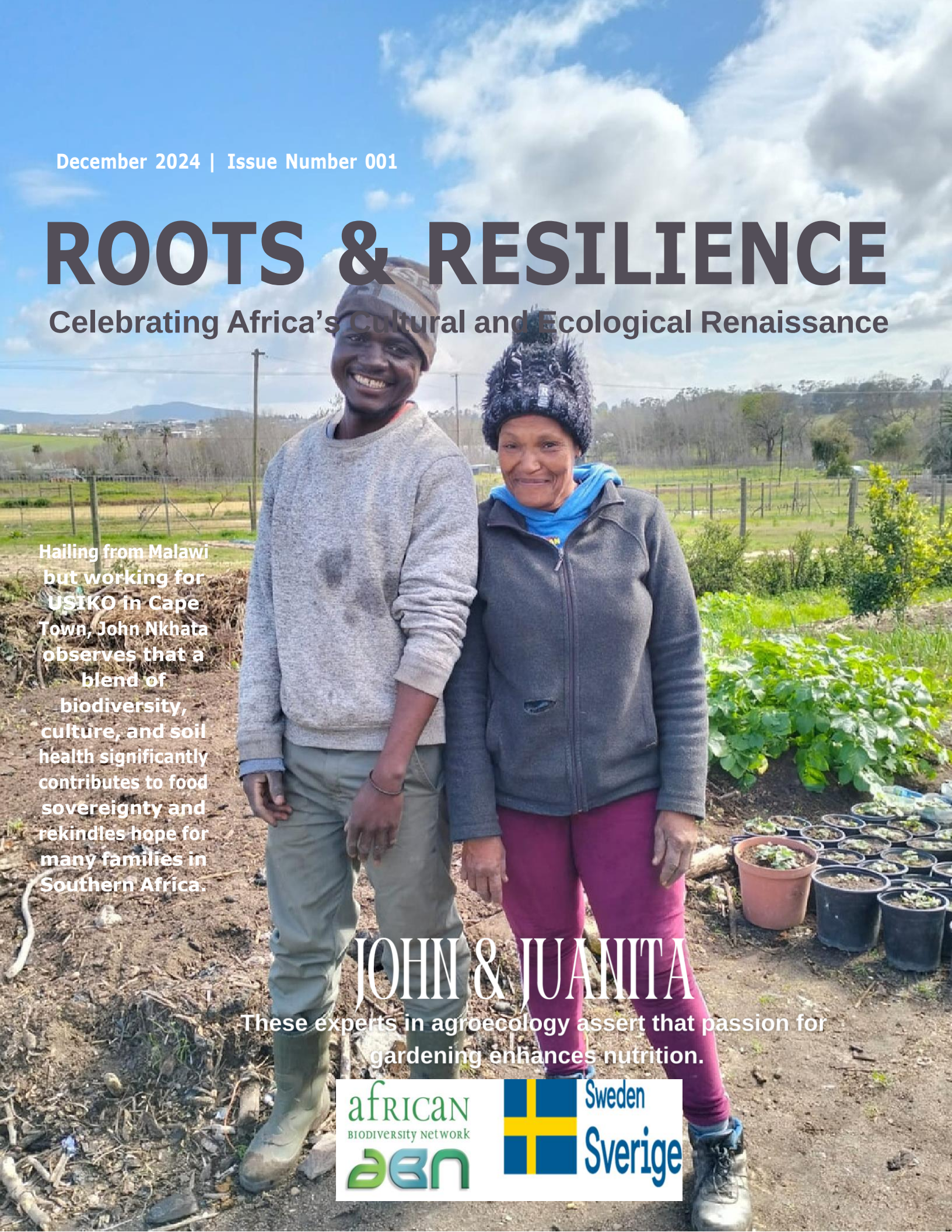
December 2024 | Issue Number 001

ROOTS & RESILIENCE

Celebrating Africa's Cultural and Ecological Renaissance



Hailing from Malawi but working for USIKO in Cape Town, John Nkhata observes that a blend of biodiversity, culture, and soil health significantly contributes to food sovereignty and rekindles hope for many families in Southern Africa.

JOHN & JUANITA

These experts in agroecology assert that passion for gardening enhances nutrition.

African Biodiversity Network ABN

Sweden Sverige

Pages

2 **EDITORIAL BOX**

3 **FROM THE EDITOR**

4 **USIKO-SOUTH AFRICA**
On regenerating biocultural diversity

7 **GDA-CAMEROON**
On regenerating biocultural diversity

12 **RIDEP-KENYA**
On regenerating biocultural diversity

16 **ENVIROCARE-TANZANIA**
On regenerating biocultural diversity

21 **THE NATURE TROPICALE-BENIN**
On regenerating biocultural diversity

25 **GER RWANDA**
On regenerating biocultural diversity

30 **CUT-A-WAYS**
On regenerating biocultural diversity

Children of the Zogbedji Women group pose for a photo with an elder after releasing baby turtles into the Atlantic Ocean. The group works with Nature Tropicale to conserve marine ecosystems in Benin.

EDITORIAL BOX

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to this issue of *Roots & Resilience*, a platform where Africa's biocultural stories come to life through the voices of communities regenerating their cultural landscapes and traditions. In this edition, we spotlight grassroots experiences from across the continent, each one a testament to the deep relationship between people, culture, and nature.

This publication is more than a magazine. It is a celebration of Africa's resilience. From the forests of Cameroon to the coastlines of Benin and the hills of Rwanda, communities are reclaiming indigenous knowledge, restoring sacred ecosystems, and nurturing intergenerational learning. These stories show us that sustainability is not only possible but already being lived by those rooted in place and purpose.

ABN hopes this issue informs, inspires, and invites you to see that in regenerating biocultural diversity, we are also reviving the integrity of our societies.

Warm regards,

Dr. Fassil Gebeyehu PhD.

Editor, *Roots & Resilience*

USIKO’s contribution to regenerating biocultural diversity

Pupils from Weber Gedenk plant vegetables in USIKO’s garden under the guidance of John Nkhata, a soil specialist and USIKO staff member. The vegetables harvested weekly from this garden enrich the nutrition of the pupils' meals.

USIKO, in collaboration with the African Biodiversity Network (ABN) and funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), spearheaded a transformative three-year project aimed at regenerating biocultural diversity in Cape Town. This initiative targeted vulnerable groups and schools, focusing on sustainable food systems and holistic community empowerment.

The cornerstone of the project was the establishment and promotion of agroecological kitchen gardens. These gardens were designed to supply nutritious vegetables to schools and vulnerable groups, addressing food insecurity while promoting health. By leveraging agroecological principles, the gardens prioritised biodiversity and soil health, cultivating a wide variety of indigenous crops known for their resilience and nutritional value. This approach not only improved food security but also preserved traditional farming knowledge, embedding it within modern practices.

Another critical component of the project was intergenerational learning, which bridged the gap between elders, school students, and youth. Participants engaged in wilderness experiential learning activities, reconnecting with nature and traditional ecological wisdom. These experiences went beyond environmental awareness, equipping youth with practical tools and life skills to address pressing societal challenges. Through these programmes, participants built resilience in tackling issues such as joblessness and rising crime rates, while adapting positively to the impacts of climate change.

Cont’d on pg 5

Cont'd from pg 4

USIKO's contribution to regenerating biocultural diversity

The integration of agroecological farming into education offered an innovative pathway for students and young people to develop sustainable livelihoods. By teaching the importance of biodiversity, soil regeneration, and indigenous farming techniques, the project encouraged a shift towards long-term environmental and cultural sustainability. Furthermore, improved access to healthy, locally grown vegetables contributed to better nutrition, fostering physical and mental well-being across communities.

Over three years, USIKO's efforts led to the establishment of multiple kitchen gardens, directly benefiting schools and vulnerable populations. The project also trained hundreds of students and youth in agroecological farming techniques, creating a ripple effect of knowledge-sharing across Cape Town. By integrating ecological regeneration with cultural revitalisation, the initiative not only addressed immediate community needs but also laid the groundwork for a sustainable and resilient future.

USIKO's success in this project underscores the power of community-driven, culturally informed approaches to environmental conservation and social development. Their work stands as a model for how biocultural diversity can be harnessed to create healthier, more equitable societies while preserving the cultural and ecological heritage of Africa.

Pupils from Weber Gedenk water vegetables in USIKO's garden after planting, joined by Arnold Okerrs, USIKO's Executive Director.

Earthworms cultivated by Bevan Thomas at Biosphere Education and Research Centre, a USIKO partner, where soil health and biodiversity conservation techniques are developed and taught.

An organically grown carrot harvested from USIKO's kitchen garden.

Cont'd on pg 6

Cont'd from pg 6

Students from Stellenzicht High School, participants in USIKO's wilderness experiential learning programmes, gained transformative experiences that reshaped their worldview.

Bevan Thomas, a soil health researcher at Biosphere Education and Research Centre, trains USIKO staff in soil health and biodiversity conservation techniques.

Wilma Adams stirs soup, preparing to serve community members who rely on it daily. This feeding programme, led by USIKO in collaboration with supporters like ABN, sees residents queueing outside Wilma's house for their share.

Green Development Advocates' contribution to regenerating biocultural diversity in Cameroon

Communities in the Campo Forest collaborate with GDA to adopt agroecological methods for improving soil fertility. The arrowroots and groundnuts displayed here highlight the benefits of this project, implemented with support from ABN.

Green Development Advocates (GDA) in Cameroon, in collaboration with the African Biodiversity Network (ABN) and supported by funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), executed a transformative three-year project aimed at regenerating biocultural diversity. This initiative played a crucial role in reconnecting communities with their natural heritage while fostering sustainable development and food security.

Central to the project was the revival of traditional ecological knowledge and practices that had been disrupted by modernisation and environmental degradation. GDA worked closely with indigenous groups and local leaders to restore sacred forests, which hold cultural, spiritual, and ecological significance. These sacred sites were reintegrated into community governance systems, ensuring their ongoing protection and sustainable management.

The project also introduced agroecological approaches to strengthen sustainable agriculture. Community members were trained in poultry and fish rearing, both in groups and individually, to produce manure for enriching soil health. This practice significantly improved crop yields while reducing reliance on synthetic fertilisers. The preparation of farmyard manure was complemented by efforts to recuperate indigenous crops such as arrowroots, maize, and groundnuts, contributing to diversified diets and enhanced nutrition.

Cont'd on pg 8

Cont'd from pg 7

Green Development Advocates' contribution to regenerating biocultural diversity in Cameroon

Additionally, the initiative empowered communities through training in advocacy for agroecological policies, which participants applied in their local contexts. This community-driven advocacy helped amplify voices at the grassroots level, ensuring that agroecological practices were recognised and supported in policy frameworks.

Intergenerational learning was a cornerstone of the project, fostering collaboration between the elderly and youth. Elders passed down indigenous knowledge of sustainable farming and cultural practices, while younger generations embraced these lessons, ensuring the continuity of their heritage. This exchange of knowledge exemplified the rich learning and cohesion within communities.

Workshops and hands-on training, including the establishment of demonstration plots, inspired widespread adoption of agroecological practices. These efforts empowered women and youth, creating opportunities for sustainable livelihoods while reinforcing community identity and resilience in the face of climate change.

Over the three (3) years, GDA contributed to the restoration of three (3) sacred forests, enhanced biodiversity across 700 hectares, and empowered 800 households to adopt sustainable agricultural practices. By integrating cultural preservation with environmental conservation, the project became a model for holistic and community-led regeneration, inspiring similar initiatives across Cameroon and beyond.

Mr Ndong, a community leader, trains his community members in agroecological practices as part of their capacity-building efforts.

A community member showcases the yield of indigenous seeds they successfully recovered during the project phase. The communities' nutritional needs have improved thanks to the diverse range of indigenous seeds they now grow and harvest.

Cont'd on pg 9

Cont'd from pg 8

Green Development Advocates' contribution to regenerating biocultural diversity in Cameroon

Indigenous chickens raised by community groups serve as a source of protein and provide manure for their farms.

Community members participating in a training session with the GDA team.

A community member tending to her cassava farm.

Cont'd on pg 10

Cont'd from pg 9

Green Development Advocates' contribution to regenerating biocultural diversity in Cameroon

Communities collaborating with the GDA in Campo Forest pose for a photo after a tree-planting session and environmental clean-up activity.

A community member showcasing seeds of recovered indigenous varieties.

Communities living within Campo forest plant trees as part of protecting the forest.

WHEN WE REVIVE OUR

From classrooms to farmlands, RIDEP's transformative project in Kenya intertwines traditional knowledge, agroecology, and environmental stewardship to cultivate resilience and regenerate biocultural diversity.

SEEDS AND TRADITIONS,

WE SOW THE FUTURE
OF OUR COMMUNITIES

RIDEP's contribution to regenerating biocultural diversity

The Rural Initiatives Development Programme (RIDEP), in partnership with the African Biodiversity Network (ABN) and with funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), implemented a transformative three-year project aimed at regenerating biocultural diversity. This initiative combined environmental restoration, intergenerational learning, and the revival of traditional agricultural practices to strengthen community resilience and promote sustainability.

At the heart of the project was the innovative trio learning approach, which brought together primary school pupils, teachers, and elders—the custodians of indigenous knowledge. This intergenerational learning model created a dynamic environment where traditional ecological wisdom was passed down, integrated into modern education, and practised within schools. Elders shared invaluable knowledge about biodiversity, farming practices, and cultural heritage, ensuring that these traditions were preserved and adapted by younger generations.

The project also prioritised environmental conservation through tree planting activities within schools. These efforts not only enhanced biodiversity but also served as a natural solution to purify the air and mitigate the impacts of climate change. By involving students and teachers in the planting and nurturing of trees, RIDEP fostered a sense of environmental stewardship and responsibility among future generations.

Cont'd on pg 13

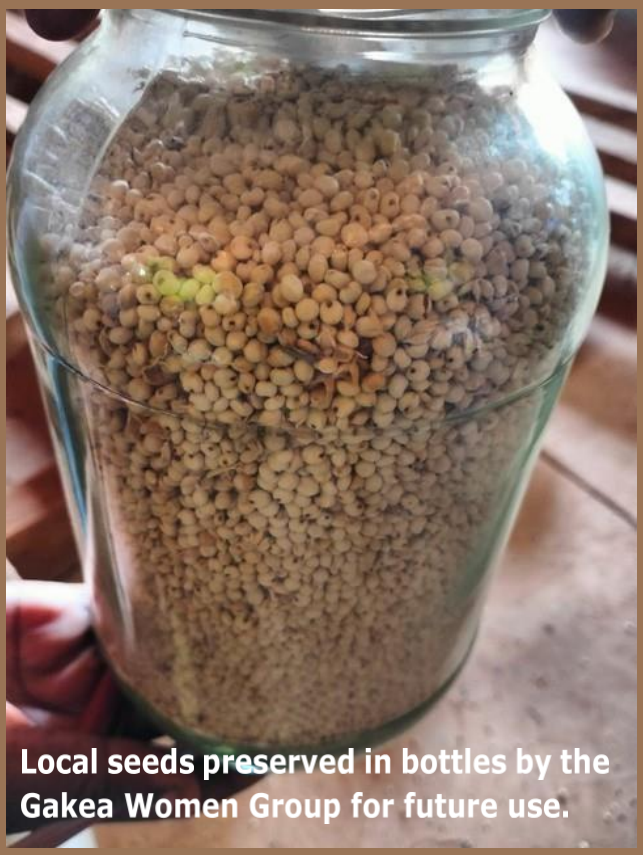
Cont'd from pg 12

Local elders, teachers, and pupils engage in an intergenerational learning session as the videographer observes.

A critical component of the initiative was the recuperation of lost indigenous seeds, including sorghum, millet, black beans, and green grams. These seeds are deeply tied to the region's cultural heritage and are known for their resilience to changing climatic conditions. By reintroducing and promoting the cultivation of these crops, the project improved food security and diversified diets while preserving genetic biodiversity. Demonstration plots and training sessions allowed community members to gain hands-on experience in sustainable farming practices, which were later applied in their own fields.

Over the three years, RIDEP's efforts led to the planting of thousands of trees within schools, the successful reintroduction of indigenous seed varieties, and the empowerment of hundreds of students, teachers, and community members. The project not only enhanced ecological resilience but also strengthened cultural identity by re-establishing the link between people, their land, and their traditions.

RIDEP's approach demonstrated the profound impact of integrating environmental conservation with cultural renewal, showcasing a replicable model for communities across Africa. This initiative has left a lasting legacy of enriched biodiversity, empowered youth, and revitalised cultural heritage, paving the way for a sustainable future.

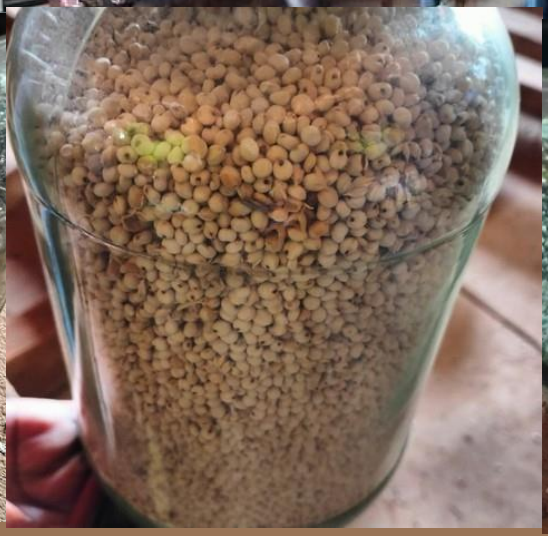


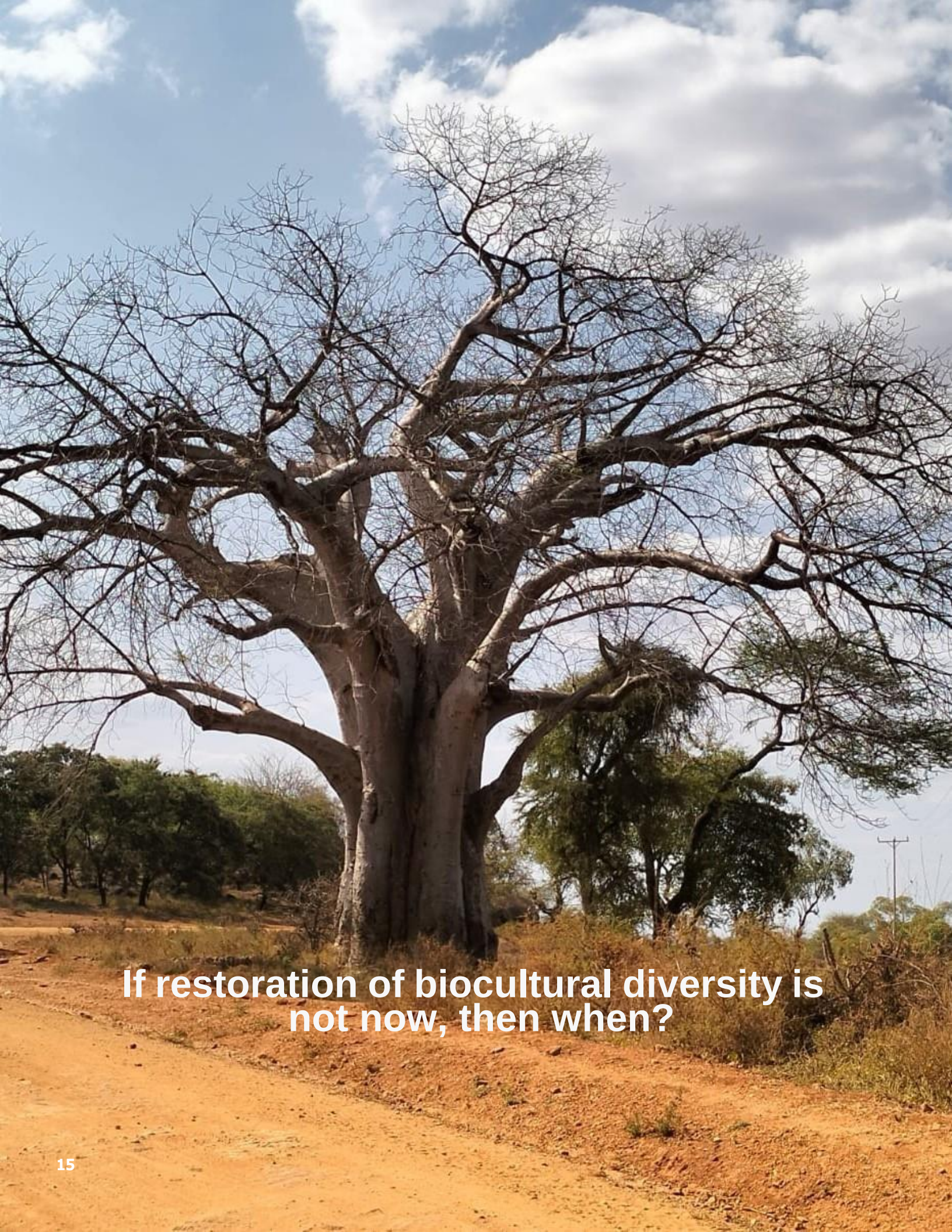
Local seeds preserved in bottles by the Gakea Women Group for future use.

Cont'd on pg 14

Cont'd from pg 13

Leaders of the Gakea Community Seed Banking Self-Help Group pose in front of their seed bank in Tharaka Nithi County. Below are seeds preserved in bottles and stored for future use.





If restoration of biocultural diversity is not now, then when?

Envirocare’s Contribution to the Regeneration of Biocultural Diversity

"By bridging cultural heritage with environmental conservation, Envirocare has created a replicable model for sustainable development, inspiring similar initiatives across Africa."

Umangu Women Group showcasing their skills in preparing compost manure. during a partners’ learning visit in Arusha, Tanzania.

Envirocare, in collaboration with the African Biodiversity Network (ABN) and with funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), has made remarkable contributions to the regeneration of biocultural diversity through a transformative three-year project. This initiative empowered local communities to reclaim, protect, and revitalise their interconnected cultural and ecological heritage.

At the heart of the project was the restoration of sacred natural sites, which are integral to the spiritual and cultural identity of indigenous communities. Envirocare worked closely with elders and cultural custodians to revive traditional ecological governance systems, enabling communities to take ownership of these biodiverse areas. These sacred sites, often degraded by external pressures, were restored as places of spiritual reflection, cultural ceremonies, and ecological balance.

Cont’d on pg 17

Cont'd from pg 16

Envirocare's Contribution to the Regeneration of Biocultural Diversity

A key component of the initiative was the promotion of agroecological farming practices, which emphasised cultivating diverse indigenous crops, including drought-resistant varieties. These efforts strengthened local food systems, enhanced nutrition, and preserved seeds tied to cultural traditions and biodiversity. By integrating traditional farming techniques with modern agroecological principles, the project built resilience against climate change and reduced dependence on chemical inputs.

Some of the fruits and fruits harvested by the Umangu Women Group showcased during the partners' learning visit in Arusah, Tanzania.

Educational workshops, community dialogues, and training sessions formed the backbone of the project's outreach. These activities fostered intergenerational knowledge exchange, ensuring that younger generations inherited the ecological wisdom of their ancestors. Additionally, the workshops created awareness of the intrinsic value of biocultural diversity, inspiring community-wide participation and ownership of the project goals.

The project also contributed to ecological restoration on a significant scale. Over three (3) years, it regenerated more than 10 hectares of degraded land and successfully restored 2 sacred sites. These activities were complemented by practical support for over 1,000 households, who were trained and equipped to adopt agroecological practices. Many of these households experienced improved livelihoods through higher crop yields, diversified diets, and strengthened connections to their cultural roots.

Cont'd on pg 18

Cont'd from pg 17

Envirocare's Contribution to the Regeneration of Biocultural Diversity cont'd

Envirocare's collaboration with ABN ensured the project's outcomes were culturally sensitive, regionally relevant, and aligned with broader biodiversity and climate adaptation goals. By bridging cultural heritage with environmental conservation, the initiative created a replicable model for sustainable development. Envirocare's efforts have not only regenerated landscapes but also revitalised the spirit of community stewardship, offering hope and inspiration for similar projects across Africa and beyond.

At the top: Umangu Women Group showcasing some of their packaged products for sale.

Middle: Rose Machange explains the herbs she is holding to Dr. Sulemana Abudulai, Chairman of the Board of Trustees at ABN, during the partners' learning meeting in Arusha, Tanzania.

Alongside: Also present are the Chairperson of Envirocare's Board of Trustees, the Treasurer of the ABN Board of Trustees, the SIDA team, and project partners from other countries.

"In the soil of our shared heritage lies the strength to heal our land and reconcile our people."

Regenerating biodiversity regenerates humanity; we cannot thrive apart from nature.

"Biocultural diversity is the heartbeat of resilient communities and thriving ecosystems."

Agroecology is the bridge that connects our ancestral wisdom with modern solutions for a sustainable future.

Nature Tropicale's Contribution to the Regeneration of Biocultural Diversity

sea turtle incubation site at Djeffa place in the community of Seme Podji.

Nature Tropicale, in collaboration with the African Biodiversity Network (ABN) and with funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), has made remarkable strides in regenerating biocultural diversity through a three-year project. This initiative was pivotal in reconnecting communities to their ecological heritage, fostering environmental stewardship, and empowering future generations with traditional knowledge.

A key focus of the project was the restoration of the marine ecosystem along the Atlantic Ocean. Nature Tropicale implemented turtle conservation efforts by releasing turtles back into their natural habitat. These activities not only supported the survival of endangered marine species but also reignited cultural practices tied to ocean conservation. Alongside this, efforts were made to restore coral reefs, which are vital for marine biodiversity and provide essential services to coastal communities.

These initiatives enhanced marine health and underscored the interconnectedness of local livelihoods with ocean ecosystems.
On land, the project concentrated on the preservation and restoration of forest ecosystems. Community members actively participated in forest protection activities, including tree planting campaigns aimed at countering deforestation and improving biodiversity. By engaging local communities, Nature Tropicale fostered a collective responsibility for maintaining these vital ecosystems, which are deeply ingrained in cultural traditions.

Cont'd pg 22

Cont'd from pg 21

Zogbedji Women Group growing Cene in the Grand Popo community. The group works with The Nature Tropicale to ecisystems restoration activities.

Saplings of coconut trees, ready for planting, as part of activities implemented by members of the Honhoue community in collaboration with The Nature Tropicale. Below are members of the Zogbedji Women Group. All these communities are located in Benin.

The recuperation of indigenous seeds formed another cornerstone of the project. By reviving native crops, such as traditional grains and vegetables, the initiative enhanced food security and preserved the genetic diversity of local plant species. These seeds were emblematic of cultural identity and dietary heritage, providing communities with a deeper connection to their ancestral practices.

Intergenerational learning played a central role in ensuring the sustainability of the project. Elders, as custodians of traditional knowledge, engaged with children and youth in continuous dialogues and hands-on activities. This approach bridged generational gaps and ensured that the ecological wisdom of the past was transmitted to younger generations. Through storytelling, workshops, and community events, Nature Tropicale cultivated a sense of pride and responsibility among the youth, inspiring them to become active participants in conservation.

Cont'd on pg 23

Cont'd from pg 22

Over three (3) years, Nature Tropicale's efforts restored critical ecosystems, preserved biodiversity, and strengthened community bonds. The initiative demonstrated how blending traditional knowledge with contemporary conservation strategies can regenerate biocultural diversity and sustain both cultural and ecological resilience. This project stands as a beacon of hope for similar conservation efforts across Africa and the world.

The above 2 photos are of the Honhoue community in the Ligbozoun Forest, serving as the forest's guardians, work alongside The Nature Tropicale to preserve the forest.

Cont'd on pg 24

Cont'd from pg 23

Honhoue community members also plant trees on their farms, with each family taking responsibility for protecting and nurturing their growth.

Cont'd on pg 25

Cont'd from pg 24

GER's Contribution to Regenerating Biocultural Diversity in Rwanda

Members of communities working with GER Rwanda tend to their tree nursery in preparation for an upcoming national tree-planting activity.

The Global Environmental Restoration (GER), in collaboration with the African Biodiversity Network (ABN) and funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), successfully implemented a transformative three-year project aimed at regenerating biocultural diversity in Rwanda. This project played a critical role in restoring ecological balance, improving livelihoods, and fostering peace and reconciliation among communities affected by the 1994 genocide.

One of the key activities of the project was establishing tree nurseries. Community members were trained to cultivate and manage these nurseries, which provided seedlings for tree planting campaigns. The trees contributed to reforestation, improved air quality, and the mitigation of climate change impacts. The project aligned its activities with Rwanda's national tree planting initiatives, which are held annually in the last quarter of the year. These activities served as a unifying exercise, promoting reconciliation and peaceful coexistence between the two communities that were involved in the genocide: the Hutu and Tutsi. The shared commitment to environmental restoration symbolised hope, healing, and collective progress.

Cont'd on pg 26

Cont'd from pg 25

GER's Contribution to Regenerating Biocultural Diversity in Rwanda Cont'd

The project also focused on sustainable farming practices, including the preparation of compost and farmyard manure. Farmers were trained to harness livestock urine, which was applied to their farms as a natural fertiliser. This practice enhanced soil fertility and increased crop yields, improving food security and livelihoods.

In addition to agricultural innovations, the project introduced income-generating activities by repurposing crop residues into ornamental items. Community members were taught to craft and sell these items, generating supplemental income to support their households. This initiative not only boosted economic resilience but also promoted the sustainable use of resources, reducing agricultural waste.

The two photos above show members of Musamo village in Ruhango District showcasing their skills in preparing compost and farmyard manure. They use this manure for their tree nurseries and farming activities. They collaborate with ger rwanda in these activities.

Cont'd on pg 27

Cont'd from pg 5

GER's Contribution to Regenerating Biocultural Diversity in Rwanda

Innocent Musore, Executive Director of GER Rwanda, in discussion with members of the communities they collaborate with in the conservation of biocultural diversity.

The combined impact of these activities was significant. GER's efforts improved ecological health, restored degraded landscapes, and enhanced the socioeconomic well-being of participating communities. The revival of sustainable practices like composting, natural fertilisation, and agroforestry also preserved traditional knowledge systems, linking cultural heritage with environmental conservation.

Moreover, the project's focus on tree planting and nursery preparation as tools for reconciliation underscored the power of shared environmental stewardship to heal divided societies. By fostering collaboration, trust, and mutual respect, GER demonstrated that biocultural diversity regeneration can be a cornerstone for sustainable development and social harmony.

GER's work in Rwanda leaves a lasting legacy of ecological renewal, strengthened cultural ties, and unified communities, offering a replicable model for other post-conflict regions across the globe.

Cont'd on pg 28

Cont'd on pg 27

GER's Contribution to Regenerating Biocultural Diversity in Rwanda

Communities working with GER Rwanda engage in various activities to conserve biocultural diversity. These include capacity building on agroecological practices, the recovery of indigenous seeds, and communal planting of bananas to foster unity among them.

Cont'd on pg 29

Cont'd from pg 28

GER's Contribution to Regenerating Biocultural Diversity in Rwanda

I enjoyed a light moment with members of Musamo village in Ruhango District during the documentation exercise.

Cut-a-ways

Sand harvesting is a significant activity along the shores of water bodies in Benin, with the majority of harvesters being women. Additionally, Benin boasts a hot water spring that has been running year-round for over 50 years, yet remains an untapped tourist attraction. Despite this,

ABN Secretariat staff, Board members and Partners organizations representatives at the Annual Review meeting in Arusha Tanzania

Cut-a-ways

John Nkhata digs out manure, ready for use in the garden. He is one of the youth embracing agroecological farming, inspiring others to see farming as a viable source of income. Below are members of the Zogbedji Women Group, who also engage in cleaning plastics from the ocean.

ROOTS & RESILIENCE

Celebrating Africa's Cultural and Ecological Renaissance

Sweden
Sverige

african
BIODIVERSITY NETWORK
ABN